

Southcentral Deanery Diocese of the South

Report for 2007 Assembly
Miami, Florida
Archpriest Basil Zebrun, Dean

Territory Covered:

The Southcentral Deanery includes parishes, missions and institutions in 6 states: Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Numerically and geographically this is the largest Deanery in the Diocese.

Census Information:

The census for 2007 indicates that within 16 Deanery communities we have a total of 575 adult members. That total represents an *increase* of 6 members over the figure for 2006.

Six of our Deanery Churches reported a decline in membership during the past year, while most maintained figures from 2006 or demonstrated modest growth, anywhere from 1 to 15 new members. Of the established communities *St. Seraphim Cathedral* in Dallas reported the highest increase, 15 new members.

New Mission Efforts Within The Deanery:

Exploratory work and meetings are taking place within the following cities to facilitate the establishment of new communities:

Alpine, Texas: Population, 5,786 + people. Median Age, 34 years. Alpine is located in mountainous, far west Texas and is the County Seat of Brewster County. Several Orthodox families, some having connections and past memberships with other Diocesan Churches, have asked for the Diocese to investigate the possibilities for an Alpine Mission. An initial organizational meeting was convened with approximately a dozen people present.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Population, 224,097 people. Median Age, 30 years. Baton Rouge is the Capital of Louisiana. Mission work has begun slowly but steadily in this city through the cross deanery efforts of a number of Diocesan clergy as well as through the efforts of people like Mark Christian, a principle lay leader. *St. Matthew's* is a mission station and will be the only O.C.A. community within the state. The group is presently meeting in a storefront every Sunday for Catechesis and a Reader's service. A priest visits once a month for confession, Vespers and Divine Liturgy. Approximately 20 people attend Liturgy with 10 to 15 gathering for Readers service.

Kerrville, Texas: Population, 20,425 people. Median Age, 45 years. The town is 58 miles Northwest of San Antonio and 85 miles West of Austin. Fr. Paul Burholt continues to lead this effort of *The Protecting Veil of the Most Holy Theotokos*, while working full time as a therapist. The group is small but generous with their time and resources, meeting for now in a beautiful home chapel.

Tyler, Texas: Population, 89,552 people. Median Age, 34 years. Located in the rolling pine laden hills of Northeastern Texas, about an hour and a half from Dallas, Tyler is called the Rose Capital of America. Fr. John Anderson and members of St. Seraphim Cathedral have been meeting once a month with approximately 30 Orthodox Christians and inquirers. The mission station of *St. John of Damascus* is in the process of acquiring 5 acres of land, recently cleared of trees and surveyed. When His Eminence, in May, visited for the first time 42 people were present for the Liturgy. A lay leader from the Cathedral visits twice a month for Saturday evening and Sunday morning Readers Services and classes.

Victoria, Texas: Population 60,603 people and the County Seat of Victoria County. Located 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico and is 2 hours from Corpus Christi, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin. Archpriest Dimitri Cozby currently serves the mission station of *All Saints*. Organized in March of 2006 the group meets for Divine Liturgy on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Sunday of each month and for Readers Services on the 2nd and 4th Sundays at the Victoria Eye Center. This past Pascha approximately 25 people were present, but the community is optimistic as Victoria is described as one of the State's fastest growing cities.

Parishes and Missions within the Deanery (Highlights):

Arkansas:

SS. George & Alexandra Mission, Fort Smith. Founded 1996. Reported membership, 27 adults. Of note: beautiful, large, new icons have been commissioned for the Church (*to be written by John Lickwar of St. Cyril's in Houston*), and this past year 8 adults were chrismated and 5 children were baptized, with 2 more infant baptisms expected very soon. Other improvements are being made to the Church's interior and the choir continues to improve with weekly rehearsals. Archpriest John Maxwell presently works fulltime outside the parish.

Louisiana:

See Baton Rouge, above.

