

Southcentral (Dallas) Deanery Report

Diocese of the South

Orthodox Church in America

Dallas Diocesan Assembly 2015

Respectfully Submitted by Fr. Basil Zebrun

Introduction:

With the blessing of His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon, as well as Archimandrite Gerasim (Eliel), the Diocesan Council recently took steps and the necessary vote to establish a Mississippi River Deanery, the seventh Deanery of our Diocese. Thus our own South Central (Dallas) Deanery is now comprised of three states: New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, with parts of East Texas annexed to the new M.R.D. Thus currently there are 15 active parishes, missions or mission stations in the Southcentral (Dallas) Deanery.

Diversity in activities can be seen throughout our territory as the faithful engage in various endeavors in efforts to grow the Church spiritually and numerically. Most communities with a resident priest offer a minimum of three liturgical services a week (Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday). Some have added weekday Liturgies, Matins and Akathists as well. Education classes for all ages is the norm, including some Vacation Bible Schools, as well as a diverse selection of outreach activities. The latter range from unique sales, to lectures, concerts, and customized websites. One may also see efforts in prison ministry, the writing of local editorials, as well as charitable endeavors, including outreach across the border into Mexico. Several active building or expansion programs are in progress, and not a few churches are choosing to invest extra savings with the Diocese, at a generous rate of interest. These funds are then used to help other missions expand or develop their own communities, when loans from local banks become difficult to acquire.

Progress continues on the Archbishop Dmitri Memorial Chapel which nears completion, and it is hoped that in the near future we may bring His Eminence home to the Cathedral.

And finally, we are blessed to have a group of enthusiastic, mission minded clergy, as well as dedicated laymen to help with the growth of their respective communities. I would like to thank especially Archmandrite Gerasim (Eliel), Diocesan Administrator; Archpriest Marcus Burch, Diocesan Chancellor; Mr. Milos Konjevich, Diocesan Treasurer; and other clergy (priests and deacons) who have assisted tremendously in an administrative capacity within our Deanery during the past year.

The following is a brief summary of activities in most of our Deanery communities, submitted by the local priests. Some final reports are pending and these will be posted as they are received.

**All Saints Mission
Victoria, TX
Archpriest Dimitri Cozby**

Parish membership remains level, new members being balanced by old families moving away. We are a very diverse lot of cradle and convert Orthodox from America, plus immigrants from Greece, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, and Eritrea. Only one of our families came from an OCA parish.

During the last year we have had three infant baptisms. We currently have one pre-catechumen and another family interested in the Church, but unable presently to commit.

Heavy spring rains have prevented us from replanting a vegetable garden on the property, as we had last year. We hope to continue to provide vegetables for parishioners, and eventually to sell some at the local farmers market and donate some to local food pantries.

We replaced the folding chairs around the periphery of the temple with nicer wooden chairs. They are the gift of parishioners who had formerly owned a restaurant and who donated some of the chairs from their old establishment.

As in previous years, the confirmation class from a local Methodist church visited for Wednesday evening Vespers during the Paschal season.

**All Saints of North America Orthodox Church
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Priest Nikolay Miletkov**

Our Sunday average attendance is around 85. We lost several families in the past 12 months who moved out of state due to job relocation.

Our weekly schedule consists of: silent recitation of the Jesus Prayer on Tuesday mornings followed by Continuing Education/Book Study; Wednesday Vespers followed by Catechumen class; Thursday morning Divine Liturgy; Saturday Great Vespers and Sunday Liturgy.

Fr Nikolay continues to be involved with the OCF chapter at the University of New Mexico.

Since last year, we have added to our ministries: a monthly men's group gathering, monthly women's fellowship gathering, as well as a middle and high school Youth Group that meets once a month for food, fun, fellowship, and enriching spiritual discussion. To further strengthen our parish life we also started organizing monthly soccer and hiking outings.

Our Sunday school is divided into 3 age group classes and takes place every Sunday after Holy Communion.

The Building Committee spent much of the year working with architect Michael Bertin. His conceptual design for our new church building was presented to the parish in November, and accepted by a unanimous vote in December.

The Sisterhood of St. Anna continues to organize fundraising events and facilitate charitable giving for local, national, and international causes. This spring we improved our parish property by having crusher fines put throughout the driveway and the extended parking lot which was previously dirt.

