

2015 Diocesan Assembly - Bethlehem, PA
January 29-30, 2015
Philadelphia Deanery Report
Fr. James Weremedic, Dean, Philadelphia Deanery

Assumption of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Church, Philadelphia, PA

Our parish welcomed seven new parishioners this past year through transfers, baptisms, and chrismations. There were no deaths and no marriages. Moreover, our outreach to our neighbors around the church continues. We have held a coat drive, delivered Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners to families surrounding our church, and have hosted FOCUS' "Operation Lace-Up," for example.

Educationally we continue with our youth church school as well as monthly Bible and theology courses. We have also gathered to watch and then discuss movies this past year, two of which were *The Tree of Life* and *Life of Pi*. This spring our parish plans to host a local community gardening co-op as they plant a garden in our church yard to help feed and to educate our neighborhood residents with regard to healthy food. Our parishioners will participate in this project, too.

Holy Trinity, Catasauqua, PA

Overall it has been a quite year for Holy Trinity in Catasauqua. Bishop Mark visited Nov. 2nd and the parish enjoyed a nice luncheon in his honor and had a good visit with him. We have been working diligently at creating a new website for our parish. The website went live the end of December and is a vast improvement over what we had. For the Christmas season we have been baking kiffles to get our members together for fellowship, and as a small fundraiser. We are also delivering kiffles to all of our members who cannot regularly attend services to let them know we haven't forgotten them this Christmas season.

Holy Trinity Parish, Pottstown, PA.

Our Parish Outreach activities were feeding the hungry in Pottstown through an organization called the Pottstown Cluster of Churches four times this year, and we hosted different speakers after liturgy who gave a talk followed by a free-will offering for their organization. In 2014, we held a variety of fundraisers that included: a Spring Bazaar, a Ham and Halupki Sale, a Fall Bazaar and a Cookie Sale.

We lost some members through moving and some through death, but also gained new parishioners so our census stayed the same at 71 members. We re-wrote our parish bylaws using the bylaws from Holy Trinity Church in Stroudsburg, PA as a template. They were submitted to His Grace Bishop Mark for final editing and approval.

Our Liturgical Schedule included the following:

Sunday: Matins and Divine Liturgy

Wednesday: Matins and Nocturnes

Friday: Small Compline with an Akathist to St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre

Saturday: Panikhida (newly introduced) and Vespers

All Feast days: Vespers with Litya, Matins and Divine Liturgy, Christmas and Theophany: Royal Hours, Vespers, Liturgy, Compline Vigil, and Liturgy.

Miscellaneous Saints: Divine Liturgy for St. Basil, Synaxis of John the Baptist, 3 Hierarchs, Finding of the head of St. John the Baptist, Holy Spirit (after Pentecost), Peter and Paul (also vespers), Procession of Life-giving Cross, Beheading of St. John, Conception of St. John the Baptist, Pokrov, St. John Chrysostom, St. Nicholas

Lenten Services: Wed. and Fri Presanctified, Canon of St. Andrew

Holy Week: Bridegroom Matins (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday), Presanctified Liturgy (Wednesday), Vespertal Liturgy (Thursday), Holy Friday Matins, Holy Friday Royal Hours and Vespers, Holy Saturday Matins and Liturgy, Pascha at Midnight (Nocturnes, Matins, Hours, Liturgy) Vespers of Pascha, Bright Monday Liturgy.

St Herman of Alaska Church, Glen Mills (Gradyville), PA

St Herman of Alaska Church in Glen Mills (Gradyville), Pa. has had a very exciting and spiritually-rewarding year 2014. Beginning with a very solemn and spiritually-rewarding Great Lent with a well-attended Mission Service and solemn Reading of the Twelve Gospels by His Grace Bishop Mark and a most joyous Pascha with our largest number of faithful in attendance. In June we hosted His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos who delivered a well-attended lecture at Villanova University as well as two talks at our Church, Great Vespers service and following the hierarchal Liturgy on Sunday. We have also recently begun our remodeling and beautification of our Church and our Memorial Hall with the installation of new floors. In November we hosted Father Archimandrite Justin of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai in conjunction with four scheduled lectures at Eastern University, Villanova University, St Tikhon's Monastery and Our own parish on Sunday following the magnificent Liturgy celebrating St Catherine, the Great Martyr. On Saturday December 13th, we celebrated our patronal feast day of St. Herman of Alaska, with His Grace Bishop Mark celebrating highlighted by the ordination to the Holy Diaconate of our choir director, Gregory Hubiak. We continually are striving to share the Word of God within our community and the whole world with our many charitable efforts on behalf of the homeless, our troops and those in nursing homes and in need of God's love and mercy. Glory Be To God For All Things!

St. Mark's, Wrightstown, PA

In addition to a full liturgical schedule made possible by having a full choir and three directors who complement each other in terms of training, experience and availability, we have also had the ongoing development of outreach ministries.

St. Mark's is an integral part of the Wrightstown Food Cupboard that collects and distributes food to needy families. This year we are responsible for the pasta and sauce for the 130 baskets prepared for both Thanksgiving and Christmas. Parishioners bring donations of non-perishable food items on a weekly basis which is then brought to distribution location at Penn's Park UMC.

