

PASTOR'S REPORT

Annual Parish Assembly

January 20, 2013

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church
Willimantic, Connecticut

V. Rev. Marc Vranes

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Year in Review	2
2012 Parish Metrics	2
VISION 2012	2
2012 Achievements, Highlights and Events.....	3
Activity Alignment with Parish Vision	7
Ministries	7
Church Maintenance	7
Coffee Hour.....	7
Choir.....	8
Web Site	8
Church School.....	8
Fall Festival	8
Fr Ilja Adamov Memorial Scholarship Fund	8
UConn OCF.....	9
Worship & Parish Metrics	9
Pastor’s Concerns	9
Parish Discipline	9
Financial Planning.....	10
Also of note	10
Final Thoughts.....	11

Mission: Matthew 22:9 – *“Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.”*

Mercy: James 2:13 – *“Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*

Ministry: Hebrews 12:28 – *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.”*

Introduction

The life of a spiritually healthy parish is also revealed by the community's response to worship. Everything in the parish's life goes through, and is driven by worship, and the faithful's response ("in the fear of God") to draw near in faith and love.

If a parish is spiritually healthy many of its perceived concerns, oftentimes rooted in finances, actually cease to exist. During this past calendar year our response to worship continued to grow. Everything we do must be rooted in the Gospel, and the love of Christ.

Over the past year our parish continued to be strengthened. In many respects, it was the year we began to act more like a parish. Whereas for years we struggled and were concerned for our own survival, it would be safe to say we have grown to the point, and been strengthened by it, that we can now survive loss. It was never that way before. In spite of our growth over the years (2009-2008), I continued to feel we were only a death or two away from being put to the test. I encouraged each person to pray for parish growth. God would send us people, but only when we were in a place, spiritually speaking, to embrace them.

As our parish continues to evolve, and the personality changes with it, then it will be up to us to adapt to the new people God puts in our midst. To embrace others, we must be willing to change. Change is consistent with spiritual transformation.

Year in Review

2012 Parish Metrics

Births: 0

Baptisms: Maya & Madegan Morrison (December 9)

Adult Chrismations: Eddie Ryan (March 25)

Weddings: 0

Deaths: 0

Receptions: **Maya & Madegan Morrison** (Coventry); **Timothy Fetzko** (South Windsor); *Wife - Katrina; Children - Anna Rose & Alex*; **Daria Biancardi** (Glastonbury); *Children - Samuel & Ethan*; **Reader Steven Bradford** (Willimantic); *Wife - Sandra*.

Defection: We did suffer one loss this year when Mrs Diane Krot moved to another community.

VISION 2012

At last year's Annual Parish Assembly, Tim Fetzko introduced us to Vision 2012. In place of a nice sounding and wordy (empty?) mission statement, oftentimes well written and intentioned but ultimately never fulfilled, Tim identified three words that would identify our parish community: Mission, Mercy, Ministry. Everything we did would be defined by these three pillars. Some of that which we accomplished were actually defined by more than of three pillars.

2012 Achievements, Highlights and Events

Annual ‘Souper Bowl of Caring’ (February 5): A total of 130 health kits were assembled, bringing our 10-year total to 969 kits. This is HTOC’s signature event, and it is always a nice sight to see so many actively engaged in this project. Deep gratitude to all those who continue to donate items each year, and to Frank Kaputa who makes sure the boxes of health kits are delivered to the local Church World Service office in Middletown.

Scouts Sunday (February 12): There were seven scouts in uniform this day. Each scout spoke about their interest in scouting, and the Christian virtues connected with the program. At the conclusion of this event, those scouts in attendance always recite the Scout Oath.

Lenten Vespers (March 11) – Holy Trinity hosted the Connecticut Deanery for Lenten Vespers, the first time it had done so since 2002. There were 64 faithful who worshipped with us, and an additional nine area clergy, along with one hierarch (His Eminence, Archbishop NIKON). Fr Ivan Bilyk from St Mary’s Ukrainian Catholic Church on Oak Street in Willimantic, who was extended an invitation to attend by Steven & Sandy Bradford, said Lenten Vespers in our church was one of the most spiritually uplifting days he has ever experienced. We will not be hosting this year, but perhaps we will in 2014. The decision as to which churches will host will be determined in December, 2013.

