

## **Mississippi River Deanery Report for DOS Assembly 2016**

The Mississippi River Deanery (MRD) encompasses Tyler, TX, Arkansas, Memphis, TN, Mississippi, Mobile, AL and Louisiana. It is made up of seven missions, one parish and nine priests. The following mission/parish reports detail the life of each respective local gathering over the last year. We collectively ask for your prayers as we continue to seek to fulfill the Great Commission in our unique geographical areas that make up the MRD.

### **Holy Resurrection Church**

**Clinton, Mississippi**

**Priest Paul Yerger**

I think most people would say that the biggest thing to happen to Holy Resurrection in the past year was the falling asleep of Matushka Sissy in October. She was so central in parish life from the very beginning that being without her is a big change for everyone.

Our attendance has been lower this year: 60-70 on an average Sunday compared to 70-85 last year. Several large families have moved away; we have gained some new members and attendees but no large families. Contributions are higher, averaging \$10,257 per month the first five months of 2016 compared to \$9,760 per month for the year 2015. Since last July we have baptized five children, chrismated adults, buried five members and two non-members. We had no marriages. We have about 90 adults and 40 children who come at least every month or so. We have a lot of small children and babies. At present we have five adult catechumens. We have two young men at monasteries.

Our Sunday Church School has been held more consistently than ever. We are sending only three youth to Orthodox camps this summer compared to seven last year. Families and children seem to be too busy with other things.

We have begun to pay a token stipend to an Assistant Choir Director, Claudia Morris, to provide some vacation and backup for Subdeacon John Wood, who has wielded the baton faithfully here since 1982.

For many years we have reserved all unrestricted gifts from non-members and special nonrecurring gifts from members as "special funds" that don't go into our operating fund. They are used for major repairs, improvements, or other projects. Using these funds this December we were able to gut the two disgusting rest rooms in our Archbishop Dmitri Parish Hall and put in all new floors, wallboard, ceilings and fixtures. They now look as good as any at First Baptist.

We had some visitors we did not welcome: raccoons and opossums who took up residence in the attic of the temple. We had to pay a large chunk of special funds to professionals to trap and remove them, clean up their soil, and install steel barriers all around the roofline.

Four by eight foot murals of the Marriage Feast at Cana and the Meal at Emmaus by Fr. Andrew Tregubov of Claremont, NH, were installed in November, and we have two more on order, The Paralytic and Sts. Peter and John at the Tomb, with several portrait icons. In June we received a four by eight foot outdoor icon of the Descent into Hades by Subdeacon Vladimir Grygorenko, given in memory of Matushka Sissy. It will be installed outside above the front door of the Temple.

We try to have a guest speaker every year. This July we will have Mother Christophora, Abbess of the Monastery of the Transfiguration, Ellwood City, PA.

We are blessed to have very close relations with the other Orthodox churches in the Jackson area, two Antiochian and one Greek. We do several events together each year and the priests have lunch together monthly.

We still worship God, pay the bills, and most important, love each other. Thanks be to God!

Respectfully submitted, Priest Paul Yerger

**St John of Chicago Orthodox Mission  
Rogers, AR  
Priest John Wehling and Priest Paul Fetsko**

Membership - As of the feast of Ss Peter and Paul we have four catechumens at St John and other enquirers visiting the mission. Also, we added four new Orthodox families to the mission who moved to Northwest Arkansas this past year.

Christian Education - The youth group continues to meet on Wednesday evenings as well as periodic parties and service/ministry events. Three of our youth attended Camp All Saints this summer. Alice Cartwright, one of our founding members, spent the last several months training to lead our children's education with the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. She will begin instruction this fall. Adult education coincided with weekly classes following Vespers on Wednesday evenings.

Liturgical - As well as the weekly services of the resurrection we have a midweek Vespers and Liturgy, as well as Vigil and Liturgy for feast days.

Temple beautification - Our ongoing Temple beautification project continued with the addition of new shrines/kiots for the Nave, icons for the shrines, candle stands, and new benches. A new chalice and diskos were donated in the summer of 2016 and a set of liturgical fans have been ordered.

Rdr Barnabas Staff regularly updates the mission website with liturgical music for various services, including hymns of the octoechos, menaion, Triodion, and Pentecostarion.

Fr. John Maxwell - We continue to pray for Fr John Maxwell as the cancer has become active once again and he undergoes treatment.

Respectfully submitted, Priest John Wehling

**Ss George and Alexandra Orthodox Mission  
Ft. Smith, AR  
Priest John Wehling and Priest John Maxwell**

Membership - We received one new member this past year and baptized two infants. At present we have one catechumen and several enquirers. An Orthodox young man joined the parish after moving here following graduation from university. A lapsed family returned to the Orthodox Faith during Great Lent. And, lastly, this spring we buried a long-standing member of the community who reposed suddenly.

Education - Our adult class/discussion group has continued this year. There has been good participation and some enquirers to the Church, as well. This fall we will begin weekly Church School for our younger children. We will also begin a weekly Orthodoxy 101 class this fall, aimed at both outreach and education.

Liturgical – As well as the weekly services of the resurrection we have a midweek Vespers and Liturgy.

Temple beautification - A new exterior door was installed in our Temple, giving it a much more pleasant and inviting appearance. We are exploring the possibility of purchasing/installing new icons for the iconostasis this year.

Fr. John Maxwell - We continue to pray for Fr John Maxwell as the cancer has become active once again and he undergoes treatment.

