

President's Update to Friends, Members, and Parishioners of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church, Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Dear Friends and Fellow Parishioners,

I hope you and all your loved ones are healthy, safe, and well. It is my duty and honor to serve as the Parish Council President of our beloved Assumption of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church and Community for a second year. Needless to say, this position is always a new challenge and experience to be dealt with daily, and we must now all deal with this unexpected Coronavirus pandemic.

Very strict precautionary measures went into effect which have suddenly changed our daily lives. We are unable to come to church and pray together as one participating extended family -- indeed, everything has changed. We must take all the precautions necessary and follow all the instructions given to us from the Federal, State, and City Government for everyone's safety. We were given certain directives to follow strictly from the Archdiocese and from our Metropolis, again, in order to prevent the spread of this disease and for our health and safety.

Now, I would like to update all of you on our finances. I can honestly say we started the new year, 2020, on a very positive financial note -- a much stronger start than what we have had for a long time -- and this is due to some events we spearheaded that ended up being very successful. Between the Tsiknopempti and our Mardi Gras dance, we netted close to 10K, all due to the hard work of the chair-ladies; the ladies who decorated, served and cleaned throughout the event; and, of course, some talented current and previous Parish Council members who helped me in the kitchen.

A big thank you to all of you who were involved in these events and to all of you who support us with your presence. We were truly planning some good, sound events for the near future, events that would have been very beneficial for the sustainability and existence of our community and church. Unfortunately, because of the present pandemic, everything is up in the air now.

At this point in time, we are in a better if not the best financial position we have ever been in as evidenced in our parish's records historically. In the past, we were always carrying over unpaid debts (bills) from previous years into the New Year. This has ceased. This was accomplished through the streamlining of our expenses, through your generosity in Stewardship, and your general donations. We also received a check from our Endowment Fund's profits of 50%, around 20K. All of our bills are paid in full, and they are still getting paid as soon as they are received. We have allocated money for emergency repairs and any donations made to the Building, Cemetery, and Restricted funds are put in their proper place. Specifically, all funds go into designated ear-marked accounts as it should be. The old practices of putting all money into one account has ceased. This is being accomplished with honesty, integrity, transparency, and accountability to the fullest; and with accurate record keeping of Parish Council meetings

recorded in minutes being saved on paper and electronically and always readily available for any purpose or reason. Thankfully, I was able to put these measures in place and apply them, thanks to the full support and communication of all the board members, and, yes, the continuous dedication and support you entrusted me with, and I thank you ALL.

And now, I have to speak about the reality we have come to experience, all of us, unexpectedly. Everything came to a complete stop, no services, no candles to light, no trays passing around, no Palm Sunday luncheon, and no Holy Week and Easter services, and only God knows how long this will last. Some members of our Parish are skeptical and are questioning if we will be able to have our Annual Greek Festival in August which is our biggest and most successful event that we have been hosting for so many years, and which helps keep us sustainable throughout the year. We are financially stronger than ever, and I can assure you that we can remain safe and sound for at least two (2) months; but with the weekly losses of income from candles and collection trays with the closing of the doors of our Church during Easter, this will hurt us dearly, sooner than later. I have asked our Stewardship Chairman, Tom Andrikopoulos to prepare a letter to communicate with more data and reminders. **Just because of the situation of uncertainty we are faced with, I would not hit the panic button, but I will encourage each and everyone to continue all the recommended practices to remain safe and well.**

We still are one of the viable and strong Churches of our Metropolis. I believe that with our prayers, even from home, and with solid faith in our Lord and His Holy Mother, this shall pass too. They are our protectors and saviors according to our beliefs as Christians.

May I remind you of Fr. Phillip's email regarding ideas for the support of the Church/Parish: such ideas must be communicated first to the Parish Council or the Stewardship Committee, and, if approved, only then can they be sent from the Parish Council or the Stewardship Committee through the Church Office to our parishioners. Despite all of the best of intentions, anything not according to protocol is prohibited because of the misunderstandings and confusion caused in the Parish Council, Stewardship Committee and then disseminated to the parishioners.

Several parishioners, of their own will and without being asked, very discreetly were generous enough to increase their stewardship contributions. We thank them for their initiative.

On the same note, I have received a letter from His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios informing me and Fr. Phillip that our Parish will be receiving a gift of love in the form of a financial donation of 5K from well-known philanthropists, Mr. & Mrs. John and Effie Lagadinos and their family. This financial support is in the form of a temporary relief from this sudden loss of income. At the same time, this gift of love can also serve as a "challenge gift" to others who may be in a position to assist by offering a "matching gift," thus greatly multiplying the support

needed for our parish to survive this unforeseen pandemic crisis. We still have to make payroll, pay utilities, insurances and our fair share regardless of the whole parish being on lock-down, which means these are truly fixed expenses.

Let me assure you, if and when we receive permission to re-open our church, community center, classrooms, kitchens, offices, and facilities, the entire property will be disinfected and cleaned by a professional company approved by E.P.A. standards.

In closing, regardless of all the negative consequences caused by this worldwide crisis, we are all dealing with everyday routines. Perhaps there is a positive side for all of us in this; and this could be a reevaluation of our true purpose in life, who we really are, and how we should become better persons, true Christians. **“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”**

May God keep all of us safe and well. This shall pass, too! Kali Anastasi and Happy Easter . . .

Thank you all,
George Foussekis, President
Assumption Parish Council