

Rector's Informational Report
Holy Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Cathedral General Parish Meeting.
Los Angeles, CA
2022

My dear Parishioners and friends of Holy Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles:

Again I have the pleasure of presenting you an annual report of my activities as Rector of Holy Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles, California, for the year 2022.

2022 marked my seventh full year as Rector of Holy Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles.

Once again I would like to begin by offering my thanks to all of you for your prayers for me and my family, for your patience, and for your tireless assistance and support in our endless work of growing this community as a spiritually healthy family, as I hope we are. Just as before, our Parish Council and I are keeping busy, and this year, there were many decisions to be made, and hard work to be accomplished in order to achieve all the goals set before us at the Annual Parish Meeting in 2022. Thank you for all you have done this past year. I am counting on your assistance and support in your respective positions in the coming year as we proceed with our Centennial Celebration preparations and the implementation of our Centennial Project, as well as the other work that awaits us.

Having said that, I would like to present you a summary of activities the year 2022.

Liturgical Celebrations, Pastoral Visits and Meetings:

From 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022, I was blessed to celebrate the following Divine services: approximately 100 Divine Liturgies, 65 Vigils, 19 Vespers, 10 Matins, 27 Baptisms, 7 Holy Matrimonies, 29 Funerals, 200 Panihidas, 60 Akathists, 130 Molebens, 5 Canons, 10 Holy Unctions and more than 100 other various "need" services. At the same time, I had numerous visits and meetings with our parishioners: more than 300 pastoral, council committees/parish-related meetings, marriage preparation, or counseling meetings, and about 100 pastoral visits.

I was able to visit nearly all of our shut-ins before the feast of the Nativity. I strive to remember all of them in my unworthy prayers. Regular visitations to parishioners this year was more regular, as it had been before, even though I prefer to visit people ONLY upon their request.

Our approximate average attendance at Sunday Divine Liturgy from January 2022 through December 2022 was the following: an average attendance of 140 people, with an average of 91 communicants per Liturgy. Vigil participation was about 34 people per vigil. These figures again represent only our in-person participation, and when compared to last year's numbers, again we are showing modest increases, and, again, it is important to keep in mind that we continue to stream services online, and so a number of people have been participating in our services from the comfort of their own home. I am very thankful to God for all of the people who are praying with us, whether in-person or via the internet all over the globe.

Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders which You have done, And Your thoughts toward us; There is none to compare with You. If I would declare and speak of them, They would be too numerous to count. (Psalm 40:5)

In 2022 I again had the honor to prepare several adults for the sacrament of Holy Baptism or Chrismation and they have become new members of our parish family. Just as every year we also lost several members who reposed in the Lord. May their memory be eternal!

Office, Telephones, E-Mail and Technological Development:

All necessary forms for completing background checks for our teachers and volunteers were submitted, and my annual compliance report to the Diocese of the West was mailed in a timely manner.

The parish website is up and running thanks to Father Protodeacon Kirill's hard work with the assistance of some volunteers. We are trying to post as much content and news as possible.

Calls to the main office as usual redirected to Protodeacon Kirill's cell to allow for 24/7 response. Please do not hesitate to call or share our contact information, but at the same time, I ask everyone to please try to remember and respect that on Monday the church office is closed as we usually take Mondays as our one and only day off. If something is

not of an urgent nature and can wait to be discussed until Tuesday, there is no need to interrupt our much-needed rest.

The Church and Parish office is open Tuesday through Sunday and we have seen an increasing amount of people coming to pray, light candles or to speak with clergy daily. Just as a side note, we are the only Orthodox Church in the Hollywood area that is open on weekdays and outside the scheduled liturgical services.

All of our contact information is available on our web site under the clergy section.

Media outreach:

Just as in the previous years, we advertised regularly in the local Russian language newspaper. More and more news is published and will be published on our web page in both languages, as well as on our parish Facebook page and Instagram.

Fr. Kirill publishes frequent updates on our Facebook and Instagram accounts, including news, scheduled services/events, and photographs. Our YouTube outreach is still up and running: our viewers are able to stream our services, and our following continues to slowly but steadily grow.

This past year I was invited to give several interviews about our parish and its prayer life in the Los Angeles Orthodox community. Several Los Angeles News Papers published interviews about us as well.

