

***Diocese of New York and New Jersey  
Commission on Mission and Evangelism  
2014 Diocesan Assembly, Endicott NY***

Archpriest Jonathan Ivanoff

With the blessing and encouragement of His Grace, Bishop +Michael, the Commission on Mission and Evangelism of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey is pursuing a three-prong strategy for diocesan growth and health:

**First**, *a more focused and aggressive approach to mission planting that will directly involve qualifying newly planted missions for OCA Church Planting Grant [CPG] status within the first two years of the mission's founding. Beginning immediately, no future mission would be established without immediate and adequate diocesan financial support for its assigned clergy.*

**Status:**

- Holy Apostles Mission, Lansing, NY, was awarded a third and final year \$15,000 OCA Church Planting Grant (CPG) for 2015. Holy Apostles has seen an increase in attendance at the Divine Liturgy of anywhere from 10 to 40% over last year, and the mission is involved in continuous efforts to increase awareness in and around the surrounding community which also involve a vibrant OCF at the two local colleges. They are also presently looking at sites to purchase for their growing community and have an established building fund with which to do so.
- Fr. David Poling and his family have purchased a home in Oneonta, thus communicating to the St. Innocent Mission their desire to remain in the community, something that previous priests have not been able to do. Such permanence in leadership will go a long way toward providing a stable foundation on which to build for the future. Fr. David made a first attempt to apply for the CPG for 2015, but was not selected; however, continuing to improve the quality and quantity of parish life could result in a successful CPG application next year for 2016. I will work with him at that time to insure such an outcome.
- The Orthodox Christian Mission Station of Pottsdam continues to strive to hold two Divine Liturgies throughout the year, even in summer, with the support and assistance of the monastery across the border in Canada. His Grace, Bishop Michael, has now established a regular pattern of visitation that includes outreach to the nearby colleges with well-attended talks, as well as the hierarchical liturgies at the chapel. It is important to note that there is no Orthodox parish within 70 miles, and that further missionary outreach exists 70 miles to the east at Plattsburgh, an effort which a CPG- or diocesan-supported priest could do. The mission needs to start thinking about and preparing for the planting grant application process by the end of next year.
- Due to an extensive construction renovation project at my parish, I was greatly inhibited this year from doing any traveling to visit the diocesan missions noted above, as well as Nino (Georgian), Staten Island, and Mother of God, Princeton, but these obstacles will be

gone by the start of November, 2014 and I will be able to resume these visits: both Oneonta and Lansing are slated for mid-November

**Second**, *the commission will endeavor to create and aggressively offer adequate resources for those parishes that find themselves in numerical decline. This new ministry of parish health and revitalization will feature both short-term seminars/workshops and long-term solutions and approaches to clergy and laity concerned about the decline of their parish.*

**Status:**

- An evangelism workshop with the theme, “***Sharing Your Faith***” was held at Holy Trinity (Elmira Heights) this past May. The workshop was similar to the one held in Clifton in October, 2013 with Fr. Andrew Damick, who presented material from his book, *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy*. The workshop was designed to teach attendees concrete ways in which to share their faith. The workshop was taped, and I need to transfer these recordings to the website so they can be more effectively utilized in the future.
- I continue to receive inquiries about Orthodox Natural Church Development, or ONCD (<http://oncd.us>), a pan-Orthodox parish revitalization ministry I began 10 years ago. To that end, two training sessions were held this year: One at Holy Trinity (East Meadow), New York, which was also attended by St. Andrew (Dix Hills), and one in Ss. Peter & Paul (Manville), also attended by Mother of God (Princeton). The training was free, with participating parishes only paying for the costs of training materials (about \$100-120 per team of 5 to 6 participants). Plans are underway for at least one ONCD training workshop in each of the three deaneries after the start of the year.

If parishes can work together to host such training at the same time for their respective teams, the logistics and costs (mostly travel) shared can greatly work to your advantage. If you are interested in learning more about ONCD, please visit the website, <http://oncd.us> or contact me at [frjonathan@hotmail.com](mailto:frjonathan@hotmail.com).

