



Mississippi Deanery Report 2017 DOS Assembly

The Mississippi River Deanery (MRD) was founded in 2015. It is composed of seven missions and one parish in a five state region: Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi and Memphis, TN. Over the last two years, the priests serving in this region have worked together to form a cohesive brotherhood, to learn from each other, pray for one another and make plans for the future. Of primary importance is the spiritual health and overall wellbeing of the local churches we currently serve. Thanks be to God, over the last two years two new buildings have been constructed, an existing Greek Orthodox temple was purchased for relocation purposes and a new parcel of land was recently bought for future development. These developments reflect an overall increase in attendance and a more comprehensive liturgical within the deanery. These blessings have resulted in the need to form two new mission stations in Longview, TX and Nacogdoches, TX. Going forward, our hope is that we continue to grow internally and externally. The MRD covets your prayers as we seek God's guidance and direction in the year to come.

Following, for your review, are the mission/parish reports submitted by our clergy.

Holy Resurrection Church Clinton, MS Archpriest Paul Yerger

We hosted a Women's Retreat November 12 sponsored by the three local Orthodox churches. The speaker was Fr. Stephen Rogers of St. Ignatius Church, Franklin, TN. It was well attended and appreciated.

In December a six by eight foot mural of the Paralytic at the Pool in Jerusalem was received from Fr. Andrew Tregubov of Claremont, NH.

In December three adults were received by chrismation.

On Sunday, January 8, we participated in the Blessing of Water at the local Ross Barnett Reservoir on the Pearl River. This had been done together by the three local Orthodox Churches for more than 20 years.

Archbishop Alexander, Archimandrite Gerasim, Fr. Marcus Burch, Fr. Jason Foster, our lay founder, Dr. Frank Kulik, and many others joined us February 4-5 for our 40th anniversary celebration.

On March 5 we participated in Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers at St. George's Antiochian Church in Vicksburg, the oldest Orthodox Church in Mississippi.

Holy Week services were well-attended, but attendance generally is down from last year.

One adult was received into membership by Chrismation on Holy Saturday, April 15.

We participated in a combined Paschal Vespers and meal at Holy Trinity and St. John the Theologian Greek Orthodox Church in Jackson. The three local churches rotate in hosting this.

Our finances are good. Regular collections and spending are within budget and we have a good reserve of unrestricted special gifts for improvements and emergencies.

Respectfully submitted, Archpriest Paul Yerger

**Christ the Saviour
McComb, MS**

Priest Jason Foster

Christ the Saviour has been without a priest for approximately one year. During that time, the faithful have come together to keep the mission moving forward. They have updated the parsonage, met for services and put together an attractive package for the right priest. The mission has a beautiful temple, parish hall and grounds. More importantly, there are many wonderful people who call Christ the Saviour home and are excited about the future. Thanks be to God, Priest Joshua Trant, who serves the faithful at St. Matthew the Apostle in Baton Rouge, has graciously served various services for the members of Christ the Saviour; and over the summer Priest Joseph Towne (ROCOR) has been serving the Divine Liturgy for them each week.

Please keep them in your prayers as they patiently wait on God to send them a priest that will love and serve them.

Respectfully submitted, Priest Jason Foster

**Holy Nativity of the Lord Orthodox Church
Shreveport, LA
Priest Jason Foster**

The faithful of Holy Nativity were blessed with a very productive year. After an extended construction period, we finally received our Certificate of Occupancy and officially moved into our new building. Consequently, we are enjoying a fuller liturgical life during the week and on weekends. Also, having our own facility has enabled us to host various events for our parishioners and deanery as well as pilgrims and priests traveling through our area.

In the fall, we welcomed Fr. Stephen Freeman. He, as expected, thanks be to God, did a wonderful job of presenting various topics to our deanery priests and greater Orthodox community. In January, we

hosted our first All Saints Winter Camp. We were surprised and excited to see over 70 children and youth from our four-state region gather together for a weekend to learn more about how to prepare for and participate in Great Lent. In February, Khouria Krista West spent a wonderful weekend with our women discussing the topic of beauty. And, lastly, we had visitors (laity and clergy) stay in our bell tower as they were traveling through our area. All things considered, I am thankful we are using our “multipurpose” building according to our plans and design.