Respectfully submitted, Priest John Wehling

**St. Seraphim Orthodox Church  
Memphis Tennessee  
Priest Mark Sutton**

The following data provides some insight into St. Seraphim Orthodox Church in Memphis, TN:

Voting Members - 37

Average Sunday Attendance - 30

Average Great Vespers (Sat) Attendance - 4

Percentage increase/decrease in total receipts from 2013-2014 - 6.1%

Total parish (Active/Inactive/Seekers) - 73

Attendance for Pascha 2015 - 57

Since February we have actively sought to relocate to a better location. We made an offer on one place but did not get it. We continue to look but nothing suitable has been found.

Several of our members have had health issues and been unable to work which is why our total receipts are down.

We had one adult baptism and two infant baptisms.

Respectfully submitted, Priest Mark Sutton

**Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church**

**McComb, Mississippi**

**Priest Benedict Crawford - Priest in Charge until July 31, 2016**

Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church was established in 2004, a "daughter" parish of Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church in Clinton, Mississippi.

At this time our total membership (including those at the Hattiesburg Mission) is 41 adults and 22 children, plus 1 catechumen. Our average Sunday attendance is around 25 adults and around 13 children. Our usual schedule of services is: Saturday, Vespers 6:00 pm. Sunday, Divine Liturgy 10:00 am. Wednesday, Daily Vespers, 6:00 pm. In the past year we have celebrated 1 Baptism, 1 Chrismation, and 1 wedding.

Once a month the Divine Liturgy is served in Hattiesburg for the benefit of our members there. Reader Vespers is served every Friday evening. The Hattiesburg Mission Station has around 14 adults and 5 children.

Respectfully submitted, Priest Benedict Crawford

Note: Fr. Benedict's last Sunday at Christ the Saviour in McComb is Sunday, July 31<sup>st</sup>. Starting August 1<sup>st</sup>, he will be the Priest-in-Charge at St. Cyril of Jerusalem Mission in The Woodlands, TX.

**St. Matthew the Apostle**

**Baton Rouge, LA**

**Priest Joshua Trant – Priest-in-Charge beginning July 24, 2016**

St. Matthew's parish has had an eventful year. In January, while negotiating the purchase of a new property, the previous priest stepped down as priest-in-charge. Since that time, the parish has been subsisting on visiting clergy and holding readers services. Yet, even during that time, God's blessing upon the parish has been discernible as in the absence of a local, full-time priest, the parish has celebrated a baptism, the reception of a convert, and a wedding. In addition, being without a priest has helped to galvanize and refocus the lay leadership within the parish.

As expected, attendance over the past several months has been erratic. For the first half of 2016, the average attendance for a Sunday Divine Liturgy has ranged from 21-65 persons with an average of 37. For a Sunday Typika service, the numbers are unsurprisingly lower, ranging from 10-30 persons with an average of 19. The parish includes 15 families that are regular donors and an additional 12 new donors contributing specifically for the need of a finding a full time priest.

Respectfully submitted, Priest Joshua Trant

Note: Priest Joshua Trant will be officially transferred to St. Matthew the Apostle on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

**St. John of Damascus Mission**

**Tyler, TX**

**Priest John Mikita**

Since our last assembly the biggest event in the life of our parish has been moving into the new temple for our patronal feast on Dec. 4, 2015. The temple was designed by Presbytera Mirella Tudora and built by Michael Morton of Ashton Wynn Construction out of Dallas. While much work remains to be done we are continually overwhelmed by the blessing of offering the Divine Services in such a beautiful place.

We continue to work through the challenge of serving a wide geographical region in establishing the patterns of worship, education, and fellowship in our parish. Some parishioners travel nearly two hours to attend services, and a great many about one hour. This leads us to continue to consolidate our offerings so that one trip to the parish can yield a multitude of experiences. Our prayer is to plant new missions to the north and south of Tyler.

Respectfully submitted, Priest John Mikita

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

Thanks be to God! Things at Holy Nativity are going well. We are approximately two weeks away from the completion of our first building. The construction process has been a challenge for all of us: dealing with contractors, finishing touches, landscaping, etc. However, being able to gather in a beautiful location we can finally call home is well worth the struggle and sacrifice it took to get there. Glory to God for all things!

The following statistical data presents a portion of the picture of where we are at this point in time as a mission:

Total number of active parish members/seekers: 120

Average attendance on Sunday for Divine Liturgy: 95 -110

Average attendance on Wednesday for Vespers: 58-68

Average attendance at Great Vespers on Saturday night: 55-60

Total number of current catechumens: 25

Total number of inquirers preparing to be received into the catechumenate: 3

Great and Holy Pascha attendance: 112

Highest attendance to date: 119

What the aforementioned numbers do not communicate is where we need to focus more of our time, talent and treasure as a church family. Specifically, we need to cultivate a richer liturgical life together, develop better education programs for all of our members, engage more as a community in outreach ministries and design a more thorough catechism for those preparing to enter the Church. In recognition of this, we have determined to make September 7th a major launch date for the mission where these internal and external spiritual challenges will be addressed. God willing, our report next year will include a summary of the fruitfulness of these new efforts.

Respectfully submitted, Priest Jason Foster

Please know we as the priests of the MRD welcome any thoughts and comments you might have regarding how to better serve our people and engage others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you have any suggestions, we ask that you forward them to Fr. Jason Foster at [frjasonfoster@gmail.com](mailto:frjasonfoster@gmail.com).

May God continue to richly bless the Diocese of the South!