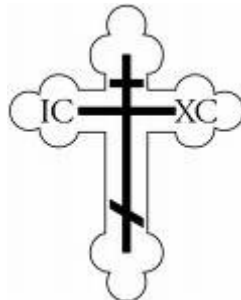




"O Holy Great-martyr George, pray unto God for us!"

**St. George Orthodox Church
Cedar Rapids, IA**

**Annual Parish Meeting
January 11, 2009**



January 11, 2009

Dear Faithful of St. George,

Let us thank God that we have the opportunity to come together for our Annual Meeting to revisit 2008 and look ahead to 2009.

I recently read an article by Fr. Michael Keiser of the Antiochian Archdiocese Department of Missions and Evangelism. In an excerpt from a forthcoming book he writes, “the active busyness that marks the life of most Orthodox congregations today – the committee meetings, the activities and programs, the mission statements and goal settings ...seem to have little to do with the essential nature of Christ’s Church and the proclamation of the Gospel...**the Orthodox Church is here as the life of Christ’s Body, the presence of God’s Kingdom, not a fundraising or fraternal organization.**”

This statement stopped me in my tracks. I am challenged by it, and I hope we all would be too. Are we, as the Church, realizing our purpose, or are we merely spinning our wheels in an effort to survive? As pastor of this community of dynamic and dedicated people, I encourage us all to rise to the challenge of realizing our purpose to be the presence of the Kingdom of God on earth. As we review the developments and accomplishments of our parish during the past year, we find much that is encouraging toward that end.

Our worship cycle increased dramatically in 2008 – we now offer services almost every day of the week. This indicates that we are serious about being a worshipping, praying community first and foremost. The icon of our Father among the Saints, RAPHAEL of Brooklyn, is now enshrined in our Church sanctuary next to a holy relic we were blessed to receive last year. He continues to intercede for us, and is present at all our services. We were also blessed to have the services of Deacon Edmund enhance our worship during the last year. May God grant him many years in His service.

The response to our 2009 pledge campaign has been very promising: before the end of 2008 we had more than \$100,000.00 committed from the faithful of this community. This shows that we, as a Church, are willing to support the operation of the church through our committed giving and not rely as much on fundraising and special activities.

During 2008, the Church was there for those who needed help. Our Lenten contribution to Food for the Hungry People Program was almost four times that of 2007. Many individuals and families in Iowa suffered incalculable loss in the flood disaster, and St. George was able, through gracious donations of many, to be a distributor of relief. We

gave assistance to more than 20 families, donated to the Willis Dady Shelter, and through IOCCA, distributed 1,000 Christmas stockings to children of flood families, all in addition to St. George's regular (not flood-related) channels of charitable giving which are listed in a separate section of this report package.

Through our Fellowship of St. John the Divine, we have been regular volunteers at the Mission of Hope in Cedar Rapids, providing and serving meals one day per month for over a year. The response from the Mission has been very positive. They look forward to, not only the food, but also the hospitality and welcoming attitude of the volunteers from St. George.

Our Sunday School program continues to flourish thanks to the dedication of its directors, teachers, parents and, of course, children. In 2008, our St. Nicholas Liturgy and program were well received. Coming in 2009 will be more such educational programs for families and children. We are already planning a children's retreat for Lazarus Saturday, and hope to have more programs like the St. Nicholas Feast Day one throughout the year. We will continue to offer our Adult Education on Sunday mornings during Great Lent, and will once again offer an evening lecture course for those who wish to learn more about the Holy Orthodox Faith.

The Orthodox clergy in our area continue to cooperate, concelebrate services and have Christian fellowship with each other through IOCCA (Iowa Orthodox Christian Clergy Association), which this past September became a corporation. We hope that greater cooperation and fellowship amongst the clergy will foster the same amongst the people. We wish to lead by example.

Finally, brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, we are allowed to be encouraged and optimistic, but let us never be complacent! Let us thank God at all times for the opportunity to work and to serve Him. We, as the Church, have been given the task of transforming the world. It may be a daunting one, but it is certainly not impossible: "***we can accomplish all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens us***" (Colossians 4:13).

