

## A New Era in Diocesan Evangelism and Outreach

*“What is our diocese doing about outreach to the Black community?”*

Saturday, July 1, 2017, saw an historic event in the life of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey: the ordination of Subdeacon Samuel Davis, of Somerset, NJ, to the Holy Diaconate. While diaconal ordinations are not necessarily historic, Deacon Samuel is the first – ever – African-American to be ordained to this office in the history of the Diocese, and he is leading the planting and development of St. Simon of Cyrene Orthodox Mission in New Brunswick, NJ, an inner-city mission working on reaching inner-city Blacks and Hispanics.



*Blessing the Antimensas for St. Simon's*

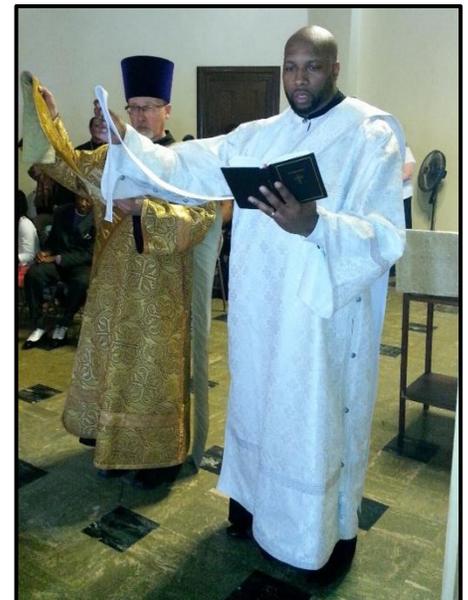
The mission originally started off several years ago in the Coptic Church, but after much prayer and reflection Samuel and his family left the Coptic Church and were united in 2016 to the Orthodox Church in SS. Peter and Paul Church in Manville, NJ. A recent graduate of Pillar College, Samuel also served in the U.S. Air Force. Samuel felt a strong calling to higher orders, and, after speaking with Archbishop Michael, was enrolled in the Diaconal Vocations Program and began his preparation for the Diaconate.

Preparing for ordination while planting a new church is not easy. July 1, 2017 could not come soon enough, but when it finally did, Deacon Samuel remembers:

*I did my very best to follow our tradition in preparation for ordination. Prayer, scripture reading, and fasting. Around 3 AM I woke up and the reality of ordination hit me. I began to recall the process to getting "here". I was a bit overwhelmed, in the sense of looking back at what the Holy Spirit had done, not only in my life but everyone involved.*

On that day, the rented chapel set up for St. Simon's at the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church was filled – with one Archbishop, seven priests, one protodeacon, two subdeacons (one not for long!), and approximately 60 laypeople there to witness and give their prayerful support to the vision unfolding before their eyes.

*I truly felt the grace of the Holy Spirit while Archbishop Michael laid his hands on me. I felt renewed and a new sense of purpose and responsibility.*



*Deacon Samuel's first litany*



*Over 60 people attended and communed*

Deacon Samuel's ordination coincided with the completion of the first six months of the mission's history, and a new chapter was now unfolding. St. Simon's has a "permanent temporary" setup at the Ukrainian Catholic parish, a chapel for their exclusive use. The chapel contains the basic items needed to conduct divine services with a deacon or reader. Certainly, there is much more that could be added to the chapel to increase the prayerful atmosphere that already greets members and guests upon their arrival. While the basics may be in place, donations and help are certainly appreciated! Among current needs are donors for the new icons on the iconostas (which can be viewed in pictures in this article): if you would like to sponsor any of these icons (Our Lord; the Theotokos; St. Simon of Cyrene), please contact Deacon Samuel at [samuel.davis339@gmail.com](mailto:samuel.davis339@gmail.com).

Deacon Samuel now serves Typika with the distribution of Holy Communion from the Reserve Sacrament every Sunday morning, and Vespers the night before. Adult Education/Catechetical classes take place on Wednesday evenings at Dn. Samuel's house. Outreach marketing heavily utilizes Facebook event advertising as well as word-of-mouth communication. Lay leadership is currently being put in place. Subdeacon Henry Hando directs a growing choir and serves as the mission's primary Reader. Deacon Samuel's wife, Matushka Julitssa, is preparing for the mission's first year of church school. Already, attendance has increased 50% since the start of the year and continues to grow as more and more people seeking the "Ancient Faith" and "Early Church" discover Orthodoxy at St. Simon's. And, this small but dynamic group of people prepare food and hygiene kits for distribution to the poor and homeless in the New Brunswick area as well as assistance to Syrian refugees via IOCC.

But beyond the basics of planting and starting a new church is the wider vision of the mission's specific and targeted outreach to Black and Hispanic people in the urban setting of New Brunswick. There is a growing awareness among the Historically Black Churches ("HBCs"), as well as the Pentecostal communions, of this "Early Church" and "Ancient Faith". Saint Simon's is poised to be a fruitful foray for our Diocese into this uncharted evangelical activity. Pray that the Holy Spirit will bless this mission and those who will find the Holy Orthodox Faith through its energetic endeavors!

Many thanks go out to Fr. James Parsells and SS. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, Manville, NJ, for their wonderful love and prayers during the time of formation, support, and growth of the St. Simon's community. The presence of the parish choir and so many parishioners during the hierarchical liturgy and ordination that day will always be remembered and cherished.



*Archbishop Michael with Deacon Samuel Davis and his family: Matushka Julitssa (Photini), far left, and their children (left to right): Morgan (Perpetua), Ava (Felicity), Alexander (Samuel) and Isaac.*