

Mississippi River Deanery (MRD) 2019 Diocesan Assembly Report

The Mississippi River Deanery (MRD) encompasses East Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Memphis and Mississippi. The clergy within the deanery seek to prayerfully support each other, and to gather together twice a year for retreats. This last Fall we rented a cabin on Beaver Lake in Northwest Arkansas and last month we welcomed Jonathan Pageau for a series of lectures at Holy Nativity in Shreveport, LA. The MRD is dedicated to serving Archbishop Alexander, strengthening the missions and parishes that are currently being served, and planting new works as the opportunity presents itself. Following is a summary of the past year for each location within the deanery:

Holy Nativity of the Lord Orthodox Mission Shreveport, LA

Thanks be to God, Holy Nativity is transitioning into a mature mission. Over the last year, services were offered at least five days a week, more people are taking on roles of responsibility and a collective vision for the future is being realized. This internal focus has helped us reestablish priorities and better equip the laity for the missionary task at hand. Sunday Divine Liturgy average attendance ranges between 90 - 120 with 140 people being associated with the mission. Last year, we had two baptisms and two chrismations. At present, we have five catechumens. Other ministries overseen by Holy Nativity include the following: All Saints Winter Camp (78 campers); All Saints Summer Camp (180 participates); and St Basil's Orthodox Coop has 21 students enrolled for the fall. Also, the mission was blessed to have Dn Herman Garrison and his family as interns from St. Tikhon's for June and July. In conclusion, Holy Nativity, by the grace of God, is doing well and moving closer to parish status.

Respectfully submitted,
Priest Jason Foster

St. John of Damascus Orthodox Mission Tyler, TX

St. John of Damascus Mission has been through a significant change in the last year with the transfer of their founding pastor, Fr. John Mikita, and the arrival of a new priest. It seems that the parish managed to maintain its growth and positive community even with such a significant event. Since my arrival in November of 2018, we have baptized eight new individuals and chrismated three adults. We currently have six inquirers/catechumens and will begin a new catechism in the fall of 2019. We had 136 in attendance for Pascha this year, the largest ever for St. John's. We also celebrated our first wedding in May in the new temple. We have missions in both Longview and Nacogdoches and I meet with them once a month to help foster their growth. Most of the folks in the missions continue to travel to St. John's for regular services which enables the church to encourage and support their work. Overall, this year has been very positive spiritually, communally, and financially and we look forward to the remainder of the year. Christ is risen!

Respectfully Submitted,
Priest David Bozeman

St Matthew the Apostle Orthodox Church Baton Rouge, LA

St. Matthew's has had an eventful and blessed year. We moved locations from a store front to a stand alone building with separate worship and fellowship areas, received ten people into the Church, and celebrated a wedding. We benefit from having frequent visitors and have several inquirers that are planning to attend the catechumen class beginning in the fall. Though not a standard measure of church growth, we have graduated from a 40 cup coffee pot to a 60 cup coffee pot which is still not enough for some Sundays. Juggling the needs of the parish while working outside the church has proved tiring and frustrating though we have dedicated lay leaders who are committed to seeing the parish flourish.

Respectfully Submitted,
Priest Joshua Trant

**Ss George & Alexandra Orthodox Mission
Fort Smith, AR**

This marks the two-year anniversary of Fr Nicholas Roth coming to the Mission to serve as its first full-time priest in its 23-year history. As such, we continue to grow and become accustomed to a full-time schedule of services and other offerings at the Mission. While we still have sought to maintain stability, we have continued to augment our schedule with more offerings. In addition to the usual services of Great Vespers on Saturday and the Hours and Divine Liturgy on Sunday, as well as Vigil and Divine Liturgy for the Great Feasts, we have added a usual Wednesday Vespers and Thursday morning Divine Liturgy, changing to the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts and Lenten Matins during Great Lent. We have increased slightly to an average of around 40-45 people at Sunday Divine Liturgy (35-40 last year), and anywhere from 6-12 at the other services. This is of the approximately 80 total people (both adults and children, as well as regular and occasional attendees) associated with the Mission in one way or another. We currently have three inquirers, and received six people into the Faith in the past year, one Chrismation, and five Baptisms. We had one death (the funeral was served elsewhere), and no marriages.

