

Appalachian Deanery Report
Diocesan Assembly 2026
Archpriest Basil Biberdorf, Dean

The Deanery

The Appalachian Deanery consists of five parishes, seven missions and chapels, and one new gathering spanning the large area from middle and eastern Tennessee to central Kentucky to central Virginia. Two of the missions (Christ the Saviour in Amherst, VA, and St Matthew in Mathews, VA) have been established since December 2025.

Fr Basil is working to advancing communication and cohesion across the deanery and placing a high priority on moving missions to full parish status. This requires improvements in stewardship and vision across the deanery. A new initiative to offer the option of weekly deanery-wide remote in-person catechesis (via teleconference) is expected to start in late August using existing materials and a rotation of catechists. This is intended to assist the large number of missions and one vacant parish in establishing faithful Orthodox Christians in a way that reduces redundancy of effort and improves the consistency and frequency of instruction, especially for those who live some distance from their missions and parishes.

Christ the Saviour Orthodox Mission, Midlothian, VA
Priest-in-Charge: Priest Joseph Birthisel

The tremendous growth of Orthodoxy in the area necessitated missionary planting to the west of the established parish. The mission station is located in Amherst, VA on the campus of Sweet Briar College, serving the largely rural and suburban communities of central Virginia. It was blessed by His Eminence, Archbishop Alexander in the first weeks of January 2026 with some dozen initial members founding the effort. Originally meeting at a shared space in a local community center, it soon moved to a largely unused chapel on the grounds of an historic women's college only five minutes from the original meeting place. Christ the Saviour Orthodox Mission Station is a daughter mission effort of St. Cyprian of Carthage

Presently, it serves Hours and Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Vespers on Thursday evenings followed by a catechism class. Attendance at liturgies now averages 35 to 40 souls. We have 15 catechumens and inquirers.

Protection of the Holy Virgin Mary Orthodox Mission, Clarksville, TN
Priest-in-Charge: Archpriest Basil Biberdorf

The Protection of the Holy Virgin Mary mission (Holy Protection) is located in Clarksville, TN, 40 miles northwest of Nashville adjacent to the Kentucky border and across the state line from the Army's Fort Campbell in Kentucky. Clarksville is the fifth largest city in Tennessee. There is a solid core of families who are permanent residents of the community coupled with the very fluid population of those serving in the Army or working as civilian contractors. Clarksville is also home to Austin-Peay University. The mission owes only \$75k on the remaining balance of its mortgage, which is held by the Diocese. The property consists of an approximately 2500 sq ft building that houses the church, parish hall, kitchen, library, and classroom-nursery, a large permanently installed mobile home as a parish rectory, and several outbuildings, all on six beautiful acres. Weekly attendance runs between 80-110 souls.

The greatest challenge currently faced by the mission is their current vacancy, with dean Fr Basil Biberdorf acting as priest-in-charge. Beginning in August, Holy Protection can expect to receive at least three weekend service cycles each month.

Ss Peter and Paul Orthodox Mission, Culpeper, VA

Priest-in-Charge: Archpriest Adam Sexton

Ss Peter and Paul Orthodox Mission Church in Culpeper continues to make steady and encouraging progress as a young mission community. Regular attendance has grown over the past year, and the mission currently has five catechumens preparing for reception into the Church through Baptism and Chrismation. Participation in the liturgical life of the mission remains strong, with regular catechetical instruction, fellowship, and a committed core of faithful working to establish a lasting Orthodox presence in the Culpeper area.

The mission has also experienced significant financial growth and increasing stability. The monthly operating budget has expanded from approximately \$1,200 to more than \$4,000, allowing for a substantial increase in clergy compensation while strengthening the mission's overall financial health. This expanded budget also reflects the mission's anticipation of relocating to a larger and more permanent facility in the foreseeable future as it continues to grow. The faithful remain enthusiastic about the mission's future and are committed to its continued evangelistic outreach, catechesis, and development as a vibrant Orthodox parish.

St Ambrose Orthodox Mission, Roanoke, VA**Priest-in-Charge: Priest Jeremy McKemy**

St. Ambrose Orthodox Mission continues to see steady growth. December 2025 was the last month that we received funding from the OCA Mission Planting Grant. So, our "training wheels" have been removed, and thanks be to God, our members have stepped up their giving to ensure that we are able to make ends meet and run a sustainable budget.