**Third**, *future meetings will not only continue to flesh out the details and "next steps" to the above, but also address the general issue of evangelism within the diocese -- both of our own members as well as the evangelization of non-Orthodox persons and communities who may be interested in learning more about the Orthodox Faith and Church.*

I have begun initiating contacts with African-American Pentecostal ministers who are interested in Orthodox Christianity and learning more from Orthodox Christian clergy. These initial contacts came via Facebook groups, *Pentecostal – Eastern Orthodox Discussion* and *Clerical Garments II*. Currently, I speak, on a weekly basis, to any one of two dozen such clergy via FB chat, email or phone conversation, and the interest level on their part is nothing short of astounding.

The interest, among black Pentecostal clergy, has been growing for well over a decade, and was given an enormous boost in the late ‘90’s and throughout the years since from Bishop Veron Ashe (Mar Enoch), a white Pentecostal preacher who converted to the Mar Thoma/Syrian Orthodox Malankara church in the early- to mid-1990’s (this is an extremely fractured church with many branches, many of which are uncanonical). He became a featured speaker on the Pentecostal circuit, preaching in and with a fiery style they were used to but

with content reflecting Orthodox (for the most part) dogmatic teaching and spirituality. He passed away from colon cancer in February of this year (2014). His influence cannot be underestimated. Many of the Pentecostal clergymen who are now interested in Orthodoxy became so after hearing him live or seeing YouTube videos of his preaching/teaching. The reason: He “spoke their language” (we are reminded here of St. Paul’s “I have become all things to all men” and his preaching, in Athens, regarding the shrine to the Unknown God).

The rise of someone like Veron Ashe also corresponded with the rise of the “Convergence Movement,” a confluence, according to them, of three “streams” of Christian T/tradition: the Pentecostal, the Evangelical, and Orthodoxy (note that Rome does not figure into this, although, for some, Anglicanism does). According to Convergence clergy, of which many Pentecostal clergy count themselves, the Pentecostal Church needs to recover what it never had: Holy Tradition, although how this is defined is a bit fluid to say the least. To Convergence clergy, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer (1928) has as much relevance and stature as the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. Many Pentecostal clergymen also claim valid Apostolic Succession, mostly via vagante bishops like Rene Vilatte or Aftimos Ofeish. Many are so convinced of this, especially and particularly in the way it “validates” their ministry, that it presents a very unique challenge to us in talking to and addressing this issue down the road.

One will inevitably think of the Evangelical Orthodox Church’s (EOC) journey over 30 years ago. There are similarities, but also differences. I hope to expand on this in the near future, as Orthodox clergy need to know these similarities as well as differences, and how they have, are, and will affect the journey these Pentecostals are on. Whereas the reception of the EOC numbered about 2,000, this Convergence movement may number over 10,000 and actually be closer to 20,000.

Up until my first contacts with these men approximately one year ago, I was informed that I was the first Orthodox priest who took the time to hear them out and speak to them without any prejudicial pre- or mis-conceptions. This is a very important point for them: Too many of them have been on the receiving end of crass and demeaning comments in Social Media for “playing Orthodox” or “dress-up Orthodoxy,” or some similar vein. While many of them can quote various saints and Church Fathers, from Ignatius to Maximos the Confessor to John of Damascus, their overall understanding and vision of Orthodoxy is extremely incomplete. Therefore, one of the most important things any Orthodox clergyman needs to do in dealing with Convergence clergy to develop a keen ability to listen without the desire to jump in and correct them (they are, in return, willing to listen, too, but it needs to start with us). They have unique and wonderful stories to tell, and we must learn them.

Two “meet-n-greets” have been held in the NYC deanery, with one currently planned at SVS on November 8; one was recently concluded in Philadelphia and efforts are underway to do the same in Atlanta (underway), Boston (in exploratory phase), and D.C. (early December), under the auspices and sponsorship of the Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Archpriest Jonathan Ivanoff