

RECTOR'S REPORT AT ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
St. Basil's Russian Orthodox Church
Watervliet, NY 12189
February 4, 2018

Brothers and sisters in Christ, welcome, and thank you for attending St. Basil's annual meeting for 2018. I would like to begin by remembering our brothers and sisters who fell asleep in the Lord in the past year: Walter Nystoriak, Elizabeth (Betty) Belokopitsky, Walter Spiak, Andrew Tarbay Sr., Vera Karpiak Szabiet, Samuel Yachup and Eva Nystoriak. In January 2018 Adam Walion fell asleep in the Lord. In the past year a friend and relative of parishioners, my brother in Christ, Archpriest Stephen Mack, also fell asleep in the Lord. Please join me as we sing "Eternal Memory" for them.

I'd like to recap some of the events of the past year. We hosted the Sunday of Orthodoxy Lenten Mission Vespers. Priestmonk Herman from St. Tikhon's Monastery was our guest speaker. We were blessed to have the myrrh streaming miracle working icon of St. Anna with us. We had a piroghi sale, and the Sisterhood hosted a stuffed cabbage sale and a garage sale. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week we added the Bridegroom Matins. On Holy Friday we added the Royal Hours. On Radonitsa, the first Tuesday after Pascha, a panikhida was served at our cemetery for all of our departed loved ones. Through the kindness of His Eminence Archbishop Michael we were blessed with the relics of eight saints for veneration and for our sanctification. I was honored, as always, to offer the benediction and to march in our annual Maplewood Volunteer Fire Dept./American Legion Post 1615 Memorial Day parade. I attended the banquet and installation of officers of the Maplewood Volunteer Fire Dept. where, as honorary chaplain, I led everyone in prayer before dinner and offered the benediction at the end. Bible Study continued on Friday evenings and catechism classes were held during the week. I did pre-marriage preparation with three couples where I spent six hours with each couple. Matushka Dorothy's grandson Paul Izzo and Megan Dowd were married in our church. Mary Breton and Benjamin Horne were married in Mary's home church, where Mary's father Archpriest Gary Breton is the rector. The wedding of the third couple, Nicole Burch and Christopher Fabian, is scheduled to take place in August. In September the Soyuz hosted a parish picnic. In November we had a Healing Service as a form of outreach and evangelization. Christmastime we added the Royal Hours and the Vespers with eight Old Testament readings. We participated in the St. Tikhon's seminarian's Christmas gift project and donated gifts to seminarians and their families. Throughout the year we have had a number of rentals at the Church Center which paid for the utilities and upkeep of the Center. We assembled IOCC emergency kits for the victims of the hurricane disaster. We have had a number of special collections and offered our support to many charities and organizations, one of which was for the support of the Bethany School in the Holy Land. His Eminence Archbishop Michael visited and served with us for our parish feastday. In February of last year we gained a new parishioner when Deborah Ahlers was received into the Orthodox faith. We welcome Subdeacon Jason Gagnon, his wife Laura, and their two children Eleanor and Julian as our newest parishioners. Laura is expecting and in June we will gain a new parishioner.

When His Eminence Archbishop Michael preached at Vespers on our parish feastday, Vladika gave us four directives, or challenges, to work on. One is education of our adults and children. Two is welcoming visitors and outreach to the local community. Three is to provide transportation for the elderly and homebound who would like to attend church services. The fourth is that all Christians should visit the sick. In the coming year the Parish Council and I will further explore and discuss how we can further fulfill and expand on each of these tasks. Allow me to just briefly touch on these topics.

In the coming year we plan to have a monthly Movie Night. Everyone, including your friends and family will be invited and welcome to attend the viewing of a film in our Church Center. Dr. Ken Lucas graciously donated a projector and we have a screen. Once we acquire some speakers we will be set to go. Popcorn and refreshments will be provided. We will view educational, as well as entertaining films. One documentary in particular that I am hoping all of us will have the opportunity to see is entitled "Becoming Truly Human." The subject of this 1 1/2 hour documentary are the "nones." They are the millennials who check "none of the above" when they answer a survey about their religious beliefs and affiliation with religious institutions. I plan to show this film more than once. I consider it vital that all of us watch it. The movie nights are not only an opportunity for us to enjoy fellowship together, but also is a form of outreach. It is a great opportunity to invite guests to a low key and non-threatening church function. It could possibly lead to an interest in the Orthodox faith and our parish. The Center is only one step away from the Church. It is my intention to continue with the Healing Service. Our parishioners very much enjoy the akathists that we serve every Friday during Great Lent. I plan to schedule additional akathists during the year. The akathist is a great service to invite a guest and to introduce someone to Orthodox worship. It is a short service that we all sing together and it is very joyous and uplifting. It is my hope that we will bring back the Russian or Ethnic Festival, a great venue for fellowship, outreach and fundraising.

