

## STRENGTHS

- 65 - DIVERSE PARISHIONERS & GREAT TEAMWORK**- Our strength lies in the fact that we are diverse group of worshippers; We have people from different age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic groups. We also come from different religious backgrounds and are at different stages in our Christian journey; Age diversity among congregation; Diverse age involvement--all ages fairly equally represented; Diversity (converts and cradles); Diversity of people; Many converts from a variety of backgrounds; Robust Convert community; Diversity in congregation, i.e., convert and cradle and young and old; Mixture of cultures and ideas; Representation of age groups in all generations, and they mingle together well; Inclusion; Many different families from various walks of life, backgrounds, and life stages; Large infusion of converts over the last few years; Diversity of demographic- age, background, even languages brought together by their common faith; Attractive to Newcomers/Converts; Desire to grow and bring in others; Many new members; Getting new members to join; Lots of young families having babies; Well educated, talented community – especially in technology, the Christian Faith; Capacity/Education Level; Desire to be an exceptional parish; Talented people; Gifts & talents of parishioners and clergy; talented, interested laity; Members with a lot of historical knowledge; There are a lot of educated and also savvy people at this church, with a lot of insight and wisdom to share; Parishioners are widely known and respected in the broader community; Confidence; Parishioners Including our priest who have or had roles beyond our parish. It broadens our perspectives; Many good and faithful servants present; Core body of dedicated parishioners; Faithful to the church; Working together for major events: Convention, Dinner, Mortgage Reduction; Teamwork; Camaraderie; Work together; We have great workers in the church; Volunteers; Our parish always steps up when help is needed – whether it is a financial issue or a project that needs organizing....there is really nothing our parish can't do!; Rally well to causes; The more, the merrier. Where there are more people sharing the same ideas, faith, goals, and ideals they are able to form a strong community, unity, to work together, to progress to accomplish wonderful things and to help each other to grow in faith; All seem to want what is best overall; Every member takes pride in being a part of this parish; Desire to be the best we can be as a parish; Passionate parishioners; We have many kind, thoughtful people in the Parish. They care about and support each other; Parishioners that are willing to give their time and money to help the Church; Inclusivity - regarding committees and getting members involved in events and educational programs/workshops; Loyal and devoted families that love our Church and want to see it succeed; Committed Core of Volunteers; Strong core group (those who participate in a broad range of activities); Stability; Faithful to the church; The community brings their gifts (time / treasure / talent) to the parish; Great potential to do great things; Parish that truly cares about its church and will always be there to help; Plenty of children and involved families; You can tell our parishioners love our church; St; Nicholas is a generation of love and family; Unconditional love; Parishioners: Our Church is blessed with loving people who love the Lord and each other; St Nicholas is a family, with the parishioners truly caring about one another; Clear love and devotion to the church and God; Loving community surrounding the Church; Serious about trying to love God and our neighbor; Community is filled with the Holy Spirit.
- 43 - FAITH** - Beautiful liturgies/services; Full and beautiful liturgical life; Opportunities to attend church services; Worship Services are Enlightening; Orthodoxy is the true faith, and many are joining; Rich liturgical life; Orthodoxy/Tradition/Faith; Emphasis on full sacramental life, e.g., encouragement to take part in confession, arrive to church on time and encouraging attendance on feast days etc.; Beauty of the liturgy, architecture and art, chanting and choir; The liturgy of other denominations have been oversimplified to cater to the least common denominator; The inheritance of tradition that assures that we are following the faith as given to the apostles; This is very attractive to those who have come to understand that without these roots, all other churches have strayed into destructive patterns that are reaching crisis proportions today, especially in the Catholic and mainline Protestant denominations (although those happen to be the ones I'm familiar with, so it may be more widespread); Well-run services; Number of liturgical services held; Liturgy; Member of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, founded and guided by the Holy Spirit; Full Liturgical Life; St; Nicholas Parish connects us to the Orthodox faith that is deep and timeless; I feel that there is a real appreciation for the importance of this connection throughout the Parish; Priest's liturgical services are very meaningful (Holy Week in particular); Our key strength is our enthusiastic desire to continue and to

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share our beautiful Orthodox Faith and Church that we have been blessed by; We are the one true apostolic church; The Orthodox faith; Liturgical activity; Numerous opportunities to participate in church life; Our Christian Orthodox Faith; Priest's liturgical services are very meaningful (Holy Week in particular); Liturgically solid, full-service parish; Lots of services and encouragement to join in; Strong liturgical life; Spiritual growth opportunities; Love of God & the Orthodox faith; The Creed; Traditions & Liturgical Practices; Jesus Christ; Authenticity/History; Large quantity of worship opportunities; Opportunity for Spiritual growth; Many services available; Lots of opportunities for worship; Spiritual Development; Participation and attendance in services and activities; Frequency of services and availability in terms of time and accessibility; Many opportunities to attend services.

