

## **State Of The Church Address November 2009**

The Assumption community has truly been blessed with people who continue to offer their lives to Christ through serving one another and supporting the mission of the Church. Over one-hundred and fifty volunteers give of themselves in parish ministries, changing lives, bringing hope and sharing the love of Christ. As co-workers with Christ, our purpose and mission is to live and share His message of salvation. *Faith becomes life* when the Lord's words are fulfilled in us and are seen. The amount we give to Christ in the form of our annual pledge is how we express to Him our response to His love for us. This reflection highlights the outcome of choices our community has made, and the greatest decision yet to be made – the amount we are able to pledge to our annual Stewardship Campaign for 2010.

"If you give a mouse a cookie...he will ask for a glass of milk"

Greek Orthodox Churches with a \$9,000 to \$20,000 monthly mortgage payment are not uncommon. Most Churches with a large mortgage payment become dependant upon various means of fundraising (usually in the form of a Festival) to make payments. Large Festivals require an enormous investment of personal time by parishioners. As a result, parishioners see their offering of time at a Festival as fulfilling their stewardship to the Church. Consequently, when the responsibility is not placed upon each member to personally provide for the ministries of Christ the result is a minimal stewardship pledge, usually around \$250 for the Church.

The fundamental flaw - indebted churches cannot expand their ministry staff

What is alarming is that no one seems to be concerned about the consequences of parishes building beyond their means. No one asks, 'Is this the best use of our stewardship resources?' Perhaps it is no wonder there is a lack of concern because one weekend a year the Church goes into the restaurant business, the mortgage gets paid, community life evolves around fund-raising events and there is no money left to hire an assistant, let alone a second priest to assist the already overburdened priest. He suffers doing ministry alone, the faithful get comfortable with this parish "life-style" ...all of this in exchange for beautiful buildings?

Building Community before Building Buildings

In 2009, our greatest achievement will be remembered for the completion of the icon dome project and the increasing of ministry staff for our community. It is true that perhaps no one in our community grew up in a parish that had more than one priest. It has only been within the last twenty years that we have seen a few Greek Orthodox communities develop a ministry staff greater than one priest. It is reasonable that some may have doubts about the value of increased pastoral staff; yet, many see the fruit of other Christian communities with multiple full time ministry staff.

God does send exceptional servants to witness for us someone whose faith has become life. The "Spirit of Stewardship Award" was established with the purpose to celebrate the life-long service by those who humbly accomplish a great deal through small things. That person who volunteers their time, without pay, and makes ministry a part of their lives is what being a steward means. Most people however, with full-time careers are busy raising their families and taking care of the needs of their households. By having another full-time paid ministry staff member, the Church doubles its effectiveness in connecting very busy people with the life of the Church and in a way that their family life is enriched.

### Our Greatest Achievement in 2010

Our greatest achievement in 2010 will be the increase we witness in our pledges! My salary as a priest is set by the Archdiocese and is published on our web site. It would be wrong for me to ask you to give sacrificially and consider increasing your annual pledge so that it may some day approach 10% of your annual income if I wasn't practicing this as well. In 2008, Presvytera and I gave \$6,500 and \$2,500 in donations to Assumption Church. If we are to meet the challenge of increasing our 2010 budget faithfully; annual pledges will have to increase significantly in order for that to happen. If financial constraints prevent one from increasing their pledge – God understands. If on the other hand, God has blessed you with the means to substantially increase your pledge, I invite you to do so this coming year. The continued presence of the pastoral assistant depends upon your support and willingness to provide. My belief is that for God's work to continue to grow at Assumption in a dynamic way this vital step in our history is necessary at this time.

### Stewardship Building Relationships

Our past Capital Campaigns were successful not just because they raised enough money, but also because they also built up our community. Growing in Christ deepens our relationship with Him and one another. Since the arrival of our pastoral assistant Assumption's community life has been enhanced, new ministries have been developed and relationships are growing between parishioners.

### New Ministries developed in the past six months:

1. For the first time, Assumption has a Junior GOYA ministry for sixth to eighth graders and at the same time, a Senior GOYA for high school students has been formed. At the request of the youth, GOYA is now meeting twice a month; previously they only met once a month. By allowing the pastoral assistant to focus on the ninth through twelfth graders, the priest can focus on the middle school students. Junior GOYA this year had over 24 participants at their first meeting. Last year we might have had twelve participate from this age group. We have increased participation in our Youth groups by well over 100% from last year.

2. The Sunday School Program is now under the full-time direction of the pastoral assistant. Having a theologically trained staff member visiting the class rooms has enhanced the overall quality of our program. This year we have over 145 students registered. The former Sunday School director was also a teacher and now that person can devote more quality time to developing lessons and the children are the ones benefiting.

3. For the first time, parents were offered a class on the “Parables of the Kingdom” taught by the pastoral assistant while their children attended Greek Dance class. Over fifteen different parents attended these seminars.

#### How The Pastoral Assistant Assists the Priest In Offering Quality Ministries

The presence of the pastoral assistant allows the priest to spend more time with parishioners and to focus on building relationships within the community. Assumption offers an abundance of ministries. As the community has grown, so has the challenge to continue to offer quality ministries at the standard which has become the hallmark of why many families become part of our community.

- a. The Assumption Stewardship Ministry Team was developed this year. This focus group is responsible for the cultivation and education of parishioners in what it means to be a steward. The Stewardship Ministry Team of twenty-five parishioners has contributed input in the development of our 2010 Stewardship Campaign. In the coming months, new fellowship opportunities will be offered in the form of small in-home gatherings of parishioners. The informal gatherings will be themed on a faith related topic and led by Fr. Andrew.
- b. By training and preparing a seminarian graduate for ordination, Assumption is providing a valuable service to the entire Church. Fr. Andrew is preparing the pastoral assistant in every aspect of being a priest. The importance of time management and prioritizing work are vital to a newly ordained priest being successful. Allowing the pastoral assistant to prepare monthly articles, sermons, teach classes, organize youth group activities, administrate the Sunday School and engage in the lives of parishioners is a learned art. Assumption also benefits by taking on this responsibility from the ministry provided by the pastoral assistant.
- c. The pastoral assistant allows the priest to be two places at once. He is an extension of the ministry of the priest and can represent him (or the Church) when the priest is unavailable. This strengthens the ministry of the parish. For example, when the iconographer was being interviewed by the press, our pastoral assistant was available and coordinated the entire process.

## The Next Building To Be Built At Assumption – Community Life

As Assumption enters into young-adulthood, prior to “owning our first home” (a completed campus with every building needed) God has allowed us this opportunity to nurture the building of community life in a dynamic way. The “cookie” we ate from the beginning has been that of Christ’s teachings, and we are now enjoying the fruit of faithful decisions. The fruit is: God built His Church, quality ministries abound for newborns to seniors, we have increased the pastoral staff and the Church is ready to plan the Consecration. All this in just eight years since opening the doors - let us give thanks to God who has provided abundantly through your faithful offerings!

Prior to embarking upon another Capital Campaign, I am calling upon each of you to prepare your souls to be “baptized” a second time along with the Church building when it is Consecrated in the future. A re-birth is accomplished through dedicating ourselves to growing in faith and love, creating life-long relationships that enhance spiritual lives, serving one another, forgiving one another, so that as we may truly offer our prayers with one heart and one mind before Christ in the holy Liturgy.

I am excited about the final “plan” that some day will finish our facilities; but I am even more passionate about seeing life-long relationships form as we allow our faith to become life and live as a community united in the love of Christ.

God’s blessings be with you all.  
Your co-worker in Christ,

+Fr. Andrew