In terms of highlights of the past year, the Mission had its first archpastoral visit from Archbishop Alexander in December – which was also its first visit by a bishop in over a dozen years. The faithful were appreciative of the visit, and hope His Eminence will return soon. While here, His Eminence also awarded Fr Paul Fetsko with the gold cross. The following month, in January, we also celebrated the 30th anniversary of Fr John Maxwell's ordination to the Priesthood, and then in February, His Eminence ordained once of our parishioners, Daniel Rudder, to the subdiaconate at St Sava Church in Allen, TX.

We continue to use the Catechism of the Good Shepherd in our Church School. With experience on our side, we are now making into a more useful program for the children. In addition to children's education, we have held a regular cycle of inquirer and catechumen classes, as well as introducing a book club that meets once a week in the evening. Our book during Great Lent was "How to Be a Sinner" by Dr Peter Bouteneff, and this fall we will begin "Churchianity vs Christianity" by Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of blessed memory.

Our increase in both total numbers as well as average attendance has had a positive effect on our finances, as well, with our year-to-date giving having increased 22.6% over this time last year (a total difference of approximately \$8,500). Because we have no debt and have had increased giving this year, we have been able to begin planning for a new parish hall. However, the current business and political climates of Fort Smith have presented some issues for us, so we have decided to postpone making any major decisions until we have more clarity, as if some of the issues are not resolved, it may necessitate our moving to a different location. Please keep us in your prayers as we try to discern our next steps and how best to fulfill our calling to be the light of Christ in Fort Smith. Our goal is not to be the biggest or the most popular church in Fort Smith, but – God willing – the most faithful.

Our major outreach program is being involved in Fort Smith Community Rescue Mission, the local homeless shelter for families and single mothers. We have one parishioner who is employed full-time there, which presents us with more opportunities to be involved. Currently, we volunteer approximately 15-20 hours each week, as well as host a monthly game night for the residents, and we donate 3% of our income to help them with their operating costs in doing Christ's work in the local community.

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

**St John of Chicago OCA Mission
Rogers, Arkansas**

The mission continues to grow, by the grace of God. We had eight baptisms and one chrismation since our last report. We also had three weddings this year. Our average attendance has been 63 persons at Divine Liturgy since January of this year. At the present we have three adult catechumens, five children, and a number of inquirers.

At present we have two Church School classes for children, as well as a midweek youth group. We have also had Sunday evening classes or groups for our young adults and a discussion (book) group met periodically.

We started a building fund as we are outgrowing our present building, particularly the fellowship hall.

Respectfully submitted,
Archpriest John Wehling

**St. George Orthodox Church
Memphis, TN**

By the grace of God, we celebrated our 2nd anniversary at our new location on March 15, 2019. Of the 15 former members of the St. George Greek OC nine are still with us, six having left for the Greek Annunciation OC.

A summary of our stats are as follows:

Voting Members-52
New Members-9
Voting members no longer voting-3
Average Sunday Attendance-45
Average Great Vespers Attendance-4
Percentage decrease/increase in total receipts in the period above-12.5% increase
Total Parish (Active/infrequent/seekers) -146
Attendance for Pascha 2019-70

Again this year we had an open house/bake sale/ and church tour event and every other week in March and April we served Lenten meals to the public. We also had a booth at the local fair.

We had several guests stay at St. Seraphim House, our hospitality house, and have continued to develop our Sunday School Program.

We upgraded all the lighting in the church to LED and will be adding more overhead lighting in the nave this year. We are also getting a new roof. We switched from Quicken to QuickBooks and are enjoying improved analysis and overview.

We did twelve services during Holy Week and Pascha. We continue to have three services a week and we are starting to see a few people from the neighborhood come by.

By God's grace, we continue to preach, teach and share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Respectfully submitted,
Archpriest Mark Sutton

**Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church
Clinton, MS**

We have about 135 members in 70 households who attend to some degree, with average Sunday attendance about 80 people.

At our Annual Meeting in January we approved an operating budget of \$11,500 per month.

Statistics July-December 2018:

1 Baptism of child
4 Chrismations of adults
1 Marriage
0 Burial

January - June 2019:

1 Baptism of child
1 Marriage
4 Burials

In March we were saddened by the repose of two long-time members, Subdeacon Peter McLeod and Paul Rohrig, who had attended the McComb church the last few years.

