

**V. Rev. Dr. Joseph F. Purpura**  
**Pastor's Report to Saint George Orthodox Church of Montreal**  
**2019**



My Dear Parishioners,

We have been blessed with a fruitful year of growth, new initiatives, and joyous events. We have had the joy of baptizing many beautiful children, marrying our young adults, educating many in the faith, forming our young people in the Lord, working and praying together. We once again journeyed together through another Great Lent, sacred Holy Week and a glorious Pascha as one family in Christ Jesus. Each week, we joyously worship God together. For all these good things, we give thanks to God.

As a community, we have also experienced our dark days, shedding tears for our loved ones gone to Life Eternal, praying with and for our families struggling with loss, illness, brokenness and all those things that belong to this fallen and broken world. Somehow, despite the many tragedies, God has blessed us and, in His time, and in His way, He upholds us even in our brokenness. The Fathers of the Church say that God prunes us to prepare us for salvation. Sometimes this pruning is painful, but in the end, it sprouts healthier life for each of us as we work on our salvation.

We are thankful for the outstanding Office Staff: Assistant Priest Fr. Jean El Murr, a living example of perseverance through his illness which has been a witness to his deep faith in Christ, as is his wife Kh. Souhaila, an equal example of patience, faith, and endurance. They both remain in our constant prayers and hearts. Fr. Justin Mitchell, our Mentoring Program Director, has done an exceptional job this year carrying out our vision of mentoring the teens and young adults. Viviane Gédéon skillfully carries out numerous office duties. We gratefully recognize Gaby Habash, Lenny Ayoub, George Bouassaly, and Joseph Kaba for their faithful weekly and daily volunteer service in the office. We thank our new Data, Financial, Marketing, and Communications Volunteer Teams, and so many of our office and parish volunteers who give so freely of their time and talents. We thank Diane Nemer, Afaf Abboud, and our new teams of Prospora (church bread) bakers, led by Alida Rossy and Carol Jazzar, who now produce the traditional Orthodox Prospora for our Liturgies and faithful. We take this opportunity to thank Rouba Khouri, our past Youth Director of four years, who worked diligently to meet the needs of our youth and continues to volunteer in our Church School. We thank Rana Jabbour for her time in the office helping us with data entry and event planning.

As a parish we are blessed with an Icon Studio and School of Orthodox Iconography. We thank Diane Sarkis and Virginie Desjardins, their staff and students for the outstanding work they do in producing icons for our community and church, as well as the outstanding work they do in teaching iconography and furthering the skills of our local and greater Montreal area iconographers.

We once again have an exceptional Parish Council of devoted officers who love Christ and His Holy Orthodox Church. I want to convey heartfelt thanks to Alan Rossy and his devoted family. As Parish Council Chairman, Alan has done a multitude of good works in many areas for the parish throughout

this past year, working alongside me and many others to help this parish move forward. Alan also serves as the parish's Stewardship Committee Chair and is a member of our Archdiocese's Board of Trustees representing the Montreal parishes and Canada. We thank Alan for his support and vision throughout this past year impacting many of our efforts done on behalf of this parish.

In addition, I want to express sincere thanks to all the officers and members of the Parish Council and their families as stewards of this parish for their tremendous dedication, faithful service and sacrifices for the well-being of the Saint George Church Community. It is a joy for me to see our Parish Council Members worshipping in the very Church to which they have been called by God to see to the daily needs.

I thank our Legacy and Trinity Fund Administrator, Elizabeth Kabbash and now, Peter Auger and the entire team for their vision, good work in helping grow our parish, and providing for those in need, fulfilling our Lord's command in Matthew Chapter 25.

As a priest, I am greatly blessed to serve at our Sacred Altar with my brothers in Christ, Fr. Jean and Fr. Justin, our Sub-Deacons Philip Genest, Robert Bayouk and Christian Kishfy, along with our Assistant Sacristan, Ernest Tewfik and our many altar servers who bring life and joy to our Sanctuary each week in service to Christ. Their good works and faith are uplifting and richly add to our Liturgy.

