

# ***The Faithful Servant***

**January, 2022**

"O Lord, I love the beauty of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells" (Ps. 25/26)

"How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord" (Ps. 83/84)

"Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away Your indignation toward us...O God, You will return and give us life, and Your people will rejoice in You...Surely His salvation is at hand for those who fear Him...Yes, the Lord will pour out His sweet goodness, and our land will yield its fruit..." (Ps. 84/85)

**PARISH MEETING--MY REPORT** Our annual parish meeting convenes Sunday, January 23. The business to be addressed includes elections of a parish council, budgeting, a by-laws change, and reports from parish officers and committees, including myself as the pastor. The meeting will be in the hybrid format, in person or on ZOOM, to which you've been sent the link. We hope many will join us as we review the past year and plan for the rest of 2022.

As I hack out the bulletins week by week and consider what I need to report on, it occurs to me that what I would put in a newsletter at this point largely coincides with what my annual report would be. So here is the proverbial stone to knock off the two birds.

**Where We Are** Of course, how we are proceeding depends largely upon where we are in relation to the COVID pandemic and the directives we receive from both the civil and Church authorities in dealing with that. We remain under the same diocesan directives we've worked with for the bulk of 2021: distancing in the building reduced to three feet, which allowed us to extend our attendance limit to 40 from the limit of 30 we had with distancing set at six feet; attendance at services still by reservation; masks required for those unvaccinated and optional for those who have received the shots; Communion received by a no-contact method; veneration of icons, etc. without contact--i.e., no kissing, but limited to deep bows. So as I've said frequently, be healthy, be signed up, be on time, be masked (as needed) and be distanced (by household) in the building as required.

By and large, we've done a good job following these guidelines. I am somewhat surprised, confused and dismayed that, once our permitted attendance was increased, there was no real increase in attendance, as I certainly expected there would be. I do know that there are those who have high-risk factors that keep them from returning, and that people are being careful when anything that may be a symptom shows up (especially true of families with children). These are certainly valid excuses for staying home and watching the live-streaming of services. But I have also heard from members of the parish who, given our attendance limits, do not want to "bump" someone from being able to sign up to be here. Let me assure you that this is not a difficulty at this point. Our Sunday attendance averages 20-25 presently (it's 50, give or take, under normal circumstances) and there is plenty of space for Sunday Liturgy, and even more for Vespers and other services. One misgiving I and other priests have is that perhaps there are those who have become comfortable with viewing Liturgy online even if they'd be able to attend. I certainly

hope that is not the case with our people. It is not the same experience; if one is able to attend within the guidelines we have, one should certainly do so.

I should mention that we've been having a large number of visitors to our services through the past couple years, both Orthodox and "seekers." Some stick around, some we never see again, some come and go; but almost every week we see at least one new person or family. I've been surprised to hear that this is a rather common phenomenon in these troubled times. For whatever the reason for this may be, we try to be as welcoming as we can, we get their contact information and try to be in touch and keep them up to date. We are grateful to them for seeking us out, especially those who remain, and we're grateful to God for sending them to us. They give us great hope for our growth when we are all able to reconvene.

Below, I go over some of the steps in reopening we've taken since the latest easing of our restrictions:

**Schedule of Services** We now offer close to our usual complete schedule of services. The weekend schedule is now offered in full: Saturday Vespers at 6:30 PM and Sunday Liturgy at 10 AM. For the Great Feasts, we also offer Vespers on the eve (on weeknights, 7:30 PM) and Divine Liturgy on the feast day at 10 AM. The schedule for feast days of a lower rank (e.g., saints' days) varies, depending on how we feel we may be able to offer the service in good order with the servers and singers available. This has been helped lately by those whom I am mentoring in their duties for another parish (read below), who are getting practice in serving and singing with us on some weekday feasts. As the Lenten/Paschal season approaches, I do not yet know how the schedule will turn out, except that I expect to be able to serve the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on Wednesdays in Lent. Right now, I can't predict whether we will do more in the first and fifth weeks of the Fast. I hope to have our usual Holy Week and Paschal schedule at least from Holy Thursday morning through the Paschal Vigil and Liturgy Saturday night/Sunday morning. Last year, we limited those to the Passion Gospels Holy Thursday night and Vespers for Good Friday, with both the morning and midnight services Saturday. I would hope to at least expand upon that somewhat this year, if we're not yet able to restore our usually scheduled services each night (the Bridegroom Matins), with the "two-a-days" beginning with Holy Wednesday Presanctified running through the Holy Saturday/Paschal services.

