

DEANERY REPORTS

CAROLINAS DEANERY

The Carolinas Deanery continues to flourish, in spite of the Corona virus restrictions. All churches have found different ways to continue regular services, teaching, and charity work in obedience to Archbishop Alexander's directions. We have several men beginning DVP programs, and next year some returning Seminary students.

Frs. Patrick Pulley (Raleigh), and Fr. Christopher Foley and Dn. Daniel (High Point) are actively involved in new Church building plans to accommodate their growing parishes.

Fr. Marcus Burch (Greenville) has completed the new Temple at St John of the Ladder, and he is beginning plans for a new hall. Fr. Andrew Cannon and his growing family have stepped quite easily into the large shoes left by Fr. Peter Robichau and the lovely, newly built Church in Wilmington. Fr. James Bozeman (Beaufort) has acquired a beautiful piece of property with hopes to build as he enjoys the beach and the mission continues to grow there. Fr. John Mikita has stepped into the Mt. Pleasant challenge with the departure of Fr. John Parker, and he and Protodeacon Mark have done a remarkable job of continuing the growth of that beautiful Church and community.

Fr. Paul Shellbach and the faithful in Hickory have found a beautiful place to host the new mission as it grows. Fr. Benedict (Edenton) and Fr. Andrew Winters (Fayetteville) continue to serve and grow their unique Missions in small towns with military and retiring parishioners. St. Mary Magdalene (Rincon) is partnering with Orthodox Christian Leadership Initiative to pilot a 12-month module dedicated to, "Cultivating Vision and Change." With this program, we hope to provide clarity to our mission as we continue to serve the Greater Savannah area.

Fr. Bill Mills was seriously impacted by the COVID shutdowns in Charlotte, but he has been incredibly inventive in finding ways on line to serve his community, and its teaching and charity activities. Fr. Mikel Bock has replaced Fr. Paul Coates in Rock Hill and although faced with limited space for worship, he is actively improving the facilities and infrastructure there. Fr. Jacob (Toccoa) retired recently, but we believe we have a Priest willing to move there soon and grow that community. Fr. Alexis Baldwin moved, and although God has not provided a replacement yet, He has provided Fr. Matthew Furman (Chaplain at Fr. Gordon) who, along with Dn. Joseph, is serving the community faithfully. Finally, I continue to plan for my retirement, and along with Dn. Nicholas, Fr. Ignatius Green has proven to be a great asset and good friend as he prepares to take the reins in Columbia.

We have been unable to have our normal spring and fall retreats because of Corona regulations but we hope to have one in January if things loosen up a bit with the possibility of vaccine availability. Steady on....

Mississippi River Deanery

The missions and parishes within the MRD have had a difficult year. Covid-19 has impacted our parishioners and churches on multiple levels. Some have dealt with physical illness while everyone has

struggled with the virus spiritually. All of us have seen and experienced members do things expected as well as unexpected in response to Covid-19. However, the clergy, following the direction of Archbishop Alexander and that of their civil authorities, have done an incredible job navigating these waters. No two missions are addressing the challenges before us in the same way. Through prayer, creativity, technology, adding more services, and negotiating week by week with parish councils and others, our priests have found a way to serve the services and the sacraments consistently for the last nine months. Our hope and prayer are that God will be merciful to us in 2021 and remove this horrible virus from us with lessons learned through repentance and faith.

Following are the individual reports for the missions and parishes in the MRD:

**Holy Nativity of the Lord Orthodox Mission
Shreveport, LA**

Holy Nativity, like the other missions and parishes in the MRD, has struggled to adjust to the the implications of Covid-19. While some parishioners have not attended Divine Services in nine months, the vast majority have been able to reestablish a “normal” liturgical and sacramental life over the last three months. During the most difficult time, Great Lent, we streamed our services, and the faithful dressed for Sunday, lit candles, and stood before their television as if in the temple. As their priest, it was humbling and encouraging to see my people do what they could to maintain their life in Christ while isolated from each other. When the restrictions were lifted, we opened the doors to the temple and live-streamed the services to our parish hall. This arrangement has allowed us to have between 70 and 90 people gather safely for Divine Liturgy on Sundays. While our average attendance is still well below where we were before Covid-19, I am thankful. Also, thanks be to God, we have not experienced any negativity or rebelliousness in regards to the wearing of masks and requests for obedience to Archbishop Alexander’s mandates. All things considered, Holy Nativity, by the grace of God, is doing as well as can be expected spiritually, financially, and in regards to the mission work we are called to do in Shreveport, LA.