**34 - FACILITIES** - Attractive building/facilities; High profile location; Great physical plant; Facilitation of events/meetings; Excellent facilities (Cultural Center, kitchen, etc.); Our beautiful building: the updated Cultural center is a huge strength as well as the updated Chapel; Exceptional and beautiful facility; Beautiful Icons; Beautiful Facility; Beautiful architecture and music; Icons; The beauty of our parish with the icons and the domes; Beautification of interior and exterior of church; Beautiful Building/Campus; Beautiful church with beautiful iconography depicting the life of Christ; The Cultural Center ; Ministry building; Beautiful church facility; Temple; Icon; Central geographic location; Great facilities and location in the community; Church building/structure; Cultural center available for use or to rent out; Beautiful new facility; Very comfortable church; We have a large facility; Beautiful, serviceable and visible facilities; Great church facility; Good church facilities; Provide a space for larger pan-orthodox gatherings/services; Cultural Center used to provide conferences, bringing community members to our church building; The physical environment of our church, looking around at the beauty and the many miracles of our Lord and feeling humbled to be in such a beautiful place as a reminder of his presence in every moment of our lives; I have found when I tell people I attend Saint Nicholas Antiochian Church they are aware of the parish due to size and impressiveness of the building and generally have follow up questions; Outreach provided by the Cultural Center.

**30 - FR. MICHAEL / CLERGY** - Father Michael; Fr; Michael is willing to talk about challenging things like Gender, Politics, Discrimination. He isn't afraid to talk about difficult/ scary subjects; Great Priest; Priest has a lot of knowledge about the Orthodox Church; Priest communicates and counsels well; Great priest and clergy; The most important person in the church is the priest. If the priest is dedicated and delivers the sermons that go to the people hearts, his Shepard's role is fulfilled. And we do have the right Shepard; Father Michael, our wonderful, spiritual leader, has implemented many ministries to encourage us to be a strong parish family that reaches out to one another and the community; Father Michael is very important in helping us to grow our faith: His excellent sermons, Bible Study, his willingness to chat anytime one needs him. A warm and welcoming spirit; We can learn from this and show our love for each other as members of God's Family; Father Michael's consistent call to action/service with the whole parish; A priest that is extremely knowledgeable and approachable to help guide us to salvation; Strong pastoral leadership; Our priest, Fr. Michael, is very dynamic, involved, and a true spiritual leader in the Orthodox faith; Priest has a lot of knowledge about the Orthodox Church; Priest communicates and counsels well; We have an excellent priest; Father Michael is a strong leader and challenges the parish both spirituality and in moving forward to grow the community; Father Michael Nasser – our secret weapon! He is a dynamic leader and an amazing speaker; Father does a wonderful job holding each member of the church accountable; Our parish is blessed to have a strong and dynamic Priest with Fr; Michael!; Approachable clergy; Educated clergy willing to teach; Talented clergy; Accessibility to Clergy; Clergy - Priest, Deacons, Sub-Deacons; We have many faithful clergy at all levels – deacons, sub deacons, readers etc.; Our clergy are very personable and also insightful; Actively involved and approachable clergy; The clergy.

**28 - STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION** - Debt Free!;Mortgage is paid off; Mortgage paid off; Debt free; Debt free; Mortgage is paid off!!!;No Mortgage; Debt free ;Last but not least, the fact that the

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church's mortgage was paid off it is a big relief; Fiscally responsible and sound Finances; Wealth; More financial resources than most and more disposable income now that the mortgage is paid in full; Financially secure; Large, healthy budget; Stewardship program; Financial capability of parishioners; Strong financial position; Strong financial position; Financial Stability; Ability to come together and support the church financially; Our parishioners support the church financially, and have maintained being financially stable over the years; We are a relatively wealthy parish; With the extra money (assuming people are contributing the same), the church can concentrate on more opportunities for the parishioners; Financial support; Significant wealth among body/attenders; Charitable giving; Generosity; Our stewardship efforts has resulted with a widening of the donor base.