Chrismation of Eddie Ryan on Feast of Annunciation (March 25): Edward was received into the Orthodox Church during his senior year at the University of Connecticut on the Great Feast of Annunciation. Eddie was – still is, in fact - a strong part of our community during his years of study at UConn. Eddie pointed out it was very important for him to be received into the Orthodox faith in the church he attended during his college years.

Geeza & Sinchuk Families who Hosted Runner Rae Heim (April 2-3): Ms. Heim became first female to run across the United States barefoot. She completed her trip in August. Rae’s visits with the Geeza’s and Sinchuk’s were the second and third two day of her five-month journey.

Hosted Confirmands from First Church of Christ (April 29): Along with their pastor, Rev. Joseph Blotz, the Minister of Faith Formation, 10 confirmands from the First Church of Christ Congregational in Mansfield, CT, attended Divine Liturgy as part of their youth instruction study. All visited downstairs at Coffee Hour, and all appeared to be very comfortable in our midst.

Adult Education Series (Presentations by B. Lacey 2x, E. Ryan, V. Villano, E. Reynolds): Presentations were made on Saint Nina, Equal-to-the-Apostles and Enlightener of the Georgians; Saint Genevive of Paris, France; St Xenia of Petersburg, Russia, the Apostle Philip, Saint Theodore Stratelates, the patron saint of Ms Villano’s home church in Maryland, and Saint Moses the Ethiopian.

Church School Program (September - December): Special thanks to Reader Steven Bradford whose involvement has been crucial to the success of church school.

Three Pierogi Making Sessions (June, July, August). Approximately 50 dozen pierogis were made at each session for sale at the Fall Festival. Thank you to all those who assisted. The proverbial good time was had by all certainly applied.

High School Graduations of Rachel Geeza, Nikolas Hutnik, and Michael Dolan (May 20): Scholarships of \$500 each were made to each of our Holy Trinity graduates. A luncheon was held in their honor as well. Rachel was also presented with a dozen red roses.

HTOC Year-in-Review Booklet: For the third consecutive year a booklet describing the school accomplishments of our children, youth, and young adults was assembled. Everyone enjoys reading about our students and their achievements.

Visit from Andrew Boyd (July 15): Holy Trinity became the first parish visited by former UConn OCF student Andrew Boyd (UConn, Class 2008) shortly after he was named by the Orthodox Church in America as Director of the Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry.

Maya's Backpack Drive (July 15): 10-year-old Maya Morrison spoke in front of the community concerning a backpack drive her Girl Scout Troop in Coventry was having.

Welcome Back College Student Sunday (September 9): Nine students, including two visitors, were in attendance for this annual event in which gift bags are presented to the UConn OCF students. Each student is also given the opportunity to speak in front of the community about their classes and summer activities.

Parish Picnic (September 16): HTOC's annual picnic was held on a bright, sunny day at Patriots Park in Coventry. Thanks to Sue Dolan who made the arrangements to rent the lodge. A final Fall Festival meeting was also held at the conclusion of the picnic.

Hosted WAIM Dinner (September 27): Nearly 45 people were in our church on this evening, most of whom had never been inside an Orthodox Church. Approximately 15-18 came wanted to see the inside of the church. WAIM reps pointed out its members are not usually invited to see the inside of the churches they visit for their meetings.

Scouting Retreat at St Basil's Academy in Garrison, NY (October 6): Participants included Maya and Madegan Morrison, Bonnie Morrison, and Steven Bradford. This annual event, attended by several hundred Orthodox Scouts, had a great impact on Maya and Madegan.

Harvest Fall Festival (October 20): The first of its kind in at least two decades at Holy Trinity. Much hard work went in to the festival, and much good-will was achieved. Thanks to Festival Coordinators Denise & Jason Geeza.

Lending Library (October, 2012): Established by Madegan Morrison, the Lending Library has Orthodox books on spirituality, doctrine, ethics, and iconography. Currently housed in the Mary Baronosky Church School Classroom, Madegan is building a book shelf in her mechanical

arts class in order to have the books placed in a more visible and accessible location.