Keep a close eye on the monthly calendars (thank you again, Alec Davidson!), Sunday bulletins and email messages from me for announcements about further services.

**Coffee Hour** Our fellowship time after Liturgy has been reestablished, to a limited degree. Spacing and masking directions are to be followed in the hall. You may notice that some chairs have been pulled out from the tables to enable the spacing. Typical coffee hour "munchies" (bagels and jelly, cheese and crackers, chips and salsa) are being set out and occasionally someone brings something more. However, we have decided generally **not** to encourage luncheons to be served for now. There was one exception: before the Church School trash pick-up service project (see below), a spaghetti lunch was served and proceeded in good order. We may be looking toward doing more such in the near future, and certainly once again when the pandemic eases. But for now, if someone brings additional food, they are expected to clean up their own containers, cooking utensils, etc., themselves and take them and the leftovers home.

**Bulletins** We began preparing print bulletins again once our directives were eased. We had an opportunity to subscribe to a local bulletin cover service from northern VA, but decided against

that. I could look into getting the extra covers from St. Mark's again if that is preferable, but so far council has decided to simply print them out on plain paper. One feature just added in the last few weeks is that the bulletin of the previous Sunday will now appear on the parish website. Thanks to Dennis Holovach for seeing to this.

**Confession** For some time, confession was only being done over the phone. We then received permission to hold confessions in person, but across the width of the church, and, of course, masked. With the latest easing of restrictions, both priest and penitent are now at the single icon stand, though we are both masked. The possibility of confession by phone is still open as may be needed for those who cannot come to church, but certainly should not be seen as the standard means of confessing for those able to do so in person.

**Veneration** We are still directed not to venerate icons, the chalice and other holy items by kissing. A deep bow, frankly, seems to be eliciting more thought, time and reverence than many people give to honoring the holy items when we do venerate by kissing! That is not a bad thing! Perhaps when this restriction is lifted, we will all give more thought to what we're doing as we do both. I think this limitation is wise. Not a good idea these days to be applying the mouths of all and sundry to these surfaces. And, meanwhile, the current practice seems to be causing an increase in reverence, rather than the opposite, as some have feared it would! One note on this--you probably do see me kiss the altar, the chalice, my hand cross and other things in the altar. How come I get away with it? Because I'm the only one doing so at the altar with those items.

**Receiving Communion** With reopening we were presented with the option for distributing Communion of using several spoons or devising a no-to-minimal-contact method. We've gone with the latter. Communicants should take a paper towel, approach the Cup, lower themselves if necessary, tilt their heads back and **open wide**. I will then drop the Elements directly into your mouth. Use the paper towel to wipe off your mouth if necessary--the communion cloth should still be used to catch anything that may fall. Deposit the paper towel in the "Holy Steel Pot." It then is disposed of in the proper fashion (burning). Antidoron is individually wrapped in a plastic sandwich bag. So you know, the no-contact-drop method was even mandated by at least one of the other synods in America long before COVID struck.

**Choir** Since reopening, the singing of Liturgy has usually been led by a single cantor singing the melody with other choir members and the congregation singing along or harmonizing. This has worked quite well, thanks to our two cantors, Kate White and Katlin Salcutan, with Daria Riegler and Dennis Holovach. When Kate leads, the others must position themselves at another stand, since Kate needs to have her children up with her; this is why you see the second choir stand in the nave. The congregation continues to join in the responses, as they should, often giving the impression as one watches the live-streaming, of a larger choir than is actually present! I have often mentioned how pleased I am at how the music of the services proceeds. The prayers of the Liturgy are sung attractively, at a reverent pace and clearly. I am very grateful to those at the stand(s) and am overjoyed to hear the community still raising our voices together in worship.

Our corps of singers has faced several further challenges. Kim Newby moved to Florida, removing her sweet soprano voice from the harmonizing. Then, with the spread of the latest variant, Dennis Holovach needed to absent himself (with his deep bass voice) from attending in person due to his high-risk status. With these two, Daria, Kate and/or Katlin, we had an accomplished "core group" at the choir stand, and I had also come to admire what Daria, Dennis

and myself could do together at Vespers and Panikhidas. Rehearsal opportunities are rare, but that we continue as smoothly as we do in Kim's and Dennis's absence is a tribute to the knowledge, experience and dedication of the singers who remain with us.

I continue to think that it is greatly pleasing to Our Lord to receive the prayers of this church sung as beautifully and most importantly, sincerely as they are, especially given the special challenges of the last couple years.