Respectfully submitted,
Priest Jason Foster

**Ss. George and Alexandra Orthodox Mission
Ft. Smith, AR**

Covid affected us in all aspects of parish life: Our Worship, Our Pastoral Care, Our Education, and Our Outreach.

Worship: 2020 began on an encouraging note. Attendance for the services were improving. This reached a peak during the first week of Great Lent when we had at least 30 people present for each weekday service during that week. We have never had such good attendance for clean week. Then Covid hit. Since then our attendance has never approached that level. The restricted numbers for attendees, our parish shut down and the fear of covid in our community greatly kept people away from Church. We do stream our services on our through our Church Face book page.

Pastoral Care: Since Covid I am no longer able to physically go to the hospitals for visits, nor are our parishioners who are good at visiting the sick. We have had to rely on electronic communication. Fortunately Fr. Paul is able to do that at Mercy Hospital where he works. Pastoral work is not the sole

work of the priests. Confessions have affected only those who no longer come to Church. Counseling and calling on others is primarily done by phone.

Education: Before Covid hit we had a robust educational program for our children and youths. We now provide links for different age groups which necessitates parental participation. We also have a Zoom class for 11-13 Susan recently has provided zoom classes for the 11-13 year olds. The teen classes have not yet resumed. Our Adult education has included Zoom daily spiritual nourishments based on the Scripture reading or saints lives of the day, Saturday Bible Study, inquiry classes and catechumen classes. I hope that these virtual classes will continue after covid has vanished.

Outreach: This has not been a time for evangelism, with the shut downs. However, Fr. Nick did make four people catechumens. Thankfully two of them, a father and a 12 year old daughter were received into the faith through Holy Baptism on August 16th. Five additional persons become catechumens, on November 15th (4 adults and one youth). If it wasn't for our website they would never have found us. Work at the Community Rescue Mission has continued. Unfortunately, game night has stopped. Fr. Nick went off the board. When he left and I have been his replacement. Three of our Church members either work or volunteer there.

Yours in Christ always,
Archpriest John Maxwell

Saint John of Chicago Mission Rogers, Arkansas

All things considered, we feel thankful and blessed at the end of 2020. We have a few persons and families that have been unable to return due to Covid, but we have had no cases of it in the mission to my knowledge. At the same time, we've had several new inquirers, catechumens, and families come to the mission during this time.

2020 is the final year for us to receive the church planting grant, so we have to transition in this difficult time to being fully self-supporting. I think we will make the transition smoothly, for the most part, as most of our folks are committed to regular giving and our new folks are, as well. And, as I said, we continue to grow as a mission which is, of course, the best way to increase giving.

We face the same challenges everyone else does in regard to feeling the loss of fellowship, education, and all the effects of Covid. But we're thankful to be in the Liturgy, the services, and to have the opportunities for fellowship that we do have.

Submitted,
Archpriest John Wehling

St. George Orthodox Church Memphis, TN

The Parish of St. George has generally fared well during the 'pandemic: tithes have remained consistent, we have several catechumens, we continue our regular schedule of services and in fact have added two additional services per week. In September we had our first and only case of Covid. Attendance dropped and still has not bounced back but most people stay in touch and I do reach out to as many as possible. Some though are very wary and will not attend services. We normally have our annual meeting at the end of September but cancelled for now. We have yet to approve our 20-21 budget and

are waiting for an opportunity to do so. Our board zooms every month so we know that our finances are in good order and we take care of other business. We of course are following our local guidance for permissible attendance, social distancing, and mask wearing. We thank God that we are able to continue our church life!