As part of our outreach efforts, we placed large signs on our Church fence inviting people to come and discover the ancient Christian Church.

**St. Anthony the Great Orthodox Church
San Antonio, Texas
Archpriest Leo Poore**

St. Anthony continues with Phase III of our Icon project. Hopefully by this fall will have the Icons of the Apostles up. Our partnership with the San Antonio food bank has resulted in our being able to reach each Friday approx. 35-55 families and about each quarter we are able to give away about 10,000 pounds of food to about 105-119 families. We are in the progress of painting our fellowship hall. We continue to receive new members and our various church organizations have remained active in their respective areas.

**St. Barbara Orthodox Church
Ft. Worth, Texas
Archpriest Basil Zebrun**

On Sunday, July 12, 2015 St. Barbara's entered a new stage of development as we welcomed into our community Fr. Joshua Trant, his wife Matushka Heather and their daughter Tabitha. Fr. Joshua is a recent graduate of St. Vladimir's Seminary. He and his wife were received into the Church at St. Seraphim Cathedral in 2008. Fr. Joshua will serve an internship as assistant priest helping out with St. Barbara's, as well as with the Deanery in general whenever possible. For now the parish continues with its normal schedule of Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday and Feastday services, and will be adding to the overall program in the near future. Our Parish Ministries Council enters its second year of service to the community, with each member of the Council assuming responsibility for a particular area of parish life. A large task ahead is the planning of a permanent, tradition temple. The initial phases of the project have begun with architect interviews being conducted by the Parish Council and Building Committee.

St. Barbara's continues with weekly adult classes on Wednesday nights, and a Book Study is now offered on Saturday afternoons prior to Great Vespers. This past year the parish conducted Saturday Church School Classes (once a month) focusing on *Church*

Sacraments and My Orthodox Family, using material published by the OCA's Department of Religious Education, and the Orthodox Christian Education Commission. Reader's workshops were also conducted periodically throughout the year, as well as altar server practices.

In addition as part of outreach efforts, the parish hosted its Annual Pysanky Festival in March, with Pysanky Classes offered in April, immediately after Pascha. A member of the parish provided a special presentation entitled, "*Stewards of Children*," helping the community become more sensitive to potential dangers to children within society generally. Visiting clergy and guest speakers for the year included, His Eminence Archbishop Nikon in August, as well as Archpriest Daniel and Matushka Myra Kovalak in October, and His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon in May. In conjunction with the Kovalak's visit St. Barbara's hosted a Deanery Clergy Conference, as well as a clergy gathering with His Beatitude on May 10.

Holy Supper following the Nativity Eve service continues to be a much anticipated community activity, along with our Annual Chili and Cornbread Competition in January, as well as our Parish Picnic, usually conducted in the summer, but held in September of 2014. This Fall we anticipate the visit of Archpriest John Behr of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, as well as the Seminary Octet.

During 2014 we averaged ninety two people for each Sunday Liturgy. We baptized eight children and chrismated two adults, celebrated one marriage, and experienced the loss of two parishioners. May their memory be eternal! Prayers are offered at each service for three Church members currently serving in the military. We look forward greatly to the remainder of 2015 and future possibilities.

St. Basil the Great Orthodox Mission, Weatherford, Oklahoma Priest Nick Aiello

We have had great growth in the last year - thank God. A year ago we had about eight people regularly attending and we now have between sixteen to eighteen members...with more interested in joining us soon.

We are just a few weeks away from gaining occupancy on the building and property we purchased last year with help from the diocese: a half acre lot with a house we have converted to a chapel in literally the best spot in the city.

Financially, a year ago our monthly offerings were about \$1,600.00 a month and for the last few months they have averaged about \$2,500.00...but will reach an average of \$3,000.00 a month very soon.

Because I am unpaid almost 100% of this amount goes to our building project and paying off our debt. This being the case, with our current rate of growth and giving, we hope to pay our debt within five to seven years. ...and begin work on our permanent temple, (converting the present building to a fellowship hall and offices).

All of this, by the grace of God and wonderful people He has sent to us, as well as the help from our diocese; in three years as an absolutely fresh mission with no core group or help from a sending parish!