**Altar Servers** We still feel the loss of the Heatwole family in this area (among others!). Right now, we are limited to two servers: Oleg Salcutan and Cyprian Lutai Jr. There was another being trained who seems to have lost interest or is otherwise unable to attend regularly. Cyprian (i.e., "Father Cyprian") is an eight year old, definitely still in training, though he has had to "solo" at times in Oleg's absence. Progress has certainly been made! And Oleg simply takes care of everything, including showing Cyprian the ropes. Things do not go as easily when Oleg needs to be absent, Cyprian's efforts notwithstanding. As good an effort as these two put out, we certainly could use a few more altar servers. Those interested, adult males or boys of grade school age, can contact me and we'll try to get you started.

**Church School** We've been able to reestablish our Church School program beyond the 15-20 minute "Church School chats" with me after Liturgy that we did last year! We hold three classes this year: pre-school to Kindergarten (Jessie Frushour), early elementary (Erin Mumma) and late elementary (Kate White). We have two substitutes available, Marlene Powell and Barbara Vomend. There has been a limited number of children taking part on a regular basis so far, largely, I believe, over COVID concerns (one parent mentioned to me that her children are kept home with **any** sniffles or such, and that's probably the right way to go these days), and sometimes it seems as though we have more teachers than students. And sometimes it's the other way around. But the children involved are very enthused. Witness one announcement after Liturgy during the Christmas holidays: Fr. D: "Church School begins after Liturgy..."; Kids: "YAY!" We have also instituted a community service project in the fall of a neighborhood trash pick-up, which we hope we can repeat in the spring and make a regular feature. The teachers have shown a great deal of adaptability given the numbers, or lack thereof, of students, and sometimes the necessity of covering for each other. I hope we can regularize the program further with a second substitute available. I hope the teachers will have something more to report on the program at the meeting.

**Technology and Me** I cannot say that I have overcome my technophobia, but I am making progress--albeit with occasional panic attacks. By request, the Friday night studies have continued with instruction classes once the study of the "minor" prophets concluded. My usual instruction course is almost at an end, and I have decided to extend the catechetical session with a discussion of our worship--what we do in church and why. My "syllabus" for this will be Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's book **Liturgy and Life**, though I intend to use quite a few other sources, especially v. 2 of the Hopko set, "Worship."

I have also been shown how to use my own laptop to live-stream the services. The very machine I am writing on now is often the source of the "broadcast" of Vespers and festal services. I am grateful to all for your patience (I hope I'm not assuming too much here!), but especially to Pete Mazikins and Dennis Holovach for their directions and assistance.

**Stats** This past year we had no baptisms, marriages or receptions into the Church. There have been three deaths in the parish: Michael Castelgrande, Ann Anderson and Gordana Ritchie. I

performed the funeral for both Mike and Ann. Both were done elsewhere, Mike's in a Protestant church in Martinsburg, and Ann's in a funeral home in Frederick. Both these were done with permission from the diocesan Chancellor; our bishop, Metropolitan Tikhon, inquired about that for Mike's service and OK'd it. Fr. Adam Sexton and Dn. Tim Skuby assisted. Gordana had not yet entered the Orthodox Church. I had told her she was ready and would do so upon her request, but that didn't happen. Her funeral arrangements were made elsewhere, though there was a Panikhida for her before a rather large gathering, certainly the largest group present since the shut-down.

Last year I reported that membership numbers were confusing. As I sit here trying to figure out a credentials list for the meeting, I can say that they remain so, and are perhaps even more so, given the number of recent newcomers. As of this writing, I do not know what number I can report.

The lack of those entering the Church in the past year is somewhat deceiving. There are certainly those, adults and children, who are awaiting baptism, and there are those who have been receiving instruction and are committed to entering when the situation normalizes. Our services are also being followed online by many with unfamiliar names. Some are most likely from this area, and some are not--some even from overseas. There are those who have viewed for some time who now join us regularly in person.

**Finances and Stewardship** Our treasurer, Daria Riegler, will have a detailed report on the financial condition of the parish. I feel I should point out some general considerations. First of all, thanks to Daria and to her husband, Doug, who assists her in this task, for their meticulous work in directing our finances. It should be no surprise that this is a challenging job to begin with and more so in these times. They persevere and present us with accurate reports and planning. We pray God will bless them for their faithfulness in a most difficult job.

Churches everywhere face great financial challenges in these times of the pandemic. Almost no one is thriving and some are even closing or face that possibility. Thanks be to God, we are not in that situation. But that is not to say that we do not face serious challenges, nor that we can sustain our parish life without the generosity of our present members and those God may send to us in the near future.