**27 - MINISTRIES** - Strong ministry programs; Variety of ministries; Well-organized ministries and fellowship groups with opportunities for every parishioner to become part of a smaller community; Multiple ministry teams allow an ala-cart offer to anyone looking to serve; Active ministries; Variety of Ministries for all to participate ; I have found regular opportunities to participate or attend various meet ups or activities as I currently fit several of the groups that regularly hold activities; A variety of activities planned throughout the year; Well-organized ministries and fellowship groups with opportunities for every parishioner to become part of a smaller community; We have several ministry teams that are serving our parish in a variety of ways. These ministry teams involve a wide range of ages and opportunities for everyone; A variety of ministries; Young Adults, Family, Men's Ministry, and at times the Okay Mama's group when it is a full family event; Programs: Solid, growing ministries; Many varied programs and activities designed to forward the mission of the church; The Forerunners have regular meetings and events to draw people in; Lots of families and family programs; Most members encouraged to volunteer/participate.

**25 - WELCOMING** - Friendly, welcoming parishioners; Caring people; Inviting / Welcoming Community; Hospitality; How welcoming and friendly many church members are; We are a very friendly and welcoming group of people and clergy. Before joining St. Nicholas, I tried another Orthodox church in the area. I was not welcomed there by the member or the clergy as I was at St. Nicholas; Midwest hospitality; Friendly church; Warm outgoing parishioners that reach out to newcomers; The people of this parish are very friendly and reach out to and welcome newcomers; Friendly-welcoming parish; Welcoming; Welcoming community; Welcoming and open members; Welcoming and charitable; Friendly and able to identify a core group of friends organically within the community; Deep bond; Friendships; A culture willing to help each other and those in need; A close community; New People Joining; Hospitality; Hospitable and welcoming to new and old members.

**22 - RELIGIOUS EDUCATION** - Christian Education: Youth, adults, Bible Study; Offering educational opportunities – adult church, school, bible study, other religious study offerings; The Sunday School Program was effectively run this year by Elizabeth Ayoub and Gretchen Zahn and there was a faithful outreach to young moms and families through varied activities; Young families are being drawn in to our Church as a result of their fun activities; Good educational environment with plenty of resources; (bookstore, icons, church school, etc.); Religious education and activities for youth; Excellent Intro to Orthodoxy class; More educational program offers than ever before; Good youth program (Sunday school); Church School Teachers & Program; Strong church school leadership; Solid teaching which challenges us to better ourselves; Watching our kids and grandkids following in our footsteps and feeling grounded, from the altar boys to the Sunday school and vacation bible school; Adult Sunday School led by Charlie Makhoul is topnotch teaching with excellent visual aids; Amy Amash and Wendy Bander have strong leadership skills and have been faithful in helping our Church secure a new Youth Director; Active Sunday school – although small; Dr Charles Makhoul is a well-educated, dynamic leader of adult study class; Many opportunities are available for people to continue to learn the Orthodox faith, and for those interested in joining our faith. There are services, classes, book clubs, Bible studies, chats, etc. for people to participate in on a regular basis; Provides many opportunities for personal growth in the faith, along with ways to connect with other parishioners through others spiritual growth; Educational; Working on getting youth more/staying involved; Growing social and spiritual opportunities for youth; Liturgical ministry

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was lead faithfully by Christine Elias and she provided bread continually (almost single-handedly) throughout the year. She also often volunteered to help with the Icon decorating.

