



October 3, 2019

His Eminence, Archbishop MICHAEL
Archbishop of New York, Diocese of New York and New Jersey
33 Hewitt Avenue
Bronxville, NY 10708

Your Eminence:

Bless, Master!

As we look forward to the visit from Your Eminence this weekend, here is a summary of our Mission activities for the time period January 1, 2019 to the present.

Liturgical and Sacramental Life

Thanks to the generous financial support of the Diocese, we are blessed to be able to have a full time, resident priest, Fr. Peter Irfan, to enable our Mission to live a full Liturgical and Sacramental Life. Each weekend, Fr. Peter serves Great Vespers on Saturday evening and Matins (Hours instead of Matins in the summer) and Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. The average weekly attendance at services is approximately a dozen people, with our highest attendance during Pascha, when that number often surpasses 50 people, total!

Fr. Peter also celebrates the Divine Liturgy on the morning of each of the Major Feast Days, either at our regular chapel or at the Hermitage of St. Olympia in Edwards, NY. Attendance at these Liturgies averages 2-3 faithful in either location. In addition, Fr. Peter has made visits to our hospitalized parishioners, both young and old, and has served Holy Communion to them as well as to a parishioner who was temporarily staying in a physical rehabilitation facility.

On the Feast of Theophany, following our Divine Liturgy in our chapel, we travelled to the banks of the Racquette River, on the grounds of Trinity Episcopal Church in Potsdam, NY, where Fr. Peter, assisted by Subdeacon Julio Gurrea, performed a Blessing of the Waters service.

During Great Lent, Archbishop Michael was gracious to visit us and serve the Divine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts with Fr. Peter. We had a large choir, including Professor Dr. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis' Byzantine Music students from the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam, who sang the hymns and responses for this beautiful service.

Once again, we had a very full Holy Week and Pascha, with at least one service each day. On Pascha afternoon, we had the Agape service at Trinity Episcopal Church in Potsdam, which was well-attended and followed by an Easter egg hunt for the children, and a large parish feast featuring roast lamb and ethnic foods from the many diverse

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backgrounds of our parishioners. Members of Trinity Episcopal Church, friends, and family members were all welcomed to this celebration.

We were further blessed to have a Catechumen, Zachary Price, received by Chrismation at our Mission in May 2019.

Music for all services is sung by between 2 and 6 of our parishioners, who are often joined by additional students. The liturgical music settings chanted are a mix of Byzantine, Russian and Antiochian styles. This choir is generally led by Professor Dr. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis, a music professor at the Crane School of Music, who has degrees in both Western and Byzantine music, who has herself set much of the music we sing, to Byzantine Chant. Many of our parishioners, both young and old, join the choir in singing hymns and responses. We sing each hymn and response at least once in English, and these are repeated in other languages as well, to make those from various ethnic backgrounds feel comfortable in our Mission.

Parish Education

We encourage children, students, and all parishioners to join us in singing hymns and responses during Liturgy and to read during Vespers services. In addition, during the academic year, we have had educational activities surrounding Vespers. Last Winter and early Spring, we showed Orthodox films following Vespers and provided pizza to encourage people to stay for discussion and fellowship. This Fall, Professor Dr. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis has begun teaching Byzantine music classes prior to Vespers.

In addition, Professor Dr. Jessica edits and distributes a weekly electronic bulletin which contains articles and other writings for our spiritual edification, often written by clergy, monastics or saints.

Hospitality and Charity

We welcome all to a full meal and fellowship time following all Sunday Liturgies, and often on Feast Days as well, and we often send parishioners (especially students) home with leftovers!

Our electronic bulletin keeps us all in touch and helps us keep track of important dates and events in the life of our Mission family. Greg Kalicin maintains our Mission website and Facebook page.

On the Sunday preceding our patron St. Olympia's Feast Day of July 24, parishioners Subdeacon Julio and Jess Gurrea hosted a picnic for the Mission at their home, following the Divine Liturgy. They extended invitations to their friends and neighbors to attend this celebration, as well.

Fr. Peter conducts outreach at the St. Lawrence Correctional Facility each Saturday morning. He speaks with inmates individually and conducts a prayer service for them, as well.

The Parish Council has allocated money for charitable endeavors, including the Helping Hands ministry in Hannawa Falls, NY, which is located just a few miles south of Potsdam and provides food, house wares, appliances and furniture for people in need.

Finances

Our current financial situation is stable, owing in great part to the support of the substantial Diocesan Grant we are blessed to receive each month. A full report of monthly finances, prepared by our Treasurer Greg Kalicin, is presented at each Parish Council meeting and at the Annual Meeting of the Parish in September or October each year. In addition to our weekly collection at services, we also receive donations from out of town friends and family members, sometimes through the Pay Pal button on our website.

Current balances in our bank accounts include:

Building fund:	\$36,634.17
Checking acct:	<u>\$13,380.73</u>
	\$50,014.90 total liquid assets

We are extremely grateful to each group and person which supports us, both from inside and outside of our Mission, and particularly to our Diocese for its most generous financial support of our Mission.

Other Mission Activities

In July, our Mission participated for the first time in the Potsdam Summer Festival, which is an extremely popular local event which includes live music, food, hand-crafted items for sale, displays from various community organizations, children's activities and even an antique car show. Our resident iconographer, Mother Sophronia, set up a display regarding icon writing as part of our booth, and in addition we sold displayed and sold icons and pysanky which were generously donated to us by Diocesan clergy. In addition, Emma Trulock, a parishioner who was home from college on summer break, did free face painting for the children, which was very popular. She decorated a jar which she set out and marked for donations to our "St. Olympia Orthodox Church", and parents and caregivers were generous in their donations to us. Since there was a line for face painting nearly all day, this gave Fr. Peter and parishioners the opportunity to talk to people regarding our Mission and to hand out to them our Mission brochures and Fr. Peter's business cards, while the children were waiting in line and getting their faces painted. This was a great success, particularly in terms of getting the word out about Orthodoxy in the North Country, and we look to make this an annual event for our Mission.

Last November, during Archbishop Michael's visit to our Mission, Mother Sophronia (Hofstead) gave a fascinating lecture on images of angels in Orthodox Icons. This was by far our most well-attended public lecture, with approximately 55-60 people in attendance. It was extremely well received by art students and professors from SUNY Potsdam, as well as by our parishioners, visitors and members of the public.

As this report is being prepared, we are looking forward to the fall visit of Your Eminence. We will celebrate Great Vespers on Saturday evening on the campus of St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY. Following Vespers, Dr. Mary Ford will speak on "Beginning to Understand the Revelation of John." The Vespers service, lecture, and fellowship and refreshments afterwards will be free and open to the public.

Most notably, less than a week prior to the writing of this report, the Parish Council has decided unanimously to take ownership (at no cost) of the former Congregational Church building and property in Norwood, NY – 7 miles north of Potsdam. This is a true "leap of Faith", a great undertaking which would not have been possible without the considerable prayers, guidance, and support [both financial and otherwise] of Your Eminence, our beloved Archbishop, and of the Diocese as a whole. We pray that this will lead to the spread of Orthodoxy in the North Country, and to the growth of our Mission, according to the will of our Lord!

We are particularly grateful to our beloved Archbishop Michael, that he makes time in his extremely busy schedule to travel to visit us, to serve us, and to meet with us in person, a minimum of twice each year. This is particularly notable, as we are by far at the northernmost extreme of our Diocese, geographically-- more than 140 miles northeast of Syracuse, New York and nearly 200 miles from Albany, New York!

Love in Christ,

Fr. Peter Irfan
Acting Rector

Cynthia Eyler, Esq.
Parish Council President

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