Mississippi:

Christ the Savior Mission, McComb. Founded 2004. Reported membership, 15 adults; an increase of 5 over last year. Located in the downtown area this community has a temple, parish hall and rectory on two distinct lots. It has shown remarkable progress over the past few years under the leadership of first, Archpriest Paul Yerger, and now Fr.

Matthew Jackson the priest in residence since June of 2006. Christ the Savior Mission is a model for others in that it is a successful daughter community to a well established, mentoring Church: *Holy Resurrection*. Presently Christ the Savior Mission has Wednesday night classes and celebrates services (some are Readers Vespers) every evening. On Holy Saturday 2 individuals were received through chrismation.

Holy Resurrection Church, Clinton/Jackson. Founded 1977. Reported membership, 40 adults. The most exciting news for Archpriest Paul Yerger's parish was the October 14, 2006 move to a new location. The community purchased a Presbyterian Church on 2 acres of land, just 9/10 of a mile from its former facility. With funds from the sale of the old Church, parishioners have renovated the new temple. The community meets for worship Wednesday and Saturday evenings, with Matins and Liturgy being celebrated Sunday mornings. Holy Resurrection's new facility houses a spacious, well lit Orthodox bookstore. Fr. Yerger continues to work outside the parish, however parishioners want him to become full time in the near future.

New Mexico:

All Saints of North America Mission, Albuquerque. Founded 1979. Reported membership, 69 adults, an increase of 17 over the past 2 years. Archpriest George Sondergaard, a veteran of the Diocese of the South, is the full time priest for this community. St. Anne's Sisterhood sponsors three yearly fundraisers as well as several charitable activities. A big loss to the parish, this past year, was the falling asleep in the Lord of Michael Irvin who provided tremendous support in various ways for both Fr. George and the Mission. May his memory be eternal!

St. Dimitri of Rostov Mission, Sante Fe/Los Alamos. Founded 1990. Reported membership, 10 adults; an increase of 4 over the past 2 years. The biggest change for this mission, recently, came in November of 2006 with the assignment of Fr. John Hennies as priest in charge. The parish holds services in a converted portion of a home: Wednesday and Saturday Vespers and Sunday Liturgy. From August 20th to the 25th St. Dimitri's will help to coordinate an Iconography workshop. On Ascension, Fr. John with regional clergy from the OCA, Antiochian Orthodox Church and ROCOR, concelebrated services commemorating the feast and the recent reconciliation between the Moscow Patriarchate and ROCOR.

St. Michael's Skete, Canoñas. Founded in 1993. (See separate report from the Skete)

Oklahoma:

Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church, Hartshorne, Oklahoma. Founded 1897. Reported membership, 5 adults. Archpriest Joseph Nelson continues to serve the parish while maintaining outside employment. Located in rural and mountainous Southeast Oklahoma, Sts. Cyril and Methodius is the oldest community in the Diocese, having a

beautiful and traditional Church with three onion domes, a modern parish hall, a rectory and over seven acres of land.

Holy Apostles Mission, Tulsa. Founded 2004. Reported membership, 20 adults. Average Sunday attendance 50 to 55 people. Another exemplary community in terms of startup and vision. It began as a missionary effort of St. Seraphim Cathedral under the pastoral leadership of His Eminence and Fr. Seraphim Hipsh. Fr. Ambrose Arrington, a graduate of St. Tikhon's Seminary and former parishioner of the Cathedral, now serves Holy Apostles'. Under his guidance the parish has purchased 7.8 acres of land and is in the final stages of construction of their new 1275 square foot chapel. Plans for the near future include a 2000 square foot multipurpose educational and fellowship building, and a larger traditional Church. 3 people were received at Pascha and 6 at Pentecost. 2 catechumens are currently studying to join the Faith.

