

Atlanta Deanery 2016 Reports

St. Mary of Egypt Church, Norcross, GA

Glory be to God, the time from July, 2015 to July, 2016 has been active as usual for St. Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church in Norcross, GA. Last year's diocesan assembly, of course, coincided with the All-American Council in Atlanta. Our parish had an active role in this event in that the two lay-chairs for the council, Michaela Staskiewicz and Barbara Massoudi are members of St. Mary of Egypt. Also, we provided a number of volunteers, and liturgical supplies for this event.

This past year, we were also, blessed with a visitation of the wonderworking Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God to our parish. This is the second time we have had this tremendous privilege. Both times, we have had large crowds, and many reports of the operation of God's grace through this holy icon.

Other events that should be highlighted include celebrations that were organized at the parish for the 50th anniversary of the ordination to the priesthood of Archpriest Dimitri Oselinsky, and the 70th birthday of Archpriest Peter Smith. We are indeed thankful for the continuing ministry in Christ's vineyard. Fr. Dimitri currently serves the mission in Montgomery, AL twice a month, and Fr. Peter serves St. Tikhon's in Chattanooga, TN twice a month.

Along with our fairly active liturgical life, we were also blessed to celebrate 5 baptisms, and 2 marriages. At the time of this writing, we have one adult catechumen, and a couple of inquirers. Currently, we have an adult study group on *The Arena* by St. Ignatius Brianchaniniov being taught on Thursday evenings.

Several outreach ministries should be recognized. One family from our Church, the Hostetters, has taken a group of 15 youths to Belgrade, Serbia for an experience in Orthodox country. Also, we continue our annual summer "Shoes for School" ministry, in which we raise fund to purchase shoes for children who are not able to afford new shoes. This ministry has received much thanks from area schools over the years. Last, we have a Bible study involving parishioners from St. Mary's being conducted in Athens, GA. This has been organized by Reader Thomas Hobbs, and has been well received by those of our faithful who live at this considerable distance from the parish.

The facilities have had repairs done to the front of the Church, and the Crosses on the outside have received new paint jobs.

Many thanks need to be given to our current parish council who labor hard to make sure that the life of the parish continues smoothly. Special thanks go to Nathan Klingensmith and Patrick Lancaster for their work over the past couple of years to streamline, organize, and bring efficiency to our finances and methods of paying bills.

Last of all, we cannot possibly thank Deacon Lazarus Muska enough for his day to day efforts on behalf of our Church. and to George Dickey for his diligent, "behind the scenes" work as warden.

St. John the Wonderworker Church – Atlanta, GA

The past year at St John's has been one of many blessings!

At this time last year, St. John's was preparing to help host the All American Council, a first for many of in the parish. Many adults and children in the parish volunteered, and attended meetings, workshops and events. Everyone experienced a new awareness of the larger mission and purpose of the Church that set the tone for the year ahead.

Loaves & Fishes Food Program was blessed with a visit from Metropolitan Tikhon and most of the Hierarchs during the AAC last summer. We proudly display the Grammata honoring the work of Loaves and Fishes, which Mat Rebecca Myers accepted on behalf of her husband, Fr. Jacob and all those who worked to build the program.

The Pan-Orthodox Loaves and Fishes program continues to serve the homeless and indigent of the community at St. John's. We serve an average of 60 people at each meal Monday through Friday. Volunteer social workers come in 2 days a week to help our clients connect with needed resources. The clients now do most of the food prep, cooking and clean-up. If they are reliable and do a good job, we gladly recommend them to area employers. Money is always tight, but we were blessed with a \$25,000 gift from one of the charities at Annunciation Greek Cathedral, along with a generous donation collected at the AAC, which has allowed us to operate this year.

As an important component to "expanding the Mission" in Atlanta, in October 2015 we were blessed to purchase property adjacent to the church. After almost 3 years of negotiation and attempts at commercial financing, things looked dim until a parishioner offered to make an anonymous loan for a large portion of the purchase price.

With very limited space, lack of storage, and virtually no "green space," we were desperate to expand in a neighborhood where real estate prices continue to skyrocket. The new parish house needs work, but we've painted and repaired the exterior of the main house, which is a great improvement. With a beautiful yard and garden, now with a donated play structure, the community held 2 wedding parties and several festive events in the yard.

St. John's was again invited to be on the Grant Park Candlelight Tour of Homes in December – the only church on the tour. We were asked back by popular demand! Several hundred people visited the church during the 2-night event, while parish volunteer were busy answering

questions. We could hardly believe how taken people were with our relatively humble place of worship. We hope to make it an annual event.

We continue to welcome many visitors and new members to St John's. Our numbers are up despite losing members to a new mission on the other side of Atlanta. At Pascha, 6 new members were received in the Church by Baptism and/or Chrismation. In addition, there are a number of Orthodox families and individual who've moved here from other cities. 130 individuals signed pledge cards this year, up from 75 the year before.

