

Mississippi River Deanery Report presented to the 18th All American Council

With the blessing of His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon and by a unanimous vote of the Diocesan Council, the Mississippi River Deanery (MRD) was formally formed in June of 2015. The deanery includes East Texas, Arkansas, Memphis, Mississippi, Mobile and Louisiana. At present there are eight parishes/missions that form the foundation of this new work. After gathering in Shreveport, LA to discuss the future plans of the deanery, the priests, along with Fr. Gerasim, agreed the first course of action is to work together to strengthen our current parishes/missions and ministries. This will be done by quarterly interaction with each other via conference calls, a quarterly email newsletter, scheduled visits by the dean and semi-annual meetings. The second course of action is to identify two potential locations for new missions. At present, the North Shore of New Orleans, Longview, TX, Mobile, AL and Oxford, MS are being considered. The next deanery meeting will be held in October where a strategic plan will be formulated for the future of the Mississippi River Deanery. Please find following the annual reports of the parishes and missions within the MRD.

St. John of Damascus Tyler, TX

By the Grace of God and utilizing the Diocesan Managed Debt program we have been building our permanent Temple over the past year and hope to be in by the end of the Summer. Presbyteria Mirella Tudora of Euless Texas designed our Church, and the servant of God Michael Mourtou, member of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Euless, has been expertly building the structure with his contracting company Ashton Wynne. Between the Managed Debt Program and utilizing experienced designers and builders of Orthodox architecture we have been able to continue to function at full capacity as a parish over the past year with multiple educational opportunities for all ages. We brought in 9 new members on Holy Saturday and have 4 more currently as Catechumens. Being a regional mission our hope over the next few years is to start 2 new mission stations to the north and south of Tyler.

Respectfully submitted by Priest John Mikita

Ss George and Alexandra Orthodox Mission~Fort Smith, AR St John of Chicago Orthodox Mission~Rogers, AR

The two missions in Arkansas are served by three priests, Archpriest John Maxwell, Priest Paul Fetsko, and Priest John Wehling. In spring 2014, as Fr John Maxwell's health became a potential factor in his ongoing ability to serve St John Mission and with uncertainty about his future, it was decided that another priest should be sought to serve the two missions. As Fr John Maxwell and Fr Paul are bi-vocational it was decided that a priest should be sought who could serve each of the missions part-time and not work outside of the missions. Fr John Wehling was contacted about relocating to Arkansas for this purpose and he and his family moved in September 2014.

Fr John W. splits his weekends between the missions being in each mission every other weekend. In his absence Fr Paul and Fr John M. serve. Fr John W. serves a daily Vespers one night each week (Tuesday in Fort Smith and Thursday in Rogers) and leads a discussion afterwards aimed at education and outreach. Fr John W serves festal services in Rogers and Fr Paul and Fr John M. serve them in Fort Smith.

Ss George and Alexandra (Fort Smith), along with its weekly schedule of services, has begun a monthly moleben service followed by an anointing with blessed oil. The hope is that this ministry to the sick and suffering will also serve as a means of evangelism.

The members of the mission are spread out over a large area of western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma. Because of this we have started a weekly bulletin that is delivered via e-mail and which aims to build a sense of community in the mission.

The mission averages app. 25 at Liturgy on Sundays. We had one Baptism and one funeral last year. We have a few enquirers at present, a new member moving to the mission in August, and two new babies expected this summer.

St John Mission in Rogers is four years old. By the grace of God and with the assistance of the diocese we purchased a building in February of this year to serve as a Temple. The members of the parish worked hard to prepare the building for Holy Week services and the first service in the building was the Vespers of Lazarus Saturday. Much work still needs to be done to beautify the Temple but we have, by the grace of God, come a long way in a short time.

As well as the Resurrection services a weekly Vespers and Liturgy are served on Thursday and Friday. Two new families moved to Northwest Arkansas in the past several months and have joined the mission. At present the mission averages app. 30 at the Sunday Divine Liturgy and has one catechumen and several enquirers. We anticipate two or more Baptisms soon.