Presentation by Sol Yniguez on Mission Trip to Turkana, East Africa (October 21): UConn junior Solomon Yniguez offered a power point presentation on his two-week trip in July to Turkana. Sol spoke with passion, insight, and humor. His presentation was well received. He also passed out CD's for members of the community to have as a keepsake.

49th Annual Diocese of New England Assembly (October 27-28): Nick & Dot Sinchuk, along with Steven Bradford, attended the assembly at Saint Nicholas Church, Salem, MA.

17th All-American Council (November 12-13): Fr Marc, along with Holy Trinity lay delegate, Steven Bradford, attended the assembly held at Holy Trinity Church, Parma, OH, in which Metropolitan TIKHON was elected as the new Primate for the Orthodox Church in America.

Walk for Warmth (November 19): Several members from Holy Trinity participated in the Walk for Warmth after the annual Thanksgiving Service. A donation of \$500 was presented to WAIM Executive Director Victoria Nimirowski from WIAM Holy Trinity delegate Dot Sinchuk in support of its Energy Assistance Program. A photo of Dot & Victoria along with a brief news story was included in a December edition of The Willimantic Chronicle.

St Nicholas Day (December 2): Annual celebration where St Nicholas visits, and gifts are distributed to our youth and young children. Thanks to those who supply candy for St Nicholas to fill shoes, and special thanks to Cathy Zbikowski of Bristol who continues to donate the gifts each year. Thanks also to Carole Kaputa who shared gingerbread tree ornaments for our children to distribute to adults from the parish.

Baptisms of Maya & Madegan Morrison (December 9): A truly memorable day. All of us will always remember how wonderful this day was. Our webmaster beautifully captured the day's events, posting 60 pictures on the website.

Farewell Receptions for Chris Adams & Chris Masterjohn (December 9 & August 5, respectively). Each received icons, and a luncheon was held in their honor. Both expressed their gratitude to the community during their UConn years.

Moment of Silence (December 21): At 9:30am, one week after the first shots rang out at the Sandy Hook Elementary School, Steven Bradford tolled the church bell 26 times before serving a Reader's Pannikhida for the 20 first grade students and six adult educators whose lives were tragically cut short.

Christmas Pageant (December 23): Special thanks to all the students, Mrs Bonnie Morrison, Mrs Angela Bull, and Mrs Katrina Fetzko. Angie was also recognized for organizing our church school program from 2002-2012. She was presented with a Barnes & Noble gift card, and flowers.

Adopt a Family (December 23): This was the sixth consecutive year HTOC has participated in this program. Gifts were delivered to a local 28-year-old mother and her two children, age 4, and four months. Thanks to Dot & Nick Sinchuk who head up this ministry.

Happy Birthday: Evelyn Reynolds (93), Helen Sadow (92): Evelyn turned 92 years old on January 12, 2012, and Helen 92 on December 2. A cake was ordered for each, and both ladies were presented with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of a grateful community.

Memorial Services for Victims from Sandy Hook Elementary School (December 16, 23): Memorial services were held on consecutive Sundays for the 26 victims of the December 14 shootings at the Sandy Hook Elementary School. On December 16, Mila Zadrozny, a 5th grade teacher at Ivy Drive Elementary School in Bristol, addressed our community and shared her thoughts on what happened two days earlier. Stephanie Zak and Susan Dolan, middle school teachers from Holy Trinity, also shared their feelings. At the conclusion of the second Memorial Service (Dec. 23), the name of each student and educator was read, the church bell tolled once each time a name was read, and a member of the Holy Trinity community came forth to light a candle. Students lit candles for children, and Holy Trinity educators lit candles for their peers.

