

HOLY NATIVITY MONASTERY KEMP, TX

2018 Monastery Report submitted by Abbess Barbara Jan 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018 nativitymonastery.com

Nativity Monastery enjoys a robust and positive relationship with the Pan-Orthodox community in North Texas and beyond. As Orthodox Christians have become more familiar with the monastery in Kemp through themed retreats, burials and memorial services, celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Saturdays and major feast days, and, as its facilities have improved, the monastic community has attracted more visitors of all ages. In its nine years in Kemp, the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Monastery is emerging as an important resource in augmenting the spiritual and temporal experience of Orthodoxy beyond the parish. In the last few years young people have begun to come more frequently to experience the monastic life and the liturgical life of the Church in a small, quiet, rural setting for a deeper experience of their faith and to meet Orthodox youth from other parishes. Not a few come in contact with Orthodoxy for the very first time in the burial of a loved one in the St. Xenia Cemetery on the Monastery property.

The monastic community has been most fortunate in the dedication of priests who have contributed to the liturgical life of the monastery. Archpriest John Anderson (SSOC), as the chaplain of the Monastery, serves the Divine Liturgy on Saturday mornings. Father David Bozeman (St. Nectarios Mission) frequently serves the Divine Liturgy on feasts that occur on weekdays. Father David also serves the Pre-sanctified once a week throughout the Great Fast. Father David offers informal sessions on a variety of spiritual topics for the nuns. Father Gerasim (SSOC) assists the nuns in

their monastic life and advises the community on administrative matters in addition to serving the Divine Liturgy. Priests from other jurisdictions, especially when bringing a group to the monastery, conduct memorial services, Vespers, Akathists, and other prayer services, as well as the Divine Liturgy. Most notable are Archpriest Michael Storozuk (St Paul), Archpriest Seraphim Holland (ROCOR), Archpriest Vasile Tudora (GOA), and Priest Philip LeMasters (AOC). It is rare that a week passes without the celebration of the Divine Liturgy to augment the daily cycle of prayer. On September 16, 2017, Archbishop Alexander elevated Nun Barbara as Abbess of the monastery. Reader John Kohl, frequently assisting Fr John Anderson at the Divine Liturgy, was elevated as Sub-deacon.

A beautiful icon of the Holy Cross, eight feet tall and visible from the road, now welcomes visitors, announcing that this is a place set aside for Christ's work of salvation. Archpriest Theodore Jurewicz (Erie, PA) donated a large icon of the Panagia that hangs in the retreat center. Father Vasile Tudora from the St John the Baptist Church in Euless donated ten other hand-painted matching icons (3'x5'). Two more icons from the same group have been installed in the sanctuary of the Monastery's chapel.

Concrete walkways now link the residence with the retreat center. A new concrete path around the residence facilitates processions. Last year dead trees were removed and live oaks, hollies and crepe myrtles were planted. An irrigation system insures that these additions will survive drought and summer heat. New fencing now surrounds the entire property.

Permanent grave markers have been designed. Families have begun to install these on the graves of their loved ones. Each year the number of burials at St. Xenia cemetery has increased. The Monastery has also invested in burial equipment for lowering coffins.

Peach trees, planted behind the house, are now yielding fruit. Produce from two key-hole gardens supply the kitchen with fresh

vegetables in season. This spring additional space has been dedicated to grow other vegetables and herbs.

The nuns strive to support themselves as much as possible by their own work. While contributions in gratitude for hospitality and prayers provide some income, it is the growth and stability of candle production that provides a source of steady income for the monastery. A consistent clientele of Orthodox parishes from several jurisdictions order beeswax candles and soy votive candles each month. The candle making operation is also of great interest to the younger orthodox visitors.

In June 2018 the Monastery received a group of young women for a retreat to introduce them to the monastic life. Archimandrite Gerasim, Father David Bozeman, Father Vasily Tudora, Presvytera Mirela Tudora, Preoteasa Titiana Popa, and Mrs. Lydia Paraskevas instructed the participants in various aspects of Orthodox life, history and culture. A similar group of young women will return during the first two weeks of June 2018.

On September 30, 2017 Priest Sean Levine spoke on "Marriage, Asceticism and the Journey to Holiness." On November 11 the Monastery directed a retreat for College students and young adults with father David Bozeman speaking "On Delusion." On the patronal feast observed on the Saturday after Nativity, Hiero-deacon Theodore Niklasson gave an address: "Understanding Shame and Guilt and their Influence upon Addictive Behavior." The St. Basil's Children's Choir from Holy Nativity Mission in Shreveport, LA sang at the Divine Liturgy. On March 24, 2018 Presbytera Jennifer Levine led a visited a women's retreat, entitled: "Finding Balance in our Lives." On April 20th another large children's camp assembled, presided over once again by Father Vasile and Presbytera Mirela. The Children's Choir from Shreveport sang at the Liturgy. Sub-deacon Michael Rehmet talked about his journey to the Orthodox Church. Each year Priest Philip LeMasters brings a group of college

students from McMurray University in Abilene, TX to visit. Finally, on April 23 the Kursk Icon of the Theotokos visited the Monastery. Father Seraphim Holland (ROCOR) walked through the entire property with the icon.