We are blessed with a beautiful choir led by Paul Jabara. We thank Paul and all the choir members for filling the church each Sunday and Holy Week with the beauty of their voices as they glorify God. We are grateful to Georges Fattouh for his tremendous dedication as our Lead Chanter and for his presence at our parish services. I thank the many chanters and singers who work alongside him for Vespers and Orthros each week as well as our special services and on Feast Days. Thank you to our Byzantine Choir Director, Nagy Helal and the many faithful members of the Arabic Byzantine Choir.

I thank Magda Naim and the Church School teachers who minister to our beautiful children. We especially thank the parents, Godparents and grandparents who see to the education and the raising up of our children in the faith and love of God. We are especially grateful that they are fulfilling the promise made at Baptism that each of these baptized children would be raised and educated in the Orthodox Faith. We thank Michel Sarkis for leading the Arabic and English Bible Studies at the church as well as the West Island Bible Study, hosted by Diane Nemer, Colette Ward and Kh. Souhaila El-Murr.

Thank you to Linda Alexander and all the Antiochian Women for their care and good works towards Saint George Church, the clergy, and all the members of this parish. We thank the Antiochian Women through the leadership of Alida Rossy, in renovating the Women's restroom in the parish hall upper level.

We thank Nick Maliha and all those who work with the newly created Saint George Social Club to bring our members and guests together for a monthly evening of fellowship.

Thank you to the outgoing Teen SOYO President, Nadine Dababneh, for her hard work and dedication in serving alongside her fellow Teen SOYO members and all of our teens, who bring joy and life to our parish through their faithfulness and good works in SOYO, the Church School, the Sanctuary, the Mentoring Program, our sports teams, and so many other areas of parish life. I also thank Alex Habib and the young adults who help with our youth and other needs of this parish.

I thank Gaby Habash for his work at maintaining our facilities and for the extensive hours he volunteers in helping to manage the many projects directed at upgrading our building systems and structures.

As a parish, we are grateful to the Larry and Cookie Rossy Foundation through whose donation, we have completed the beautiful granite front church stairs and obtained new, more efficient heating and air conditioning systems.

We also recognize and are grateful to the Alan and Roula Rossy Family Foundation for their great generosity in the care, upkeep, and major improvements to our Church and facilities as well as our upcoming expansion project. We thank Joanne Rossy for her leadership and work in preparation for our future office and Church School expansion and redesign. May the Lord bless and multiply all their good works.

We remember and thank the many people who this year and in past years have considered this parish in their planned estate giving. Their generosity and remembrance of this Church during their life and upon their death have helped make possible the financial health and growth of this parish and its many ministries.

I take this opportunity to thank Metropolitan Joseph for allowing me to devote so much time to the ministry of this parish. We lovingly acknowledge Bishop Alexander for his love and care for this parish and its faithful members; we are grateful for his prayers, pastoral visits, and participating in our liturgies and sacraments. We hope and pray that we will see more of His Grace in the coming year and are grateful to our Lord God for the restoration of his health.

I thank all our faithful members of this parish, who fill our church with their presence and love each week in worship, for their service and growing generosity to this parish and its ministry. There are so many others whom I should personally acknowledge today, but what really matters is that God sees your good works and we, as a community, are greatly blessed by you and your presence.

### **New Initiatives**

In the midst of my third year with you as your Pastor, I continue to observe and study the needs of this parish along with Alan Rossy, the Parish Council, Fr. Jean, Fr. Justin, and many others as we continue to lay out and implement plans each year to better meet the needs of the faithful. So much has been accomplished over the life of this parish and we are very grateful for the foundation and good work already established by our loved ones who came before us. Now, the current leaders and faithful of this parish are called by God to continue building upon the foundation established and sustained by Christ. It is our duty to make St. George Parish a beacon of light and hope for the faithful of Greater Montreal who seek a serious and deep faith and relationship with Jesus Christ and His Holy Orthodox Church.