Respectfully submitted by Priest John Wehling

**St. Seraphim Orthodox Church
Memphis Tennessee**

Voting Members-**34**

Average Sunday Attendance-**32**

Average Great Vespers (Sat) Attendance-**5**

Percentage increase/decrease in total receipts from 2013-2014-**3.5% increase**

Total parish (Active/Inactive/Seekers)-**80**

Attendance for Pascha 2015-50

Statistically we've had a little better year, communication and involvement with each other has increased, morale is good. We are looking forward to our new home in the Mississippi River Deanery.

We will be doing improvements due to a water leak and insurance claim. We do need more room in the nave and will work on that this year.

Respectfully submitted by Priest Mark Sutton

**Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church
Clinton, MS**

By God's grace we had a peaceful and stable year. We have about 140 people in 67 households who attend with some regularity; we average about 80 at Sunday Liturgy.

Our operating income for 2014 was \$114,060 and operating expenses \$110,135. Unrestricted nonrecurring gifts were \$13,252 and restricted gifts were \$9,671. For January - May 2015 our operating income was \$46,594 and operating expenses were \$44,781. Unrestricted nonrecurring gifts were \$910 and restricted gifts were \$5,859.

In August we installed a new twelve by eight foot mural of the Samaritan woman and the blind man on the left wall of the nave behind the choir. This was the gift of an anonymous donor and was painted by Fr. Andrew Tregubov of Claremont, NH. We also received a portrait icon of the prophet Job by Fr. Andrew.

We had Fr. Patrick Reardon of All Saints Church in Chicago as an edifying guest speaker three nights in October.

The three Orthodox churches in the Jackson area have the Paschal Vespers and feast together each year. This was our year to host it and we had a large crowd, good weather, and lots of good food.

We have a Youth Fund and solicit donations to send our children to Orthodox summer camps. This summer we had three attend at Antiochian Village and four at Camp St. Thekla in South Carolina.

For the period July 1, 2014, through June 30, 2015, we baptized 4 children and 1 adult and chrismated 8 adults. We had 2 marriages and 4 burials.

Respectfully submitted by Priest Paul Yerger

**Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church
McComb, Mississippi**

Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church was established in 2004, a “daughter” parish of Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church in Clinton, Mississippi.

At this time our total membership (including those at the Hattiesburg Mission) is 40 adults and 22 children, plus 1 catechumen. Our average Sunday attendance is around 25 adults and around 13 children. Our usual schedule of services is: Saturday, Vespers 6:00 pm. Sunday, Divine Liturgy 10:00 am. Wednesday, Daily Vespers, 6:00 pm. In the past year we have celebrated 2 Baptisms.

A particular joy for our community this year has been the celebration of three weddings. Our small community has only celebrated a handful of weddings since it began, but this year we celebrated three within the space of five months.

Once a month the Divine Liturgy is served in Hattiesburg for the benefit of our members there. Reader Vespers is served every Friday evening. The Hattiesburg Mission Station has around 13 adults and 5 children, including 1 catechumen there.

We are largely a “long-distance” parish for most of our parishioners. Only about one third of our parishioners live within a half hour drive.

This year we celebrated our fourth annual “Greek Festival.” Although our parish has only one parishioner of Greek ancestry, we have found this to be a good way to help local residents to learn about our parish and about the Orthodox Church, tour the church, and generally be aware that we are here and friendly.

Respectfully submitted by Priest Benedict Crawford

**Saint Matthew the Apostle Mission
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

In the past year we’ve seen significant increases in congregational participation, doubling our number of adults and youth serving as readers and altar servers. In December we held our third children’s Nativity Pageant, with a growing group of adults and children participating. Classes for children and adults are held on Sunday mornings periodically throughout the year. We have had six adult Chrismations, two infant Baptisms, and we continue to encourage inquirers who are exploring the Orthodox Faith.

