

State of the Church Address: December 1998

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

-1Thes 5: 11-28

How does one measure the accomplishments of a parish? It is very difficult to assess ourselves as Christ would. Our Lord's expectations are always the high because he has created us for greatness and dignity. He said, *"You must be perfect as Your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matt 5:48). At the same time, St. Paul testifies that *God's call to perfection is realized in our weaknesses. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Cor. 12:9). This is the ever present tension as we journey on our pilgrimage towards His heavenly kingdom. The journey this past has been both exiting and challenging as we as a family united in Christ continue to be changed by His Spirit into a pleasing body that glorifies God. *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit"* (2 Cor 3:18).

Growth

The arrival of new families continues. New families have joined in with the faithful and have become active members in the life of Assumption Greek Orthodox church. Those of you who on Sundays have greeted the visitors to our community, thank you!. You have left a positive impression on these people. They always remark about what a nice feeling they visit Assumption and participate in our worship. This past year the Brown family was joined to the Orthodox Church through Chrismation. They are now living in California. We also have welcomed three new Christians through Baptism.

Missions & Philanthropy

O.C.O.M.: Orthodox Christian Outreach Ministries was formed in January of this year. This group is focuses on giving Orthodox Christians hands on opportunities to minister

and interact with the needy. The organization is made up of members from all the Greek Orthodox Churches. They have been responsible for coordinating relief efforts at the Whole Life Shelter in downtown Phoenix. Activities range from reading books on Saturdays to children at the Shelter, refurbishing its facilities and bringing our children to play with the children who live there. The contacts for O.C.O.M. at Assumption are Alexandria, Antonia, Chuck and Kim.

Agape Canister Distribution

Efforts were begun by Chuck and have continued to grow throughout the greater Phoenix area. If you would like to become a partner in the ministry by placing canisters and collecting the funds for our National Missions Center please contact Chuck.

Philoptochos

This year our community has seen the resurrection of an active and strong Philoptochos. On May 30, Tula hosted an organization meeting and officers were elected and events began to be organized. Under the guidance of their new President, Harriet and her hard working board, Philoptochos is back working for those in need. On November 7 a membership tea was hosted by Angela & Anne. Over 40 were in attendance including the Diocesan Philoptochos President Lula.

Building Campaign & Parish Council

Beginning in January of 1996 the Parish Council has worked together to bring us to this point. We owe them all a great deal of gratitude and appreciation. They have spent hundreds of hours volunteering their talents, offering their professional services (free of charge), donating anonymously when needs arise and most importantly have expressed their love and devotion to Christ by the manner in which they have served all of us. It has been an honor for me to work with this group of individuals.

On November 22, of this year, twelve years to the date after an initial forty families came together, we kicked off the beginning of an exciting phase in the history of Assumption Greek Orthodox Church. A strong group of 15 families committed early in the Campaign to \$515,000.00. A shovel is about to be planted because of the faith, hope and love of many of our parishioners. We ought to acknowledge the 32 member steering committee, plus their committee members (an additional 50 members) of our community for having served us with great love and devotion. 10 homes of Parishioners were opened up for information meetings, advance commitment dinners were held and phone calls were made. They also have volunteered hundreds of hours of work.

Professional skills were utilized such as Michael, for a wonderful video presentation on the Campaign. Finally, the testimonials that have stirred the hearts and faith of members of our community.

Perhaps the most time consuming portion of the project has been the publication of the Campaign materials. They have communicated clearly the vision of our Building Campaign, they have been first class which shows the love and seriousness with which we have approached this project, and always on time in our hands so that we know what is happening in the Campaign. Paul and Alexandria, Vasile, and Charles have put together are responsible for the promotional materials.

Spiritual Growth

Stewardship has steadily increased from year to year. This is a sign that indeed we are becoming more aware of the spiritual significance to making offering to our Lord for the building up of His church. From 1996 to 1997 we saw an increase of 20% in the average stewardship pledge. From 1997 to 1998 we have seen an increase of 30% in the average stewardship pledge. Today the average family give \$680 a year to the ministries of Assumption. Our stewardship goal for 1998 is \$93,000. Still well below other Christian communions who average \$2,500 in their communities. We accomplished an all time high in stewardship pledges this year totaling \$87,958.02 To date, we have collected \$76,000 in stewardship, \$7,000 in donations, \$4,241 in radio ministry, and \$24,000 in special offerings totaling over \$111,000.00. Truly it is a blessing to see the direct support of our ministries through the hands of so many faithful individuals and families.

Studies in Orthodoxy

This past year two series of studies were offered. The Lenten journey was a seven week study on Great Lent that was hosted in the homes of parishioners between February 24 and April 7. A second study was held on the Lord's prayer as interpreted by St. Gregory of Nyssa which was held between July 23 and August 20. A valley wide Catechism is in the works that will be taught by all the clergy of the valley for inquirers into the Orthodox faith. In September of 1999 this program will begin.

Sunday School

This year we have been blessed by faithful and dedicated Sunday School Teachers. Under the supervision of Donna the program is even better than last year. We have invested in educational materials, books and aids to help our children. The Sunday School teachers have put many hours into preparing lessons and even donating from their own resources to provide the children with needed material. We owe them all a great deal of appreciation.

- Moms & Tots : Presbytera Andrea welcomes new Moms into the community.
- Pilgrimage to St. Anthony Monastery: March 14
- Great Friday Retreat
- Women Retreat: Sponsored by St. George's Antiochian Church
- Summer Camp: June 28-July

- Super Orthodox Saturdays
- Book Store: Harriet
- Oasis: Ann & Alexia

Community Outreach

1999 Greek Food Festival: The current chairman of next year's festival is Steve. Many thanks to his efforts this past year for coming forward and giving of his expertise and time. The 1998 Festival met with rainy weather and kept the profits to \$5,946. The entire amount has been left in the "Restricted Special Event Fund" which is designated to be used as seed money for any Special Events that our community sponsors. These funds are not used for operations of the church. The balance of this account is 11,600.57.

Greek Language & Cultural Program

Lina Lughes began a Greek School program on September 13. Presently she has over 57 students enrolled.

Community Fellowship

- Ice Skating: Feb 8
- Family Picnic: McCormick railroad park, Feb 15
- Coyotes Hockey Night: Feb 25
- Palm Sunday Luncheon: April 11 (Peter)
- Pascha Midnight Meal (Nick)
- Pascha Picnic: April 18, (Cathy and volunteers)
- Gold Tournament: June 6 (Chris)
- Feast Day Dinner: August 1
- Super Orthodox Saturdays: Sept 12th

Physical Improvements

- The remodeling of a bathroom into a private office
- New carpeting installed in two classrooms and painted.

A new air conditioning unit was purchased this year.