- 21 - STAFF**- Excellent and efficient staff; Dedicated, hardworking staff and clergy; Talented, dedicated staff; Church Staff; Great staff; Solid clerical team; Priest has liturgical support staff; Priest has liturgical support staff; Dedicated and hardworking clergy and paid staff; Dedicated, energetic and willing volunteers with varied talents, skills and ideas; Church Staff & Volunteers; The Church staff (Keith especially) who keeps everything running smoothly; Excellent Office Administration, staff & volunteers; Actively involved and approachable parish administrator; The administration and communication St. Nicholas has Administrator is well aware of all events going on in the church which allows for things to run smoothly; Highly organized & Parish runs well; We have an amazing parish administrator who really cares about our parish; Good operating organization; This parish is very administratively organized. There are lots of people in the parish, so this is a necessity to keep track of everything going on and what needs to be done; Our church administrator is outstanding and keeps our parish organized in every way; Administrator is well aware of all events going on in the church which allows for things to run smoothly; Parish Administrator and secretary; Active young adult community; Growing social and spiritual opportunities for youth; Growing Youth Group; Dedication to youth; Strong young adult/early career/college group; good programs for youth; Our strength lies in the fact that there are different activities/groups (both charitable and fellowship) within our church so that one can choose (based on their strengths and comfort level) where one wants to put their energies; Opportunities for engagement; Groups and activities to get involved.
- 15 - PARISH COUNCIL** - Parish Council Members; Solid leadership team – council; So far what I have observed, still being new here, is the leadership here is awesome; Hearts are in the right place, firm yet loving, always moving forward trying to do what we are supposed to be doing; The Parish Committee works hard to keep things going; Deconstruction (looking at a plan and seeing where the holes and possible issues present themselves);Great mission statement!;Good people willing to serve on the parish council; Our parish council has a relatively diverse and capable construct. We are financially able to do good things and make a difference in the community and on a bigger scale in the (old country) and the orphanage in Mexico; Strong PC to lead; The Parish Counsel is dedicated, competent, and proactive to work together with the Priest and with the parishioners to help us not only to come worship in a beautiful, well maintained God’s House, but also, to get and keep us involved in this big, beautiful family; Willingness to address and tackle major issues; Strong understanding of church values and a willingness to envision a clear mission and purpose for the future; with dedicated lay leadership; Prioritizing.
- 13 - COMMUNITY OUTREACH** - Works of Mercy; Active in the neighboring communities; Strong leadership in Works of Mercy; Community Service; We help others in our community; Works of Mercy program is strong; Many projects to serve the community; Opportunities to do charitable work in the community; Community Outreach; Our charitable outreach program helps our community at large in so many wonderful ways; Increased interest in charity and evangelism; Community involvement; Evangelistic Outreach Events invite the public in to “Come and See”.
- 11 - TECHNOLOGY** - Increased streaming/online attendance during Covid; up to date technology; Streaming liturgies/services; Live streams of services; Website – full of information; Good use of technology...;e.g. weekly you tube Messages, streaming during pandemic, utilizing online survey and rsvp tools; Technology; Well-designed technology to view services online; Services are accessible online and the website is well designed; The Tech Ministry through the web is introducing people who might not have heard about our Church; Tech savvy.
- 10 - CHOIR-CHANTING** - Music Ministry is drawing people into our Church. Talent: Nick Ayoub, Christiana Hultink and the chanters are faithful in their musical preparation and Donna Hatterm

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provides excellent choir practice sessions that results in beautiful music for our services; Strong Choir; Music Ministries: Choir & Chanters; Music program: Liturgical choir, Byzantine Chanters; Good musical support; Choir & Chanters; Choir & Chanters Enhance Services; Strong chanter team.

- 10 - GREAT FELLOWSHIP EVENTS** - Middle Eastern dinner; Active/full church calendar; fellowship events; Community Building/Fellowship; Many opportunities to meet and connect with other members; Many opportunities to meet and connect with other members; The dinners we hold together— cooking, preparing, working and serving make us all feel like one family; A variety of activities planned throughout the year; Ample opportunities to participate in the community outside of liturgy; We share our culture through Middle Eastern Dinners and Workshops.
- 8 - HISTORY** - 50+ year history in GR; The long history of St; Nicholas in the Grand Rapids area; History of Success and Pride; Many large, multigenerational families; Intergenerational body; Family; Strong multi-generational Orthodox families; Rooted in an ethnic tradition while also not being held back by it; Many legacy parishioners; Our values that came from our ancestors and feeling we have to carry on that tradition; A long standing history; Our core community and friendships that developed throughout the years; Our parishioners.
- 8 - COMMUNICATIONS** - Communication to parishioners: Mid-week newsletter, Sunday bulletin, Special announcements and notifications; Communication (needs/events/keeping parishioners informed); great communication to parish members; Quick and effective communication; Communications are good; Communication (needs/events/keeping parishioners informed); Church board and staff keeps parishioners informed about every aspect of the church and communicates properly to get news out; Good infrastructure for activity planning, community development (communication methods, planning processes, etc.);).
- 6 - YOUTH DIRECTOR** - New Youth/Family leader; (Youth Ministry has become a strength as more focus, time, energy, and resources have been spent on it. Still have a ways to go, though! Especially with SOYO;); Recent hiring of a youth director; Recent Youth Director position; Recently hired youth director to allow and ensure all of our young people are engaged in all aspects of their faith; Increase in youth participation and recent hiring of youth director.

## **ONE OFFS –**

- ~ Kind but blunt and not afraid to thoughtfully speak my mind.
- ~ Know how to "party" and have fun.
- ~ Good size parish; not too big and not too small.
- ~ This is a large parish (to me). There are many people of all ages who are a part of it and serve in many different capacities. When I moved here, I felt this looked like a "healthy" parish and wanted to be part of it.