

Atlanta Deanery Parish Reports – July 2015

St. Mary of Egypt Church – Norcross, GA

On November 1, St. Mary's will celebrate its 35th anniversary of the consecration of the Church. We continue to provide a parish home for many who are temporarily in the area for work. Also, we seek ways to reach out to a very different demographic group than when we were established.

Since last year's assembly, we have had 6 baptisms (4 infant, 2 adult), and 6 marriages at the parish. Currently, we have 6 catechumens who have all added much to the parish. They are our most zealous attendees for services. Our Thursday night class is always lively with discussion. Soon, most of them will be ready to be received into the Church. Much had been done to encourage relationships away from services throughout the week.

We have established a high school, college age small group which meets weekly, and had been going through an Old Testament survey together.

We have continued to work on the beautification of the Church. Recently, we got new altar covers for the Church from Belgrade, Serbia. We believe that this is the first time they have been replaced. Also, we were donated two new lampadas from Greece. New lighting has been installed in the altar area as well.

The flooring project in the hall has been completed, and a new stove has been installed in the kitchen. The rector's office has been renovated, and a separate business/ choir office has been established. This will enable the priest to meet with people without distraction

Fr. Peter Smith and Fr. Dimitri Oselinsky continue to serve the need of missions at least two weekends per month.

Report for St John the Wonderworker Parish, Atlanta, GA

It's been a very active year at St John the Wonderworker Parish in Atlanta. We just had our annual St John's Feast day with Archimandrite Gerasim as our guest speaker. In addition to the usual Vigil Service and Divine Liturgy we extended the festivities with our 2nd annual St John's day open house and cookout on the following Saturday, July, 4th. Despite heavy rain showers we had a good crowd who moved inside for a feast of Greek food (a generous donation from the Annunciation Cathedral). Fr Gerasim gave a spirited public talk in the afternoon followed by Vespers.

Among our other events this year we had a Lenten retreat with the theme of the Orthodox Christian approach to death and burial. Dcn. Mark and Elizabeth Barna gave an excellent workshop and offered themselves as resources for those interested in traditional Orthodox care for the dead.) We experienced our first (green) funeral this

year where women from the parish prepared the body. It was a deeply moving experience for the family of the deceased.

During the Christmas season we were invited to be a part of the Grant Park Tour of Homes. Our neighborhood is in one of the oldest sections of Atlanta with a number of historical homes. Our church building was chosen to be a "special stop" on the tour. During the 2 evenings of the tour over 700 people passed through the church. Parishioners served as tour guides and answered questions about the icons and Orthodoxy in general. Most people had never seen an Orthodox church and the response was overwhelmingly positive.

This year has been something of a time of recovery for our parish. Last year we had a number of our most active members join the new OCA mission in Marietta, an offshoot of St. John's and St. Mary of Egypt parishes to the Northwest suburbs. While it was difficult both emotionally and financially to lose this number of long time members, by God's Grace and Mercy have filled our ranks with new members and are back on track with our budget. We rejoice at the continuing expansion of our shared mission to the metro Atlanta area.

In 2014 we baptized 9 newborns, all boys. This year has been slightly less prolific with 5 new boys and at last one beautiful little girl. We received 5 new adult members through Chrismation. We had one wedding and 2 funerals. We mourn the loss of Catherine Payne, long time parish member and sister of Matushka Rebecca Myers. We also miss Chantal Trainor, faithful supporter of Loaves and Fishes.

We are steadily working to improve our church building beginning with painting the sanctuary including a blue ceiling awaiting some angel and stars. We hope to purchase the property adjacent to the church, a large house on a double lot with a big public space and 2 apartments. This will give us much needed space for things children's activities and a library as well as a residence for the pastor's family.

Our Loaves and Fishes program for feeding the poor continues to be an integral part of the parish. Our Legacy Ministries in addition to operating a small, unique summer camp, brings together our youth with the elderly, with the young folks performing in period costumes. Our St Nicholas Academy, offers a Christian education for elementary through high school.

We are very excited about the AAC coming to Atlanta and have many volunteers anxious to get to know their brothers and sisters from across the country. We are very grateful for this and for the many blessings we have received.

Your Brother in Christ,
Fr. Tom Alessandroni

Parish Report for St. Innocent Orthodox Church, Macon GA

This past year things have been going well at St. Innocent Orthodox Church. Sunday attendance has continued to hover around 45-60 people and at times this swells to 70 or so. We continue to have a steady stream of visitors and inquirers. It seems that God is always sending people to us.