Regarding numerical growth, since January of this year we have been blessed to baptize and or chrismate 28 people. Currently, we have 10 catechumens preparing for entrance into the Church before Nativity and six inquirers who are visiting. Our average Saturday Great Vespers and Sunday Divine Liturgy attendance is approximately 60 and 105, respectively. On a normal Wednesday, 65 to 70 gather for vespers, a meal and age appropriate education classes. With this influx of people, it has created new ministry and administrative challenges that we are struggling to address in an efficient and effective manner. There is a lot of work to be done going forward and we are praying for God’s guidance and direction regarding what we are to do and how we are to do it.

Holy Nativity currently has a combined 65 children and youth. Many of these young people are homeschooled. After two years of praying and discussing what we could do in regards to a collective education program, we launched St. Basil’s Orthodox Co-op last fall. At the beginning of our first academic year, we welcomed 15 students and four teachers. On Tuesdays, St Basil’s gathers for matins and a full day of coursework; and Thursday morning begins with the Divine Liturgy. The children’s choir is heavenly. It has been a blessing to watch them grow and develop spiritually, intellectually and liturgically. God willing, we will have nine new students in the fall.

The last “high point” of the year was our recent All Saints Summer Camp that was held for the third year in Ledbetter, TX. We had a record attendance of 106 campers and 20 staff personnel. Participants joined us from LA, TX, OK, AR and MS. It truly was pan-Orthodox as children, youth and staff joined us from the OCA, GOA, AOC and ROCOR. The hard work and planning between the Dallas Deanery and Mississippi River Deanery was well worth the effort as our young people enjoyed a week of daily services, focus groups, crafts, games, theme nights, activities and making new Orthodox friends.

Respectfully submitted, Priest Jason Foster

St Matthew the Apostle Orthodox Church
Baton Rouge, LA
Priest Joshua Trant

The parish has had a relatively calm year. After a tumultuous 2016, we have focused on rebuilding the liturgical life of the parish, giving primary attention to weekend services, a midweek service, and feasts days. We have transitioned from a donor supported paid choir to a choir supplied entirely from the parish and are working on getting our service books updated. Our attendance is lower than we had hoped but giving is up over previous years.

As of this writing, we have a contract on a piece of property and are hoping to construct a simple building consisting of combined parish hall and worship space, allowing us room to grow and a space that better suits our needs.

It is a blessing to see the parish dynamics change in subtle ways, as members step into new leadership roles and begin to take responsibility for the life of the parish. We have a strong core group of members that has made my transition as the new priest of the parish much easier than it could have been and most often a joyful process. Overall, during the past year we have witnessed God's faithfulness as we strive to move forward as a parish.

Respectfully submitted, Priest Joshua Trant

Ss George & Alexandra Orthodox Mission

Fort Smith, AR

Priest Nicholas Roth, Archpriest John Maxwell and Priest Paul Fetsko

The highlights of the past year for Ss George & Alexandra would undoubtedly include the mission's decision at its last annual meeting to finally pursue having a full-time priest for the first time in its 20-year history, culminating in the assignment of Fr Nicholas Roth in May 2017. That, with the leadership and guidance of Frs John Maxwell, Paul Fetsko and John Wehling over those years, has put the mission in an advantageous position to move forward with renewed enthusiasm and dedication to growing the Orthodox Faith in Fort Smith.

With Fr Nicholas' arrival, the mission is again serving Vespers during the week. The cycle of services includes Vespers on Wednesday and Saturday evening, the Hours and Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning, as well as additional services for the Great Feasts and other Saints. Although there are about 85 people in total associated with the mission, the average attendance at Divine Liturgy is about 40, with the average attendance at Vespers hovering around a dozen. There is currently one catechumen, as well as three inquirers, and a family that has recently moved to Fort Smith from Ukraine has begun coming to church. During the past year, Ss George & Alexandra had one baptism, one chrismation, and two deaths.

We continue to enjoy strong relations with St John of Chicago Mission in Rogers. The folks at St John came down at the end of May to welcome Fr Nicholas and Matushka Mary, and we will return the favor for their patronal feast in October. Hopefully it will become a local tradition!