Your Brother in Christ,
Archpriest Mark Sutton

**St. John of Damascus Orthodox Church
Tyler, TX**

This year at St. John of Damascus Orthodox Church in Tyler, TX has been fairly easy to gauge primarily for three reasons: finances, attendance, and inquirers. Financially, the mission has remained on solid footing throughout the year, even being able to proceed with the installation of a new iconostasis and the beginning of our iconographic program. Pledges have remained strong and we anticipate ending the year on budget. Our attendance at services also remains strong, especially now that many of the attendance limitations in Texas have been lifted. We have enjoyed several parish-wide outdoor social events that have bolstered the community, especially our "October Extravaganza" which featured an Easter egg hunt, pumpkin carving, and hayrides. Since the beginning of March, I have had over forty inquirers contact us with many visiting. We currently have roughly 15-20 participating in our on-line catechism, many of whom will be received into the Church at Pascha 2021. The remaining inquirers are participating in limited ways but I anticipate many of these will also move toward catechism in the coming year.

Overall, the year has produced in nearly all of the faithful a purified experience of life in the Church. Their fidelity to the Church and our life in Christ has been very rewarding to see and my hope is that as we continue to pass through these challenging times, the Church will continue to grow and produce the virtues of patience, love, trust, and endurance that each of us needs and desires.

In Christ,
Priest David Bozeman

**Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church
Clinton, Mississippi**

Of course almost everything has been affected by the Covid 19 virus. I would say we have survived it well so far, thanks be to God. We obeyed all the church directives, and as far as I know had only one person contract the virus. He recovered quickly from it, although he now has another serious illness.

A few of our members simply dropped out and have not been seen since, and quit contributing financially. But most of them have continued to attend regularly as the quotas allowed, and continued to contribute as their finances allowed. Nevertheless our contributions from members through October 2020 averaged \$11,434 per month compared to \$16,495 per month last year. We will certainly "make it," but our budget for 2021 will definitely be reduced and we will have to reduce our contribution to our Mississippi Missions fund.

The last six weeks (since the quota was lifted) we have averaged 45 people in church, compared to more than 80 before the plague.

Since January we have been blessed to have Fr. Alexis Baldwin and his family in Mississippi. He is now living in the Starkville-Columbus area and serving missions in Columbus, Hattiesburg, and McComb. He is a very active worker and these missions are picking up new members. In other parish news, in 2020 we had three baptisms with chrismations, three convert chrismations, and now have two catechumens. We had no funerals.

In May we installed a 4 by 8 foot outdoor icon on the front face of the church, by Vladimir Grigorenko of Dallas. This is a memorial to Matushka Sissy Yerger. We also installed inside a 12 by 8 mural of the St. Thomas touching the Lord, by Fr. Andrew Tregubov of Claremont, NH. We installed a portrait icon of St. Moses the Black, in memory of the late Subdeacon Peter McCleod, a frequent face at these Assemblies.

Respectfully submitted,
Archpriest Paul Yerger

**St. Matthew the Apostle Mission
Baton Rouge, LA**

Though there has been less “activity” at the parish this past year, it is not one any of us will soon forget. We managed to receive two adults into the Church and baptize two children. We have a dozen inquirers currently attending classes and signing up for services. Figuring out how to integrate newcomers into the community has been a challenge. Among the other blessings of this past year, we were able to install a new iconostasis which has been a tremendous joy to the parish. We will begin our property search in earnest this next year and are hoping and praying God will continue to bless the parish as He has in the past.

Respectfully Submitted,
Priest Joshua Trant

**Christ the Saviour
Mc Comb, MS**

Baptisms/Chrismations: 0 Catechumens: 0 Normal attendance: Nine adults, however, there are a handful of others loosely associated that have infrequently attended during the Pandemic Buildings: Parsonage, Church Hall, Priest office building, and Church all owned Ministries: (Currently) Divine Liturgy and Vespers once a month The buildings at Christ the Saviour need maintenance, but are all in good working order. There is still quite a lot of life in the community and the area surrounding. An estimated 12,000+ people live in McComb as of 2019. Pike County, in which McComb is situated, is home to 39,000+. The McComb micropolitan area is home to 52,000+ people. The city of Brookhaven is a mere 30 minute (25 miles) drive from McComb and is home to 34,000+ people. Christ the Saviour remains an island in the South West corner of Mississippi. The four closest Orthodox communities to it are all in Louisiana, 60+ miles away, one way drive. Holy Cross Mission Station in Petal, the next closest, is 70 miles, one way. In an age when many Orthodox commute to Church, the generally accessible ministry area population of nearly 100,000 people has often proven to be sustainable. The Mission effort can definitely be successful given a methodical and well thought out vision for the future.

