



Saint Mark Orthodox Church

Archdiocese of Washington DC – Orthodox Church in America

Annual Parish Meeting – Sunday, Nov. 20th, 2022

Pastoral Address

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I'm writing this with the delicious aroma of the food for the bazaar wafting around all over. Thank you in advance to Tina Burpee and new chairperson this year, Regina Kundell, as well as all the workshop coordinators, their families and the many co-workers involved in the preparation and execution of our only annual parish-wide fundraiser. It's been wonderful to see some of the responsibilities and work being taken up by newer and younger members now. As we approach the conclusion of this year and gather for our annual November parish meeting, it has again been my pleasure to serve you as pastor.

God has blessed us in so many ways this year, especially by sending us visitors and families who have joined us in our liturgical Eucharistic fellowship. We greet them with joy! I'm pleased to report that we currently have six catechumens who are studying and preparing for their reception into the Church. Thus far in 2022, we have baptized and chrismated 10 people, performed 3 marriages (although by the time of this meeting, we will have 5) and served 3 funerals.

Nicholas Rotunda has stepped up to coordinate our church school program which began on September 25th. this year. Stacy Pederson is helping plan and coordinate teen group activities. Our classes are staffed with enthusiastic and capable teachers and assistants. We've got a nice blend of educational, service and fun activities and outings planned for the coming months. We are looking forward to a wonderful academic year.

Once again you have responded generously throughout the year, in all of our charitable endeavors. 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 with needs. We've taken collections for relief and assistance as needs have arisen and become known to us. St. Mark was particularly involved in helping to pay for Alaskan clergy and spouses to come and attend this year's All-American Council in Baltimore. I thank you for all of this as well as your continued support for the Shady Grove Pregnancy Center.

I would like to thank and commend all who volunteered to plan and serve for the many activities and events we have held and hosted this year including but not limited to a day's worth of meetings of our Holy Synod of Bishops, the Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers and social gathering, and of course our parish 50th. Anniversary Celebration! So much has been and needs to be done in such a vital parish. Opportunities for ministry abound. In addition to the current efforts involved in our liturgical, administrative and social life, we now look forward to offering instruction in the tradition of bell ringing toward the end of this month. I encourage all to take up and consider the theme of this year's All-American Council: "Becoming Vessels of Grace".



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Applying this to our lives, let us seek to discover our God given talents and find ways to use them for the upbuilding and glorification of God's Holy Church.

I also want to acknowledge that our community was indeed "tested" during the height of the Covid pandemic. The challenges associated with that caused many churches, ours included, to experience loss and transition among members. Although we will always mourn the absence of some dear people from our midst, we must strive to maintain the bond of Christian love with them and among us all, for that is what our Lord has said that we, his followers, will be known by.

After all this time, it's a joy for me to see attendance and participation once again increasing. The voices of children in the church were sorely missed. With that in mind, I'd like to thank Gale Rutan for her generous donation of the new icon of Christ blessing the children - now on a special stand in the center of our church for the children to more easily reach and venerate.

Some unexpected benefits from the Covid era should also be recognized. The first is the effort and effectiveness of our live streaming services. It has been a welcome option (which we will continue) for those unable to attend services, but also as a tool for evangelization. Many people have discovered the beauty of Orthodox worship by watching our YouTube channel. Some have thereby been encouraged to come in person and see for themselves.

And finally, because for a time we were unable to "hear" confessions in church because of masking and the six foot rule, I began more so to meet with people in my office by appointment for confessions and pastoral counseling. This has been very well received. It continues as a preference for many and seems conducive to deeper personal spiritual growth and the development of a more solid faith. May it be blessed!

With love in Christ,
Fr. Gregory