

**Commission on Mission and Evangelism**  
**Diocese of New York and New Jersey**  
**Archpriest Eric G. Tosi, DMin - Director**

*“Christian believers, and those called to evangelical ministry, are not concerned with results. They know that the fruit of their evangelism is in God’s gracious hands. Their pure, joyful proclamation of God’s wonderful work in Christ and the Holy Spirit heralds eternal life, divine peace and joy, and the gift of God’s goodness, beauty, and truth, freely bestowed and freely received. They are, in this sense, disinterested in the number of converts produced; their concern is not conversion at all. Surely, they hope to “to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things” that Christ commanded (Mt 28). But they know as the great missionary St. Innocent of Alaska constantly affirmed, that no one comes to the Father except through Christ (Jn 14:6). The only task of a genuine evangelist is to sow God’s Word. Results are up to God.”*

Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction**

As in many things which we all experienced this year, it was not at all what I expected. Certainly the pandemic shut down many planned activities and events and restricted our ability to move forward in this most critical of Diocesan and parish activities. Yet as I exhorted the mission clergy (and my parish) from the very beginning of the lock-down, we should see this as the greatest missionary opportunity we shall ever experience. We will need to find new ways to reach out to people, new ways of explaining Christianity to those in despair or lost and most importantly, find new ways to open our parishes and missions to the surrounding community. In times of difficulty, the Church has always thrived and found its footing. We must take advantage of this and be creative in expanding our reach and our evangelical efforts. This is the greatest time for evangelism.

Our beloved Fr. Thomas Hopko wrote in the above quote that we should not be so concerned about results (the irony does not escape me in that I will be writing about results) but rather we need to sow the Word and leave in God’s hands. As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6 “I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase.” Each encounter we have whether in person or virtually is an opportunity to sow, each person who comes to us seeking consolation and comfort is an opportunity to sow. Every service we serve, every sermon we preach, every call we make, every email we answer is again an opportunity to sow. We do not know where that sowing will lead, giving it to God for the increase, but we are planting the seeds and doing the work we are all called to do in God’s vineyard. Let us not be negligent in this regard.

**Work of the Commission**

*“Orthodox mission – internal or external – is by nature “ecclesiastical.” It cannot be understood as an individual or a group activity, disconnected from the Body of Christ. For those who work for it; it is the Church that they serve, the Church that they represent; it is the life of the Church that they transplant. No one is saved alone; no one offers Christ’s salvation alone. One is saved within the Church, one acts within the Church, and what one lives and offers to others is done in the name of the Church.”*

As Director, I have instituted some new policies of accountability and discussion over the past year which were quite successful. I also endeavor to keep His Eminence Archbishop Michael, the Chancellor, Mitered Archpriest Joseph Lickwar and the two Deans with missions, Archpriest Gary Breton and Archpriest Alexey Karlgut informed as well as including them in various communications. Some have attended the online meetings. I will not recount the details of each of the four missions in the Diocese as you can read about them in their reports.

1. There are now monthly online forms that each mission fills out at and submits for the previous month's activities. These forms are compiled and evaluated in a quarterly report sent to His Eminence, the Chancellor and the Deans. Each quarterly report highlights specific items that may be of interest or concern. His Eminence reviews these with the Chancellor and Deans at periodic meetings.
2. There are quarterly meetings (currently via Zoom) with the mission clergy in which each share details of their ministry with one another as well as discuss challenges and issues that are of mutual benefit to the life of the mission. These are recorded and a summary is sent to His Eminence. His Eminence, the Chancellor and Deans are invited to attend these meetings and some have participated on an ongoing basis.
3. I have been able to visit some of the missions (before the pandemic shut down travel) and have assisted them in such areas as financial issues, potential property reviews and certain pastoral challenges. I endeavor to be a resource for the missions and the clergy in order to assist them through some challenges. As such I have had numerous conversations with all of the missions and clergy over a wide range of issues.
4. I now electronically publish a quarterly newsletter on missions and evangelism entitled "Koinonia". It is published on the Diocesan website as well as an electronic copy is sent to all the clergy in the Diocese. The newsletter contain articles on a particular theme as well as reflections and a review of missionary activities of the Diocese.
5. I have begun to the process of inventorying and gathering the resources of the Diocese in both time, treasure and talent so that we can better understand and apply them to the missionary and evangelistic direction of the Diocese. It is planned to gather some selected individuals into a core group to assist in raising funds for missions as well as to assist in planting new missions.
6. It is hoped that we will begin to have an annual Mission and Evangelism Conference open to all clergy and lay people of the Diocese. We will bring in speakers, share papers, work through challenges and inspire people to evangelize in their own communities and parishes. This was put on hold during this period and we will work on having the first one this next year.
7. I will also begin the discussion with His Eminence and the Deans on identifying potential and intentional mission and evangelism opportunities. This will focus the Diocese and the parishes on

not only the potential around them but also allow us all to look outside of our parochial responsibilities and see a larger community that surrounds each and every parish.

## **Conclusion**

*“It is about what the churches of Christ, Christ’s one holy Church, believe, teach, pray and do.”*

Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko<sup>3</sup>

I know that we all pray that soon we will be able to return to our normal activities of our parishes. But again we should not think in that way but rather utilize the lessons we learned and implemented to further the mission of the Church wherever we are planted. The Commission remains dedicated to provide the experience, tools and material to the members and parishes of the Diocese. We are open to any suggestions that allow us to continually look at new ways to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to provide new tools and resources to plant missions and evangelize the surrounding communities. But ultimately it is about doing something, anything that can reach out to individuals and communities in ways that draw people into a new understanding and relationship with Christ and His Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hopko, “Except These Chains: Evangelism, Dialogue, and Tolerance” in *Speaking the Truth in Love* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 80-81.

<sup>2</sup> Anastasios Yannoulatos, “Orthodox Mission Past, Present and Future” in *Mission in Christ’s Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 220-221.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hopko, “Confessing the One Faith” in *Speaking the Truth in Love: Education, Mission and Witness in Contemporary Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2004), 139.