Respectfully submitted,
Priest Alexis Baldwin

**Holy Cross Mission Station
Hattiesburg, MS**

Baptisms/Chrismations: 0/1 Catechumens: 1 Normal attendance: 18 adults, 7 children Buildings: Renting sizable 2300+ sq ft store front in Petal, MS Ministries: (Currently) Divine Liturgy and Vespers once a month, months with 5 Sundays, Vespers and Divine Liturgy twice that month; with additional services as scheduled or allowable. When I'm not serving, lay led Typica on Sundays. Faithful participate in regular online community discussions/fellowship, online book club held throughout the year, online workshops, Monday through Friday Online Mission Daily Scripture and Prayer, and twice a month Friday night Online Catechumen classes Holy Cross has seen good growth this year, with new members/catechumens, as well as more routine services being offered. They've complete some beautification of their store front space (ongoing), improved the ability of the Choir (ongoing), and successfully completed a pledge drive, doubling monthly giving; all during the pandemic. The mood of the community is very positive and the level of commitment in all areas of community life has increased greatly. This will continue, by all indications, into 2021 and going forward.

Respectfully submitted,
Priest Alexis Baldwin

**St. Catherine Mission Station
Columbus, MS**

Baptisms/Chrismations: 1/1 Catechumens: 6 Normal attendance: 16 adults, 6 children Buildings: St. Catherine purchased (ongoing mortgage) their current 1,000+ sq ft church building which houses the chapel, two bathrooms, as well as two other rooms: one for a bookstore and the other for fellowship. Ministries: (Currently) Divine Liturgy and Vespers twice a month. Infrequently this year, an extra service when it is able to be scheduled. When I'm not serving, lay led Typica on Sundays, as well as readers Vespers frequently on Wednesdays throughout each month. Faithful participate in regular online community discussions/fellowship, online book club held throughout the year, online workshops, Monday through Friday Online Mission Daily Scripture and Prayer, and twice a month Friday night Online Catechumen classes St. Catherine has seen quite a bit of new growth this year since I arrived and began serving. The community has completed several church beautification projects, both in continued maintenance and interior additions. New members coming from the towns outside of the city of Columbus have injected substantial vitality into its already growing community. As recent of the beginning week of December, I've even been contacted by a couple of new folks interested in Orthodoxy and looking to visit St. Catherine's. This growth by numbers is certainly likely to continue into 2021 and the future.

Respectfully submitted,
Priest Alexis Baldwin

On behalf of the clergy and faithful of the Mississippi River Deanery (MRD), we ask that you continue to keep us in your prayers as we, along with all of you, beseech God to be merciful to us during these difficult and unprecedented times.

In Christ,

Priest Jason Foster – Dean
Mississippi River Deaner

NORTH FLORIDA DEANERY

Annunciation Russian Mission, Jacksonville, FL (2012)

Hieromonk Arkady (Migunov) *Priest-in-Charge*

This past year they began some preliminary site work on their 5-acre church property, digging the pond and bring site up to grade. Because of social distancing and limited space in their narthex Fr Arkady celebrates a second Liturgy on Saturday except for when he serves the Gainesville Mission.

St. Alexis Mission, Palm Coast, FL (1995)

Served by area Clergy

Fr Phillip Drennan who is on loan from the Antiochian Archdiocese serves the mission. Because many members of the mission are of retirement age, COVID has significantly impacted Sunday attendance. Mat. Rozanne Rucker is presently choir director.

St Andrew the First Called, New Port Richey, FL (1976)

Priest Patrick Smith, *Rector*

In May of this year the interior renovations of St. Andrews were complete. St. Andrews was duped by an illegal contractor and had estimated cost overruns exceeded \$160k and what should have been a 3-4-month project lasted two years. The DOS on behalf of St. Andrews sued the illegal contractor and the General Contractor (GC) who aided and abetted the illegal contractor. To date St. Andrews won a default judgement against the illegal contractor. Now it is a matter of collectability. We are continuing in our lawsuit against the GC. We simply want to be made whole.