As a southwest Virginia Mission, we are in a rural area. Many of our people drive 30-60 minutes (or more) to arrive at church. Our demographics have shifted over the past year or two to be dominated by young families. Many of our inquirers and catechumens have little or no consistent church attendance in their past. This coming Sunday, will be a microcosm of way things have been going. We'll be bringing in eleven people, half of which are children. Of the eleven, only two were baptized in their prior Christian confessions.

St Anne Orthodox Church, Oak Ridge, TN**Rector: Archpriest Basil Biberdorf**

St Anne continues to experience the steady growth of other churches in the diocese. Attendance at Sunday catechesis during the school year runs between 30-40 people. Sunday liturgy attendance averages about 220, which is at the limit of the current space, even with the removal of the walls to allow the nave to flow into the parish hall. The parish is delighted to welcome Fr Daniel Werner as the new associate priest, completing the Teutonic "takeover."

This past spring, the parish completed construction of a new 1500 sq ft covered pavilion, providing additional space for coffee hour, classes, and other gatherings most of the year. Changes are being made to allow the choir storage room to accommodate a desk for occasional computer use by the choir directors, deacon, and giving counters.

The greatest need at St Anne is for more space: for worship, gathering, and classes. Fr Basil is currently evaluating a change in plan from relocating the entire church to the 14 acres owned 30 minutes south to pursuing an effort to use our property to begin offering services, classes, and fellowship in a location accessible to inquirers, catechumens, and members in the western and southern parts of Knoxville. The second greatest need is the improvement of formation for catechumens and new Orthodox Christians, with several discussions ongoing to improve in this area. The addition of Fr Daniel and the expected ordination of a new deacon and preparation for an additional catechist are all positive changes in this direction.

St Athanasius Orthodox Church, Nicholasville, KY

Rector: Archpriest Justin Patterson

St Athanasius experiences steady but not explosive growth. Attendance at Wednesday catechesis classes is usually 20-40. More than half of the attendees are catechumens or inquirers.

There have been a few changes and improvements in the organization part this year. The parish has a new part-time administrative assistant. The office, conference room and the nursery/classroom areas have been renovated to better accommodate current needs. The clergy and laity at St. Athanasius are actively involved in various ministries supporting members of the parish as well as local communities in need.

Fr. David Thatcher, in his active retirement, celebrates Vespers every other Saturday at his home chapel in Mercer County with a stable number of people attending. There is an interest among the faithful to potentially do more services and activities in the long term.

With the support of the Rector, Fr. Justin Patterson, and the blessing of Archbishop Alexander, Fr. Giorgi has begun planning monthly services in Lexington, as an exploratory step toward planting a mission there.

St Cyprian of Carthage Orthodox Church, Midlothian, VA

Rector: Archpriest David Arnold

As is being experienced around the Diocese of the South, the growth of the number attending services and expressing interest to join the Orthodox Church has put a lot of stress on the physical structure, the clergy, and the lay members of the parish. For the most part, this is still considered as eustress, but certainly the necessities are mounting beyond what can be sustained without some adaptation within the administrative oversight and the functional administration of the parish. This challenge is being met by very capable and energetic members of the parish council, as well as the cooperative volunteer spirit of our laity.

Financially, the parish has maintained strong voluntary offerings, including tithing households, regular free will offerings, and contributions to the Building Fund, so that a 1.2 million dollar parish hall is now complete and occupied (220 maximum). We will be servicing a \$464,000 mortgage (as of 4/30/26) while we look to accomplish resonance reduction and iconographic beautification of the hall and grounds. Previous undesignated contributions now exceed \$200,000, which will be used for mortgage principal pay down, mission clergy support in Virginia, and planning future renovation of the Temple interior (aesthetic beautification and iconography). We hope to begin feasibility studies (2027) for a school building structure on our property that would serve our Church School, as well as a Home School Cooperative, and even talked about Orthodox Classical Christian School.

Mission clergy support around Virginia began with the St. Ambrose of Milan Mission, Roanoke/Salem, Virginia (now served by Priest Jeremy McKemy). We are now supporting the Christ the Saviour Mission, Amherst, Virginia, served by Priest Joseph Birthisel, and also the St. Matthew Orthodox Mission, Mathews, Virginia, served by Archpriest David Arnold, and Priest Andrew Dunks. Plans are ongoing to put both mission clergy support outlays on a three year duration with six month resets that gradually give the missions full financial support of the priest in charge. This accomplishment, accompanied with growth of the mission, would allow the mission to take the step toward supporting a full time priest, or possibly to qualify for an OCA Mission Planting Grant.

