

*Diocese of New York and New Jersey
Commission on Mission and Evangelism
2015 Diocesan Assembly, Yonkers, 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 (highlights):

- Holy Apostles Mission, Lansing, NY, will complete its third and final year on the OCA Church Planting Grant (CPG) at the end of next month. Holy Apostles has seen blessedly healthy growth in this past year and is quickly filling up the space they are now in. Recent agreements with their landlord (local R.C. church) have extended the time they can continue to use the present facilities.
- St. Innocent would have been on track for applying to the CPG for 2016, but their present situation does not make that possible. If a new resident priest can be assigned in the near future, I will coordinate a CPG application with them.
- St. Olympia, Potsdam, continues to hold two Divine Liturgies throughout the year with the support and assistance of the monastery across the border in Canada. His Eminence 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 will be prepared for a planting grant application as soon as a priest can be assigned.
- With a new priest at Mother of God mission in Princeton, NJ, and soon-to-be-completed facilities (check out the latest pictures on their website), the mission can begin a new chapter in her life and development that will ultimately lead to full parish status, we can pray, sooner than later.

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:

- Orthodox Natural Church Development, or ONCD (<http://oncd.us>), a pan-Orthodox parish revitalization ministry begun over 10 years ago, continues to be used by parishes

in the diocese, most recently (as of the timing of the Assembly) by Christ the Savior in Ballston Spa and St. Basil in Watervliet. Discussion has begun with parishes in Buffalo and Rochester, as well as in central New York State. Parish Church Health Team training is free, with participating parishes only paying for the costs of training materials (about \$100-120 per team of 5 to 6 participants). Those interested in having me come to do such work with their parishes are encouraged to call or email me. 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.

- I can also offer parishes training and coaching in the following areas: strategic planning (parish values, vision, and mission), spiritual giftedness and spiritual gifted ministries, leadership development, small group ministries, personal and parish-wide evangelism, and strengthening interpersonal relationships within the parish.

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.*

For the last two Diocesan Assemblies, I have submitted reports pertaining to the interest discovered among African-American Pentecostal ministers with Orthodox Christianity. While two more "Meet-n-Greets" between Orthodox clergy and their clergy were held this past year, including one in Philadelphia, there appear to be a series of developments that are rapidly changing the nature of this interest and its consequences for outreach and evangelism in and among these communities:

1. Many have an intense interest in, are holding out for, or are hopeful for resurrecting a sort of "Western Orthodoxy". The announced retirement of the ECUSA bishop and installment of the new bishop recently was long awaited, but many have expressed severe disappointment that it's a bit of the old Who song, "Meet the new boss, same as the old boss." The new bishop seems to offer no hint of any desire to reconcile with ACNA or any of the conservative elements still holding out in ECUSA itself. Thus, this becomes a seemingly dead-end road for them. Again. Back to square one: Reinvent the wheel, or (continue to) look elsewhere?
2. There is a growing dissatisfaction with the A-A communities in the incredible growing phenomenon of ordaining virtually anybody, anytime, a "bishop" in their churches. While this started as a desire to bring legitimate (as they saw it) "Apostolic Succession" into their churches, it has now become a cause of great questioning, scorn and derision. Pictures can be seen online and elsewhere of "convocations" of several churches coming together for preaching and services where there are more clergy than lay in attendance. This has called into question the very nature of what "Apostolic Succession" actually is, and who really has it. Back to square one: Reinvent the wheel, or (continue to) look elsewhere?
3. It would also seem there is a great reluctance of any of the major churches involved in the Pentecostal/Convergence Movement to approach canonical Orthodoxy. While some of the reasons for this can be debated, it would appear that the issues break

down here into two major ones: 1). They want to be recognized as legitimately Orthodox, much like the EOC back in the mid-'80s prior to their trip to Constantinople, and 2). They are afraid to come to us as they already know we will not grant them that. They also know that no other group, such as any of the Oriental Orthodox, will recognize them, either.

Therefore, I propose that the Diocese of New York and New Jersey prepare for and carry out a major initiative next spring, after Pascha, with speakers including hierarchs, professors from our seminaries (at least two of whom are already conceptually on-board) and others, come together in a two- to three-day conference, invite the clergy from these groups at little to no cost to them, and discuss in a series of logically connected sessions the meaning of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and offer them help and support and dialogue as they struggle through these and other related issues. This should be done in southern New Jersey to maximize attendance from the New York/New Jersey/southeastern Pennsylvania/D.C. area where the greatest number of these congregations can be found.

I also wish to propose a second conference mirroring the one I recently attended at Hellenic College/Holy Cross, "*Speaking to Secular America.*" The speakers and the topics presented were outstanding and need to be repeated so that more of the clergy and lay of our parishes can learn from them.

Respectfully Submitted,
Archpriest Jonathan Ivanoff