We are happy to see a revival of mission services in Hattiesburg, MS, about 100 miles southwest of our church, but when it has weekly Liturgies we will lose about a half-dozen good households.

Fr. Lawrence Farley of Langley, B.C., will speak here June 21-22, and Abbot Tryphon of Vashon Island, WA, October 25-26. The latter event is a women's retreat sponsored by the women of the three Jackson area Orthodox churches, but we will host it here at Holy Resurrection.

Glory to God for all things!

Respectfully submitted,
Archpriest Paul Yerger

**Christ the Saviour
McComb, MS**

The members of the mission in McComb, MS are steadfast and committed to the work of the Gospel. Christ the Saviour functions as a regional church with people traveling over an hour to attend services. As they continue to pray for a new priest, Fr Don Berge, a retired Antiochian priest out of Memphis, faithfully serves Great Vespers and the Divine Liturgy for them once a month with reader services being held consistently at other times. There are on average 25 people in attendance. This small but mature mission is dedicated to Christ and His Church. It is debt free with a beautiful temple, parish hall and parsonage. For a priest looking for a quiet and peaceful Southern town, McComb may be a perfect fit!

Respectfully submitted,
Priest Jason Foster - Dean

Mississippi River Deanery Mission Stations

St Ephrem the Syrian Mission Station Longview, TX

Fr David Bozeman continues to work with and serve the faithful in Longview, TX at St Ephrem the Syrian Orthodox Mission. At present, there are approximately 25 - 30 people that gather in a designated room at Trinity Episcopal Church once a month. This mission station continues to attract inquirers and eventually, God willing, will become a mission with weekly services. At present, the majority of the members faithfully attend St John's in Tyler, TX.

St Paisios Orthodox Mission Station Nacogdoches, TX

Fr David Bozeman also provides oversight for our mission station in Nacogdoches. It, along with St Ephrem's in Longview, is made up of people that attend St John's in Tyler, TX. Services are offered at the mission station once a month. "Nac" is home to Stephen F. Austin University as well as a small gathering of Orthodox Christians. At present, 10 - 15 people attend the monthly service. This area has a lot of potential and our hope and we hope can eventually bring all the Orthodox together to move forward with the Gospel.

Holy Cross Orthodox Mission Hattiesburg, MS

The faithful of Holy Cross have relaunched the mission in Hattiesburg which is located 70 miles north of Gulfport, Mississippi and 105 miles northeast of New Orleans, Louisiana. This "new" work has a lot of promise! It is the only Orthodox presence in a city that has a metro area population of approximately 150,000 people. Also, it is home to The University of Southern Mississippi. At present, there are approximately 15 - 25 people that gather for services once a month in a rented space. The faithful are trying to secure a permanent location. This will help the mission grow as they have a constant flow of people from the University and the surrounding area either reconnecting with the Orthodox faith or making inquiry. At present, Fr Don Berge is faithfully serving Great Vespers and the Divine Liturgy once a month with the laity engaging in reader services at other times. Holy Cross has a tremendous amount of potential. Please keep the faithful in your prayers as they seek to firmly establish the mission in Hattiesburg.

St Catherine's Orthodox Mission Station Columbus, MS

St Catherine's in Columbus does not have a full time priest, but this mission station functions like a parish. The faithful have already purchased and renovated an existing church building. Now, it is a beautiful Orthodox temple that is becoming well-known in the Columbus area. Although priest led services are not consistent, Fr Seraphim Joa serves as his schedule permits and Fr Paul Yerger offers his assistance as needed. Moreover, the faithful have a close relationship with Fr Alexander Fecanin and St Symeon's in Birmingham. St Catherine's does hold weekly reader services, Sunday school classes, book studies, etc. When a priest is serving the Divine Liturgy, there will be approximately 25 -30 people in attendance. Over the last year, they have had three baptisms and people interested in the catechumenate - including students at nearby Mississippi State University. The future is extremely promising for St Catherine's. Please keep them in your prayers as they continue to seek a priest that can serve them on a regular basis.

Respectfully submitted,
Priest Jason Foster - Dean

Glory to God for all things! Please continue to keep the MRD in your prayers as we seek to work the fields the Lord has given us that are ripe for harvest.