



Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Monastery

Report for the Diocese of the South

January 1, 2015 to June 20, 2016

Nativity Monastery enjoys a robust and positive relationship with the Pan-Orthodox community in North Central and Eastern Texas. As Orthodox Christians have become more familiar with the monastery in Kemp through themed retreats, burials and memorial services, celebrations of the Divine Liturgy on Saturdays and major feast days, and as its facilities have improved, the monastic community has attracted more visitors of all ages. Some are merely curious; some desire to experience the liturgical life of the Church in a small, quiet, rural setting; others come to give of their time and expertise; and, young people come for a deeper experience of their faith and to meet Orthodox youth from other parishes. Not a few come in contact with Orthodoxy for the very first time in the burial of a loved one in the St. Xenia Cemetery. In its mere seven years in Kemp, without question the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Monastery is emerging as an important resource in augmenting the spiritual and temporal experience of Orthodoxy beyond the parish.

The Liturgical Life of the Monastery

Visitors from parishes of many jurisdictions, from Athens, Austin, Denton, Dennison, the Greater Dallas-Fort Worth region, Shreveport, Tyler, Waco, Waxahachie, even Tulsa, OK, come to monastery for liturgical services and to enjoy monastic hospitality. The monastic community has been most fortunate in the dedication of many priests who have contributed to the liturgical life of the monastery. Father John Anderson (St. Seraphim) as the chaplain of the monastery serves the Divine Liturgy on Saturday mornings. Father David Bozeman (St. Nectarios Mission, Waxahachie) frequently serves the Divine Liturgy when major feasts occur during the work week. Father David also conducted pre-Sanctified Liturgies regularly throughout the Great Fast this past year. In addition, Father David has been conducting informal sessions on Church history for the nuns. Father Gerasim (St. Seraphim) assists the nuns in their monastic life and advises the community on administrative matters in addition to serving the

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Divine Liturgy. Father Michael Storozuk also frequently serves. Other priests, especially when bringing a group to the monastery, conduct memorial services, Vespers, Akathists, and other prayer services, as well as the Divine Liturgy. A week without a Divine Liturgy to augment the daily prayer cycle of the nuns is a rarity.

The Monastic Household

While community is usually small, from time to time nuns from different jurisdictions visit for extended periods of time. Each brings a special expertise to the community. No matter what the length of the stay, the monastic experience becomes richer for the presence of another voice in prayer.

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A beautiful icon of the holy cross, eight feet tall and visible from the road, now welcomes visitors. Even more than the sign at the gate, the cross unmistakably announces that this is not a mere homestead, but a place set aside for Christ's work of salvation.

At present capital improvements are being made to the monastic residence. Two bathrooms and the laundry room have been renovated, thus eliminating annoying leaks and mold. Also, the back porch was replaced last summer.

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Last fall fruit trees were planted behind the house. At the same time crepe myrtle were planted along the drive. This spring, with the help of volunteers, the nuns built two keyhole gardens, which have begun to supply the kitchen with fresh vegetables.

The Candle Operation

The nuns strive to support themselves as much as possible by their own work. While contributions in gratitude for hospitality and prayers provide some steady income, it is the growth and stability of the candle operation which is becoming the sustaining source of income for the monastery. The monastery now has a consistent clientele of Orthodox parishes from several jurisdictions who order candles each month. This provides for a more predictable income.

The candle making operation is also of great interest to the younger orthodox visitors.

The Retreat Center

Even before the completion of the transformation of the pole barn into a retreat center, the hall began to host larger groups of visitors, first for the patronal feast and soon after for presentations on Orthodox themes. Hieromonk Alexii Altschul, from a Serbian Orthodox Parish in Kansas City, closed out the 2014 year with a talk on the significance of Mt. Athos for the world. In the spring of 2015, Katherine Morrison (now Arthur) gave a presentation of her missionary trip to Africa. Later in the summer Father Deacon Mark Barna addressed a Pan-Orthodox group on the subject of Orthodox Christian burial and his experience providing first for his own family and then for others. Dian Kauth, a member of Sts. Constantine and Helen Antiochian Orthodox Church, complemented his talk with legal advice. In September Theresa Kohl from St. Seraphim Orthodox Cathedral spoke at a retreat for women on the topic of St. Monica of Thagaste as a role model for modern orthodox women. Father Vasily Tudora was the keynote speaker at the patronal feast December 26; his topic, "The Christian Family Suspended between Tradition and Temptation." Father Vasily and Matuska Mirela also entertained the assembly with traditional carols.

2016 began with a visit from a group of young adults from ROCOR parishes who came to the monastery to work and pray. Bishop Peter visited the monastery while they were there.

The retreat center has also hosted several retreats for orthodox youth. These have been organized by various parishes. At a pan-Orthodox retreat arranged by St. Mary's Romanian Orthodox Church in Euless, Ian Rehmet presented an enthralling talk on his visit to Greece and pilgrimage to Mt. Athos. It is also not unusual to see tents pitched in front of the Retreat Center and a camp fire blazing several times a year as Orthodox children, guided by their clergy, engage in work, prayer, discussion and recreation.

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The Retreat Center's second floor is now complete, with deep appreciation to Father Michael Storozuk. Two bedrooms and a bath will now allow the monastery to accommodate female visitors overnight.

St. Xenia Cemetery

The cemetery is fast becoming a special ministry. The first burial, in 2011, was of a miscarried infant. A section of the cemetery is reserved for the burial of miscarried children and a source of comfort and closure for their grieving families. Schema nun Elizabeth was the first adult to be buried in the cemetery in 2012. Since that time an infant and a year later his grandfather, a husband and wife, the father of a nun, and several other orthodox adults have been interred. At least one would likely have been cremated had the cemetery not been available and the orthodox community not risen to the occasion and educated the non-orthodox spouse. Many of those who attend the burials at the cemetery are experiencing an Orthodox service for the first time. When a parish is unable or unavailable to offer a mercy meal, the nuns provide for the mourners.

Improvements have been made to the cemetery over the past two years. A paved concrete path now leads from the retreat center along the western boundary of the cemetery and up the center to a gazebo. Live oaks have also been planted along boundaries, with plans to add more as burials are added. Improvements have been made to the drainage and issues are addressed as they occur.

Weather permitting, the Divine Liturgy is offered in the cemetery at the gazebo. Other memorials and prayer services are also conducted in the cemetery. This is becoming a traditional aspect of youth retreats, - another opportunity to enrich the young in their faith.