We have also been able to send two of our members, Matushka Debra Maxwell and Lydia Stewart, to St Tikhon's Seminary in May to receive chorale conducting training, as well as to become certified to teach the Catechism of the Good Shepherd. CGS is a priority for us, with instruction beginning in full this fall. In order to properly facilitate CGS, we are also looking to do some work on our parish hall, as it is currently a limiting factor in our growth: the building is about 75 years old and is in great need of renovations. Thankfully, we are debt-free, which will allow us to make progress on this goal uninhibited. Additionally, we had a 57% increase in giving from 2015 to 2016, and we are on track to realize another 14% increase in 2017 if current levels hold.

We were also able to send three of our youth to Camp All Saints in Ledbetter, TX this year, along with one parent as a camp chaperone. All of them immensely enjoyed the experience and are eager to return next year, hopefully with more of our youth in tow.

The main focus of our community outreach is the Fort Smith Community Rescue Mission, a local faith-based homeless shelter. One of our members works there, and Ss George & Alexandra has had a

member on their board of directors for a number of years. This creates a number of opportunities for both giving and volunteering.

As Ss George & Alexandra is located in the section of the former Fort Chaffee, a WWII-era training base that has been sold off and privatized for development, we anxiously await the revitalization that this is supposed to bring. Current plans call for the Arkansas College of Health Sciences to welcome its first class in 2020, a \$21 million building project on Fort Chaffee just two miles from the Church. With it will come about 2,000 housing units, as well as potentially 30 retail businesses. Needless to say, this would greatly enhance our ability to evangelize in our current location.

We continue to pray for Fr John Maxwell as he continues his fight with cancer, and we would ask you to remember him in your prayers, too.

Respectfully submitted, Priest Nicholas Roth

**Saint John of Chicago Orthodox Mission
Rogers, AR
Priest John Wehling**

We were blessed in the past year to see continued growth at the mission. We had several persons move to the area who were already Orthodox, others who already lived here and were Orthodox who discovered the mission, and a handful of converts.

Financially, it was a year of transition as Fr John Wehling was relieved of his half-time responsibilities at Ss George and Alexandra in Fort Smith and became full-time at St. John. This has been challenging but we, by the grace of God, are staying afloat.

We continue to look for ways to become more visible in the community, including future involvement at local farmers' markets. We also are continuing work to beautify the Temple.

2016-17 Metrical Numbers

Baptisms: 2

Chrismations: 2

Weddings: 0

Funerals: 0

Adult members: 40

Children: 20

Catechumens: 2

Respectfully submitted, Priest John Wehling

**St. George Orthodox Church (Formerly St. Seraphim Orthodox Church) i
Memphis, TN
Archpriest Mark Sutton**

Voting members-37

Average Sunday attendance-40

Average Great Vespers (Sat) attendance-6

Percentage increase/decrease in total receipts from 2016 to 2017-216% increase

Total parish (active/infrequent/seekers)-95

Attendance for Pascha 2017-50

We purchased a new church on March 15, 2017 and had our first Sunday Liturgy on April 2. We changed our name from St. Seraphim to St. George to honor the saint and all the work done by the former congregation who resided in the building for 30 years. Fifteen of the former church members continue to attend the new St. George.

Our efforts over the last 12 months have been dominated by the sale of St. Seraphim and the purchase of St. George and moving. We worked extensively with our Dean Fr. Jason Foster and Mr. John Della Monica of the Orthodox Church Capitalization Investment Fund to acquire the property.

We currently are cleaning and renewing the three bedroom house on the property as a guest house and office.

Many gave extra time and money to make the transition.

Respectfully submitted, Archpriest Mark Sutton

St. John of Damascus Mission
Tyler, TX
Priest John Mikita

This year has been one of unprecedented growth for our mission. The “bump” that is possible with new construction set in and we saw record attendance throughout Great Lent through the Spring, seeing over one hundred for Pascha for the first time. We brought 11 catechumens into the Faith on Holy Saturday, will bring in 7 more in late summer, and have a growing class for the Fall.

We continue to work towards meeting our debt obligations with the Diocese, curtailing additional infrastructure needs while focusing on membership growth.

We have also been very excited to see the declaration of mission stations in Longview to our north and Nacogdoches to our south, comprised mostly of parishioners currently traveling long distances to Tyler. Longview Mission Station had their first meeting in mid-July with 29 in attendance.

Respectfully submitted, Priest John Mikita