*With the exception of the All-American Council,
pictures of each of these events were posted on the Holy Trinity web site in 2012.*

Activity Alignment with Parish Vision

	Mission - spread the word	Mercy - help others	Ministry - sustain ourselves
Activity/Event	<i>To embrace the church's history and tradition while actively engaged in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.</i>	<i>To support our mission by extending our church's hands and hearts to those in-need, both in the local community and beyond.</i>	<i>To further our mission by establishing and maintaining educational programs and activities designed to build our spiritual lives; as well as the preservation and beautification of our temple.</i>
Annual 'Souper Bowl of Caring'			
Scouts Sunday			
Lenten Vespers			
Geeza & Sinchuk Families Hosted Runner Rae Heim			
Hosted Confirmands from First Church of Christ			
Adult Education Series			
Church School Program			
Three Pierogi Making Sessions			
Visit from Andrew Boyd			
Maya's Backpack Drive			
Welcome Back College Student Sunday			
Parish Picnic			
Hosted WAIM Dinner			
Scouting Retreat at St Basil's Academy			
Fall Harvest Festival			
Walk for Warmth			
St Nicholas Day			
Baptisms of Maya & Madegan Morrison			
Farewell, Graduation and Birthday Celebrations			
Christmas Pageant			
Adopt a Family			
Memorial for Victims from Sandy Hook			
Establish Lending Library			
Summer Outdoor Clean-up			
Regular Interior Cleaning and Maintenance			

Ministries

Church Maintenance

Since he rejoined our community at the end of June, Steven Bradford cleans the church weekly. The church has never looked better, and we all owe Steve a debt of gratitude. Prior to Steven taking on this chore, the UConn students, along with Tim Fetzko, handled the cleaning. Frank Kaputa and Bob Dolan contribute their skill set in taking care of small maintenance projects, while Greg Zlotnick takes on the heavy lifting. All the lighting in the church was fixed in December, compliments of Zlotnick Construction.

Coffee Hour

In 2012 we moved to a different arrangement where each person or family who will be in church on Sunday is asked to provide a food item. Thank you to all who offer food, while still putting a dollar or two in the basket. Every bit helps. A special thanks to Sonja Chowanec who keeps us all well fed, and to Joe Hutnik who is always the last one out after cleaning up the coffee pot and making sure no garbage gets left behind.

Choir

Continued thanks to Mary Ellen Junda and Jason Geeza, and all the singers, who sing beautifully and prayerfully. One change we will institute in 2013 is occasional congregational singing. When Mary Ellen is away due to a professional obligation, or Jason is not able to be with us, we struggle. There is no other way to say it. Mila Zadrozny is a big, big help, but she will be away for a few months this year after the birth of her baby in June. On those Sundays when no one is able to lead us in worship, each parishioner will be provided a book with Tone 1, and asked to sign from wherever they are standing. Discussions have recently taken place regarding choir growth and what can be done in that area. Mary Ellen Junda will be giving an oral report on the choir at today's meeting.

Web Site

Report prepared by Tim Fetzko. There are no adequate words that any of us can offer - with the possible exception of Barbara Lacey - to express our gratitude to Tim for what he has accomplished with the web site since becoming the webmaster in November, 2011. And to think, it is only going to get better ... and very soon, too.

Church School

Report prepared by Steven Bradford. The same thing that is said for Tim and the web site, can be said for Steven and the church school program. We are so far ahead of where we have ever been thanks to Steve's contribution and passion, and along with the necessary parental involvement.

Fall Festival

Denise Geeza has prepared a report. Chairs and tables to be ordered soon.

Fr Ilja Adamov Memorial Scholarship Fund

The scholarship fund, supported by the weekly 'small basket' and annual offering in August, on the Sunday closest to Fr Ilja Adamov's repose, is very strong. We extended \$1,500 worth of scholarship assistance to three worthy students in May: Rachel, Mike, and Nik. The combined scholarship income was nearly \$1,500 in 2012. We will extend scholarships (amount TBD) to Mike and Nik in August, 2013, for 2013-14 academic year. Amadeo Ruiu and Patrick Dolan will be graduating from high school in June, 2014. We will need continued support in order to provide scholarships to those from our own church who are all loved dearly. Our scholarship fund is different than in most parishes in that we provide a level of support each of the four years one of our students is enrolled in college.

