Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
Українська Православна Церква США

11 August, 2026

Mr. John Stasko, President of the Parish Board of Administration
Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Parish
220 Mansfield Blvd
Carnegie, PA 15106

Dear Mr. Stasko, Deacon Evan, and beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, Spiritual Children of Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Parish:

Christ is among us!

It is with a heart burdened by profound sadness, disbelief, and prayer that I write to you following the sudden and unexpected repose in the Lord of your beloved pastor, the Reverend Father John Charest.

There are moments in our earthly pilgrimage when words seem insufficient to express what the human heart is experiencing. The unexpected departure from this life of a priest - one who stood before the Holy Altar, celebrated the Divine Mysteries, proclaimed the Holy Gospel, heard the joys and sorrows of his spiritual children, baptized, blessed, comforted, and prayed with his people - leaves a particularly deep wound within the life of a parish family.

Today, that wound is yours.

I know that many of you are experiencing shock, sorrow, confusion, and perhaps questions for which there are presently no answers. We do not know or understand all the circumstances surrounding Fr. John's sudden repose. At such a painful moment, I ask you not to allow uncertainty or unanswered questions to overshadow the Christian responsibility entrusted to us: **to pray, to love, to show mercy, and to entrust our departed brother to the boundless compassion of Almighty God.**

The life of a priest is inseparably joined to the life of the people entrusted to his pastoral care. A priest brings his parishioners before the Holy Altar every time he celebrates the Divine Liturgy. He carries their names and their needs in his prayers. He shares their baptisms and weddings, their celebrations and illnesses, their accomplishments and disappointments, their tears and their final farewells.

In the same way, the faithful become part of the priest's own life.

Fr. John served among you as your pastor and spiritual father. Whatever burdens he may have carried within his own heart, and whatever circumstances surrounded these final moments of his earthly pilgrimage, we entrust them now to the One Who alone knows completely the mystery of every human heart.

God alone knows the depths of the human soul. God alone sees the wounds that others cannot see. God alone understands the burdens that sometimes cannot be expressed in words. And God alone is the final and merciful Judge of every human life.

Therefore, beloved brothers and sisters, this is not a time for speculation. It is a time for prayer. It is a time for compassion. It is a time for the parish family to become what the Church is called to be at its very best - a community in which we bear one another's burdens, hold one another when we are weak, and remind one another that even in the darkest valley, Christ remains with us.

Our hearts and prayers must especially surround Fr. John's wife, Dobrodiyka Laryssa, their children, as well as his parents, and entire family. Their grief is beyond what words can adequately describe. I ask each of you to treat them with extraordinary tenderness, patience, discretion, and Christian love. In the weeks and months ahead, may they experience through you not curiosity about circumstances, but the healing presence of Christ and the loving embrace of His Holy Church.

I also want each of you, the spiritual children of Saints Peter and Paul Parish, to know that you are not alone.

On behalf of His Eminence Metropolitan Antony, the Council of our Metropolia, the Consistory, and the fullness of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, I extend to Mr. Stasko, Deacon Evhen, the Parish Board of Administration, and every member of this parish family our prayerful support and paternal embrace.

As your hierarch and spiritual father, I embrace each and every one of you in this hour of pain.

I will walk with you through the difficult days ahead. Our Church will walk with you. We will pray together, mourn together, and seek together the consolation that comes from Christ, Who Himself stood before the tomb of Lazarus and wept, revealing to us that tears of grief are not contrary to faith but can become an expression of profound love.

At the same time, Christ proclaimed: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." (John 11:25)

This is the hope to which we must cling now.

I ask you, therefore, to gather spiritually around the Holy Altar and to remember your newly reposed pastor, the servant of God **Priest John**, in your prayers. Pray also for one another. Reach out to those who are struggling. Be attentive to those who are silent. Hold close those whose hearts are overwhelmed by grief. And above all, remain close to Christ.

Together, let us pray:

O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, Physician of our souls and bodies, Resurrection and Life of all who place their hope in You, look down with compassion upon Your newly reposed servant, Priest John.

You alone know the depths of his heart. You know every joy and sorrow, every hope and disappointment, every burden carried openly and every struggle known only to You. Remember his priestly service, his prayers before Your Holy Altar, and the people whom he sought to serve in Your Name. In the abundance of Your mercy, forgive every transgression, voluntary and involuntary, and receive Your servant into the place of light, the place of green pasture, the place of rest, from which all sickness, sorrow, and sighing have fled away.

Look with particular tenderness upon his beloved wife Dobrodiyka Laryssa and their children. Hold them close when their hearts are overwhelmed. Strengthen them when they feel weak. Console them when human words cannot. Surround his parents, siblings, relatives, and friends with Your grace.

Remember also, O Lord, the faithful of Saints Peter and Paul Parish, now grieving the loss of their pastor. Unite them in love. Preserve them from despair, division, speculation, and judgment. Grant them wisdom, patience, compassion, and peace. Send down upon them Your All-Holy Spirit, the Comforter, that in the midst of their tears they may still perceive Your presence and in the darkness of grief behold the light of Your Resurrection.

For You are the Resurrection, the Life, and the Repose of Your servant, Priest John, O Christ our God, and to You we send up glory, together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Beloved brothers and sisters, please know that you remain in my prayers before the Holy Altar. May our merciful Savior strengthen each of you, may the Most Holy Theotokos cover Fr. John's grieving family and your entire parish community with her maternal protection, and may the grace of the Holy Spirit sustain you throughout the difficult days ahead.

With profound sorrow, paternal love, and prayer in the Risen Christ,

+Daniel

Archbishop Daniel
Spiritual Father of the Western Eparchy

Memory eternal to the newly reposed servant of God, Priest John.
Вічна йому пам'ять!