Atlanta is booming again, with many young people opting to live in-town. A good percentage of St. John's parish is made up of "Millennials." They've formed an active young adult group which has become a magnet for others in that generation. We also have many young children and are in serious discussion about the best way to engage them in church in a creative and meaningful way through childhood and into adolescence and beyond.

Atlanta has a large African-American population and a reputation as a place of opportunity for people of color. It's our desire and I think the Lord's will that our congregation represent the diversity of the surrounding community. In January, we started a local Brotherhood of St Moses with 8 people, black and white, committed to working on our own unexamined biases and making our parish a welcoming haven to all people.

In July, the local Brotherhood hosted a forum on the Orthodox approach to reconciliation between races, inviting Fr. Jerome Sanderson and Dcn. Turbo Qualls, and our own Subdeacon Basil Moses Martin to speak from their personal journeys to Orthodoxy. In planning, we had no idea that it would take place in the wake of recent, disturbing racial incidents, which made discussion all the more serious. Nonetheless most of us left the conference with a sense of joy and hopefulness.

As you can see there is a lot going on here, not always neat and orderly but never boring. I am very grateful and humbled for the privilege of serving at St. John's with such a wonderful community and the exceptional guidance of our diocesan leaders.

Thank you all for your prayers and loving support!

In Christ,

Priest Thomas Alessandrone

HOLY MYRRHBEARERS ORTHODOX MISSION MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

Holy Myrrhbearers Orthodox Mission meets twice monthly for Great Vespers on Saturday evening and Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning at the Chapel of Holy Cross Episcopal School on 4400 Bell Road in Montgomery, Alabama.

The present mission membership is 10 adults and 3 children. We do have visitors from time to time. Attendance at Great Vespers ranges from 5 to 7 people and 10 to 15 people for Divine Liturgy. All members of the mission faithfully participate in the holy sacraments of the Church.

William (Peter) and Shannon (Martha) Thompson continue to serve as the contact people for the mission. Please check the Diocesan website for further information.

We welcome all visitors to the Montgomery area to come and pray with us at Holy Myrrhbearers, and we are always looking for Orthodox people who have moved into the area.

In Christ our Lord,
Archpriest Dimitri Oselinsky (retired)

{And we note that Fr. Dimitri celebrated his 50th Anniversary in the holy priesthood, on May 29, 2016! Many Years, Father Dimitri !! }

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. Of course at Pascha the church is full. We continue to have sporadic visitors and inquirers. This year we have not had many inquirers or catechumens as we have in previous years. On the other hand we have had a few Orthodox people and families move to our area and join our community. It seems that God is always sending people to us.

The day to day ministries of the parish continues. Church school is still going well and is divided into three groups. The choir meets regularly for practice and continues to grow in talent and ability. The prison ministry still meets weekly at Central State Prison in Macon. This year we have baptized or chrismated 3 inmates, 2 who are deaf and one who was a Sufi Muslim from Turkey of all places! In prison our typical gathering has around 12 attendees. Last summer we

worked with FOCUS do deliver backpacks to the less fortunate school children in our area. We continue to have adult education classes on Sundays. Our book club which meets every six weeks or so has read and discussed around 6 books this past year. Fr. Theophan continues to be regularly invited to the local colleges to give presentations on Orthodox Christianity.

This past year we decided to undergo a parish health assessment with Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff's "Orthodox Natural Church Development" program. The program assesses parish health in eight areas and is designed to give the parish an opportunity to discuss corporate strengths and weaknesses and to strategize for the future. Along the same lines, but in a much different way, Fr. Steven Voytovich, the current dean of St. Tikhon's Seminary, gave a Lenten retreat which also included a parish health assessment. The good news is that both assessments came to the conclusion that we are generally healthy, thanks be to God! Our high score was in "Inspiring Worship Service." Of course there are always areas to improve in and now we know what they are.

As we look to the future our first priority has become doing the work necessary to design and finance a permanent parish hall. We have an architect and we have been steadily working towards a design that complements our beautiful temple. 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. Other committees are working in the background such as our iconography and cemetery committee. However, most of our energy and focus committee wise is being put into the parish hall which is our greatest need at this point.

Finally, we are preparing to celebrate our 20th anniversary (since the founding of St. Innocent Mission) in September of this year. As part of this anniversary event one of our parishioners is working on a mini documentary which will feature interviews with a few of the original founders. We are also preparing a historical narrative of the founding of our parish and creating a photo archive.

As we head into our 20th year it is our hope that God would continue to grace us, guide us, send us spiritually hungry people and help us to do His work in the Middle Georgia region.

