

**Mississippi River Deanery Report
Diocese of the South Assembly
All American Council 2018**

The Mississippi River Deanery (MRD) is composed of parishes, missions and mission stations in East Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi and Memphis, TN. Since its inception in 2015, the MRD has seen the construction of a new temple and a multipurpose facility, the purchase of two new properties and the formation of three new mission stations. The priests that serve in the MRD enjoy a close brotherhood and gather twice a year in retreat. They seek to serve Archbishop Alexander, their parishioners and each other for the Glory of God and “For the life of the world.” Following are the annual reports as presented by each priest respectively in the MRD.

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

Thanks be to God, Holy Nativity continues to mature as an Orthodox mission. Over the last year, we have catechized and received nine converts into the Church. Our weekly Sunday liturgy attendance is averaging between 100 and 115 people with high days of 125 to 130. Our liturgical schedule now includes matins, vespers, small compline and a Divine Liturgy on different days during the week. We continue to expand our outreach in lower income areas. Our prayer is one day to have an inner-city chapel that is incarnational to the people we are seeking to evangelize. Our youth and children’s programs continue to grow through the efforts of St Basil Orthodox Homeschool Co-op, various monthly activities and All Saints Orthodox Summer and Winter Camps. Lastly, please keep us in your prayers as we seek to be the heart, mind and hands of Christ in Shreveport-Bossier.

Glory to God for all things!

Respectfully submitted by Priest Jason Foster
Priest-in-charge

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

The past year has been steady. We continue steadily to build our liturgical life and are slowly seeing more participation in parish activities. One highlight during the past year was holding our first parish retreat in conjunction with our patronal feast celebrations. At the end of my second year at the parish, I can see a communal memory beginning to take shape and an expectation for the yearly cycle of services, fasts, feast days, and classes. We are beginning to see an increasing number of visitors at our services and attending our inquirers classes. In addition, we were blessed to be able to receive a few families into the Church at Pascha. We currently have several more families who are eager to join the Church and, God willing, will be ready to be received by Nativity or Pascha. Unfortunately, our property search continues. We have had contracts on three

properties, none of which have worked out. We continue to search for a suitable property within the city desiring to establish St. Matthew's as the Orthodox presence in Baton Rouge. However, out of necessity, we may need to move the parish outside the city limits where property is more affordable.

Respectfully Submitted by Priest Joshua Trant
Priest-in-charge

St John of Chicago Mission Rogers, Arkansas

The mission continues to grow, by the grace of God. We had three Baptisms and nine Chrismations since our last report. We also had a wedding this spring. Our average attendance has been in the 50-60s for the first half of this year.

There were a couple of highlights to the year. First of all, our patronal feast last October was the hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom of our patron, Saint John Kochurov. Along with celebrating the feast liturgically we were able to contact St. John's great granddaughter and great great grandson and record a long conversation via Skype which was edited and played at the festal meal. The conversation, particularly with Tatiana Kochurova, was remarkable. Not only did she give us some historical insights into St. John's life and martyrdom but inspired us to ongoing faithfulness in living out the gospel today as Saint John did so tirelessly a century ago. Following the airing of the video the evening was completed when members of the youth group sang a song they had composed in memory of Saint John. It was truly a wonderful evening.

The second highlight of the year was being awarded the church planting grant by the OCA. The grant comes at a very important time as we seek to become solidified as a parish. It is our hope and prayer that receiving the grant will help us as we continue the life and work of the Church in Northwest Arkansas.

Respectfully submitted by Priest John Wehling
Priest-in-charge

Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church Clinton, Mississippi

We have about 75 households who attend to some degree, with average Sunday attendance about 70 people. At our Annual Meeting in January we approved an operating budget of \$11,500 per month. In the spring, we hosted the annual Pastoral Conference of the Diocese of the South in February, with Fr. Patrick Reardon of Chicago as guest speaker. Also, we hosted Paschal Vespers and Feast for the three Jackson area Orthodox Churches. We have commissioned the two remaining murals on our nave side walls, the Women at the Tomb and St. Thomas Touching the Lord, from Fr. Andrew Tregubov of Claremont, NH. Lastly, In March we hosted two sisters

from the Convent of St. Elizabeth in Belarus in March and collected offerings for them. We have a member who spends two weeks every summer with another ministry in Belarus.

Statistics thus far in 2018: 5 Baptisms of children; 2 Chrismations of adults; 2 Chrismations of children; 1 Marriage and 1 Burial.

Glory to God for all things!

Respectfully submitted by Archpriest Paul Yerger
Rector

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

The Columbus Mission Station, St Catherine's, celebrated its first Divine Liturgy in their newly acquired temple, a former Church of Science building, on June 16, 2018. Since the purchase of the property, the faithful have been focusing on renovating and beautifying the space for Orthodox worship. They are very thankful for the liturgical items and icons gifted to them by Lori Edwards in honor of her dad, Fr Demetrius Edwards, of blessed memory. At present, the community is meeting weekly for prayer and developing outreach strategies for their area. All things considered, thanks be to God, the mission station is off to a strong and promising start.

May God continue to bless their efforts.

Respectfully submitted by Priest Jason Foster
Dean

**Christ the Saviour Orthodox Mission
McComb, MS**

Christ the Saviour enjoyed the pastoral ministry of Fr. Joseph Towne for approximately one year as he was on loan to us from ROCOR. During his tenure, services were often weekly and the faithful gathered for various events. Over the last year, the mission made repairs to the parsonage and other areas of the property. Unfortunately, Fr Joseph was recalled by ROCOR to serve another parish. Since that time, the faithful have continued to gather and pray. God willing, we will have visiting priests on rotation soon and a permanent pastor in the near future.