St. Justin Martyr, Jacksonville, FL (1994)

Archpriest Theodore Pisarchuk, *Rector*; Fr Jacob Hatch, *Associate Priest*

Many ministries have been paused due to Covid, and the parish is restarting as ministries as they are able. A “hybrid” (in person and online) class is taught every Wednesday evening following Vespers. The parish was fortunate to receive a PPP loan.

St Mark, Bradenton, FL (1979)

V. Rev. Jonathan Cholcher, Rector Fr. Johathan arrive at St. Mark in May and has been well received by the parish. Because of the large nave of the church, Sunday attendance is almost at pre-Covid levels.

St Philip the Apostle Mission, Tampa FL (2005)

Archpriest Joseph Ciarciaglino *Priest-in-Charge*

A continuing touchstone of this community is the ongoing work of Akonyibedo Health Center in Northern Uganda (<http://www.ugandaclinic.org/>). All services are live streamed and there is a weekly Zoom class.

St. Raphael Orthodox Church, Inverness, FL (2002)

Igumen Sergious (Gerken), *Rector*

Fr. Sergious took a Medical Leave of Absence from March 8th- November 8th, which began just days before the lockdown. When the lockdown ended Fr John Chudik served the community faithfully for which we are all grateful. One of Fr Sergious first actions when returning was to bless members of his community to begin the groundwork of forming a mission in a nearby (30 minutes) fast town called The Villages where some 30% of the parishioners avail from. This hiving will require time and a lot of planning to make it successful for both communities.

St. Simeon Church, Titusville, FL (1966)

Fr Kyrill Williams, *Priest-in Charge*

Fr Kyrill is keeping full liturgical schedule despite full time employment as a Hospice Chaplain The parish has weathered Covid well.

St Stephen Orthodox Church, Orlando, FL. (1969)

Priest Daniel Hickman, *Rector*

Despite Covid, St. Stephens is full speed ahead with working with and supporting both the Orlando Russian Mission and St. John the Merciful in Kissimmee (South Orlando).

Orlando Russian Mission (2018)

Priest Andrey Syrkin – attached to St. Stephen

The mission is presently transitioning from its gathering phase to hiving off which we will see in 2021. Today they are looking for a facility to call their own.

St John the Merciful Mission, Kissimmee FL (2019)

Priest Daniel Hickman, *Priest-in Charge*

A 2020 graduate of SVS, Dn Phillip Beiner is the “pastoral leader” _of this mission under the direction of Fr Daniel. They continue to gather community. Dn Phillip serves a Obednitsa every Sunday that a priest is not in attendance.

St John the Theologian Mission Station, Gainesville, FL

Hieromonk Arkady (Migunov)/Archpriest Theodore Pisarchuk

The pandemic has greatly impacted this ministry. We have only restarted a monthly Saturday Liturgy and hope to return to the monthly Vespers once the pandemic is over. If we had a mission minded priest in the area, we could plant a healthy church.

Valdosta Orthodox Mission Station, Valdosta FL

Archpriest Theodore Pisarchuk/Priest Jacob Hatch

Services have not resumed yet due to the pandemic. We plan to restart in January.

SOUTH FLORIDA

Christ the Saviour Cathedral (Miami Lakes)

The Cathedral has remained financially stable during the pandemic, and has even continued to grow. In June, 10 new members were baptized outside in a lake, to accommodate for social distancing. And by the end of summer, four new catechumens joined the ranks. The current building project (an expansion of the parking lot for additional spaces) continues, but was slowed down drastically by the pandemic. We hope to complete the project in 2021.

St Nicholas Church (Fort Lauderdale)

Fr Igor Kseniuk is settling into his new parish, which was depleted greatly over the previous years due to the opening of a nearby ROCOR parish, amongst other factors. He and his Matushka have been rebuilding the choir, and have begun a regular cycle of services. Under the Fr Igor's leadership, the parish finally completed its roof-replacement project, and have been therefore able to reinstate their insurance on the property.

