

September 1, 2024 – Feast of the Indiction – Letter from New Parish Rector

Dear Faithful of St. Olympia Mission,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever! Happy Church New Year!

What a privilege it is for me, an unworthy priest, to be chosen by His Eminence Archbishop Michael to serve this blessed community. How fitting to begin this new chapter on September 1<sup>st</sup>, the Church's New Year. May we make a good beginning together with our Lord!

I arrive at an interesting juncture in the history of this mission, in the aftermath of a historic storm which caused major damage to the church's facilities. Instead of arriving to find a mission paralyzed by despondency, I am pleased to have found a family of faith roused to action. Instead of a spirit of mourning, the prevailing attitude is rather one of thanksgiving and hope for the future. This aligns with what St. James, the brother of the Lord, reminds us: *“Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”* (James 1:2-4).

As members of the Holy Orthodox Church, and especially of a mission, patience is critical. I ask your patience as I grow into my new role as rector. I ask your flexibility as we rebuild and build up this mission. And I ask your forgiveness for when I fall short of my calling or when I let you down. Thankfully, though, it is not about me. It is about Jesus Christ. **If we walk together with Christ—our Pilot, our Shepherd, our High Priest—we will lack nothing.**

With the Lord as our firm foundation and guide, there are three things that I plan to focus on: 1) the worship (i.e., establishing a liturgical rhythm), 2) the building (i.e., making our space safe, suitable, and accessible), and 3) the people (i.e., ministering to the needs of the community).

**The worship.** As Fr. Schmemmann says, *“Liturgical services are not one of the 'aspects' of the Church; they express its very essence, are its breath, its heartbeat.”* My goal is to have the doors of the church open as much as possible—certainly for the 12 great feasts, regardless of which day of the week they fall, and for other weekday liturgies, akathists, moliebens, and for confessions. After all, a family who prays together stays together and people who pray together become a family. These services are enriched by our liturgical chant and choral music traditions — one of the greatest gifts that we, as the Orthodox Church, and as St. Olympia in particular, have to offer. I look forward to expanding and developing this gift and offering it to the community and beyond.

**The building.** If our worship is the lifeblood and breath, the physical church building is the body. Thanks to an incredible outpouring of support from across the diocese and beyond, we have the resources (over \$30,000 in funds raised!) to begin renovating the church, especially the lower level which sustained the brute of the storm damage. We will focus on making the building safe and also handicap accessible, making sure that all who desire to “come and see” can do so. Since we only arrive at the spiritual through the material, the physical state of our worship and fellowship space matters. Furthermore, it ought to reflect the beauty of our Faith and the majesty of our God, the Master Architect.

**The people.** As we begin together, you can expect me to listen. I look forward to getting to know you and learning the needs of our parish community, and the broader community in which we serve. This will help triage where to focus our efforts. There is so much that we can do, in terms of education (e.g., Orthodoxy 101 classes, Sunday School), fellowship (e.g., hosting movie nights), college ministry (e.g., establishing an Orthodox Christian Fellowship chapter), outreach (e.g., feeding the hungry, hosting community concerts), etc. Once again, we must be patient and take a page out of the Greeks' book: "siga, siga." "Slowly, slowly."

According to Archbishop John Shahovskoy, *"The purpose of ministry is to widen the Church beyond Its material boundaries, to take it into the people's homes, into their souls. Not infrequently, the opposite happens: this world invades the Church."* We must remain faithful to the traditions which we have received, while finding creative ways to share the Gospel with people from diverse backgrounds. We are all stewards of a 2000-year-old, vetted, trustworthy, time- and battle-tested Tradition. Every one of us needs healing. The Church offers it freely.

As we reflect on the liturgical year behind, and press forward to the year ahead, may we do so with thanksgiving, patience, and trust in the Lord who gave His life in order to save ours. May the Lord direct our steps and have mercy on us!

Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Gregory Fedorchak