

## Commission on Missions and Evangelism

### Archpriest Jonathan Ivanoff, Coordinator

Commission members (by deanery): NYS: Archpriest Alexey Karlgut, Priest Matthew Markewich, Will Warner; NJ: Archpriest Gary Breton, Priest Gregory White, Deacon Samuel Davis; NYC: Archpriest Wiaczeslaw Krawczuk, Priest Martin Kraus, Mark Vassilakis

Please note: All information contained in this report is current as of October 19, 2017

With the blessing of His Grace, Bishop +Michael, the Commission on Mission and Evangelism has been tasked with the following three charges, a three-prong strategy for diocesan growth and health:

1. **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. It was also agreed that, going forward, no future mission would be established without immediate and adequate diocesan financial support for its assigned clergy.

#### *Status Highlights:*

- St. Innocent, Oneonta, NY: The mission is not yet in a position to apply for a CPG until its stewardship matches the amount now being received by the diocese. The mission now has approximately 10 acres of land in its possession (no mortgage) for future development. It continues to rent chapel space at an Episcopal church in downtown Oneonta.
  - St. Olympia, Potsdam: The mission station has gained the assignment of a full-time priest (although the priest is not paid a full-time salary) which will allow it to, at a minimum, have weekly rather than bi-weekly liturgies along with a fuller liturgical cycle with weekly Saturday vespers and other services at a chapel setup in the home of a parishioner. The Archbishop has been able to make yearly visits coupled with presentations on Orthodoxy to the larger Potsdam community at SUNY Potsdam. Attendance is small and a strong focus on evangelism and outreach will be needed to bring them to the next level.
  - St. Simon, New Brunswick, NJ: The diocese's newest mission plant began weekly Reader Vespers and Obednitsa services in January of 2017 led by then-Reader Samuel Davis. Samuel's ordination to the diaconate occurred in June of 2017 and he is currently enrolled at St. Tikhon's Seminary in the M.Div program. The mission is in the first year of a rental agreement in a hall that has been setup as Orthodox worship space. The mission will also be positioned for the CPG in 2018 or 2019. The mission is still in the early phases of development but has already hosted an on-site Akathist to the African Saints that drew nearly 70 people, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, to a 2-1/2 hour worship service with a significant preaching component following. The mission's focus on the minority communities in and around New Brunswick make their vision and mission of outreach and evangelism unique not only in our diocese but in the entire OCA.
  - One more potential mission plant is being looked at in the New York State Deanery, in the area in and around Alfred College in Alfred, NY. I will be visiting with interested lay leaders in Alfred immediately following the Diocesan Assembly.
2. **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 offered as a revitalization tool, but while some parishes have requested information in the past year, it and the other resources offered are severely underutilized, especially by parishes which presently are clearly undergoing numerical decline. Parishes should remember that 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](mailto: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.
3. **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.

*Status:*

- One year ago I reached out to the clergy and lay listed at the top of this report inviting them to join a re-formed Commission. Unfortunately, during this past year, I became unable to begin any new work corporately with the Commission, but am happy to report that those obstacles have now been removed and a conference call is planned for the end of October to begin planning efforts that will take us into next year. One particular goal of the Commission in the coming year will be to completely re-do the Commission portion of the diocesan website better serve the missionary and evangelical needs of the diocese.
- In early October, 2017, thanks to the efforts of Archbishop Michael and Fr. Peter Baktis, the Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black held its annual Conference in Princeton, NJ, attended by a record attendance of over 100 people from at least six Orthodox jurisdictions. A good (but not great) attendance from our own diocese was there, and was surely an eye-opening experience for all.
- Interest and receptivity among the non-Orthodox in Orthodox evangelical outreach continues to wax and wane. Last year and before, the Archbishop, myself and Dn. Samuel Davis had met with a bishop of a Protestant parish (with three locations in NJ) who had become interested in Orthodoxy, but interest and follow-up on his part has proven difficult, as has the interest and response of a pastor upstate. However, the Akathist held at St. Simon's in New Brunswick this fall brought a large number of Black and White Pentecostal and other pastors to the service, and there was not only a tremendous interest in Orthodoxy but specific requests to follow-up with further meetings to discuss the good work that has now begun.
- I will be submitting to His Eminence for his approval and blessing, and for the support of the entire diocese, a proposal for a major evangelical outreach conference in mid- to late-October of next year. The theme for this three-day, two-night conference (Thursday - Saturday afternoon) would be ***Bearing the Cross: Following the Path of St. Simon of Cyrene***. Invitations would be specifically sent to Convergence, Pentecostal, and other non-denominational (and especially non-affiliated) communions to attend and participate in a series of active panel discussions and debates. Registrants would be sent a copy of any one of several books (*Slave Religion, Unbroken Circle*, or Nun Katherine's book on slavery) for proper conference preparation. The conference would utilize a full cycle of Orthodox worship, including the Akathist to the African Saints, and allow attendants to see Orthodox services well-done. It will feature as major themes "*Where is the Church Today?*", "*Apostolic Witness, Succession, and Tradition*", "*What Does it Mean to Bear One's Cross?*", "*The Social Response of the Church to Racial Reconciliation*" and, finally, "*Where Do We Go From Here?*". All of these themes are of great interest to Black church communities, and we will directly explore ways for interested parishes to enter Orthodoxy.

Respectfully submitted,  
Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff