



Diocesan Report 2020  
St. Olympia Orthodox Mission.

### **Liturgical and Sacramental Life**

Thanks to the generous financial support of the Diocese, we are blessed to have priests to serve our Mission. Fr. Peter Irfan served through October 9, 2020 when Fr. Paul Fedoroff became our priest-in-charge.

On Sunday, October 6, 2019, Archbishop Michael served the first ever Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at our small chapel. It was very well attended by more than thirty people – near capacity! During that Liturgy, he blessed Fr. Peter with the Klobuk and Epigonation.

Every weekend, Fr. Peter faithfully and prayerfully served Great Vespers on Saturday evening followed by Matins and Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning until COVID-19 changed our lives. During the first few months of COVID-19 restrictions, we had no more than the priest, one chanter or reader, and one parishioner –three households, total, for services following Archbishop Michael’s directives.

As the pandemic continued, Fr. Peter served the Divine Liturgy each Sunday morning, with one chanter or reader and one parishioner/household present. All other services were curtailed. Through a rotation system, one for chanters/readers and one for other parishioner households, we were able to accommodate those parishioners who felt safe to gather and attend. Everyone who was able to, could worship at our chapel for Divine Liturgy approximately once every five weeks. Because of our small size, we never had to “close” to all parishioners unlike many other Orthodox churches in the US and around the world.

These rotations continued when we had Divine Liturgies on Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday, then during Holy Week on Holy Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. Even though attendance was limited and the service schedule was abbreviated, those present were able to worship, pray, sing and listen to the traditional hymns of the season. While some things were quite different this year (i.e., “Come, receive the light from the unwaning Light!” did not result in a dramatic lighting of the chapel by a capacity congregation), other moments were as sublime and poignant as ever! Our beautiful services and hymns are meaningful, timeless and eternal!

In June 2020, Archbishop Michael blessed us to expand our attendance up to 10 households for Sunday Divine Liturgies, after we proposed a plan for preventing the spread of COVID-19 among our members, to the community, and beyond. Then, during his visit to our Mission in September 2020, His Eminence expanded that further to 16 households, as we continue to implement those measures.

Our web site <http://saintolympiaorthodoxchurch.org>

Throughout the year, Fr. Peter celebrated other Divine Liturgies on Great Feasts and other Feast Days, both at our chapel and, with Vladyka Michael's blessing, at the Hermitage of St. Olympia in Edwards, NY. The celebration of our Parish Feast Day fell on a Saturday this year, and we were blessed to have Divine Liturgy at the Hermitage on that day, along with a special meal and gifts for all present, thanks to Fr. Peter and Mother Sophronia.

Catechumens John Otis and Patrick Rogers were received by Chrismation at our Mission: John in November 2019 and Patrick in June 2020. Three more Orthodox households have begun attending services at our Mission, also.

Fr. Paul Fedoroff began as our priest-in-charge on October 9, 2020. The next day, Fr. Paul served Saturday Vespers for us, and we intend to resume Saturday Vespers on a weekly basis.

The liturgical music settings chanted at our Mission are a mix of Byzantine, Slavonic and Antiochian styles. Our music director is the decorated Dr. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis, a music professor at the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam, with degrees in both Western and Byzantine music. We are accustomed to her absence in the summer and during SUNY Potsdam breaks, however, she has been out-of-town since March 2020, when SUNY Potsdam shifted to remote learning. That meant that she was absent for Holy Week and Pascha, a daunting prospect! In her absence, Cynthia Eyler, Peggy Wheeler, and Zachary Price usually lead the liturgical music. We enjoy excellent congregational participation in singing hymns and responses. We sing hymns and responses in English, occasionally repeating them in another language, to help those from various ethnic backgrounds feel more comfortable in our Mission.

### **Parish Education**

We encourage children, students, and all parishioners to join us in singing hymns and responses during Liturgy, to intone psalm verses, and to read during Vespers services. Due to pandemic restrictions, we were unable to hold other educational classes. We look forward to resuming educational events following Saturday Vespers when it is safe to do so, under the guidance of our new priest-in-charge, Fr. Paul. We also hope that Dr. Suchy-Pilalis will resume teaching Byzantine music classes when she returns to Potsdam.

Early in 2020, Dr. Suchy-Pilalis passed the "baton" of editing and distributing our weekly electronic bulletin, to our parish council secretary, Dr. Peggy Wheeler. We thank both editors, past and present, for their hours of work and research in preparing this newsletter, which contains articles and other writings for our spiritual edification, often written by clergy, monastics or saints, or excerpted from the OCA website.