St Herman Church (Lake Worth)

Fr Philip Kontos has continued to stabilize his parish, even in the wake of the pandemic. Giving has remained fairly consistent over the past year, and he has begun to the internet as a resource during the lockdowns. He has overseen some renovations, including tiling the floors, painting, and other things.

St Peter Church (Port Saint Lucie)

Fr Maximus Urbanowicz is now a few years into his rectorate at the parish. He has successfully handled some stressful situations in the past year, including attacks from a few parishioners. He continues to grow the parish. The parish made the transition to online services during the pandemic.

Ss Peter & Paul Church (Miami)

At the present time, the parish is still awaiting the arrival of its new rector, Fr Aleksey Rukavitsa. The pandemic led to a moratorium on work visas. Although this has since been lifted, the backlog is huge, and there is no estimate for his arrival in the US. Fr Philip Reese continues to serve at the parish.

St Demetrius Church (Naples)

Fr Gleb McFatter continues to work primarily as an accountant, while taking care of the parish on the weekends. The parish has experienced some growth, as new people continue to relocate to the Naples area.

Holy Cross Church (Fort Myers)

After many years of faithful service, Fr Leonid Palceski announced his impending retirement, after suffering from a stroke this summer. We are presently seeking candidates for the parish, with the hope of placement in early 2021. In spite of his health, Fr Leonid is continuing to serve until further notice.

Holy Spirit Church (Venice)

Fr Stephen Lourie's work at the Venice parish remains remarkable, brining stabilization and even growth. Their current project underway is to create a dedicated narthex for the church edifice. Giving remains strong. However, attendance has remained low during the pandemic due to the fact that the parish has a higher elderly membership.

South-Central Deanery

St Seraphim Cathedral

2020 has been very challenging for every parish in our Deanery.

The year started out well for St Seraphim Cathedral with four weddings in the first two months, records attendance, a large group of inquirers, and catechumens. Tragedy struck before the Annual Parish Meeting in January as Milos Konjevich, Cathedral treasurer, suffered a massive seizure. Milos never regained consciousness and reposed on February 2nd. The rest of 2020 has been an uphill climb making successive serious steps to restore financial clarity to the accounts of St Seraphim Cathedral. A forensic audit began in the Spring. The Cathedral community still has more progress to make before our books are clear and set for 2021.

Sustained record attendance reached in January and February then plummeted, very much like the stock market, to a cadre of five persons around Holy Week and Pascha. Massive rains saw damage to some of the frescoes in the ceiling in March and their eventual repair in late April. Efforts to host the Diocesan Assembly in Dallas in July were postponed. In July the Cathedral community was impacted by the repose of Protodeacon Gregory Norris.

In late spring in person attendance at the Divine Services began anew along with wide-spread resentment toward Diocesan guidelines governing parish re-opening. The practice of live-streaming the services only partially ameliorated the frustration at access to attendance at services and parish social life. The summer brought more relief through the presence of Reader Phillip Ritchey working as an intern at the Cathedral and making nearly daily services possible. Resuming Baptisms and Chrismations, postponed since Pascha, pumped new life into the Cathedral community. By autumn with the loosening of guidelines governing liturgical practice and the re-introduction of Church School classes on Sundays, attendance and morale steadily increased. Despite the fact that attendance has steadily increased,

pushing the boundaries set in place, incidences of Coronavirus have soared, necessitating caution at each gathering.

Deacon Theophan Warren has guided the catechumens and inquirers through the lockdown and re-opening and it is common to have fifteen to twenty every Sunday. Catechumens and newborns have been received into the Church individually as one strategy to limit the number of people in attendance at each reception.

As winter sets in we are reminded each week by the departure of relatives or friends of the Cathedral community: beginning with His Beatitude Metropolitan Theodosius and His Eminence, Archbishop David.

