



2024 Diocesan Report
St. Olympia Orthodox Mission, Potsdam, NY
Covering the period: October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024

Dear Vladyka, fathers, brothers, and sisters,

While I have only been the parish priest at St. Olympia for about a month, it is clear that the Lord is preparing our blossoming mission for the next phase of its growth. This past year, the parish made significant improvements to the worship space; it received 8 newcomers into the faith, with only a part-time priest; and it made provisions to be able to welcome me as a full-time priest beginning September 1, 2024.

Hurricane Debby

On August 9, three weeks before my installation as the new rector, the North Country region of New York state suffered torrential rains, high winds and floods from Hurricane Debby. The church's lower level—housing the fellowship hall, Sunday school space, kitchen, bathroom facilities, plumbing and heating systems, storage and office space, and also our resident Norwood Food Pantry—received approximately 10” of contaminated water caused by sewer backup, rendering it unusable. Water also overwhelmed the bell tower and came through the ceiling into the nave, also causing significant damage to that ceiling and also to the basement ceiling below.

While the damage to our building has been a major set-back, in other ways it has provided a boost: it has challenged our parish to band together; it has revealed the extent to which we are cared for and supported by the diocese and beyond; and it has expedited much needed building renovations. **We are immensely grateful for the prayers and generous financial support of His Eminence, our beloved Archbishop Michael, of the Diocesan Council, and of the hundreds of benefactors who have supported our relief effort.**

Storm recovery

We have spent the last several weeks decontaminating and clearing out the basement, obtaining estimates, and planning next steps. The following is scheduled for early-October: 1) installation of a new combination boiler/water heater unit (currently underway); 2) professional removal of asbestos-containing walls and floor tile, and encapsulation of underlying floor; and 3)

professional mold remediation. Other aspects, such as the installation of new water-resistant flooring and wall paneling, rewiring of our electrical system, and the replacement of damaged kitchen cabinetry and appliances, are being addressed in parallel and will comprise the next phase of our recovery effort.

By the grace of God, and through your prayers and generosity, we have fundraised over \$70,000 in six weeks! With the denial of our insurance claim and no guarantee of FEMA aid, these funds are vital for restoring our downstairs.

A space fit for heavenly worship

Thankfully, our recently-renovated upstairs worship space suffered minimal storm damage, other than to the ceiling. Here is snapshot of some of the work completed over the past year:

- Removal of pews and carpet; refinishing of the hardwood floors throughout the worship space and side narthex
- Expansion of the iconostasis
- Restoration of the altar ceiling and walls; revealing two beautiful full-height stained glass windows in the altar (previously hidden by the organ and boarded over from within and without)
- On the exterior, painted trim on four twelve-foot high stained-glass windows in preparation for plexiglass storm windows; mortaring of foundation and resloping ground to prevent ground water incursion

In September, we applied for a grant from the Rock Foundation, which if awarded, will enable us to renovate the nave, side room and narthex ceiling and walls to match the altar.

Liturgical and sacramental life

With pastoral support from Fr. Nikolay Khalimonov and our beloved dean, Fr. Alexey Karlgut, and catechetical instruction from our subdeacon, Julio Gurrea, St. Olympia received 8 new members into the Orthodox Church this past year (5 by baptism and chrismation, and 3 by chrismation alone). We were blessed with several archpastoral visits from His Eminence Archbishop Michael, the most notable being for our patronal feast in July. For this, our resident hymnographer, Dr. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis, wrote the hymn texts/music that comprised the vigil service in honor of St. Olympia so that it could be premiered that evening. This ambitious sabbatical project spiritually uplifted our community and marks a significant contribution to the church at large.

Now with a full-time priest, we have begun slowly implementing weekday services (akathists, moliebens, vespers, weekday Feasts, etc.) as well as broadening the sacramental life (house and other blessings, unction, visitations, more frequent confessions, etc). On September 27 (Martyr Callistratus), the inaugural liturgy was celebrated at St. John the Soldier Orthodox

Mission in Watertown, NY. Once I begin as an adjunct professor at Clarkson University in Spring 2025, I hope to establish an Orthodox presence on campus, and facilitate OCF gatherings.

Finances

Our current financial situation remains stable, thanks to the Diocesan Grant that we are blessed to receive, and to the continued support of our parishioners and friends who have been especially generous in response to our flood relief fundraising appeal.

Flood relief (GoFundMe and offline donations): \$72,744
Savings: \$35,743
Total liquid assets: \$108,487

Miscellanies

Here are some final miscellaneous updates:

- Secured priest housing in the parsonage of the nearby Methodist Church; however, this did not come to fruition within the timeframe, due in part to roof damage from a fallen tree (July 2024). However, another blessing in disguise: Mother Sophronia plans to move the Hermitage of St. Olympia from Edwards, NY, into the parsonage in mid-October 2024. Having the Hermitage close will be a major blessing to the St Olympia community.
- Members of St. Olympia's choir showcased Orthodox hymns in concert at the annual Festival of Sacred Music and Text sponsored by the Potsdam Interfaith Community
- During the month of September (i.e., first month with a full-time priest), we averaged 28 people for liturgy and 13 people for vespers
- We have ~4 members of our parish community who have trouble making it to church due to physical limitations; therefore, we are prioritizing handicap accessibility and exploring chair lift options
- We have a small group (1-3 people) of potential catechumens
- We have one parishioner enrolled in the Diaconal Vocations Program

Thank you for your prayers and support at this pivotal juncture in the history of our mission and for helping St. Olympia realize its potential as a much-needed spiritual haven in St. Lawrence County.

Your servant in Christ,



Fr. Gregory Fedorchak