Our diocese has been extremely generous to us. In the past two years, we have been excused from paying our assessments both to the Archdiocese of Washington and to the Orthodox Church in America. We have also received a \$7,000. grant from the diocese to assist us in our specific difficulties stemming from my prolonged absence and the recent departures of many significant donors due to deaths and moving out of the area, as well as to the results of COVID. There has been some discussion of our assessments being excused into this year. I am of the opinion that this should not happen. We have the numbers to support parish life if all involved assume their stewardship responsibilities, as so many have in the past.

But for the past year, we ran on a deficit budget and plan to do so again this year. Obviously, that cannot continue for very long before we do face serious difficulties. We experienced a taste of that when the cost of replacing the roof turned out to be almost double what was estimated (details at the meeting).

While we know that at this time there are those whose participation in the life of the Church in person is limited, we call on you to take the opportunity to contribute to the building up of the

Body of Christ. There is more than amassing money involved here. As witnessed in Scripture, stewardship is a part of our faith and always has been, even in the days before Christ. Witness the tithing required for the upkeep of the Temple and its staff, and the words of the prophets we even studied this past year (Haggai and Malachi come to mind) about caring for the House of the Lord and its worship. We ask for a willing renewal of your time, talents and treasures so our local church can continue the work of the Lord for the benefit of all, as described in so many places in the New Testament: the "good measure" of Luke 6:38; the "widow's mite" of Luke 21 and Mark 12, which the poor women gave out of "all her livelihood that she had"; the mutual benefit from the generosity St. Paul describes in II Corinthians 8:10-15; the bountiful "sowing" and "reaping" of the "cheerful giver" in the next chapter, vv. 6-15; and that out of our "Thanks...to God for His indescribable gift!" (9:15).

In short, we are in need at this time of the support of all those who belong to our local church community so that we can continue in our service to God and to all of you at the present time, and look to recover and grow as the pandemic wanes and we return to a form of normalcy. We have signs in our midst of the opportunities before us: the newcomers, inquirers and even our own children. Read on to see how you can help assure that St. Catherine's can continue and increase in our service to Our Lord and to all His people...

**To Pledge** Below is a copy of the contents of the pledge card which has been available at church. Of course, not everyone is able to attend these days. If that is your situation, feel free to use the copy of the form here. Just return it somehow to church, copy and email it to our treasurer, Daria Riegler, or send it via snail mail—just do inform us of your intention to regularly support the regular operation of the parish to that degree. Remember that this includes the regular contributions to the week-to-week operation of the parish; not to include candle money or special appeals or donations. I also include here the contents of the reverse side which explains some things about pledging your support to St. Catherine's:

### Stewardship pledge form

*Thanks be to God for all the ways He blesses us!*

I/we pledge the following amount/s for the year 2022, to St. Catherine Orthodox Church,  
Hagerstown, Maryland

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **Weekly** x 52 = \_\_\_\_\_ per year

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **Monthly** x 12 = \_\_\_\_\_ per year

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **Annually** (lump sum)

\_\_\_\_\_ Please include me/us on the roster of supporting members of  
St. Catherine Orthodox Church

Sign x \_\_\_\_\_ x \_\_\_\_\_

May God bless you for your faithfulness!

[Here's the information from the back side of the pledge card]

**What you should know about your pledge of support:**

**It is confidential.** Only the priest and Treasurer have access to pledge information (for record keeping purposes).

**It is urgent.** The only source of support for your church is the generosity of individuals who worship here...

**It is an act of faith.** Offering the first portion of your blessings to God is an expression of thanks and praise. It's also an expression of trust in God that He will honor His promises.

**It is appreciated!!**

**Beyond the Parish** Several items at the diocesan and general Church level should be of interest to us. This summer, July 18-22, the Orthodox Church in America will hold its triannual All-American Council in Baltimore, with the theme "Becoming Vessels of Grace. It will largely focus on vocations. Originally, this Council was scheduled for 2021, but was postponed due to COVID considerations. Of course, not everything concerning the Council has been set, including format (all live, virtual, or hybrid) as much concern remains over conditions due to the pandemic. Part of our business at our annual meeting will be to elect a lay delegate to the Council. Anyone interested in attending as a delegate, alternate or observer should contact Fr. Dennis.

Our diocese has lost several significant priests in the last year. Fr. Daniel Hubiak, former Chancellor of the OCA, and visitor to St. Catherine's on several occasions, fell asleep in the Lord. He lived in retirement on the Eastern Shore and served Christ the Savior Church, now in Berlin, MD, when it was getting started as a mission. Fr. Michael Koblosh also fell asleep in the Lord. In retirement, he served All Saints of North America Mission in Alexandria, VA for some time and guided them through their formative years.