### **Hospitality and Charity**

Fr. Peter visited our hospitalized parishioners, both young and old, and served Holy Communion to them. He also visited an Orthodox woman who resided in a local nursing home. On Saturday mornings, Fr. Peter did weekly outreach at the St. Lawrence County Correctional Facility ("jail") in Canton, ministering to inmates individually and conducting a prayer service. He had to pause this ministry during the beginning of COVID-19 restrictions, but was able to resume it in early summer 2020.

Our electronic bulletin keeps us all in touch and helps us keep track of important dates and events in the life of our Mission family. Greg Kalicin continues to maintain our Mission website and Facebook page, that help to publicize our Mission activities and appeals.

The Parish Council has allocated money for charitable endeavors, including the Helping Hands ministry in Hannawa Falls, NY, which is located just a few miles south of Potsdam and provides food, house wares, appliances and furniture for people in need. We hope to continue to do more of this in the near future.

Our meals and fellowship times following services have been restricted due to the pandemic, unless we received a special blessing to do so, most notably on our parish Feast Day on July 25, and on September 27 for the Archbishop Michael's visit. Under the leadership of Fr. Paul, we are now planning to resume some fellowship time after Sunday Divine Liturgies, in obedience to our Bishop and in compliance with government regulations and directives.

### **Finances**

Although our attendance at services has been down due to the pandemic, our donations have in fact increased! Our current financial situation is stable, thanks to the Diocesan Grant we are blessed to receive and to the continued support of our parishioners and friends. A full report of monthly finances, prepared by our Treasurer Greg Kalicin, is presented at each Parish Council meeting and at the Annual Meeting of the Parish. In addition to our weekly collection at services, we also receive donations from out of town friends and family members, sometimes through the Pay Pal button on our website. In November 2019, we held our first "Giving Tuesday" appeal.

Current balances in our bank accounts include:

Building fund:	\$36,652.50
Checking acct:	<u>\$25,813.14</u>
	\$62,465.64 total liquid assets

We are very grateful to all who support us, both from inside and outside of our Mission. We are particularly thankful to our Diocese for its faithful support of our Mission.

### **Other Mission Activities**

The Potsdam Summer Festival was cancelled this year, so we were unable to continue our participation in it. We look forward to resuming this in 2021, and to making it an annual event for our Mission. It is a great venue for us to get the word out about Orthodoxy in the North Country.

Last October, during Archbishop Michael's visit to our Mission, we held Great Vespers on Saturday evening on the campus of St. Lawrence University in nearby Canton, NY. Following Vespers, Dr. Mary Ford spoke on "Beginning to Understand the Revelation of John." The Vespers service, lecture, and reception afterwards were free and open to the public. All was well received by our guests and parishioners, including professors at SLU.

Although Vladyka Michael was unable to visit in April 2020 due to the pandemic, he did visit us on September 26-27, 2020. Thanks to a beautiful, warm weekend, we were able to accommodate all who attended Vespers, and even the overflow crowd in attendance for Matins and Divine Liturgy that Sunday safely. We opened chapel doors and windows, and provided outdoor seating too.

The following weekend was Fr. Peter's last Liturgy at our Mission. This was bittersweet: we were happy for him to reunite with Matushka Mary and daughter Sada, but sad to lose Fr. Peter, our first resident Orthodox priest here in the North Country.

Our web site <http://saintolympiaorthodoxchurch.org>

One of the beautiful things that Fr. Peter accomplished for us during his time in the North Country, was to connect us with the leaders of the First Congregational Church in Norwood, NY. They offered us their building for our growing Mission. We hope that very soon we will take over ownership of the former Congregational Church building and property in Norwood - seven miles north of Potsdam, so that we will be able to advertise and to have space to grow. As this report is being written, we are awaiting approval from the New York State Attorney General's Office, a necessary step before the property can be transferred. Like so many things this year, unfortunately this has been delayed by the pandemic and office closures. However, as soon as we receive the necessary approval, we are eager to take ownership (at no cost) of this beautiful 19<sup>th</sup> century church building. This is indeed a true "leap of Faith" and a great undertaking. It would not be possible without the prayer, guidance, and support of our Archbishop, and of the Diocese as a whole. We pray that this will lead to the spread of Orthodoxy in the North Country, and to the growth of our Mission, according to the will of our Lord!

We are deeply grateful to our beloved Archbishop Michael for making time to visit us, to serve us, and to meet with us in person, twice each year. This is particularly notable, for two reasons: first, he must travel to the far northernmost extreme of our Diocese to do so; and second, he managed to do so even during the global pandemic! Glory to God!

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Eyler, Esq.  
Parish Council President