Your servant in the Lord Jesus,

Fr. Fred Shaheen

January 11, 2009

Your Grace Bishop Mark,
Rev. Fr. Fred Shaheen
Brothers and Sisters in Christ

By the Grace of God, and the leadership of our priest and the chairpersons of all parish organizations, St. George Church, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, enjoyed a successful year 2008.

For the second year in a row, the Parish Council held a January retreat that helped us, as a group, to properly focus on the mission of the Church and our role as a parish and parish council.

We continued to make significant improvement in the financial strength of our parish. Through the generosity of our parishioners, we achieved record pledge income in 2008. Combined with the Parish Council's responsible spending and commitment to abide by the budget, we were able to fund all of our operating expenses and other obligations including support of our priest and his family, Sunday school and youth activities, more than \$25,000 in maintenance and improvements, tithing ten percent (10%) of income to the Archdiocese and donating five percent (5%) of income to charitable causes. We did all of this while drastically reducing our dependence on special fundraisers such as dinners and bake sales. As we move forward, the Parish Council will continue on this same path with a commitment to eventually eliminate our parish's dependence on fundraisers as a means of funding operating expenses. We want to give parishioners the opportunity to focus their efforts on the liturgical life of the church without the need to constantly worry about working on fundraising events. We believe strongly that the pledges of supporting members should cover the church's operating expenses. Thank you to all parishioners who have helped the parish move closer to this goal by increasing their pledges.

2008 was also a landmark year as our parish was blessed with the ordination of Deacon Edmund Abodeely and Subdeacon Jim Atty, who have been assisting Fr. Fred and serving our parish well. We thank God for their commitment and the valuable contributions they have made to our liturgical life.

Perhaps the most inspiring aspect of 2008 was the parish's increased focus on charitable work and charitable giving. For two consecutive years, we have distributed to various charitable institutions throughout the world an amount equal to five percent of the parish's annual income. In 2008, this totaled \$9,250. In addition, the catastrophic flooding of 2008 created tremendous need in our community and the parish of St. George responded with extreme generosity. Our parish was responsible for collecting and distributing thousands of dollars in cash, food, clothing and supplies to flood victims. The parish family also made a commitment to prepare and serve meals at the Mission of Hope and many parishioners have participated in this ministry. These activities were in

addition to the many existing charitable activities the church sponsors and participates in annually. Included in this report is a summary of the parish's charitable activities over the past year. We are grateful for the generosity of our parishioners who are putting their Faith to work in His service.

I am truly inspired by the direction that our parish has taken in recent years. More than ever before, we as a community are focusing on doing the things that are pleasing to God.

I am thankful to God for giving me the opportunity to serve Him and the parish of St. George.

Congratulations to incoming Parish Council Members, Nick George, William Shadid, Subd. Joe Nassif and Dr. Samir Bishara. We thank our outgoing Parish Council members, Nicole Daoud and Gayle Goodale, who have served the parish faithfully. Both have held the position Parish Council Secretary. May God grant them many years.

Finally, thank you to Fr. Fred, the Parish Council, the heads of parish organizations and committees, and all parishioners who contribute to making St. George Church a friendly and welcoming place for Orthodox worship and fellowship.

In Christ,

Rdr. Nicolas AbouAssaly
2008 Parish Council Chair

ST. GEORGE LADIES AUXILIARY ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2008

- Sponsored and served many coffee hours
- Baked bread for Sunday services – total donations of \$1,135.00
- Donated food to shelters
- Sponsored 2 bake sales & booth at Marion Arts Fest – total profits of \$23,159.99
- Served at mercy meals
- Donated several dozen cookies to the Red Cross
- Helped to keep food pantry filled for needy
- Donated \$150.00 to Orthodox Mission (OCMC)
- Donated \$200.00 to St. Luke's Health Care Foundation
- Donated \$300.00 to the Antiochian Women Project
- Prepared and served the refreshments after Trisagion services
- Decorated the hall for the different seasons
- Furnished the paper products to the Teen SOYO when they sponsor meals for parish
- Transferred \$26,320.00 to general fund

2008
SAINT GEORGE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH
TEEN SOYO ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY:

- Teens met with Deacon Edmund & Kari as new Teen Soyo Advisors
- Planned, organized, and served the luncheon for the St. George Parish Annual Meeting
- Donated \$233.14 to NAC-SOYO Youth Workers Fund