Our Sunday morning attendance averages in the 30s, occasionally reaching the 50s; we continue to welcome newcomers while bidding farewell to those moving away due to school graduation and work transfers.

After an ambitious budget increase in 2013, we determined to maintain the same numbers for 2014 and 2015. In the past year we have successfully met our financial obligations while increasing our savings in our diocesan building fund. We distribute alms to those who ask us for assistance and support the IOCC, OCMC, and FOCUS. We are coming to realize that our storefront setting is placing limits on growth and activities. Although we identified a desirable property within our price range, restrictive neighborhood covenants and zoning issues precluded purchase.

We continue to discern ways to minister in the location God has given us while exploring a move to more suitable location. Along the way, we pray for the wisdom and patience to abide faithfully as branches of the True Vine Who is Christ our God, since without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Respectfully submitted by Priest Mark Christian

Holy Nativity of the Lord Mission Shreveport, LA

Thanks be to God! Through sacrificial giving and the help of the Diocesan Debt Management Program, the faithful of Holy Nativity formally began their building program in March of 2015. Due to significant and unprecedented rain delays, the foundation for our new multipurpose facility was not completed until July 11, 2015. Hopefully, the structure will be occupied by the end of August and completed in September. The 4,500 sqft facility contains a temporary temple space, two bathrooms, two showers, a storage area, kitchen and parish activity center. Eventually, this building will be converted into a two-story education center (bookstore included) and an indoor recreation facility that also serve as a parish hall. Currently, Presbytera Mirella Tudora of St John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Euless, TX is working with local architects in the Shreveport area designing a new temple for our location. The prospective plans are to be presented to Holy Nativity in the fall of this year. God willing, construction on the new temple will begin in 2017.

Following is a summary of our parish life statistics for the period July 2014 to July 2015:

Average Sunday Divine Liturgy attendance: 75

Average Great Vespers (Sat) attendance: 47

Average Wednesday Vespers attendance: 66

Current Catechumens: 14

Baptisms and chrismations: 7

Increase in Tithes/Offerings/Designated Building funds over last year: 43%

Pascha Attendance: 94

Total Parish Members/Catechumens/Seekers: 101

Other highlights from last year include weekly men's luncheons, monthly woman's ministry events, monthly youth events and a summer youth retreat, an Akathist of Thanksgiving with Meal and talent show followed by neighborhood ministry at Thanksgiving, Nativity gift baskets for the needy, nursing home Nativity programs, pan-Orthodox Nativity Retreat, ongoing support of two OCMC missionaries, prayerful participation in 40 Days for Life, our Annual Annunciation Celebration Crawfish Boil and Fish Fry, five visits to Nativity of the Lord Monastery including one retreat, and a Holy Nativity sponsored pan-Orthodox Vacation Bible School. Lastly, Holy Nativity worked in conjunction with St. Seraphim's Cathedral to plan and organize All Saints Summer Camp. The camp was held at Cooper Farm in Ledbetter, TX June 27 – July 3. In total, sixty-three campers (OCA, ROCOR, GOA and AOC) from ages 8 to 18, five priests, and 12 counselors/staff personal enjoyed a week of prayer, study and a lot fun together.

This last year has been a real blessing to all of us at Holy Nativity. Please keep us in your prayers as we seek to be faithful to the Great Commission in the greater Shreveport area along with our Christian brothers and sisters at St. George Greek Orthodox Church and St. Nicholas Orthodox Church (AOC). Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Respectfully submitted by Priest Jason Foster

Conclusion

This concludes the Mississippi River Deanery Report. As a newly formed deanery, we covet your prayers as we seek to follow the missionary example established by the Holy Apostles and imitated by Vladyka Dmitri of blessed memory. In the future we will look to the strong and proven deaneries that make up the Diocese of the South for guidance and direction as it relates to spiritual and numerical growth. May God bless our efforts as we prayerfully begin this new work of expanding the mission in East Texas, Arkansas, Memphis, Mississippi, Mobile and Louisiana.