As is customary, I would like to ask for your assistance again: 1. Please take a minute to leave a personal review about our parish on **Google Maps**. How to do it? It is very simple: just **Google** Holy Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles and write couple of good word about us. What is it for? Well, by doing so our rating on this search engine will continue to go up. When new people search for the parish our rating is friendlier, our reviews are bigger, and there is a better chance people will decide to visit us and make our parish their spiritual home. 2. Please subscribe to our YouTube account so we can use this account more productively. Each of these little efforts bring great results: 1. We are only parish at least in Hollywood that is open 6 days a week, and people can come during the week to pray, light a candle or talk to a priest. That is a very important service that we offer and people do come, visit and more importantly come back some on a regular basis. 2. Our YouTube outreach is a great avenue to support shut-in parishioners and keep them in the church's fold. As we have seen, many people

looking for Orthodoxy find us via our YouTube channel as well. Living in Hollywood we attempt to adopt Hollywood-like ways to promote our activities. Starting last year we began producing short films as invitations for our special events like our Parish Feast day. This year we also did such a film and we hope to do more of this kind of informative videos sharing the rich history and future events with the Orthodox community of the Greater Los Angeles.

Special projects:

This year, again we were able to complete several large projects that had not been completed in the previous year. I would like to thank you all for your hard work and participation. Thank you for for your help.

We were able to continue with small repairs in our temple and the rest of the parish properties, and we continue to renovate the main parish office, and after successfully completing the frescos in the main Altar of Cathedral we started frescos on the wall over the iconostasis, hoping to have this part finished by Pascha 2023. Air conditioning and heating system were installed in two additional rooms of the school building, the old sacristy was renovated into a modest studio apartment for our Protodeacon and we offered the apartment over the garages to our choir director reader Sergei and his family. Additional I personally along with the parish acted as guarantors for reader Volodymyr Telizhenko and his family who came to the US as a refugees from Kyiv, Ukraine. On the second floor of the school building, we refurbished two classrooms into a modest three bedroom apartment. A multitude of smaller repairs and maintenance work on our parish campus were completed, and there is more to come in 2023.

As I said before, Marina Smetanina continues her work on the iconography of our beloved temple. Marina and I continue to worked very closely to determine the right composition to make our church not only beautiful but also theologically rich and unique. The next phase of iconography will be the top portions of the walls around the church, on the windows level. As soon as some preliminary sketches are completed, we will develop a budget and present it to the parish. However before we look too far into the future let us complete what we have already started. The cost of the current project was estimated at \$30,000.00, and we still have about \$10,000.00 more to raise to meet our goal. I hope that we will be able to find all the necessary funds to reimburse Marina for her beautiful work.

Several additional icons were added to our church; donors to replace the rest of the prints with real hand-written icons are still needed . A list of these remaining icons is available for your consideration on our announcements board, Facebook, and website. We are still seeking donors for the rest of the icons of American saints which will complete the interior of our St. Herman Church under the bell-tower. A list of these remaining icons is available for your consideration on our announcements board, Facebook, and website.

As you will see from our treasurer's presentation, with God's help, we are managing to slowly and continuously complete one project after another and develop our spiritual home into the presence of Heaven on Earth. Our common labor moves us closer to God, allowing us to : *"Enter into the joy of our Lord."*

Thank you, dear parishioners as through our selfless offering of gifts, work and care we manifest our desire of that which is Heavenly!

Vestry/Sacristy, Sanctuary:

This past year, our Cathedral again became richer through the addition of several icons and objects. An antique icons of St. Nicholas was donated to us by an anonymous donor.

A new processional icon of the All-Holy Theotokos Rescuer of the Perishing, a new processional cross, and four hand carved liturgical fans were donated. Two new analogia for the main church and new analogia for St. Herman's church were made. Thank you all for your care and generosity.

Choir:

Again I would like to thank Reader Serge Liberovsky for his hard work with our parish choir. With Serge's hard work Liturgy, Vigil and Akathists are sung by full choir. Serge manages to have Regular rehearsals and encourage more and more people to serve God through singing. Several bilingual books were produced for parishioners and I hope this year we will be able to produce bilingual book for the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts and the Vigil.