Texas:

St. Seraphim of Sarov Cathedral, Dallas. Founded 1954. Reported membership 160 adults; an increase of 15 over last year. This, the largest Church in the Deanery and the Diocesan See, continues to be a focal point for mission and education. It continues to be a source of inspiration as well for Diocesan clergy and laity. St. Seraphim's is served directly by His Eminence Archbishop Dmitri, Archpriest Joseph Fester, Fr. John Anderson, Fr. Martin LeBrecht, Deacon Stephen Kroll and Deacon Gregory Norris. The inner adornment of the Cathedral with murals by Iconographer Vladimir Grigorenko continues and is nearing completion. This fall Vladimir hopes to begin work on the inside of the dome. Once completed only the narthex will remain to be painted. October 19 through 21 a Church singing workshop will be hosted by St. Seraphim's. The Cathedral celebrates Slavonic services one weekend a month, Friday night and Saturday morning, and a Spanish Liturgy once a month on Saturday. The choir, led by Mr. Nicholas Paraskevas, remains competent and efficient in its ability to sing, at a moment's notice, for any service.

St. Paul the Apostle Mission, Denison/Sherman. Founded 2003. Reported membership 13 adults. Average Sunday attendance, 22-29 people (*up 7 people from last year*). Fr. Michael Storozuk serves the mission now as a full time priest for St. Paul's. His skills as a carpenter and iconographer are well known to any who have visited the Dallas Cathedral or the Chapel in Denison which he and his parishioners built by hand just 3 years ago. St. Paul's is located in a rural setting on 2 acres of land. The community (*a successful offshoot of St. Seraphim's*) is involved in charitable efforts (*food pantry and meals on wheels*), receives good exposure in the Denison newspaper, has provided Orthodox materials to the local library, and Fr. Michael is asked regularly, every semester, to give a lecture on Orthodoxy at nearby Austin College. The parish is planning the construction of a 2000 square foot hall. Work continues on wall images of the Apostles, Evangelists and other Saints. On Pascha 2 adults were received into the Church at St. Paul's. A Women's Retreat was conducted at this community on March 10. His Eminence visited for the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on March 7. The consecration of the Church will take place on Saturday, August 25, an event to which many are looking forward.

St. Maximus the Confessor Mission, Denton. Founded 2001. Reported membership, 17 adults. Average Sunday attendance, 50 to 55 people. Another daughter of the Cathedral, this parish is located about 40 miles North of Dallas in the thriving city of Denton directly off the campus of the University of North Texas. Fr. Justin Frederick serves the community full time, having Vespers on Wednesday and Friday, Vigil Saturday night and on the eves of Feasts, Liturgy Sunday morning and the morning of Feasts, Matins on weekday mornings. The parish, along with the University of North Texas Orthodox Christian Fellowship, hosts discussions and dinners twice a month at the Church as well as occasional events on campus such as lectures by Archbishop Dmitri for the Nativity of Christ and Pascha. They are favorably received by both students and faculty. Groundbreaking for the new Church will be held in October, a momentous time for this relatively young community.

St. Barbara Mission, Ft. Worth. Founded 1978. Reported membership, 58 adults. Average Sunday attendance, 65 to 70 people. Yet another effort springing from St. Seraphim's. This mission has recently finished a new 6440 square foot all purpose building (*complete with a 22 foot gold leaf onion dome and cut stone exterior*) on a three acre tract in Southwest Ft. Worth. The new facility gives the parish room to grow while planning the construction of a traditional Church. The community hosted a Pan Orthodox Vespers this Spring: 180 people were in attendance. On September 29 St. Barbara's will host a day long Conference of the OCA's Department of Christian Education. Catechumen classes are held Tuesday nights. Church School is held one Saturday a month, two hours prior to Great Vespers. Parents are provided materials each semester, enabling them to follow up and emphasize at home those lessons presented at Church. The choir continues to improve and excel having the opportunity now to work with great acoustics in the new chapel. A male choir has also been formed, which occasionally sings at Vespers or Liturgy as needed. *A Place for Grace*, a local home for abused and neglected children, is a primary focus for charity work.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Houston. Founded 2005. Reported membership, 15 adults. Average Sunday attendance, 30 to 40 people. Fr. Basil Biberdorf is the resident priest, serving the mission while working part time outside the parish. He is aided by Deacon Joseph Carter. Fr. Basil strives to make the OCA a viable presence in local Pan Orthodox affairs. The parish enjoyed a recent visit by His Eminence Archbishop Dmitri for Great Vespers and a Reception on Saturday, April 21. Fr. Basil says that the multi cultural makeup of the parish is a very positive sign for future growth. The mission's choir continues in its excellence. Services are held on Saturday night and Sunday morning.