FEBRUARY:

- Collected canned goods & monetary gifts for Souper Bowl for caring
- Monthly meeting and supper @ Deacon Edmund and Kari's home
- Planned, organized and served a meal at the Mission of Hope

MARCH:

- Collected \$53.19 in their Lenten fishbowl to help with a meal @ the Mission of Hope
- Met at Zio Johnno's for dinner and Fellowship

APRIL:

- Monthly meeting at Saint George
- Held Vigil following Great and Holy Friday Services

MAY:

- Fellowship w/ St. John's & St. Raphael's beginning w/ Vespers then Pizza & Bowling
- Tony Haddad, Mary Nemer, Sarah Schneider & Chase Hepker Graduated
- Offered Coffee Hour to thank Parish Council for monetarily assisting Bible Bowl Team

JUNE:

- Hosted a Camp St. George Fundraiser w/ a Camp Style Luncheon & Raffle
- Gave each Bible Bowl participant \$25.00 to help offset gas costs
- Planned, made and Served luncheon at the Mission of Hope
- Tony & Nicole Haddad, Michael Khouri and Hannah Valentine took 5th place in the Bible Bowl at the Midwest Annual Convention

JULY:

- Following Vespers enjoyed a movie night pot-luck on the Big Screen at St. George

AUGUST:

- Purchased Icon of St. John Chrysostom icon as he is the patron Saint of Teen Soyo
- Haddad's hosted a meal to wish Tony well after his last meeting as President

SEPTEMBER:

- Installed new officers for 2008/2009; President Nicole Haddad, V.P. Michael Khouri, Treasurer Jacob Aucutt, Sec. Gabby Abouassaly and Historian Sarah Aucutt

OCTOBER:

- Youth Month, teens read the Apostle and served as Ushers
- Dinner and Fellowship at Mike and Cheryl Aucutt's home
- Special meeting to prepare for All Saints Room
- Hosted a Room teaching about the life of St. Raphael for the All Saints gathering
- Raised \$304.00 for Special Olympics

DECEMBER:

- Assisted with St. Nicholas party and kicked off Advent Food drive
- Christmas gathering & meeting @ Aucutt's concluded with a gift exchange
- Assisted Al Kacere w/ shopping for & compiling food baskets to be delivered at Garfield
- Participated in Christmas Pageant in addition to serving and cleaning up after the meal

2009 GOALS

- ❖ **Build an Outdoor Shrine to a saint for Prayer and Pilgrimage**
- ❖ **Visit the St. Isaac of Syria Skete or St. John Chrysostom Monastery in Wisconsin**
- ❖ **Design and Purchase T-shirts for our Teen Soyo Chapter**
- ❖ **Sponsor Mission of Hope Meal(s)**
- ❖ **Attend a retreat at Saint George, Cicero**
- ❖ **Begin monthly camp style Vespers with blessing of Father Fred**
- ❖ **Sponsor Bible Bowl team for the 2009 Parish Life Conference Bible Bowl**
- ❖ **Integrate with Sunday School to assist in programs for the youth of the church**
- ❖ **Integrate w/ St. John's Goya & St. Raphael's Teen Soyo for Fellowship & Ministry**

St. George Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church
Annual Parish Meeting
Sunday, January 11, 2009
Cemetery Committee Report

2008 Cemetery Activity Highlights:

- 1) The “St. George Orthodox Cemetery Facts and Information” pamphlet is available for distribution upon request. See Nick AbouAssaly or Jeff Abraham for further information.
- 2) The routine lawn and grounds maintenance continues to be provided year round by Mr. Jim Petersen of Affordable Lawn Service. We are pleased with his services. TruGreen Lawn Service provides limited seasonal/specialized lawn service applications.
- 3) In late spring, 2008, a cedar tree was planted in the East (new) Section of the cemetery. We hope that it will thrive in the years to come and add to the serenity of the cemetery property.
- 4) We are ever grateful for the many volunteer hours of service offered by former Cemetery Committee member, Joseph Hidder. His services provide for the ongoing cleaning and beautification of the cemetery as the eternal resting place for the beloved departed family members of St. George Church.
- 5) The recently-developed East Section of the cemetery now provides a variety of options for burial spaces. Limited space is still available for purchase in the West (old) Section of the cemetery.
- 6) Upcoming future projects:
 - a) Construction of a parking lot to at the front of the East (new) Section of the cemetery was completed in July, 2007. It can accommodate approximately 20 vehicles. This should ease parking problems encountered on Memorial Day and during funerals, given limited on-street parking availability.
 - b) Proposed **replacement** of the current plumbing system (water lines and hydrants) in the West (old) Section of the cemetery is being planned, as well as **placement** of a plumbing system and hydrants in the East (new) Section.
 - c) As a long-term goal, we would like to see a chapel constructed on the cemetery property.