Sunday School, Saturday Parish Russian School, Youth and Young adults programs:

The **Saturday Russian School** was amalgamated with our **Sunday school** and transformed into a great program for our young parishioners. The new curriculum

reflects the vision of our Parochial school and our children now learn the Orthodox Faith through also through other subjects like literature, history and others.

At last year's Annual Parish Meeting I reassured everyone of my commitment to do everything possible to make our school flourish and grow. We have an active group of young professional educators from our parish, who volunteered to actuate this endeavor, and at the present time we have one, united Parochial School that operates on Sunday following the Divine Liturgy. Children and parents actively participate in the Divine Liturgy, and after receiving Holy Communion students begin their school day. At the present time we have 35 students. I would like to thank Pdn, Kirill who has taken on the role of administrator as Youlia Handzii was not able to continue in this role and teach at the same time. My thanks go out also to Ekaterina Solovskaya, Maria Goncharova, Svetlana Kornienko, Julia Emelin, Marie McEntire, Tatiana Prizer, Reader Vitaly, and Youlia Handzii. I hope that during the summer we will spend even more time to plan for an even more successful upcoming academic year.

The Little Sisterhood of the Great Martyr Barbara Starting September most of the girls are in church helping with collections and most importantly they continue to be first to deliver my cappuccino right after Liturgy. Thank you, girls, but I really would like to see your back in your aprons or other kind of identifying "uniform" as you help during the Liturgy.

The Children's Choir under the leadership of Katya Solovskaya, bringing us joy every Divine Liturgy with their singing. Thanks to Katia's creativity and love to this project and kids they are constantly learning new repertoire, and practice via Zoom every Saturday and every Sunday during and after the Divine Liturgy.

Please continue sharing information about our children's programs with everyone, as every child is welcome to become a part of them. All of our children should be involved in parish life.

Every Tuesday we continue to serve the Akathist to our Patronal Icon of the All-Holy Theotokos "Rescuer of the Perishing." After each Akathist, I regularly meet with our Catechumens for an educational meeting. Please, if anyone has any suggestions for other types of outreach, do not hesitate to let me know.

Bookstore, Coffee shop:

As for the Kiosk and coffee shop, again you can see in the Treasurer's Financial Report for last year, that the bookstore again transferred \$15,000.00 to the parish. This year we had \$27,000.00 in sales. Many thanks to Sister Elisabeth and Cornel Dascalu for their tireless work. We have continued bringing new items to the store, despite the difficulties with receipt of Orthodox goods from overseas. Our Russian books section and icon section have grown. Icons are really hard to keep in stock, so we will have to order icons in larger quantities with increased variety.

Our coffee shop continues to gain popularity, showing about \$7,000.00 in sales. Thanks to this income we were able to invest in a professional-grade espresso machine so that our coffee comes out even tastier and the operation is even quicker. The sales of Church Brand coffee packages are also doing well and we are gaining clients outside of our parish. I hope we can work to promote our coffee on an even larger scale.

Parish Museum:

Several tourist groups and students came to visit our museum again this year. Many more historic artifacts were located in our parish archives and donated by individual parishioners. During our Annual Slavic Festival, the museum became a big attraction and even many non-orthodox people interested in the history of Hollywood came to the museum to hear presentations organized by Mr. Ivan Podvalov.

Ivan Podvalov and Protodeacon Kirill are continuing their work on the preparation of a video documentary dedicated to the history of our parish. Several important interviews were done by Ivan and a lot of materials have been collected. Again, I would like to ask you for assistance, especially from those parishioners who have been in our parish a long time. If you have in your possession any photographs, videos, or publications connected with our parish life, please share them with me so that they can be scanned and preserved in our parish archives. I would also ask interested parishioners to consider writing a historical note in preparation for the 100th anniversary booklet and video documentary.