Both the founding bishop and priest of our own community, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius and Fr. Basil Summers, fell asleep in the Lord soon after the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord last year. Fr. Basil first responded to inquiries about starting services here and offered Saturday Liturgies at first on a monthly, and then twice-monthly basis. This was done under the supervision of Metropolitan Theodosius, who, along with being the Primate of the OCA, was the local bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington. He also ordained me to the holy priesthood in February of 1983 and assigned me to St. Catherine's upon my graduation from seminary that summer. May God keep them all in His eternal memory!

Our diocese now has a new community on the books. Services, mostly Saturday Vespers and an occasional Divine Liturgy, have been offered in western Fairfax County, VA, for a couple years. Now the community that has grown there has been granted "mission station" status, under the patronage of St. John the Theologian. The new mission has been served by Dn. Matthew Prentice of St. Mark's in Bethesda, with priests offering Liturgy as available. St. John's now

joins All Saints in Alexandria and Holy Archangels in Annapolis, MD, as missions of our 10-community diocese.

**As For Me...** I can say that my health is quite good, possibly better than it's been for years even before my hospitalization. I've been glad and grateful to be able to resume more of my work as St. Catherine's pastor, though, of course, that is still limited by considerations of the pandemic situation. However, I can say for sure that I presently have no plans for further surgery or hospitalization. I also have no plans nor desire for retirement at this time. I repeat what I said in my report last year--that in many ways, I still feel as though I am still re-starting!

I have some pastoral/priestly responsibilities beyond the parish. I remain the secretary of the Archdiocese of Washington, which involves taking minutes at the various archdiocesan meetings--the annual assembly, twice-yearly archdiocesan councils and the mission committee, of which I remain a member.

I have a new responsibility this year as a mentor in the diaconal training program for our former parishioner Gary Childs, now a parishioner at All Saints of North America Mission in Alexandria, VA. He was being mentored by Fr. Michael Koblosh, the pastor at All Saints, until Fr. Michael's death. As I had instructed and received Gary and his family into the Church, it fell to me to see him through the program. We meet weekly to bi-weekly, and I also assist his wife, Anita, who is taking over choir directing duties at the Mission. Not only is this extremely interesting and enjoyable for me, but it also has caused me to keep up on my theological reading and study.

**A PSALM FOR 2022** If you've been with us through the time of the COVID pandemic, you may recall that when we were shut down I would send out in a weekly email blast of a Psalm that I thought was pertinent to what we were experiencing at the time. One Psalm which I sent out, 84/85, seemed to me to be particularly expressive of a hope for restoration of God's people after a period of trial and suffering, such as in Israel's return from the Babylonian exile.

That Psalm still seems relevant to our current situation. Genetics being what they are, the virus mutates and variants arise, setting back the process of recovery in all walks of life, including the life of the Church. I find that this Psalm is still applicable. I go to it regularly in hope of restoration in all levels of society. It is my prayer for the world, for our country, for the entire Orthodox Church as well as the Church in America, for myself, and especially for the life of St. Catherine's. May Our Lord continue to pour down His "sweet goodness" upon all of us and bring us all back together soon to worship Him--Father, Son and Holy Spirit--"in spirit and in truth," so that we may continue to grow in His "righteousness and peace!"

### **Psalm 84/85**

You have shown favor to Your land, O Lord; You have brought back the captives of Jacob.

You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You pardoned all their sin.

You withdrew all Your wrath; You turned from Your hot anger.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away Your indignation toward us!

Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?



O God, You will return and give us life, and Your people will rejoice in You.

Show us Your mercy, O Lord, and grant us Your salvation.

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people, to His saints, to those who turn to Him in their hearts.

Surely His salvation is at hand for those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land.

Mercy and truth have met; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth arose from the earth, and righteousness looked down from the sky.

Yes, the Lord will pour out His sweet goodness, and our land will yield its fruit.

Righteousness will go before Him, and its footsteps shall open the way.

**Have You Noticed...?** 2021 was the 40th anniversary year of St. Catherine's. Fr. Basil Summers offered Vespers the first weekend of December in 1981 and regular services started from there. I doubt that we could have done justice to a celebration of this landmark this past year, given the circumstances. But in 2022, keep watch!

**A Final Item** Yes, it's been a year since **The Faithful Servant** has been issued. That should not happen again. Watch around Lent. By your prayers...