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem Orthodox Church,
The Woodlands, Texas
Hieromonk John (Anderson)**

Glory to Jesus Christ! St. Cyril's 2014-2015 was a glorious year. While a couple families have moved away new Orthodox families have joined St. Cyril's. In addition, we had nine baptisms this Pascha, and currently have a number of inquirers preparing to be enrolled into the catechumenate. Due to steady growth we continue to implement more and more structure and organization to meet the needs common for a growing mission.

Property purchase efforts:

- Since our goal is to have our own place of worship, it is a priority to find property. We have expanded our search from dialogue with our current landlord to the surrounding cities and towns. As of June 2015, we continue to rent space from Hope Pointe Anglican Church. We discovered that as it currently stands we would be unable to purchase the Hope Pointe parcel.

Local outreach:

- St. Cyril's is a member of and volunteers at the Woodlands Interfaith Outreach organization. Woodlands Interfaith is not a religious institution or ecumenical organization, but rather functions as the local food bank, but offers many more services. Any persons in need can go to Interfaith to find aid. As a member church we volunteer and donate, as well as volunteer at special help events.

- Twice a month Fr. John offers Typica services at two of our local senior centers.

- Fr. John was cleared to serve as a volunteer chaplain in the Texas prison system and is in dialogue with an inmate at the Ellis Unit 8 in Huntsville about offering services for a group of men.

Medical Leave-of-Absence:

- In March, Hieromonk John was granted medical leave-of-absence by His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, due to a flare-up of ulcerative colitis. The LOA stretched to the end of June. Fr. John has returned to The Woodlands with the colitis in remission, glory to God!

Services:

- We continue to celebrate regularly scheduled services including: Wednesday night Vespers, Friday night Akathist Hymn, Saturday Catechumen Class and Great Vespers, and Sunday morning Divine Liturgy. Our goal this year is to begin serving regular Saturday evening Vigil.

Final highlight:

- Fr. John is a member of the local Pan-Orthodox Clergy Brotherhood of Houston. Our brotherhood truly enjoys close friendships as well as frequent fellowship. Recently, the Brotherhood has composed letters and been vocal to protest problematic developments in our country regarding marriage.

Anniversary:

- In November 2014, St. Cyril's celebrated its 10th year anniversary with a banquet. It was attended by 100 people from the surrounding Orthodox communities including several of the local Orthodox priests. Archimandrite Gerasim was our special guest and presenter. It was a wonderful event.

In conclusion:

- With our recent anniversary we have been encouraged in our labors in Christ's vineyard. We continue to give thanks that we can enter into the Mystery of the Kingdom even now. We at St. Cyril's continue steadily in our work to build up the Body of Christ and to preach the Gospel. It is a joy to report continued cohesive unity and love within our mission, as well as a zealous desire serve the Lord. We request your prayers as we enter into another blessed year of fruitful labor in Christ's vineyard in Houston.

Sts. Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Church Hartshorne, Oklahoma (Pending)

St. George Orthodox Church Pharr, Texas Archpriest Antonio Perdomo

- ❖ My family has been at St. George for over thirteen years.
- ❖ Membership continues to fluctuate. People move away and new people join the Church. Our membership hovers around 60. If we were to estimate all the people that come to Church from time to time and included them in our membership, I would guess our numbers could rise to about 120. An average of about 50 people come to Church on Sunday. A few Sundays there have been more than 70 in attendance.
- ❖ This past year there have been eight baptisms and Chrismations. Also one wedding.
- ❖ Church School has been very nice with the addition of the two school rooms..
- ❖ Education in the Church is very important Catechumen classes and a Lenten series have been offered this past year.
- ❖ Currently, information is shared with members through the weekly announcements from the ambon, on both bulletin boards, by making phone calls as needed. We also have the Church web site and the Church Facebook Page and a Sunday Church Bulletin as other ways to keep our members notified about the ongoing activities in the Church. We are considering the development of an online newsletter or membership news page to offer members.
- ❖ Pastoral care, house blessings and hospital visits continue on a regular basis.
- ❖ Our new hall is built. The commercial kitchen completed. Still hoping to build a porch roof in the back of the hall. Also, starting to think about the challenges of expanding the temple.

It seems that more people would come on Sunday if there was more room for people to fit more comfortably.

❖ Thus far this year St. George has paid the bills, tithe, support of the seminaries and aid with some charity work.

❖ The Food Pantry continues to serve those in need of food in the community. Most of the months 80 to 100 families are served. This has given our Church a wonderful opportunity to serve others and to connect with the community.

