



## St. Raphael of Brooklyn Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church

Metropolitan SABA, Primate; Bishop ANTHONY, Auxiliary Bishop of Toledo and the Midwest  
Father Symeon Kees, Pastor

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October 1, 2023

Dear St. Raphael Church family,

Thank you for your faithful material support of our parish and its mission in Iowa City! By God's grace and your help, we have borne witness to the Tradition of the Orthodox Faith in this city for over twenty years. We have been blessed to be able to reach out to those around us with the light of Christ, and to help multiple generations of Orthodox Christians in Iowa City and from surrounding areas, along with new seekers and inquirers alike, find at St. Raphael's a place to live and practice the Faith in a welcoming parish family.

We hope you will review our 2023 achievements and 2024 aspirations on the next page to see just how much you are accomplishing here at St. Raphael!

**New this year:** we are asking *everyone* in the parish to complete a membership card, no matter what amount you need to put on the pledge line. As always, the amount any person or family pledges, as well as sensitive information such as bank account details, are kept strictly confidential and known only to the Treasurer. However, consistent with the provisions of our Parish Constitution, Father will use the pledge roster to determine who is eligible to vote in the upcoming December Voter's Meeting. **If you are a baptized/chrisdated member of the Orthodox church in good standing and plan to vote at the annual meeting, please be sure to return your pledge packet by November 12 to be sure you are on the list of voting members.** If you have any questions about this or any other matter concerning pledges and offerings, please contact Father Symeon or Austin Collins, who chairs the Stewardship Committee.

**Some of us committed to the Round Up Challenge in 2023. Will you join us in 2024?** If you rounded up to a whole percentage last year, consider continuing the challenge by increasing your pledge by an additional 1%. If you have not yet undertaken the challenge, begin this year by determining what percentage of your income you contributed last year, and round up to the nearest whole percentage, with an eye towards increasing by 1% each following year in order to eventually reach a tithe of 10% (or more!).

Please return your membership card by **November 12** by mailing or dropping off at church the attached pledge form (please mark it "Attention - Treasurer" for confidentiality purposes.). Or, fill out the online form found at <https://www.raphaelchurch.org/donate>. Electronic forms go directly to the Treasurer for confidentiality purposes.

We strongly encourage you to fulfill your pledge via monthly ACH. It makes it easier for both you and the church to budget! If you selected ACH withdrawal last year, your pledge will continue to be withdrawn in the same amount this coming year unless you elect to make a change. You may also visit the church website and arrange for a recurring gift via PayPal or Donor Box.

We sincerely appreciate all those who support the mission of St. Raphael Church, whether financially or with time and talents provided through music, teaching, maintenance, cooking, participation in the services, and much more; we are not a parish unless we serve, work, and worship together. That being said, since **we receive no funding from the Archdiocese or the government**, have no endowment fund, and have a mortgage and many other obligatory expenses, we fundamentally rely on your financial generosity. We are truly blessed by each and every one of you.

In Christ,

The Stewardship Committee

Austin Collins, Chair

Lori Branch

Karen Kuntz

Becky Morey, Treasurer

Alli Rockwell

**In 2023, your tithes and offerings have allowed us to take many steps forward in our efforts to serve and evangelize in our community.**

- We celebrated the major feasts and fasts of the year, including a blessed Lent and glorious Pascha.
- We welcomed numerous inquirers and new catechumens.
- We continued to provide spiritual instruction and edifying discussion for youth and adults.
- We offered a new spiritual home to incoming University students and others moving to Iowa City.
- We renovated and significantly expanded our Food Pantry, and officially dedicated it to the patronage of St. Maria of Paris.
- We fully funded our budget for kitchen installation through the generosity of all those who contributed to our capital campaign. Thank you most especially to everyone who contributed towards the kitchen to help us feed our family and community!
- We provided a loving and worthy sendoff to Fr. Ignatius and Kh. Maria after seventeen years of service in our community as they take on Father's new parish assignment in Cedarburg, Wisconsin, and have welcomed Father Symeon, Kh. Jing, and their children Marina, Genevieve, and Alexander into our family. Many years to both families, and may God bless this upcoming first year under Father Symeon's pastoral care and leadership!

### **Goals for 2024**

In addition to continuing our common life together by serving those in need, coming together for fellowship, welcoming new inquirers and members, and, most importantly, joining in worship of the Holy Trinity through all of the services throughout the liturgical year, we hope to undertake a number of exciting efforts in 2024. **All of this and more is possible through your continued support, if we all come together to contribute our treasure, time, and talent to the gospel mission our parish is called to.**

**Facilities.** In addition to ongoing maintenance and the progressing kitchen installation, we plan for beautiful restorations and improvements to our altar and iconostasis, which have served us since the purchase of the building and earlier and are in need of some upkeep. We also hope to provide baby-changing stations in our restrooms for the parents of young children in our family. Perhaps most importantly and exciting, we plan to install a new chair lift covering our full stairwell so that all members and visitors can fully participate in our liturgy and fellowship regardless of their age or physical ability.

**Education.** Our Sunday school program started its new year of instruction in September; the middle school and high school classes are working through the Archdiocese curriculum on the Epistle to the Romans, aiming to establish all of our older students in a deeper understanding and love for the Faith, while our pre-K to elementary class is providing foundational instruction on the basics of Biblical doctrines and spiritual life in the Church.

**Food Pantry.** We are seeing an increased need in our community for assistance with food and other basic household needs, which our Food Pantry team is working hard to address. We also hope to further develop the cooperative work between the Pantry and the Community Garden to provide more food and resources to those in need.

**Choir.** The choir is planning to update and increase the number of service books due to consistent participation during the services, and would also like to send representatives to the Archdiocese's Sacred Music Institute conferences to continue developing our excellent choir program.

**OCF.** Our OCF chapter is going to spearhead preparations for our celebration of St. Raphael's feast day, which we hope to see develop into a major yearly event. Our students also hope to provide financial assistance for members to attend regional or national OCF events, as well as participating in local community service and outreach.