- Fr. Theophan Buck

St. Symeon Orthodox Church, Birmingham, AL

It has been a very full year at St. Symeon's in Birmingham. Following our communities' participation in preparatory and choir contributions to the All-American Council in Atlanta last July, 2015, we then hosted the annual Pastoral Conference at St. Symeon's in February, 2016, with Fr. Deacon Stephen Muse as our speaker. It appears that our communities' efforts in hosting the participants were well received and it was

very gratifying and encouraging for our folks to meet and fellowship with our Diocesan clergy. Just the week prior to that, we had marked one full year and liturgical cycle in our new temple. In reviewing the eventful recent years, this coming year at St. Symeon's would appear to be a relatively quiet one, by comparison! We do hope to have an Archpastoral visit by His Grace, Bishop Alexander.

We had another record Pascha attendance, our second Pascha in the new temple. There was an adult retreat in Lent and also a children's retreat in June. Our choir director, Alex Fecanin, and seven of our singers are travelling in Europe this July with other local college singers as the Americora Choir. My oldest daughter, Anastasia, was married on June 5 - a wonderful day.

We bid farewell this year to two of our original members, Archpriest Demetrius Edwards, pastor of St. Gregory's Mission in Tuscaloosa and Mr. Columba Robertson – Memory Eternal!

- Fr. Alexander Fecanin

St. Luke Orthodox Mission, Anniston, Alabama

We returned from last year's Diocesan Assembly and All-American Council in Atlanta, encouraged to take up the challenge of expanding and growing our mission here in Eastern Alabama. We currently rent a historic stone mansion for our temple. The desired next step is to acquire a permanent home for the Lord's altar in this area. A piece of property was found, which seemed perfect for our next phase. It included a church, parish hall and a house for the priest. Over the course of half of the year, we worked tirelessly with the owners and with the Diocesan Treasurer to work out a practical financial path forward to taking possession of it. In the end, the entire process unravelled, leaving us somewhat mystified. I always remember St. John Chrysostom's last words in exile before his repose: "Glory to God for all things!" So we remain at the moment, still renting a place for our temple, but we have faith that God has a plan for us. My personal perspective on the past year's search for property is that it was a very valuable learning experience. The next time the opportunity develops, we will be both better informed and more prepared. For the moment we identify with those of you who have gone through similar experiences in recent years. St. Porphyrios always counseled "Faith and Patience" and to that holy advice we will attend.

Otherwise, the year has been both blessed and full of growth. We baptized and chrismated four adults and added another two Orthodox couples who relocated to our area. We also have four catechumens at present and about five or so inquirers. Our Holy Week services saw record attendance and at Holy Pascha, we had over seventy join us, setting another new record for our mission. We rented a large tent for the parish lawn and decorated it with a chandelier and lights for the Paschal feast. This proved to

be so popular that we will make it a traditional facet of our annual celebration. We have also purchased a smaller tent for use during our very lively coffee hour following Liturgy.

We emphasize community and prayer throughout the week and not just on the weekend. To that end, we serve Matins on most days of the week and are starting the next session of our Wednesday evening class on the Holy Scriptures. We hosted my former seminary professor, Fr. Juvenally Repass, after Great Vespers, to speak about his missionary labors both past and in preparation for future work in Guatemala. Following this, we established bulletin boards in the parish hall to keep people up to date on Orthodox mission work around the world and how they can contribute toward aiding it. Just this past weekend, we had our Annual Picnic at the lake, hosted by one of our families who live on a beautiful body of water with a dock and boat. Many families were able to attend and the children especially reveled in swimming.

Finally, my Matushka's mother, Khouria Jedonne Cecilia Rhudy, unexpectedly passed away in February. She and her husband, the retired priest, Fr. Stephen Rhudy, have been living here and laboring with us since 2009. She was a key part of our choir and is much missed. Her funeral was the first for our mission and it proved to be amazingly Paschal in its bright radiance. Fr. Alexander Fecanin and some of his choir from St. Symeon's in Birmingham joined us for the funeral. We were able to take her to her final resting place at the beloved Sts. Mary and Martha Monastery in SC. Now she labors for us in prayer in the Lord's Kingdom. May He bless and guide our path forward.

Fr. Basil Henry - Priest-in-charge

St. Basil's Orthodox Mission, Marietta, Georgia

St. Basil's purchased their first property this year and are very hopeful for future growth.

St. Gregory the Theologian Mission, in Tuscaloosa

The Mission's founder, Fr. Demetrius Edwards, fell asleep in the Lord on December 27, 2015. May his memory be eternal! Fr. Seraphim Joa (retired) of Huntsville has served the community periodically. There are about a dozen adults in the Mission.

Sts. Constantine and Helen Mission, Helena/Mcrae, Georgia

This mission is served on two Saturdays a month by Hieromonk James (Bohlman) of St. Mary Magdalene in Rincon. It also will be served periodically by Fr. Theophan from Macon. This Mission likewise has around 12 members.

– *Fr. Alexander Fecanin*