❖ Mission work in Mexico is an ongoing project of the Church. We are hopeful to be able to send a couple of missionaries on Mission trips to Mexico this coming year. St. George continues to support summer camp and send participants.

❖ The International Festival was a success once again this year. There are other fundraisers in the Church throughout the year. The past two years the new hall has made it possible to offer a Dinner Theatre as a fundraiser. The funds help us in so many ways including meeting our yearly budget.

Holy Apostles Orthodox Church

Bixby, Oklahoma

Archpriest Ambrose Arrington

(Pending)

St Jonah the Wonderworker Orthodox Christian Mission

Alpine, Texas

Priest Nicholas Roth

St Jonah's has experienced a number of highs and lows over the past year. While a full-time priest was finally assigned in February, at the same time one of the founding members of the parish, Marilyn Bailey, fell asleep in the Lord. Additionally, a young, active couple moved back to their hometown, finding the geographical isolation of Alpine too much for them. These losses were offset by one infant baptism and two adult chrismations over the past four months, as well as one parishioner moving back to Alpine from the West Coast, leaving the total membership of the mission at 19. Of those 19, 15 are voting members. The average Sunday attendance is 12, while the average Great Vespers attendance is 9. While the baptism and chrismations finished our round of current catechumens, we do have one seeker from the local university, as well as a few other friends of parishioners who attend from time to time.

St Jonah's finances are improving, both due to an increase in giving within the parish, along with receiving a DOS Mission Planting Grant over the course of the next three years. Our year-to-date giving is up 76.9% over where it was at this time last year, and we have realized a 33.1% increase for the period of July 2014 to June 2015 over July 2013 to June 2014. This has enabled us to make great headway on our Diocesan loan during the same time period, reducing our debt by 7.3% just over the past six months.

Given our current giving levels and estimating modest growth in the mission, it is reasonable that St Jonah's will retire the debt to the Diocese within the next six years, freeing us up to pursue larger projects, by the grace of God.

In addition to the regular Saturday and Sunday services, Vespers is served every Wednesday evening, as well as for the Feasts. Our choir has just recently undertaken serving the All-Night Vigil for Great Feasts, which everyone has found to be spiritually rewarding. Additionally, because of the past events, this was the first time in two years that the services were held here throughout Great Lent, including the full cycle of services during both Clean Week and Holy Week. We have also implemented Adult Education/Inquirers Classes, held every two weeks during our coffee fellowship immediately following Divine Liturgy.

In addition to education and local outreach, our main focus right now is the beautification of our worship space. We are blessed to have a number of quite talented skilled craftsmen in our parish, who make it possible for us to perform much of the work ourselves. One of our parishioners has fashioned beautiful leather panels for the iconostasis, giving us a very unique southwest feel. We are currently searching for full-size icons for the iconostasis to replace the temporary laminated ones that have been in use, and also are undertaking various minor projects to enhance the beauty of the temple, such as new flooring. Since we are so far away from most everything, we also have a parishioner who has undertaken the responsibility of melting down and purifying our candle stubs to make recycled candles for the Holy Table. It has enabled us to cut down on what would be a monstrous shipping cost to return the stubs and given us a bit of self-sufficiency, as well.

As you might surmise from the above, we are incredibly blessed to have such a dedicated group of parishioners. It is this dedication and faith that has enabled St Jonah's to accomplish so much in so short a period, by God's grace.

**St. Maximus the Confessor Orthodox Church
Denton Texas
Archpriest Justin Frederick**

St. Maximus is running record Sunday attendance so far this year of 89; Vigil attendance Saturday evening averages more than 36. We are within \$3000 of paying off our debt to the diocese, moving ahead on our project of building a permanent church. Regular liturgies on Thursdays have been well-attended by mothers homeschooling their children, and homilies directed towards the children have been well-received. The priest is working to develop two men as catechists to help in the work of introducing inquirers to the Orthodox Church and doing some of the work of catechizing catechumens.