St. Michael the Archangel Mission, Houston. Founded 1982. Reported membership, 13 adults; an increase of 4 over last year. Average Sunday attendance is 20 to 25 people. Fr. John Filipovich serves this community full time, celebrating weekly and festal services. St. Michael's rents a second story storefront in downtown Humble, but is looking for more permanent facilities of its own. In December the community hosted "Credo" a mixed quartet of Church singers from St. Petersburg, Russia that sang at the Liturgy on December 3 and then later gave a public concert of hymns and Russian folk songs. During the past year four people were received into the Church at St.

Michael's: two adults and two infants. His Eminence visited the community on Sunday, April 22: 46 people were present. The parish conducts meetings every other month and is becoming more "goal oriented," emphasizing that the work of the mission is everyone's work.

Protecting Veil of the Most Holy Theotokos, Kerrville. See above.

Tyler Mission. See above.

St. George the Great Martyr Church, Pharr/McAllen. Founded 1979. Reported membership, 31 adults. Average Sunday attendance, 50 people. Arguably the Southern most Church in the Diocese. Through the efforts of His Eminence, and a Cathedral Reader later ordained Priest, St. George's was originally a missionary effort of St. Seraphim's. Since last July St. George's has received into the Church 4 adults and 5 children. Currently the community has 2 adult catechumens and 3 children. A Fundraising Campaign has been reestablished to expand the hall. The food pantry ministry is very active and feeds over 100 families each time it is opened. Last year 14,000 people were served. These efforts have caught the attention of the local press. One priest, a counselor and four youths participated in the St. Peter the Aleut Camp in July. Missionary trips continue to Monterrey, Mexico, as well as assistance to Casa Amparo Orphanage in Reynosa. St. George's is becoming a center for disseminating information about the Orthodox Church in Spanish. Fr. Antonio Perdomo serves this mission while working full time outside the parish.

St. Sava Mission, Plano. Founded 1988. Average Sunday attendance, 120 people. This parish (*which began as a St. Seraphim effort*) has experienced a rebirth during the past two years. It first moved to rented facilities more conducive to worship and fellowship (3000 square feet total), but then recently purchased over 7 acres of land on which the community hopes to construct a traditional chapel in the near future. Fr. Seraphim Hipsh serves the community holding adult education and catechumen classes as well as the following: Monday Matins; Wednesday and Saturday Vespers; Thursday and Sunday Divine Liturgy; in addition to Feastday and Holy Week services. The choir continues to improve and excel. It has been recorded so that visitors to the parish website may hear something of what they might hear during an actual visit to the Church. In addition, some novel ideas having to do with communicating to the deaf and non-English speaking members during services are being investigated by Fr. Seraphim and others.

St. Anthony the Great Church, San Antonio. Founded 1979. Reported membership, 60 adults. Average Sunday attendance, 78 people. Fr. Leo Poore is the priest in residence for this well established community. He is aided by Fr. Thomas Brooks Ledford and Deacon Timothy Goetting. This past year the Church's strikingly beautiful, handcarved Iconostasis was blessed/dedicated on February 10: an inspiration to the faithful and visitors alike. The parish is involved with a local charity, "*Catholic Worker House*," which takes care of whole families, providing food and clothing while helping adults to find work. St. Anthony's also has participant missionaries taking part in Project Mexico.