UConn OCF

Although there are fewer students than in years past, the current group is as faithful to Holy Trinity as any group of students in the past were. Chris Adams graduated with this Master's degree in December, 2012, and will be living and working in Hartford. We are hopeful that Chris will continue to be an active part of Holy Trinity on some level. He mentioned in his closing remarks to the community (December 9), he's seen all the baptisms at Holy Trinity over the years (Carmon Twins, Evan Zadrozny and Andrew Paradis on the same day, Fetzko Twins, and Morrison Sisters). It is our hope Chris can see many more in the years ahead. Eddie Ryan is in the first year of graduate school; and in addition to Tashie Leva and Sol Yniguez, both juniors in the undergraduate program, all three will graduate from UConn in 2014. First-year students Sarah Luft and John Lardas have been supportive of us this year. We look forward to their participation in the years ahead, and for the continued growth of the OCF.

Worship & Parish Metrics

Like all priests, I wish our response to Liturgy and prayer would be more consistent. In spite of the movement of many in to the parish community, our weekly attendance – those announced as 'The People of God' in the weekly bulletin – remains essentially unchanged, however there are exceptions. Even comparing numbers from five years ago to today, they remain somewhat similar. An example of monthly averages the past two years:

	2011	2012
September	27	35
October	33	34
November	30	32
December	39	37

Other months in 2012 reflect similarly, as to comparing one year to another. There are two ways to look at this. We need more members, or we need the current members to be more consistent. In this case, both are necessary. The truth does not lie somewhere in between. We can also suggest a clunker of a week in any month of 2012 skewed the percentages a bit downward, yet then again we could offer a good week from time to time inflated the numbers.

Pastor's Concerns

Parish Discipline

One of the other areas of concern, and I have spoken and written about this in the past as well. There is nothing new here. Divine Liturgy is scheduled each Sunday morning at 9:30, yet there are often fewer than a handful of people in church at that time, so Liturgy is delayed with the hope that others will soon gather. If we had a parish of 150 people, and a small percentage, say 30-40, were in church at that time, it could work. But a small parish, in which less than five people are in church to hear "Blessed is the Kingdom ..." presents a concern ... and a lot of anxiety, too. As was pointed out previously, I am mindful that we have seniors, young children, and families who come from a distance. Any number of things can occur which cause a delay. Fully understood. But overall, we have to shower greater spiritual discipline in this area.

Financial Planning

The other area of concern. Although we again passed a balanced budget for the most part, sometimes I feel like it's done with smoke and mirrors. Maybe that's just me. The Fair Share has been discussed at length too, and thankfully this year our response was beyond (75% / \$3,450) what it had ever been previously.

Our weekly offering however, is a worry. It has remained between \$18,500-\$20,000 the past several years. This should be the major way the parish is funded, and quite frankly, we need to do better. As the parish grows, the budget will naturally increase also. Up to this point, we have always depended on the generosity of our parishioners to offer free will gifts. We have to be going beyond mere hope they will respond, to something much more concrete.

I would suggest that 2013 be the final year we fund the parish through free will gifts, and instead, we consider moving to a pledge system. The parish was supported by a pledge system many years ago, as recently post cards were discovered indicating as much.

By committing to a pledge system to fund the church, beginning in early November, 2013, pledge cards will be mailed to each person, and they will be asked to commit to a certain level of financial support for the following year. Prayer must accompany this decision. Cards should be returned no later than December 15. Our 2014 budget would then be reflected by the total amount pledged. The other reason for doing this is when a person is absent from church for a week, or several throughout the year, then we will at least receive the much-needed financial support that otherwise might not be provided when that person or family is away.

While our current system allows us to pay the bills, it does nothing to provide for future programs, outreach, maintenance, or upgrades.

On a personal note, one of the reasons why I have been reluctant to use my complete allotment of five weeks vacation time over the years, is because of the financial strain this would place on the church. For example, if I were to be away two Sundays and a substitute cleric served, the offering that Sunday is often barely enough to pay the substitute (\$175); I get paid as well. Then, if I were to be away an additional two Sundays and we chose not to have Liturgy at all, then that's two more Sundays without income. Add in just one storm related cancellation, and that is five Sundays, or nearly 10% of the year, when there would be no church income. When the church is closed, the parish is nice enough to pay me for those Sundays. It is deeply appreciated.