St. Nektarios Orthodox Church

Waxahachie, Texas

Priest David Bozeman

We at St. Nektarios Orthodox Mission celebrate our third anniversary in July 2015. In the last year, we have seen significant changes to the mission and our work here in Waxahachie, TX. Our most significant change was the purchase of a historic home (1869) here in Waxahachie to serve as a new permanent home for the mission. Through our efforts, we were able to secure seller financing and raised enough money through gifts and the DOS "Church-friendly Loan" program to afford the down-payment. We closed on the property at the end of November 2014, began renovation work on the property, and celebrated our first Divine Liturgy on January 18, 2015. Being in the new property has provided us with greater fellowship area, beautiful green space with mature trees and lawn, and greater ease at keeping a full liturgical life.

We held a full Holy Week schedule in April and the season of Pentecost allowed us to add three catechumens to our mission. We did not have any occasion to celebrate any weddings or baptisms this year but look forward to those sacraments in the coming year. Average Sunday attendance has remained between thirty and thirty-five but now that we are in a permanent facility we hope to see significant growth. To this end we hosted an "Open House" in June and saw a number of visitors who expressed interest in our mission. I (Fr. David Bozeman) was able to attend the first OCA Mission School in Detroit earlier in the year along with our choir director, Reader Daniel Homiak. We both were encouraged and enlightened with a number of ideas to help facilitate spiritual maturity among the faithful and greater involvement in the surrounding community. We will be holding a series of self-assessment discussions in July to evaluate our progress over the last three years and plot our goals for the foreseeable future.

One significant community event was blessing the Labor & Delivery unit at the new Baylor Hospital in Waxahachie. I was asked (by Mat. Amy Bozeman, RN) to come and offer a few words and had the chance to bless both the hands of the nurses and administrators as well as the entire L&D unit. The reaction from the nurses and staff was strong and incredibly positive.

Wednesday evening has also been a good opportunity to hold community discussions following daily vespers. We began a series of talks open to the community based on Fr. Andrew Damick's book *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy* and it has turned out to be a lively time of discussion including Roman Catholics, Methodists, and even non-Christians. Having the doors open to these kinds of talks has allowed us to bring the community into us and we are seeing some spiritual fruit from the talks.

Three years is an important time in the development of the mission and as we turn to being more self-sustaining and spiritually mature, we anticipate that others will be drawn to the truth of Orthodoxy as we live it out in Waxahachie.

St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church
Denison/Sherman, Texas

Archpriest Michael Storozuk
(Pending)

St. Sava Orthodox Church
Allen, Texas
Priest Photius Avant
(Pending)

St Seraphim of Sarov Orthodox Cathedral
Dallas, Texas
Archimandrite Gerasim (Eliei)
Archpriest John Anderson

2014 was marked by on-going construction on the Archbishop Dmitri Memorial Chapel. Simultaneously, the former residence of Archbishop Dmitri was remodeled. Intensive cataloging work continued on the Archives of Archbishop Dmitri during 2014.

Metrical statistics:

14 Baptisms and Chrismations
1 Wedding
10 Funerals

Average attendance on Sundays 175
Average attendance on Saturday evening 25
Third Saturday of each month Liturgy in Slavonic, average attendance 35
Fourth Saturday of each month Liturgy in Spanish, average attendance 15
Confession takes place regularly on Wednesday through Saturday evenings

St Seraphim Cathedral hosted the 2014 Diocesan Assembly. This took months of preparation and involved many people working tirelessly.

Two Episcopal visits:

Hierarchical visit during Diocesan Assembly and again on September 14th, coinciding with the Assembly of Bishops in Dallas

Parish Events:

Fifth Sunday of Great Lent, Archpriest Chad Hatfield as celebrant and homilist
Pan-Orthodox Vespers, Priest John Mikita from St John of Damascus Church in Tyler, TX gave an address.
Mother's Day Luncheon for women of parish
Thanksgiving Dinner for Parish
St Nicholas Day celebration

Education:

Church School September through May: 50 students enrolled

Church School begins following reception of Holy Communion.
12-week inquirer's class taught by Deacon Gregory Conley (February through April),
representing a movement away from private instruction to public catechesis

Guest speakers:

Andrei Desnitsky from the Institute of Bible Translation in Moscow
Michael Paraskevas on Music Ministry with OCMC in Guatemala
Nicholas Chapman on Orthodox Christianity in Colonial America
St Katherine's College Fundraiser
Hieromonk Alexei Altschul: Mount Athos and the Spiritual Life

Financial:

General Tithe income increased 15–20%
Exterior lighting on Cathedral property restored and enhanced.