- 7) We are grateful for the support and assistance provided by Cemetery Committee members, Mike C. David, Mike Goodale, and Steve Yuza.
- 8) For *future purchases of cemetery lots*, please contact Mike C. David or Steve Yuza. Questions or concerns related to *cemetery maintenance* should be directed to Mike Goodale.
- 9) Routine bill payments and maintenance of bookkeeping records associated with matters related to the St. George Cemetery continue to be the responsibility of the St. George Parish Council Treasurer.

Thank you!

**Respectfully submitted,
Your brother in Christ,
Jeffrey Abraham
Cemetery Committee Chair**

Scholarship Committee
2008 Report

We are pleased to report on the continued success of our scholarship program which is entering its third year of existence. Over the initial two years we have awarded approximately \$3,000 in six awards. In May 2008 we awarded the following:

Abby David	\$200
Tony Haddad	\$600
Sarah Schneider	\$500

All the award winners have been well deserving and expressed great appreciation for the financial support in continuing their academic pursuits. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to support our young people as they enter this crucial phase of their lives.

As of October 31, 2008 we have approximately \$28,000 in our endowment fund with the Cedar Rapids Foundation. Unfortunately this is significantly less than the previous year due to the economic downturn effects on the investments made by the Foundation. All endowment funds, investments, etc have suffered declines during this time. The bylaws cover the placement of the funds and the amount distributed on an annual basis.

The committee will be meeting shortly to start the process for the 2009 awards and we will be communicating to the parish in the very near future. As always our bylaws are posted on the Church website in case you have any questions about our procedures. Also you may ask anyone of the committee members. We look forward to the continued success of the program and hope that you will consider a contribution to the program. As we look at size of our Sunday School, all realize that our fund must grow to keep pace as many more applicants will be coming in the near future. Thank you for your past support and we know we can count on you in the future.

Yours in Christ
Scholarship Committee

Fr Fred Shaheen
Jim Haddad
Nick George
Ikram Easton
Joe Nassif
Allan Nimmer
Melissa McMullen

St. George Sunday School 2008 Annual Report

St. George Sunday School had another active and successful year due to the dedication and support of the following staff members:

Cathy Brousseau & Kareme Elessais	Preschool teachers
Kari Abodeely & Cheryl Aucutt	Kindergarten/1 st Grade
teachers	
Dr. Marie Svatek & Catherine Pilkington	2nd/3rd Grade teachers
Alan Kacere & Jim Brousseau	4 th /5th Grade teachers
Jana Nassif	Middle School 6 th -8 th teachers
JoEllen Haddad	Senior High School 9 th -12 th
teachers	
Jana Nassif	9:20 Lg. Group for 2/3 rd graders
Alan Kacere	9:20 Lg. Group for 4/5 th & Middle School

A Very Special Thank You to Jeannete Abraham, Laura Gangestad, and Heidi Nassif who served as substitute teachers. Also *Thank You* to Mike Aucutt and Melissa McMullen for their support in special activities.