The day to day ministries of the parish continue. Church school is still going well and is divided into three groups. The choir meets regularly for practice and has grown significantly in the last year both in talent and ability. We continue to have regular inquirer, catechism, or adult education classes on Sundays. These classes are also recorded and put online for our extended community. This Pascha and Pentecost we received 8 new member by Baptism and Chrismation. In the last few months a lay led adult bible study has begun on Sunday's before the Divine Liturgy. The prison ministry still meets weekly at Central State Prison in Macon. The week of Pentecost we received an inmate of 20 years or so into the faith by Chrismation. In prison our typical gathering has around 12 attendees.

Fr. Theophan continues to be regularly invited to the local colleges to give presentations on Orthodox Christianity. This year Fr. Theophan has served as the president of the Monroe County Ministerial Association. The MCMA does small local projects and fosters greater relationships among the Christian communities of Monroe county GA. Fr. Theophan recently started his second unit of Clinical Pastoral Education.

Our only major event in the past year was our 4th annual Bible and BBQ which featured Fr. Barnabas Powell as our guest speaker. At this event we offer free food, church tours and a guest speaker. Attendance was down this year due to unforeseen circumstances but the event was a success.

Currently we have a few operating committees that are working on future projects. Our first priority has become doing the work necessary to finance and build a permanent parish hall. It is our hope, God willing, to be able to build in the next year or so. Currently we use a rented mobile office space which does not have enough classrooms or even a kitchen. We have outgrown our trailer and the lack of space restricts us. We have paused on our iconography project in order to put all our energy into the parish hall which is our greatest need at this point.

Overall, the theme of this year has been to slow down and look inward at the quality of our parish. We are starting to have more gatherings in people houses such as book clubs and retreats to foster a closer sense of community. This summer and fall we have decided to work with Fr. John Ivanoff and go through the Orthodox Natural Church Development process.

It is our hope that as we are faithful with what God has given us that He will grow, establish and bless our community.

Report of St. Luke Mission, Anniston, Alabama

We have had a wonderful year of growth and development here at St. Luke Mission. The most visible change is our new iconostasis. When St. Symeon the New Theologian Orthodox Church in Birmingham moved into their magnificent newly constructed temple, they offered us their previous iconostasis. I am originally a son of that parish, having been baptized and chrismated there by Fr. Alexander Fecanin back in 1988. That iconostasis has had a venerable history and is of great importance to me personally. I was overjoyed when Fr. Alexander called and confirmed the donation of it to us. We rented a huge truck, drove to Birmingham and spent the day taking apart the largest and most complex jigsaw puzzle that I have ever encountered. The following week a group of us spent every day carefully and creatively installing it here at St. Luke, transforming it from its great width to a lesser structure, to fit our mission's temple. The end result was absolutely amazing! We completed it in time for Forgiveness Sunday and the beautiful new iconostasis completely took our experience of Great Lent, Holy Week and Pascha to an entirely new level. Our Lenten services set new attendance records.

Inspired by this, we proceeded to entirely refurnish the altar area. An oversized antique china cabinet with glass doors was installed to house and organize our various liturgical items. A new work table for the altar servers, complete with all new supplies was added as well.

The idea arose of making our narthex a focus on the saints and events of the Old Testament. Before long, the entrance was radiant with icons of the creation of the world, the faces of many of the prophets and figures of importance in the Old Covenant. Entering the church, visitors pass visually from the Old Testament into the Grace of the Gospel, to stand before the Throne of God in heavenly worship.

We have never had pussy willows for Palm Sunday. This year, we included pussy willows, to the joy of our Russian families, as well as, planted two trees to supply us for years to come. This development was made possible by one of our new members, with a degree in horticulture and connections in the florist community. Her skills have greatly expanded the use of flowers to beautify the temple and the exterior grounds.

Speaking of new faces, we've been greatly blessed to add eight communicants over the past year and currently have four catechumens. Our catechumenate program has undergone a revision and is extensively expanded with special emphasis on living the Orthodox life. We also have several inquirers. This year has seen much greater receptiveness from people in the local community as I travel about daily as a priest in cassock and cross. (I sometimes joke that Walmart is my other congregation since so many workers and shoppers come up to me for prayers or even answers to questions about the Holy Scriptures. The same happens throughout the area, along with that occasional "what are you supposed to be" stare that you are all familiar with.)

One of my favorite activities is visiting the local nursing home on the feast of St. Nicholas. I've been blessed (that is one way of looking at it) with appearing to be the very incarnation of Santa Claus himself. Several of my priestly brothers share this with me. I try to put it to good use. Not only do we celebrate and focus on the beloved saint of Myra, but in addition, we seek to spread the joy of Christ's incarnation and the season to those in our community. One of the highlights of this is my donning a classic Santa Claus suit and accompanying St. Luke parishioners to the nursing home to sing

Christmas carols, hand out little presents and candy canes. Then, we travel the halls of the facility robustly singing the songs of the season, to visit those poor bedridden folks unable to leave their rooms. Few things are comparable to the experience of the reaction of these little helpless ones, as Santa Claus bursts into their room with several little children-helpers in tow to shower them with attention, candy canes, season's greetings and the affirmation of God's love for them.

One of our new families has a house with a dock on a nearby lake. This year we enjoyed the first of many events there. The fun included a grand picnic, complete with pontoon boat ride, jet-ski rides and swimming. Our plan is to bless the lake this January on Theophany.

We continue our full liturgical life by having a daily service or class, six out of seven days of the week. At present, we are about a third of the way through an in-depth study of the Gospel of St. Matthew. Through your prayers, may God show us the way to even greater growth and development in this little corner of the Lord's Vineyard.

Glory to God for all things.

Fr. Basil Henry

Report of St. Gregory Mission in Moundville, Alabama

Saint Gregory's, in Moundville, Alabama, located only 25 minutes from the University of Alabama campus, encourages and welcomes the Orthodox students to attend service while they are away from home. It should be noted we have seen a decline of students from Orthodox counties, at the University.

Our parish is regional with some people driving as far as 60 to 100 miles which mean most of our attendance for Saturday Vespers and Sunday Liturgy.

St Gregory's is blessed to have a wonderful book store, with many items from Russia, Romania, and Greece; icons and much more. The Sisterhood of Saint Xenia has yard sales twice annually, to assist Saint Gregory's.

Last year, St. Gregory received 1 new Catechumen.

We continue to have visitor from other Orthodox Churches during visits to friend and family in the Tuscaloosa area; we also have visitor that come to services as they travel thru Alabama.

Please continue to pray for Saint Gregory's!

In Christ

Fr. Demetrius Edwards

Sts. Constantine & Helen Mission Helena, Georgia

The Mission is composed of a total of 13 members (10 adults and 3 children). The Mission owns 2 acres of land on which it has established a doublewide building which provides space for a chapel, a kitchen and Fellowship area, two classrooms and two bathrooms.

The Mission has one Reader in its membership. Each week the Mission conducts two Reader's Services, as well as a weekly choir practice. Twice a month Fr. James (Bohlman) travels from the St. Mary Magdalene parish (Rincon, GA) to the Mission in order to offer the sacraments, to give counsel and guidance, and to conduct a monthly parish meeting.

The Mission faithfully tithes 10% of its monthly income to the Diocese of the South.

The Mission is fervently praying for a full-time Priest/Pastor of its own who would help the Mission grow as well as enabling the Mission to have a full liturgical and sacramental life. To that end, by way of offering housing compensation to a future priest and his family, the Mission has purchased a 3-bedroom home and acreage across the road from the Chapel. The Mission would also be able to offer a small monthly stipend.

Submitted by Fr. James (Bohlman)
Priest-in-Charge

St. Symeon Church, Birmingham, Alabama

It has been an extraordinary and historic year at St. Symeon's, highlighted by, at long last, the move into our new temple on February 1, 2015. The following weekend, on Saturday night, February 7, an automobile crashed straight through the front of the old church, driving through three walls before stopping at the foot of the old clerics steps, while barely missing the Theotokos mosaic on the exterior wall ! Thanks be to God that no one was seriously injured, through the prayers of the Theotokos!

On Saturday, March 28, a crew of over 40 members worked 12 hours from morning till night to install the new temple iconostasis, which had arrived from Greece.

An Iconographer is under contract to begin work on the new temple interior, with phase one scheduled for October 2015.

St. Symeon's Choir will sing at the opening Liturgy of the All-American Council in Atlanta on Sunday, July 19. We look forward to hosting the next Diocesan Clergy Conference in February of 2016.

In the past year, there were 13 Baptisms (5 Adults , 8 Children) and 4 marriages. Sadly, the one funeral, the first in the new temple, was of a 30-day old infant Jonathan, one of a pair of twins. His brother Luke is doing well.

We are eternally grateful to Milos Konjevich for all his support and expertise in working out the financing of the building project! Many Years, Milos !!!

To God be all the glory!!!

Fr. Alexander Fecanin
Dean, Atlanta Deanery