- 1. Teen SOYO:** As we move forward in securing a new parish Youth Director, we will see to it that Teen SOYO and its many ministries and offerings becomes a priority and that we conduct this ministry, with excellence, for and with our youth. I expect that Teen SOYO, our Mentoring Program, our Church School, and our Youth Choir will all work together as one ministry that forms our young people in Christ and equips them to live righteous and successful lives as Children of God. We want our young people to succeed in all aspects of their daily lives, and we will continue to build our youth programs with this hope in mind.
- 2. Involving our youth in the worship life of the Community:** I have written before that as a community, we are blessed with gifted children, with so many talents including music and

serving at the Altar. I have often stated across the Archdiocese that if we engage our children, teens, and young adults into the worship life of the community and give them a real and meaningful place in the parish, they will much more likely stay and be engaged in the parish for all of the days of their lives.

3. This is the goal for our young people, that as the Baptism service states: “when they are old and grey they will walk in the ways of the Lord.” For this to happen, they must be engaged in the life of the Church today in a real and meaningful manner.
3. **Youth Mentoring Program:** Through a very generous grant from the Chamandy (Glenn and Amel) Family Foundation our first annual \$100,000 grant was received and utilized. I am very pleased by the progress made in the first year of the Mentoring Program and the number of our young people, especially young adults, engaged by this work. Creating and developing a robust and meaningful youth mentoring program has been a dream and desire of mine and my wife’s ministry for many decades. It is a great joy to see this dream being fulfilled here at St. George Montreal. It is interesting to see the number of people who have been engaged and energized by this effort and the impact it is having on the entire parish, even though this program and ministry is still in its early stages. We have just completed the first year of this work and are now laying the groundwork to enter the second, and what we hope will lead to many more years. You will hear much more on this vital ministry and work in Fr. Justin Mitchel’s mentoring report.
4. **Choirs:** Music is an integral part of the worship and spiritual life of every Orthodox Christian Parish. At St. George, we have been accustomed to having an excellent choir and music effort. I have asked Paul Jabara, the Director of Music for this parish, to further raise the level of all our music efforts. While we have an excellent English choir, I want to see more of our talented parishioners engaged in the Choir’s weekly work, as well as that of our Byzantine and Youth Choirs. Paul will focus this year on building the English Choir, help us meet the needs of our Byzantine Choir and help establish a full and well-trained youth choir. While these efforts will take years, we must earnestly start these efforts now. I ask that all our choirs and Church School give Paul their full cooperation. As Chairman of the Archdiocese Department of Sacred Music, Paul is uniquely positioned and has tremendous resources to help us be successful in all these areas.
5. **Baptisms, marriages, and funerals:** This past year, we wrote and distributed our first article on the sacraments. “When a Child is Born,” was written to help our parishioners understand what we Orthodox Christians do in terms of caring for a newborn child, and its relation to God and His Holy Orthodox Church. In the coming year, I hope to publish work on Orthodox Christian Marriage. I have observed over the past two years, that we need to regain our Orthodox practices in this area. We want our young people to marry in the Orthodox Church because:
  - a. it really does matter;
  - b. all other Christian bodies recognize our Sacrament of Marriage, while the reverse is not true.
  - c. we want our parishioners to still be members of this parish after marriage.

I also hope to publish work on Orthodox care of those who have died. We have an Orthodox tradition and practice and a clear Orthodox understanding of how we love and care for those who have gone before us. It is a beautiful tradition that offers dignity and respect for the body and at the same time cares deeply for those left behind. We need to work together as a

parish to regain these beautiful traditions and right practices of our Orthodox Christian forefathers and foremothers as well as brother and sisters from around the world.

