



Saint Mark Orthodox Church

Archdiocese of Washington, DC - Orthodox Church in America
V.Rev. Gregory Safchuk, Rector

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is Risen!

This year Pascha came, despite a most unusual Great Lent. Just as our Lord, Jesus Christ, could not be contained by a sealed tomb, so too our celebration of His victory over sin, evil and death burst forth upon us despite our inability to gather together because of the Coronavirus pandemic. I usually offer thanks in my spring pastoral address to all those who helped make Great Lent, Holy Week and the Feast of Pascha happen in our parish. But this year, it was said so beautifully by one of our own, Jurette Hecksher, (posting on our parish email list) that I am moved to quote from her words:

As we pivot from services streamed from St. Mark to those streamed from St. Tikhon's, I want to give a heartfelt thanks to... everyone who prayed, read, sang, or managed the technology for the services for and with us all online this week. Truly, our church has never looked more beautiful and full of radiance than it somehow did through a camera lens these last several days, and the worship in which you all guided us allowed us to experience unforgettably the truth that the Church as Christ's Body is not bound by earthly constraints of space and time.

In a way by all of this, we have entered into a different dimension of worship. I have to "see" you in my mind and heart while looking into a camera, and you likewise, must try to join me in the sacred space of the church depicted on your screen. But the reality is, we are all still united in the Body of Christ.

Nonetheless, the physical reality of life in this world demands attention and focus. Our Spring parish meeting will likely take place virtually, as so many other things have of late. After the normal reports, among the agenda items, is a report from our Pew Committee, which met this morning (May 1st. via videoconference) under the guidance of Mark Phinney. After much research and discussion of information, a lot of progress was made toward a recommendation for moving forward. For me personally, this was an extremely positive and significant step. I so look forward to having you all once again enjoying fellowship and worship physically present within the walls of our church. I feel that the proposed changes will serve to facilitate the comfort, safety and beauty of our parish gatherings. I hope you will agree!

We will also hear an update on efforts to improve our live-streaming of worship services from St. Mark. Fortunately, this capability was already in place prior to the issuance of meeting restrictions and helped carry us through these past few months. Having realized how valuable this tool is for those unable to attend, we plan to continue streaming services even after we are able to return to our regular liturgical schedule.

Our 50th. Anniversary Committee will update us on what has been done and what will be done in planning for and celebrating this milestone in the life of our beloved parish.

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Although our church school program was suspended, I'm pleased that many of our teachers initially provided material and guidance to parents for home church schooling, and that parents were able to take advantage of the virtual church school program online from the OCA.

It has been a challenge to continue pastoral work under the "stay home" restrictions. I have made an effort to reach out via phone, text and email to many of our faithful. Some confessions have been heard, and catechetical and other counseling sessions have taken place via video or audio calls. I've welcomed the opportunity to answer questions and speak with all who desire to talk.

We've recently received initial guidelines from our Holy Synod of Bishops regarding the re-opening of our churches. We will begin to work toward implementing them in a timely and safe manner, as we await more specific directives from Metropolitan Tikhon regarding the parishes directly under his care.

Thank you all for your patience and faithfulness during these trying times.

With love in the Risen Lord,
Fr. Gregory