Other:

Our property management committee had our annual strategic meeting again, and again we set our priority list for maintenance. Last year we actually renovated a new studio for our Protodeacon and total reconstruction of the stairs on the apartment over garages, as well as several other projects. On behalf of the Parish Council, I again appeal to your generosity as already this 2023 started with urgent repairs of plumbing in the school building and we already spend over \$20,000.00 on something that was not part

of our budget. Dear brothers and sisters, again I turn to you and ask you to consider making a generous donation toward our building fund. Although we are concentrating on nice and pleasant projects like the Centennial Construction, we have to be realistic considering it's not only our community that is 100 years old, but also most of the buildings on our campus are this age as well, and much work needs to be done, such as the roof over the school building that has not changed in over 35 years and has begun to leak. Thanks be to God that it leaks only several times a year as we live in California. Nevertheless, it needs to be replaced this year.

This year we lost our beloved former diocesan hierarch and rector, Bishop Tikhon. Vladyka lived a reclusive style of life, and for over 30 years no repairs were done to the apartment where he lived. This year we are facing another major project of retrofitting this space completely. So as you see your help is much needed.

My dear family in Christ, with God's mercy towards us so much has been done in our parish during the past year.

It was a successful year also even as differences of opinion over the war in my homeland Ukraine, challenges and worries sought to divide us, and yet through prayer, we have remained united as a parish family. The words of the Great Litany that begin Vespers, Matins and the Divine Liturgy: *"In Peace let us pray to the Lord. For the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls. and For the peace of the whole world, for the good estate of the holy churches of God and for the union of all."* are still on our lips and I hope in the hearts of all of us with great hope that God will arrange peace, just as He did it many times through the history of the salvation of His people. And as family in Christ we continue to believe *"that He might liken us to the image of His Glory... so that those who were dead in Adam might be made alive in Thy Christ Himself...and that He will "Preserve the good in His Goodness, and make evil to be good by His goodness." (Liturgy of St. Basil the Great)*

In the same Liturgy of St. Basil the Great we hear the words: *"For since by man sin entire into the world, and by sin death..."* we should clearly understand that we are the source of all problems we face in this life and that goodness comes only from God through whom we are granted the deification of our humanity. With sadness we can say that for many, this life serves only for achievement of all manner of earthly goals, be it career, wealth, fame or other worldly aims. But for us who have come to be called Christians, our goal is different. Our goal of this earthly life is eternal communion with Christ and therefore ultimate Love, Truth, and Goodness should become the most desirable qualities of our earthly existence. God gave us each other in this wonderful historical parish. With rich history, traditions, sisterhood, school, choir, property and everything else that we can

use for our salvation. But we cannot reap where we did not sow. We should not adopt this consumerist attitude “what do I get from this?” or in other words, “what’s in it for me?” Christ came into this world not to take but to give, and if our goal is to be Christlike our question should be how can I serve, contribute, help or at least participate.

Last year we began to celebrate 100 years of our mission in Los Angeles, and we have been working hard to make that celebration not only a great and happy event, but most of all we should see it as an opportunity to participate in God’s work here on Earth and by this very participation to draw closer and closer to Him.

Our architect, Vladimir Elmanovich, and his team of assistants finished their work and submitted geological and engineering reports and drawings to City Hall for final approval. We still will have to submit to various departments for particular permits but we are approaching the finishing line.

Our fundraising efforts already brought great results. I would like to inform you that we have already raised around \$420,000.00 in donations and pledges toward the Centennial project, and I hope we can reach our goal before we can break ground this summer.

Dear brothers and sisters, again this past year we as a parish council had to make some difficult decisions, and I as well had to personally take certain decisions and effect certain changes. These decisions were made first of all in consultation with our Parish Council and with its unanimous support. All all them were made with only one goal in mind and at heart: to make our parish an even better place. One of my favorite quotes from St. Paul says *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”* (1 Corinthians 15:10)

My dear spiritual children, as your priest, I ask your forgiveness if I perhaps failed you in some way but again please be assured that Matushka and I truly try to work for the benefit of our parish. I look forward to work TOGETHER with the PARISH COUNCIL that we will elect today for duration of 2023 year. The wise Solomon says, *“there are many plans in the heart of man, but only what is determined by the Lord will take place”* (Proverbs. 19,21) so I ask you to pray for us, so that our plans may be blessed by the Lord and indeed take place through his Divine will and the operation of the Holy Spirit.

I truly love all of you with my whole heart, even as I feel how much love I receive from you, unworthy of it as I am.

May God continue to bless all of us and all of our labors for the benefit of His Holy Church, in this God-beloved community of Holy Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles.