

CENTRAL FLORIDA DEANERY REPORT

St. Justin Martyr Church, Jacksonville (Father Ted Pisarchuk)

The most significant even of 2008 was arrival of Hieromonk Arkady and the establishment of the Russian Mission. The mission began in November with about 30 people and has grown to over 100. They meet on the 2nd and 4th Sunday for Slavonic Liturgy at 12n. We have purposely treated the Russian mission as a full part of St Justin and not an appendage. Feasts are held together and all social activities. Fr Arkady has been very active in reaching out to the local Russian community. He is a gifted priest and evangelist and is admired in the community. He has become a true leader in the community.

This year we increased our parking area a much needed 50% and added a well used one-acre sports field and basketball court. We postponed the expansion of our facilities this year due to the start up of the Russian Ministry in order to assess our needs and impact on finances. We have learned that our greatest need now is to expand the fellowship hall. On Sundays when the nave is full, the Fellowship Hall is overcrowded. We may expand both simultaneously, it depends on how the capital campaign goes. We continue to improve our grounds with a beautification program of both the cemetery and grounds.

With the addition of the Russian Ministry we have to be careful on finances. Personnel expenses (salaries) are now about \$200k. Offices are now full time and the youth director is working 30 hours per week. We have two full time priests, a professional choir director, and two stipend clergy. This includes our new Deacon, Deacon James Nicholas who has been a wonderful addition. Average attendance is up 6% and income is up 10% over the past year.

Holy Trinity Church, Safety Harbor (Father Peter Tutko)

During the past year we completed our new church building and had the Door Opening on February 16 with many of the local clergy and their members come and join us for this glorious day. On the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we hosted the Vesper service. We had 15 priests participate. that was a record for our Tampa Bay area. Our new Church was filled with our brothers and sisters from around the Tampa Bay area. We have had new faces attend service and had three Chrismations and have one catechumen preparing for Holy Baptism. My son Mark was engaged and I have had the joy of receiving my future daughter-in-law into the Faith on Lazarus Saturday. Their wedding will take place on Nov 2, 2008. Our new Church will be dedicated on October 11, 2008. We are hoping the beautification of our new Church will be completed by then, with the icons and frescos to be written by Elia Damianakis, who is a master iconographer and a member of Holy Trinity. A Dedication Journal is being published for this event.

Father David Rucker (Orthodox Christian Mission Center, Associate Director)

We continue to benefit from having Fr. David at OCMC. Through his presence and ministry new doors are opening for our deanery and diocese, as well as our Church at large for participation and involvement in "making disciples of all nations" through the expanding programs of the Mission Center. In fact, Fr. David wrote the feature article in the Spring 2007 issue of the OCMC Magazine which illustrated the good work in the Diocese of the South. Fr. David will be moving the staff into a new 12,000 sq. ft. Administration and Training facility in December of this year, on the new 20 acre campus, which God has provided for OCMC. All will be invited to attend a "Grand Opening" and dedication event being tentatively planned for May 2008. Fr. David continues to emphasize that OCMC exists to serve each Diocese, and to make each local parish successful. He specifically requests your prayers for new missionaries, which are desperately needed, and for financial resources for funding the general operations of the Mission Center. Fr. David reports that he is honored to serve in this capacity and that his family has adjusted well to St. Augustine.

When Fr. David is not traveling for OCMC, he serves at St. Justin Martyr Church in Jacksonville where he is attached. He also serves occasionally as a "supply priest" in our diocese upon request.

He also "humbly" reports that his son, Ethan, will begin his freshman year this fall at University of Florida as a "Gator," and begs forgiveness from all his fellow Texans for the errant ways of his son!

St. Philip the Apostle Mission, Tampa (Father Joseph Ciarciaglino)

We will Chrismate our 2nd catechumen on Pentecost. We now have an "inquirer" who seems very interested. We are approaching the mid 20s in membership. 1/2 of the parish family units are now sacrificial givers (10% or higher).

Attendance on Sunday is usually 100%, meaning that either all are present or those absent are absent for honorable reasons. It is rare for anyone to miss Divine Liturgy on Sunday and not tell me ahead of time that they will be absent and why. I did not institute this it is something that has been going on from the beginning.

As for the plant, we have had the outside painted and finally got our two classrooms carpeted. In addition we got a nice write up in the Tampa Tribune at Theophany when we blessed the Hillsborough River. Also we hosted the Pan Orthodox vespers service on one of the Sundays of the great fast. Our food for the poor drive where we collect food for the poor is a continuous activity.

St. Raphael Mission, Inverness (Father David Balmer)

St. Raphael Orthodox Mission is an enthusiastic parish of older adults with a median age of 70. As such, there parish members who are semi-mobile and those who are under medical care. St. Raphael's currently has just under 70 communicants on the "Priest's List". The Treasurer and the Audit Committee reported 57 members based upon their review, which is a 19% increase from the previous year. The average Sunday attendance this past year was 48. Two catechumens were received this year.

With His Eminence's blessing, the priest and parish began celebrating a Vespers service in a retirement community 35 miles distant. The "Vespers in the Villages" are offered twice monthly and have had an attendance ranging from 8 to 24. This outreach is bringing lapsed Orthodox Christians back to the Church as well as servicing our more distant and less mobile members.

In mid-July, an additional building adjacent to the Temple was remodeled and consecrated as "Holy Myrrhbearers' Hall". Currently, a three-foot square mosaic of the Holy Myrrhbearers is being produced by several of the women of the parish. When complete, it will grace the front of the building.

Recently a donor has provided the funds and expertise to replace all the concrete work on the property to include a wide sidewalk and concrete parking stalls for our handicapped drivers. This work should begin in July.

Through the Holy Spirit, the Parish itself continues to grow together. Parish members increasingly visit and call one another when ill which supplements the visits by the Priest and the Visitation Ministry of the Parish Council. The fall classes on "Orthodox Spirituality" were well attended.

St. Stephen the Protomartyr Church, Longwood/Orlando (Father Mark Stevens)

Attendance continues to grow at St. Stephen. So far this year we have averaged about 175 on Sundays, which represents a 13% growth in numbers over the previous year. We currently have about 80 children enrolled in our church school, and have outgrown our education building (constructed 4 years ago).

We recently "burned the mortgage" on our education building, having paid off the loan in four years. This means that we now move onto the next phase of our long-range program: the construction of a new temple. Preliminary designs have been made for this temple, and final plans and commitments are (hopefully!) to be made in early Fall.

We continue to try to do a better job of ministry to our members, and to reach out to those people beyond our walls. We have conducted retreats, brought in speakers, regularly held Bible classes and a catechumen class, and we have provided a vacation church school program (40 children enrolled). We are currently strengthening our stewardship program as well.

Buildings and statistics are important, but people are far more important. We are blessed with many, many wonderful and loving people at St. Stephen Church, and they are the reason for our continued growth. They also are the reason we have such hope for the future of our parish and for the future of Orthodoxy in the Orlando area.

St. Andrew the First-Called Church, New Port Richey (Father Pavel Yurin)

St. Andrew Church struggles in many ways. Senior citizens make up the majority of the parish, and “snowbirds,” who travel to Florida for the winter, swell attendance during that season. Father Pavel ministers to Russian immigrants in the area.

St. Mark Church, Bradenton (Father John Chudik)

St. Mark Church is in the midst of a wonderful building program. The beautiful new temple is taking shape, and the members of the parish look forward eagerly to worshipping God in this new structure. Photos are available on the parish’s website. Father John continues his nursing ministry in addition to his duties in the parish.

St. Simeon Church, Titusville (Father Krist Nickolas)

St. Simeon Church is in a time of transition. Father Krist works outside the parish to make ends meet. He is working hard to develop a better choir. Father Krist has worked hard to teach Bible classes and to teach his people the Orthodox faith.

St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Mission, Palm Coast

This mission has been sputtering for a number of years. Father Nicholas Harris travels to serve the community. Attendance is steady, but there needs to be a reinvigoration of its vision if there is to be hope for the future.