When I was a seminarian at St. Vladimir's I belonged to a group called the St. Panteleimon's Society. The group was headed by a local priest, Fr. Stephen Plumlee, myself, Ann Zinzel (Fr. Schmemmann's secretary), some lay people and other seminarians. We made monthly visits to local hospitals and long term care facilities and celebrated the Divine Liturgy for the residents. After the service we enjoyed coffee and snacks and fellowship with everyone. I never realized how many Orthodox Christians were residents of these facilities. Perhaps we can establish such a group in our parish.

I have been acutely concerned and aware of the high percentage of youth who have left the Church. I have been trying to learn and educate myself about ministering to our youth and what we need to do and change in order to address the needs and concerns of our young people. I have learned that this is a complex and difficult issue, and I have printed a number of articles concerning this in our bulletin.* Tapping into our budget for Evangelization, I have provided a number of our young couples with the book "Blueprints for the Little Church" and the book "Know the Faith." I also provide copies to every couple that does pre-marriage preparation with me. It is one thing when you recommend a book to someone, it is more valuable and a visible sign that you care when you *give* the book to someone. I still have the very first book (other than "Faith of Our Fathers" which I read before I was received into the Orthodox Church) that I ever read about the Orthodox faith. It was a gift to me from my parish priest. It was "The Orthodox Church" by Timothy Ware.

Many of our parishioners are generous with providing rides to those who need them, whether they be elderly parishioners or Orthodox students in local colleges and universities. Wouldn't it be great if we had a church van like the ones that we see all the time with the name of the church on the side, who provide transportation on Sundays to worshippers who need a ride? I don't expect this to happen any time soon, but all realizations begin with an idea and a dream. Evangelization is a line item on our parish budget, and it is a topic on every agenda of our parish council meetings. It is one of the major concerns and duties of a Christian church. Metropolitan Philip Saliba of blessed memory called Orthodoxy "the best kept secret in America." It is high time for the secret to be let out of the bag and revealed to the American people. Sayeedna's message was "Come home, America! Come home to the Orthodox faith!"

St. Basil's Russian Orthodox Church began with an idea and a dream. A handful of Slavic immigrants, with perseverance, hard work and God's help made that dream into a reality. Two glorified saints, Tikhon of Moscow and Alexander Hotovitsky, were directly involved in the founding of our parish. They are forever embedded in and part of the history of St. Basil's Church. I firmly believe that the same Holy Spirit and perseverance is alive and functioning today. The vision of our founders was stated clearly by the Soyuz when it was incorporated in 1931 as the American-Russian Maplewood Association. The first item of purpose stated in their incorporation was, and I quote, "Advancement and preservation of the Orthodox faith." Don't misunderstand the word "preservation." We are not perpetuating a museum or glorifying the past. The paradox is that although the Gospel and the Words of our Lord are "the same yesterday, today and forever," yet we are forever evolving, creating, learning, adapting, growing and changing according to a changing world with new technologies and developments. We do not live in a bubble or in a museum, but we grow and are open to change and new ideas, all within the framework of the unchanging eternal Truth of the Orthodox Christian faith.

At this time I would like to recognize and thank my fellow Parish Council members, whose wisdom and dedication kept our parish functioning, alive and growing. I wish to thank and recognize all of you, our parishioners. We are all a community, called upon by the Lord to work together in love, faith and mutual respect. The words repeated at every Divine Liturgy, that we have "one mind and one heart" is not a mere sentiment or unrealistic pipe dream. It is a realistic challenge and expectation of every Christian community. I thank all of you for your prayers, your attendance at Divine Services, your generous gifts and donations, your love, your concern and dedication, your forbearance, your time, your hard work, your sharing of your talents in so many ways and your patience with me and my unworthiness. I ask your forgiveness for not mentioning right now the name of every parishioner and the deeds that each of you have done and continue to do in giving of yourselves out of love for the Lord, St. Basil's and the Maplewood community. God bless all of you and may the Lord reward all of you! Thank you!

Archpriest Peter Olsen, Rector

*Attached as an addendum to my report