Please keep us in your prayers as we seek God's direction for the mission.

Respectfully submitted by Priest Jason Foster (Dean)
On behalf of the faithful of Christ the Saviour

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

This past September Archbishop Alexander made an official parish visit for Sunday Divine Liturgy and tonsured two Readers, Nicholas Heren and Anthony Thomas. Two years after moving in to the new temple we were able to budget the 25% managed debt payment to the diocese in addition to the 10% tithe. Over the past 18 months we have had 27 baptisms and chrismations. We have outgrown our parking lot and temporary hall. The first permanent icon, a deisis on the front of the temple with our Lord, the Theotokos, and St. John of Damascus, was completed in May by Vladimir Gregorienko.

Respectfully submitted by Priest John Mikita
Priest-in-charge

**St. Paisios Orthodox Mission Station
Nacogdoches, TX**

The mission station in Nacogdoches continues to meet twice monthly, once during the week for prayer, education, and confession, and one Divine Liturgy on a Saturday. They meet in a space provided by the local Episcopal Church. There are 4 families active at St. Paisios.

Respectfully submitted by Priest John Mikita

**St. Ephraim the Syrian Orthodox Mission Station
Longview, TX**

The mission station in Longview meets at least weekly for Reader's Vespers on Wednesday nights in addition to one Divine Liturgy a month on a Saturday. There are 35 communicants. They meet in a space provided by the local Episcopal Church.

Respectfully submitted by Priest John Mikita

**Ss George & Alexandra Orthodox Mission
Fort Smith, AR**

While there is nothing major to report in regards to our Mission over the past year, one aspect that has been important is stability. As I (Fr Nicholas) have just now hit the one-year mark in Fort Smith, our focus was to ensure that we maintained regularity and "expectation management" for a while before making any major changes. To that end, we have slightly increased our weekly schedule of services, normally serving at least one Vespers and Divine Liturgy during the week in addition to our weekend services and the services for the Great Feasts. Since I am full-time at the Mission, we were also able to fully hold the cycle of services for both Clean Week and Holy Week.

Related to that stability, perhaps, our numbers have also been stable across the boards. We had one baptism, one marriage, and one death in the past year, and our average attendance continues

to hover around 35-40 for Divine Liturgy and about 12 for Vespers and Vigil. We currently have one catechumen and three inquirers. This stability is true of our finances as well, with our YTD giving within \$300 of where it stood this time last year.

Our Christian Education program is continuing to grow in providing the Catechism of the Good Shepherd, with one catechist returning to St Tikhon's Seminary this summer to receive the second level of training. Overall, our impressions of the program are positive, although there is still a great deal of work to be done in "translating" some of the lessons from a Roman Catholic milieu into an Orthodox one.

We are continuing to investigate ways to improve our buildings and grounds, particularly our parish hall. In December, we formed a building committee to begin the process of finding the most cost-effective method of moving forward. We have not yet begun a formal campaign, as we are still in the process of inspecting our current building to see if it is salvageable, or if we will need to start with new construction.

By the time this report is presented, we will have sent four youths and one chaperone to All Saints Summer Camp. As of this writing, all of them are excited to go again this year, and look forward to the experience. God willing, next year Fr Nicholas' schedule will allow him to participate.

We continue to look for effective, meaningful ways to reach out to the local community. Orthodoxy is barely recognized, much less understood, in Fort Smith, and we need to identify and employ specific targeted methods if we are to grow here.

We continue to pray for Fr John Maxwell as he continues his fight with cancer, and we would ask you to remember him in your prayers, too.

Respectfully submitted by Priest Nicholas Roth
Priest-in-charge

St. George Orthodox Church (formerly St. Seraphim) Memphis, TN

We celebrated our one year anniversary at St. George on March 15, 2018. Thankfully, 15 former members of St. George Greek Church are still with us and serving the community. A summary of our statistical data is as follows:

Voting members-38; New members-10; Voting members no longer with us-1; Average Sunday Attendance-45; Average Great Vespers attendance-4; Total parish (active/infrequent/seekers)-107; and Attendance for Pascha 2018-87

This past year was very active in various ways. ABP ALEXANDER visited St. George and served Sunday Liturgy. We had 5 outreach events including hosting the deanery meeting and having a public talk by Fr. Chad Hatfield; having an open house for the community, hosting a

bake sale and musical event for the public; and we served Lenten meals to the public 3 Fridays in Lent. Finally, along with the Antiochian and Greek churches in Memphis, we sponsored three public showings of "Becoming Truly Human". Each showing had 140 people in attendance, mostly from our three churches. We have a good relationship with our Greek and Antiochian brothers and sisters and we plan on, God willing, continuing to do things in the future.

Regarding new temple improvements, we had the nave and altar painted and new carpet installed in the nave. We have progressively made enhancements in other areas as well. We set up a hospitality house, St. Seraphim House, and have had several guests stay in it. Our hope is to offer it to more travelers and pilgrims in the coming year.

Lastly, we took an initiative to strengthen our children's educational programs. One of our members was certified in May to teach the Catechesis of the Good Shepard and we will start in the Fall with ages 3-7. We look forward to seeing our young ones grow and develop more in their faith.

By God's grace, it was an active, growing year in many ways!

Respectfully submitted by Archpriest Mark
Rector

On behalf of the clergy in the MRD, thank you for reviewing our annual report. I humbly ask that you keep us in your prayers as we seek to be faithful to our callings in Christ.