St Maria of Paris Orthodox Mission, Cleveland, TN

Priest-in-Charge: Priest Kevin Rigdon

As with other Orthodox churches throughout our land, St Maria's in Cleveland, continues to

experience steady growth; a steady stream of inquirers and catechumens, and a number of Orthodox who have moved to the area. The majority of new people coming are young families, which means we have begun a children's catechism alongside our adult catechism class. In addition to information, our catechism involves our catechumens volunteering to serve in various capacities in service to the parish.

This growth is a beautiful thing to behold, but of more significance, at least to us, is the increasing participation in parish life. Our monastery pilgrimages have been at capacity over the last year, both for the men and the women. Growth also means that we have more participation in bringing food, church cleaning, and other tasks around the church.

Additionally, St Maria's has passed our sixth year providing monthly meals to the local homeless shelter, as well as, our eighth Christmas backpack drive, wherein the community collects cold-weather items and fills backpacks for the clients of the homeless shelter.

St Matthew the Apostle Orthodox Mission, Mathews, VA **Priest-in-Charge: Archpriest David Arnold**

State of the Mission

By the grace of God, St. Matthew's has experienced a year marked by steady spiritual growth, community deepening, and significant infrastructural advancement under the leadership of Fr. David Arnold. Our liturgical life is flourishing, as evidenced by rising attendance numbers at both Saturday evening and Sunday morning services. The sacramental life of our mission remains vibrant; we were blessed to celebrate one Holy Baptism and one Chrismation this past year, and we are currently nurturing a dedicated cohort of two catechumens on their path toward the Holy Church.

On the administrative front, a major milestone was achieved through the acceptance and signing of a new lease at the current building. While our financial growth remains slow, it is steady and sustainable, allowing us to manage our obligations responsibly. Our community life is highly active, anchored by a robust church school program serving between 10 to 19 children, a flourishing women's Bible study, and regular fellowship events including our men's pizza and movie get-togethers. We look forward to the coming year with deep gratitude, focusing on deepening our ministries and cultivating our home here in Mathew's County.

Strategic Highlights and Achievements

- Infrastructure Milestone: Successfully transitioned to a new lease agreement that financially assists the church, securing a stable environment that can be tailored—as much as the lease agreement lets us—to the long-term liturgical and community needs of the mission.
- Flourishing Ministries: Cultivated strong educational and social infrastructure through targeted peer ministries, including dedicated women's spiritual studies and consistent men's fellowship gatherings.
- Youth Formation: Three members maintain an active youth presence, ensuring that up to 19 children receive regular, structured instruction in the Orthodox faith.

Metrics

Foundation families: 6 with 31 people

Baptisms: 1

Receptions via Chrismation: 1

Enrolled catechumens: 2

Average Sunday attendance: 45 (with priest), 35 (without)

St Nina Orthodox Mission, Berea, KY

Priest-in-Charge: Archpriest Justin Patterson

St. Nina has experienced growth this year, having marked its second year in its rental space. As the mission keeps growing in numbers, the leadership desires more autonomy, functioning less as a Chapel and more as a Mission Parish. Strengths at St. Nina include attendance and engagement. However, stewardship and financial robustness remain challenges.

Currently, St. Athanasius clergy rotate at St. Nina Mission. There is weekly Tuesday Vespers and Catechesis (mostly served by Fr. David Thatcher). Divine Liturgy is celebrated two Sundays a month, served in rotation by Fr Justin Patterson, Fr David Thatcher, and Fr Giorgi Lomsadze.

St Tikhon Orthodox Church, Chattanooga, TN

Priest: Priest Silouan Parchert

So far in 2026, there have been 12 baptisms, 19 chrismations, 1 funeral, and 2 weddings at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Church. Our average attendance has increased from approximately 150 (in May 2025) to approximately 200. We have a newly-ordained deacon as of December 2025. Our various ministries are thriving. We have men's and women's groups that meet monthly. Our prison ministry is composed of volunteers who teach classes monthly at a local state prison.

St. Tikhon's is in the early stages of a building project and is planning the launch of a capital campaign. We recently purchased a property and a house adjacent to the parish. The purchase of the property and house has allowed the priest to have an office, and the additional square footage will be beneficial as we start planning the construction of a new temple space.