**6. Financial health of the parish:** While the parish is in overall good financial shape, it still requires the ongoing prayers and financial support of every faithful member of this parish. While we are a very active parish, and while many of our parishioners are very generous, there is so much more we should and need to be doing as a vibrant Orthodox parish. Your generous financial contributions are necessary to this growth and good work. I especially thank those of you who have increased your financial support to this parish and community as you are making a difference!"

**7. Other Completed, In Progress, and Upcoming Upgrades:**

**a. Church sound system (Phase 1):** We have completed the 1st stage of improving the quality of sound from our sound system in the Church. We now need to properly mic the choir and chanters stand, so our online live streaming will be more robust and complete. As well, a few other adjustments are necessary for Phase 2 sound improvements.

**b. Altar Table Covers and Sets:** We have completed fabricating new Altar covers and now have the proper liturgical colors of gold, blue, green, red, purple and white sets, meeting the needs of each liturgical season. We thank Peter Auger for his assistance in completing this task.

**c. Computer Systems:** We have upgraded the office computer systems, so we can better serve the members of this parish, at the same time securing our systems and data through an enterprise level of security.

i. We are utilizing a new, updated, secure, and more robust system for our parishioner data and their contributions through IconCMO Parish Data Management Systems.

ii. Our day-to-day document creation and management is handled through Microsoft Enterprise levels 3-5 Office 365.

iii. Our online contributions are handled through Bambora and IconCMO.

iv. Our secure event online registration is now handled through Rubix, an IconCMO company, so that parishioners may easily register and securely pay online for parish events, thereby acquiring their tickets early and from the comfort of their own home.

**d. Communication**

**i. Website:** We have completed the first level of a total revamping of our website and online services. Explore our new web offerings at <https://SaintGeorgeMontreal.org> . Our website now offers:

1. Online giving portal through IconCMO Systems and Bambora.
2. Weekly parish bulletins
3. Parish calendar
4. Online livestreaming of services each Sunday and parts of Holy Week.
5. Mentoring Program portal

6. Event registration
7. News section
8. Organizations

**ii. Enhanced Parish Communications:** We have instituted better systems to communicate effectively with the parish at large through the following:

- 1. Email through Constant Contact:** allowing parishioners to effectively receive parish information and to manage whether they receive our emails or not.
- 2. Call-Em-All Texting and Voice Messaging:** to better reach our parishioners who tend to not use email and to more personally message our materials.
3. Parishioners may opt-out of these messaging systems, though they will then miss opportunities to receive information from the parish, and not have opportunities to register early for events that often sell out.
- 4. Canada Post:** We are implementing changes to be more cost effective and successful with our printed mailings:
  - a. We have just registered for and received our Indicia for substantially reduced postal rates for mailing out physical mailings.
  - b. We are now making available Business Reply Mail, as a service and benefit to our parishioners to make their mailing back to the parish easier. This will hopefully increase our response rate and ultimately, making our efforts more cost-effective.
- 5. Higher Quality Printing at A More Affordable Cost:** Quality Assurance has been instituted for our Sunday Bulletins, service booklets, and all other materials which are now folded and stapled to make for easier handling and reading, and ensuring that all documents are complete. This has been accomplished by better managing our printing and equipment purchasing contracts, resulting an average monthly savings of \$500.00 on previous agreements.

St. George Church Community has had a blessed and fruitful year. A great deal has been accomplished this past year, much is in progress, and much more is to be done. Kh. Kathleen and I have made the St. George community an integral part of our ministry in the Church and in our hearts. We look forward to moving forward with the parish as we bring many of the projects in development to fruition, building upon that work and starting new initiatives. Together as one Church family rooted in Christ, we can do great things. We ask our Lord and Master Jesus Christ to bless and multiply all our good works and to bless you, the faithful members of this parish.

Yours in Christ,



V. Rev. Dr. Joseph F. Purpura, Pastor