Also of note ...

a) We have not had an Archpastoral visit from His Eminence, Archbishop NIKON since September 14, 2008. In the past, several scheduled visits were cancelled due to his poor health. Although his health has improved, he is also currently *Locum Tenens* of the Diocese of the South, a much larger diocese than New England. He is very busy. Still, we will try to plan a 2013 visit.

b) We had hoped to host the WAIM Walk for Warmth on November 19, 2012. A lot of thought

and planning went into hosting – we had even secured a \$2,000 Parish Grant Initiative from the Diocese of New England to help with expenses - but logistically however, it just did not work out. Although the WAIM Board of Directors honored our intention and appreciated our passion, our church and downstairs was simply deemed not large enough to host an event where well over 250 people would be in attendance. At this time we acknowledge the contribution of Holy Trinity's WAIM delegates, Dot & Nick Sinchuk. Thank you & Many Years.

c) A monthly (Saturday from 9a-11a?) Book Club discussion is gaining momentum. Each Saturday we will begin with an Akathist where all participants will be expected to participate.

Final Thoughts

a) The Year 2012 was much better; the best ever during my 16-year pastorate at Holy Trinity. I am pleased on so many different levels, while my concerns have been spelled out (finances, weekly response to worship). The sense of community at Holy Trinity is perhaps our most identifiable characteristic. During the baptism of Maya and Madegan in December, one of their friend's mothers, Mrs Fleming, spoke to me downstairs. She said what struck her *immediately* upon entering the church was the **strong sense of community**, and that she had rarely if ever encountered that feeling before when walking into a different church for the first time. I have said it many times over the years, if someone visits us and chooses not to return, it will not be because we have not done our part in welcoming them. It will be for another reason.

b) There will be two opportunities in 2013 to assist the Windham Area Interfaith Ministry with a Saturday morning clean-up at its offices, one in the Spring, the other in the Fall. It would be good to have a group help with the cleaning. Our church is in the community, and although we may live elsewhere, our community's presence in Windham County cannot be overstated.

c) We will need to determine if there should be another October Fall Festival scheduled, or at least the frequency of them in the years ahead. In Denise's report she suggests another Festival in 2013. In order to reduce Denise & Jason's burden, perhaps another person/s would like to chair the 2013 festival?

d) The web site will change in 2013, and it will be significantly improved. See Tim's report (also January 6 bulletin).

e) As his Eagle Scout project, Patrick Dolan will be working towards building a new sign for the front of the church. It will have a more contemporary look and certainly be more in line to those other churches have these days. The current sign, although still functional, is outdated. The inside of our temple is very beautiful, and we need to announce that with something beautiful from outside the church as well. Thank you, Patrick.

f) Without having Lenten Mission Vespers, it would be good for us to have least one other signature event in 2013. The idea is not to have something simply for Holy Trinity members, or even those from other Orthodox Churches in Connecticut, but it would be good to have something broad enough that would appeal to people from all denominations in Windham County. It's all part of the vision. I have been thinking along the lines of exploring a 'Church Growth' presentation offered by V. Rev. Jonathan Ivanoff, pastor of St John the Theologian

Orthodox Church in Shirley (Long Island), NY. Something on a Saturday in April, say from 10a-3p, including Hours, and concluding with Great Vespers. We would need to offer Fr Jonathan an honorarium.

g) We will need to define our parish's 2013 vision. The recently posted web site survey will assist us. Our three pillars do not have to be equally weighted, so if the feeling is we were top heavy in 'mercy' in 2012, then we can allocate our resources and efforts elsewhere in 2013.

h) And to conclude, a special thanks to our choir, and to Amadeo Ruiu, Andrew Dolan, Patrick Dolan, Ziv Kaputa, Mike Dolan, and Nik Hutnik who serve with me in the altar. It is a joy ... and deeply appreciated. I look forward to the next wave of servers, Alex Fetzko, Evan Zadrozny, and others who might join us in the years ahead.