As has been the case for several years, we continue to join with Our Lady of Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Church in an outreach to the Bucks County Jail every Wednesday night. A compliment of three, two lay and one clergy, are usually there for both the men and the women inmates.

In response to interest from The Birches, the newest care facility in Newtown, we go on alternate Fridays, offering a prayer service and some teaching to the residents, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox who attend. We also participated in the annual Craft Fair there as an opportunity to witness and meet members of the community.

His Grace Bishop MARK visited in June, attending Great Vespers and serving the Divine Liturgy, after which he recognized those celebrating major wedding anniversaries during 2014. His Grace was also here in June for the Diocesan Council Meeting which was hosted by the parish.

Fr. Timothy Hojnicky came and gave a Lenten Retreat on the topic of parish growth.

An Advent Retreat was offered to the parish by Fr. Martin on *Where Christ finds us and where we can find Him*.

Three times this year Fr. Martin was invited to give the invocation at the Newtown Town Council meeting, as part of the clergy rotation from the Newtown area.

A regular series of Adult Education classes was established based on parishioner interest. One, *Orthodoxy in the Public Square*, focuses on issues that are topics of discussion in the social and political arena of our society from the perspective of Orthodox teaching and practice. The other, *Science and Faith*, addresses topics in science from the point of view of Orthodox theology. This group draws on the sizable and diverse group of scientists who are members of St. Mark's and is open to all with any interest in this area.

Church School comprises two groups, a preteen and teen group. The preteens are interviewing members of the parish as part of their education in the Church as family. The teen group is engaged in three areas, with three different teachers, covering the areas of what does it mean to be a human being, how can I live/defend my faith, what relationship is there between Orthodox Christianity and other faiths.

Fourteen adults and six children have joined our parish this year, stretching our facilities. Facilities improvements have also taken place with the paving of the parking lot and drive with gravel, the demolition of the obsolete swimming pool adjacent to the rectory, which we hope to convert into a secure play area for younger children.

Fundraising has assisted greatly in our ability to pursue these extra projects with our annual Pascha and Christmas Food Sales, Pysanky sale, and Super Bowl Sunday food sale.

As a first step to becoming a tithing parish, we have been tithing our fundraisers, supporting local charities that assist the homeless as well as Orthodox Christian Prison Ministries.

Finally, in response to significant growth in parish membership, we are looking to initiate a long term planning process for physical expansion.

St. Michael the Archangel, Wilmington, DE

This past year St. Michael's has given evidence that we are a living and growing parish. We have seen the number of choir directors grow with the addition of several young people who, under the training and guidance of Paula Daubert, our lead choir director, are now leading our parish family in liturgical worship services. *Prayer and Intimacy with Christ* was the theme of our Lenten Retreat on April 5th with guest speaker, Dr. Albert S. Rossi, presenting. Our Parish Cleanup Day saw an unprecedented number of parishioners come out to clean and beautify the inside and outside of God's house.

Our outreach and witness to others has increased with the active participation of parish members in the local Family Promise ministry, which strives to meet the needs of those left homeless. In March 2014 Parish Council approved a partnership with St. Philip's Lutheran Church (Kirkwood Highway in Wilmington) to support Family Promise. As a "Support Host" St. Michael's now helps families in our community with meals and hospitality 3 or 4 times a year. Family Promise, founded in New Jersey in 1986, was created in response to the growing

need to provide shelter, meals, and comprehensive support to families without homes. The Interfaith Hospitality Network, a program of Family Promise, unites religious congregations to assist homeless families. Each house of worship provides accommodations and meals for 3 to 5 families (up to 14 people) for one week every 3 or 4 months on a rotating schedule. February was the first time St. Michael's volunteers participated in Family Promise. Their reaction was so positive we approached Parish Council with a recommendation to join the Family Promise network as a "Support Host". We do not offer sleeping accommodations or social services. We go to St. Philip's during their host week to serve dinners, listen to families compassionately and provide someone to sleep there for emergencies. St. Michael's support schedule in 2014 was February, July, and October. In 2015 the dates will be weeks of February 8th, May 31st, August 30th, and November 15th.

And the children! There are so many children in our parish now, from babies to toddlers to young adults, joining in the worship of our parish community, learning the Gospel, and encountering the Lord of the Gospel.

Our library continues to grow as evidenced by the two new bookcases donated to the library in August to accommodate the overflow of books. Mary Anne Farrell and Maria Gregors reorganized the books to eliminate overcrowding and leave room for growth. We asked parishioners the titles of Orthodox books that they have enjoyed reading and to write very brief recommendations that we could post on the bulletin board outside library. A couple of parishioners recommended new Orthodox books for the library, and they were added to our inventory.

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Bethlehem, PA

Over the past year we held a variety of events; Fish Dinners, Russian Days Festival held in September, Christmas Bazaar and Choir Concert, Presentation on Orthodox Spiritual Life given by Dr. Harry Boosalis (Nativity Fast), Pan-Orthodox Movie Night, Annual Yolka by Church School for St. Nicholas Day and today's Annual Diocesan Assembly.