All Saints Orthodox Mission in Victoria

All Saints has not had a resident priest since the repose of Archpriest Dmitri Cozby in May 2018. Archimandrite Gerasim with the help of Priest David Wooten have provided intermittent liturgical services with occasional substitution of some regional non-OCA clergy. The arrival of Priest Brooks Ledford to the Corpus Christi area in the fall has brought a further possibility of occasional services as well as the encouragement of a pastoral visit by Archpriest Marcus Burch in October. A significant portion of the congregation is elderly and have compromised health, so re-opening the parish has had significant challenges. Subdeacon Paisius Franklin suffered a real health scare and hospitalization this summer but has bounced back well. The parish community looks forward to getting a full-time priest.

All Saints of North America Orthodox Church in Albuquerque, NM

The Parish Community met the lockdown with strong attendance, solid financial growth, and an on-going building program. Priest Nikolay Melitkov has worked indefatigably during the lockdown and subsequent re-opening. The building program of the new temple has fueled parish morale during this period. Fr Nikolay has kept regular services going.

Fr Nikolay faced the great pastoral challenge of the repose, funeral, and burial of Deacon Gerasimos (Gerry) Sondergaard at the end of April. This became a theme that most of our priests have encountered: ministering to a terminally ill parishioner and burying someone during the Coronavirus period. Deacon Gerasimos was the younger twin brother of Archpriest George Sondergaard who passed away on Bright Wednesday in 2014. The community was blessed by the pastoral visit of His Eminence, Archbishop Alexander, to the Monastery of the Archangel Michael in July, which resulted in the ordination to the diaconate of Sub-deacon Silouan Parchert on the Fourth of July.

St Anthony the Great in San Antonio

The story of St Anthony the Great Orthodox Church in 2020 begins with the arrival of Fr David Wooten and his family to San Antonio only the summer before. Fr David began with reconciliation work in a parish that had faced a series of challenges. He integrated himself into the group of priests serving in the region. After barely settling into a routine Coronavirus hit. San Antonio had fewer cases than the other metropolitan areas in Texas, but the civil restrictions hampered church attendance. As with a number of our parishes, conspiracy theories and revolts against Diocesan regulations have spread dissatisfaction and disaffection among a number of the parishioners. After Pascha, at time of re-opening of the local parishes, the lack of a unified approach by local clergy have limited the return of people to in-person attendance at services. Election year divisiveness has not helped the return of people to regular attendance and parish fellowship.

St Basil the Great Mission in Weatherford, OK

After having faced the move of several people from the area in late 2019, St Basil the Great Mission faced the pandemic and limitations on services and attendance. Fr Nicklas explained that although their physical building is small, nevertheless, since the congregation is small, too, they have not experienced restrictions on attendance.

St Cyril of Jerusalem Mission in the The Woodlands

Priest Benedict Crawford saw two very difficult years after his arrival in The Woodlands. Just as things were turning a corner in The Woodlands the pandemic hit and lockdown ensued. Fortunately, Fr Benedict has been working very diligently the entire time. New people are inquiring about the Orthodox faith on a regular basis. Fr Benedict was able to project the live services into the small adjoining hall and in this way augment attendance at their small temporary facility. After the setbacks of the last few years, St Cyril in the summer and fall of 2020 has continued to see growth and stability.

St George the Great-martyr Orthodox Church in Pharr

The active ministry of Archpriest Antonio Perdomo has been seriously tested during 2020. His thriving parish hit one obstacle after another as Great Lent began. The restrictions of liturgical services and parish assembly took a great toll on his parish primarily due to its isolation. His ministry is connected to missionary visits to Mexico, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Everything was postponed and cancelled. While the pandemic left the Rio Grande Valley relatively untouched in March up until Pentecost, leaving people puzzled by the seeming inapplicability of Diocesan guidelines to their remote parish, the pandemic arrived in full force in June and tore through the entire region, leaving almost every family in the region affected by disease or death. Right at this time, in early June, Archpriest Antonio drove to Dallas to send his mother-in-law back to Colorado on a direct flight, but on returning home his health took a turn for the worse. He suffered a serious blood clot in the leg, nearly depriving him of a limb, then a clot passed through his heart and affected his lung. As it turns out, this was not the worst of it. Doctors eventually discovered that the cause was Follicular Lymphoma with a specific tumor in his thigh area. He was in and out of the hospital and finally received medical and ecclesiastical permission to return to ministry at the end of November. We are fortunate not to have lost one of our hardest working priests. During this time period Priest David Wooten worked closely with the Diocesan administration to provide occasional pastoral visits "too far" (to Pharr) and create a bridge to a restored liturgical life to this area of the Diocese that was hit hardest by the Pandemic.