The following is a chronological summary of activities throughout 2008:

January/February:

- We began working with the Midwest Region Festival Contests. We had 18 winners.
 - 25 entries in art, 9 were winners. (Zayna Bardawil, Sophia Abodeely, Nicholas AbouAssaly, Rita Daoud, Peter Nassif, George Elossais, Gabrielle AbouAssaly, Sarah Aucutt, and Tristan Stevens)
 - 18 entries in writing, 4 were winners. (Allie Sarchett, Zayna Bardawil, Kathryn Saba, and Eugene Nassif)
 - 13 entries in poetry, 5 were winners. (Nicholas Nassif, David Abraham, Christian Nassif, Miriam Elossais, and Gabrielle AbouAssaly)
- On two Saturday mornings, the children met at the church to work on their art and photography entries with the help of Mike Aucutt. Large group Sunday School sessions began working on writing and poetry entries.
- For Valentines Day the children made Valentine Cards that were sent to the senior and ill members of the parish.
- We had a wonderful Godparents Sunday for all the children. Many Godparents attended Liturgy with their Sunday School Godchild and enjoyed coffee hour together. The children made bookmarks and a booklet for their Godparents.
- Children in 2nd grade began a 1st Confession class let by Jana Nassif.

March/April:

- On Lazarus Saturday, 2nd Graders participated in their first Confession. A Brunch followed Liturgy in their honor.
- The children had an Easter Egg Hunt on the morning of Pascha organized by Jana Nassif.

May:

- The Sunday School presented an Orthodox Study Bibles to high school graduates Anthony Haddad, Mary Nimmer, and Sarah Schneider.
- We recognized children who had faithful attendance by giving certificates. Sophia Abodeely, Annmarie Abodeely, Jeffrey Abraham, David Abraham, Kristin Saba, Kathryn Saba and Anthony Haddad received trophies for having excellent attendance.

June/July:

- Nicole Haddad, Anthony Haddad, Michael Khouri, and Hanna Valentine participated and did a GREAT Job in the Bible Bowl.
- A summer reading program titled “Reading for Scoops,” was instituted throughout the summer, encouraging children to read books from our growing children’s library. On the Sunday following the conclusion of Vacation Bible School, the children who participated enjoyed scoops of ice cream during coffee hour.

August:

- Kari Abodeely planned and supervised the St. George, Friends in Orthodoxy Agape Bible School, with the theme - “Power Lab”. Approximately 50 children attended (the largest group ever). As part of the program, children made cards for the seniors, sick, and shut-ins in the church. They also brought food items and staples for the flood victims.

September/October:

- Sunday school began September 9th. We continued having large group early sessions from 9:20-10:00 for grades 2nd through 8th. This year we divided the children into 2 large groups. 2nd /3rd graders are meeting with Jana Nassif and 4/5th and Middle School students are meeting with Alan Kacere. During these sessions discussions of Feast Days Saints, Tithing, Liturgy, Gospel passages, and Creative Festival topics are discussed. Preschool through 1st grades also had their lesson begin before the Divine Liturgy. After Divine Liturgy, Grades 2nd through high school had lesson classes. Preschool through 1st grade did their craft and singing at that time.
- Jana Nassif organized a “*Celebrate the Saints, Fall Costume Party*”. The adults dressed in costumes representing Saints and organized games that helped the children learn more about the saints. Pizza, candy, and prizes were provided.

November/December:

- Kari Abodeely and Dee Kacere attended the Sunday School Institute at the Antiochian Village the first weekend in November. It was a great learning experience for both.

- Children were encouraged to read books about Advent and the Christmas Story by participating in “Candy Cane Readers.” All who participated received candy cane book marks the Sunday before Christmas.
- On December 5, the children participated in the celebration of the St. Nicholas Feast Day. A service followed by a Lenten dinner, crafts and games provided enjoyment for children and adults. Students made special St. Nicholas cards to be mailed to the seniors in our church. Special thanks the Fr. Fred, Deacon Michael, Kari Abodeely, and for helping coordinate this event.
- The children took part in the Christmas Play entitled, “*H.A.L.O....On The Air*” on Sunday, December 21, at 4:00 PM followed by a Lenten Supper. The play was directed by Jana Nassif, with Melissa McMullen providing music support. A *special thank you* to Mike Aucutt for the NEW stage design and helping us make it possible for St. Nicholas to visit our children.

Goals for 2009 include:

Provide opportunities for more adults and families to help with Sunday School Events.
 Purchase an additional microphone for events in the hall.
 Purchase new resource and reading books for our Children’s Library.
 Send at least one representative to the Teacher Training Workshop in November at the village.

Dee Kacere,
 St. George Sunday School Superintendent