

## **Priest Report General Assembly (May 2009)**

*Christ is Risen!*

Over the past 14 years, I hope you have come to trust in my leadership as your priest. I consider your trust to be something sacred. At the end of my life, I will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of how I led you and cared for your souls. I rejoice today in what God has accomplished through us and I am looking forward with great expectations of a fruitful future as we consider perhaps one of the most important decisions this community will ever make. By supporting the proposed amendment to our budget, the Parish Council can go forward and hire a Pastoral Assistant. They are considering, our own Allan Boyd who graduates from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology with a Masters of Divinity this May. Your faithfulness to what it means to be the Church has always been an inspiration to me as your priest.

The path that Assumption has followed from the beginning was not always familiar to most from other Greek Orthodox parishes. I have attempted to lead this community based upon the guiding principles found in the Gospel. The Gospel defines us, guides our decision making, provides direction and vision for us. God's principle of "Divine Providence" teaches that He supplies the resources so that we can accomplish the work He calls us to do.

Our history has borne witness to God's providence every step of the way. Most recently, we retired the mortgage in 8 years, funded the Iconography Project, funded all proposed phases of the Dream Campaign, we have had our best first quarter ever in 2009 and our Operating account balance is \$72,000! This is miraculous considering the economic climate beyond the walls of Christ's holy Church.

### **A Vision for Tomorrow**

Our community and its ministries have grown dramatically these past 14 years. We are at a crossroads. By God's providence we are presented with an opportunity for us to invest today in expanding the ministry Staff at Assumption that will benefit generations to come. In order for us to continue to advance the gospel in our community and offer quality ministries - it requires another full-time, properly trained Pastoral Assistant. When you look at how other Christina Churches function, it is striking how many people serve on a full-time basis staffing ministries that support the growth of these communities. By contrast, there are few Greek Orthodox parishes in the Metropolis of San Francisco who have more than one full time priest or a Pastoral Assistant. One can speculate as to the reasons for this- from not enough available priests; to Churches servicing debt with nothing left over to spend on additional staff or, perhaps some priests do not want to share their ministry with anyone else. The truth is however, that parishes, who value providing quality ministry and developing ministries, supply the funding to make it happen. The result is that these communities shine because they

have more lives being affected and changed by the love of Christ. These communities grow because visitors come and witness this phenomenon and they want to experience it as well. As personal faithfulness increases, participants in ministries and stewardship being offered to Christ also increase.

One Greek Orthodox Parish with a similar vision to ours began over 35 years ago in Irvine California, St. Paul's. Today it has grown to 450 families. They employ three full-time office staff members; two full-time Priests and one full-time Pastoral Assistant. Their community abounds with quality ministries. They are only 150 more families than Assumption is today.

When Assumption's Master Plan was developed in 1996, it consisted of a Church for 375 people; 7 Sunday School classrooms, an Administration Building and a multi-purpose Community Center. No one (including myself) considered how we would support the priest and the ministries that would be developed as the new Church grew over the following 12 years. At the beginning, we were 90 families which represented around 300 souls. Today, the new Church has grown and that responsibility has expanded to 1500 souls. I am asking you today, to invest in the spiritual care of your community so that it may continue to grow as a "life-giving tree" to all who come.

Assumption is blessed with many parishioners who lead ministries. We have approximately 75 parishioners who have leadership positions in the church and over 450 participants in these ministries. The impact of having the liturgical assistance of a 2nd priest, Fr. Virgil, is significant. Fr. Virgil's presence during Holy Week and just on Sunday's throughout the year enables me to offer you more of myself. If Fr. Virgil was not here, Assumption would be a very different place.

All of the ministry leaders and their participants are under my supervision. As they have grown and increased in number, I am finding myself saying - 'it's too bad more is not being done with these groups.' I see more and more missed opportunities slipping by to make a difference in the lives of our young people and adults. We will have to give an account to God of why we didn't do more with what He gave us to do. I do not want to tell him - we settled because we became overwhelmed, or, that we ignored the problem or, that we could not agree on a solution. I am turning to you today, to support the solution and approve the proposed amendment. This is being done with the encouragement and blessings of Metropolitan Gerasimos, who sees the expansion of ministry staff as an essential element to the future growth of the Greek Orthodox parishes in America. He wants Assumption to continue to be the example he desires for other parishes to follow.

In addition to typical parish responsibilities, I have been given additional duties. I am serving as Vicar of the Southwestern region of the Metropolis of San Francisco, the Metropolis Council, the Metropolis Board for the Commission of Missions and Evangelism and the Board of Trustees at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

Our Archdiocese and Metropolis are so understaffed that often parish priests with additional capabilities assume multiple responsibilities that extend beyond the confines of a local parish. I happen to be one of those priests.

I have loved being your priest these past 14 years and I am thankful for having had supportive Parish Councils and the support of generous Christ loving parishioners - you have all made these past years fruitful. I am looking forward to continuing on here for many more years; I also want to see the realization of whatever God has in store for us. I do not think that is a coincidence that on this Third Sunday of Pascha when the Apostles chose the first deacons to assist them in furthering the Gospel, that we are gathered here today to do essentially the same thing. After they ordained the deacons we are told that...the Word of God increased and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem also increased...(Acts 6) - this is why we are doing this today.

St. John Chrysostom commented on this day and said, "Thus they were enabled to give their attention to things spiritual...they had been taught by Moses's example not to undertake the management of everything by themselves."

"And the Lord said to Moses: Gather unto me seventy men of the ancients of Israel, whom you know to be... masters of the people...That I may come down and speak with you: and I will take of your spirit, and will give to them, that they may bear with you the burden of the people, and you may not be burdened alone. (Numbers 11:16-17)."  
I conclude with St. Paul's words of instruction that were given during anxious and uncertain times very similar in many ways to our time today with so much economic uncertainty.

"Be rejoicing in the Lord always; again I will say, be rejoicing. Let your reasonableness be known to all men. The Lord is near: Cease being anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and by supplication, with giving of thanks, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

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