St Paul Orthodox Mission in Denison

Archpriest John Anderson restored the monthly celebration of the Divine Liturgy at St Paul Orthodox Church around Pentecost. The small physical size of the Church placed constraints on reopening as has the older age of some of the parishioners. The return of Deacon Herman Garrison to the Denison area has provided great support. His projected ordination to the Holy Priesthood in late December brings hope to the parish community. Members of the parish suffered a number of health challenges in 2020 unrelated to coronavirus.

St Sava Orthodox Church in Allen

St Sava Orthodox Church has fared well during the pandemic due to the investment of the parish in building its new temple two years ago. This has allowed the possibility for substantial in-person attendance. In addition, Priest Photius Avant has live-streamed the services regularly since April. During the Spring he actively and enthusiastically produced a series of regular presentations to the parish and through Facebook on the miracles of Christ. Beginning around Pentecost Fr Photius immediately began to arrange the reception of converts by Baptism and Chrismation which had been delayed since Pascha.

Parish attendance and participation at St Sava Orthodox Church has remained stable even amidst election panic and the appeal of conspiracy theories.

Sts Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Church in Hartshorne, OK

Due to the distance from Dallas and the unprecedented character of the Coronavirus epidemic, it was not until July that Archpriest John Anderson was able to begin making monthly visits to Sts Cyril and Methodius Church in Hartshorne, OK the oldest parish in the DOS. With the return in May of Deacon Herman Garrison to the southern Oklahoma/north Texas area, Fr John had steady support in serving the old parish. It has been a challenge to reinvigorate the local congregation and to provide instruction between monthly visits.

APPALACHIAN

How does one summarize anything associated with the year 2020? It is a year promised to be 1918 and 1929 experienced all at once as far as death and economic catastrophe are measured by those epochs. The promise seems to continue for 2021. Relief from the burden of such promised suffering may or may not be found by the distribution of vaccinations economic "reset" around the world. Mitigation efforts such as "14 days to flatten the curve" are hard to recall now that days have turned to months.

The missions and parishes of the Appalachian Deanery, like our sister missions and parishes of the Diocese of the South, are trying to offer the hope and consolation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the spiritual life of the Church. It has been a difficult thing to do with all the proclamations of what is or what is not the Orthodox Christian response to our condition. Some of our mission and parish members have decided to follow their own understanding of that response, finding a common mind with that of another bishop or priest. While the negative result from such loss of unity is felt among us, the Appalachian Deanery is offering the fullness of the Orthodox Faith through her missions and parishes while respecting the need also to show concern for vulnerabilities of the neighbors among us suffering either in health or of need.

The St. Ambrose Mission, Roanoke, VA, is managing to show growth during this year, and stands in good position as Fr. Sam Gantt plans to "really retire."

St. Athanasius Church, Nicholasville, KY, keeps a safe and full schedule while planning to host an intern during the coming summer months in order to focus on a new mission plant near Berea, KY.

Dormition of the Theotokos Church, Norfolk, VA, has installed a beautiful Iconostasis with the icon panels currently underway to place in the wooden frame.

St. Anne Church, Oak Ridge, TN, has accomplished the transition of a priest to retirement and leadership of a new priest in a manner to emulate.

St. Andrew Church, Ashland, VA, has continued the project of interior beautification and installation of iconography, all while surviving the need for a bi-vocational priest.

These and the other remaining missions and parishes of the Appalachian Deanery report much the same phenomena of priests around the Diocese who are busy with inquirers, catechumens, virtual and in person classes or meetings in order to assist their encounter with or journey toward the Orthodox Christian Church. This is our calling whether in good times or difficult. This will continue to be our effort, encouraged and strengthened by the Holy Spirit and the bond of our common purpose in the Diocese of the South. We are thankful to have such a Diocese, and look forward to the unified resolution of our troubles and the earthly cares causing them.