



Saint Mark Orthodox Church

Archdiocese of Washington DC – Orthodox Church in America

Annual Parish Meeting – Nov. 17, 2019

Pastoral Address

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I've never really been a "numbers" person. Although they are necessary and provide valuable information, statistics, records and balances don't tell the whole story. For example, our current membership is over 200. But on average, our actual attendance on Sundays for liturgy usually ranges anywhere from 100 to about 140. Our metrical record book has 0 entries for marriages this year. However, I was pleased to serve at Emili Malatesta and Wesley Friel's wedding this past January in Philadelphia. Also, it was my joy to perform the betrothal service for my son, Alex and his fiancée, Aislinn in June, and more recently, to bless the marriage of Tom and Rodica Cipu in September. None of these appear in the statistics. The metrics record 6 deaths, but I'm sure that in the context of our greater community and extended parish family, we have suffered more loss. The last two categories are pretty straight forward – 8 baptisms and 1 chrismation.

Although we have been blessed with many visitors and been happy to receive some families and individuals into parish membership, we've also had to say goodbye to some members who have relocated this year. Again, those incoming and outgoing may not dramatically affect the totals, but it sure impacts us in our hearts and heads. Thankfully, we currently have four catechumens and a number of seekers and inquirers who are studying about the Orthodox faith and attending our worship services.

Although our church school enrollment is 55 students, our teachers report that only a small fraction of students actually attend classes regularly. In some classes on certain days, no students have come. This, of course, is demoralizing to our teachers who come prepared and ready to teach every Sunday. Again, numbers fail to communicate the larger picture.

Our Vacation Church School program took place July 22-25th. Again, it was geared toward children ages 4-11. Approximately two dozen children participated in the classes, prayers, singing, games, music and crafts (as well as lunch). In addition to the teachers, many parents also volunteered to stay and help. This year, I'd like to especially thank Fr. Joseph Woodill for leading the morning prayers and offering inspirational words to the children each day.

Our team of Youth Group advisors, led by Abby Dean and Hilary Frimenko, continue to schedule and offer a good variety of fun, educational and service activities. Those events I have attended and heard reports about have been very successful and greatly appreciated. It's my hope that families will more highly prioritize these opportunities and take fuller advantage of them in the future.

With the departure of chair, Dn. David Phelps, it is my hope that someone will step forward to lead the important work of our Church Growth and Evangelization Committee. Our greeters continue to welcome both new and familiar faces to our community

Returning to “numbers” again, although we have money in the bank, our parish council president points out in his report that we are facing some major expenses in this and upcoming years. God will bless us - of this I am sure; but we all still need to keep our shoulders to the plow regarding the good stewardship of our time, talents and resources.

You have responded generously throughout the year, in all of our charitable endeavors. For this I am deeply grateful. Our discretionary fund continues to provide assistance to those in need both within and outside of our parish community. Our onsite food pantry is well stocked and ready and responsive to those who approach us in need. We’ve taken collections for relief of those in specific need from various natural disasters – such as floods, hurricanes, and fires. Our Montgomery County “back to school” backpack assistance effort has again been a great success this year. I thank you for all of this as well as your continued support for our Stepping Stones House meal preparation efforts and the Shady Grove Pregnancy Center.

I would also like to thank and commend all of our choir volunteers (directors and singers) for their tremendous efforts to both prepare for and sing the services, and to encourage others to consider becoming involved in this vital ministry. It is a pleasure to serve here at St. Mark and to hear the wonderful feedback from visitors. Thank you as well to our team who prepare the propers sheets for each scheduled service so everyone can follow along more easily and participate more fully in them.

At the point of this writing, under the watchful eye of Tina Burpee (thank you!) we have completed food preparation and setup for this year’s bazaar. Thank you all for stepping up and committing so much of your time and effort to this worthy endeavor.

It is my joy to serve you as we move ahead together with preparations for the celebration of our 50th anniversary in 2022.

With love in Christ,
Fr. Gregory