Liturgically we held a full cycle which included: All Sunday's and Major Feast Days, about 89 Liturgies celebrated during the year including Sundays, Feast Days, Memorial Liturgies and Presanctified, along with 3 Hierarchal visitations by Vladika MARK, regular Memorials for our departed loved ones and House blessings.

Our Church School has been a blessing to see the Church School program grow and develop this year. We have had more activities and better attendance, and Church School teachers have worked hard to make this year a special one for the kids. We look forward to continued growth in the years to come. (3 Classes with 20 Children)

Of course we had miscellaneous aspects such as major repairs to our heating and insulation, flood repair from broken pipes and several new Icons added to the nave of church Temple. Our website improved with a new and improved look, consistently updated with new pictures, a new Facebook Page for parish established, updated Email Group List established for communicating with members. We committed to our Revitalization Meetings. The Library is now available for parishioners for spiritual study and Greeters are in place every Sunday with regular coffee hours, often with complete meals for increasing fellowship. The Mother's playgroup held regularly at the rectory. Our Educational program includes the Catechism Classes and Bible Studies/Adult Education held at appropriate times throughout the year with a Monastery pilgrimage to St. Tikhon's Orthodox Monastery.

We are blessed to utilize the gift of Charity in the following manner: Donations given to various organizations and needy persons throughout the year - collections taken up at coffee hour, Donations given to local food banks annually, Donations to St. Tikhon's Seminary and Monastery, Donations to St. Herman's and St. Vladimir's Seminaries, Regular volunteers from the parish who help serve at the soup kitchen and Christmas Giving Tree program instituted for Nativity Season this year to help those in need - in conjunction with local community based organization.

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Coatesville, PA.

This has been a good year for St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in Coatesville, PA. Of course, we have Liturgy every Sunday morning as well as Vespers every 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month. Bible Study is also held at the rectory every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month. New to our parish is Sunday School every Sunday morning for the children. This year our Holy Week was filled with services every day up until Pascha. Just last week we held our Annual St. Nicholas Day Dinner with neighboring Orthodox Churches Holy Ascension (Antiochian) and Holy Spirit (Ukrainian). We are looking forward to the New Year to be prosperous as we anticipate celebrating our 100th Anniversary in 2016.

St. Nicholas Church, Philadelphia PA

There was a prolonged Annual Meeting over a few months with continuing discussions on select committee reports, including actual support, best future directions as services, scheduling, location, growth, facilities upkeep, importance in total parishioner understanding internal and external problems, future outlook, where we fit in the picture and problems that could develop. Maintenance and anticipated facility improvements needed and costs.

This year St. Nicholas and St. Michael's Churches had the Great Jordan Water Blessing between churches, the dinner had a better attendance than last year..

St. Nicholas participated in the Lenten Missions for the OCA Philadelphia Deanery and the Greater Philadelphia Orthodox Brotherhood.

Katherine Kariouk again arranged the program for the Sunday School Yolka and Program, including St. Nicholas as an annual event.

During Great Lent St. Nick's Boutique sponsored its Annual Egg-Stravaganza with sales of thousands of decorated eggs and other Easter related articles on display.

St. Nick's Sportsmen's Club held its Potato Pancake Dinner and other fund raisers during the year.

The Christmas Eve Holy Night Supper held before the Evening Services has continued to grow and improve over the years, and this combination has attracted the larger percentage of participants for the Christmas Holy Days. Following the Liturgy a social and Christmas Carol session replaces carolers going from home to home, as people now live in all sections of the Greater Philadelphia Area., making that task almost impossible

The Annual Parish Picnic was held on the North Lawn with wonders of Russian Music foods and refreshments.

The Sisterhood of the Pokrova held their Annual St. Nicholas Dinner, and other minor fund raising events during the year. Their membership now includes mostly younger members.

St. Nicholas has special Recognition and Appreciation Banquets honoring first the 80 year old plus group, and then the 90 year old plus group, and was surprised at the turnout and enthusiasm.

This was a project well received and supported.

Each Sunday an individual or family volunteers to provide a luncheon for those who come to church. It provides an excellent opportunity to see family and friends at least once a week for talk and fellowship. The proceeds add much to help cover the expenses of a Downtown City Parish.

St. Nicholas continues their charitable works for Great Lent, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and others as we see need. Usually these are done on the confidential basis worked through the priest and deacon, funded by individuals and parish as needed.

You can expect the full range of services at St. Nicholas, with a choir of professional quality. The average parishioner drives 32 miles to get to the church, and the quality we provide must be worth their time, investment and efforts, because they must drive past many other Orthodox Churches before they get to 7th and Brown..

The parish always continues excellent maintenance and upkeep of the facilities, as the church is going on 200 years old and is in constant repair. The parishioners are fully aware of these needs and continue funding these needs. They are proud of their inheritance and what they have in the City of Philadelphia, anxious to remain where they are even with the trend of a small congregation.

St. Stephen's Cathedral, Philadelphia, PA

This past year was filled with important events for the life of our Cathedral. First of all, St. Stephen's was a place for the enthronement of the new hierarch of our Diocese, His Grace Bishop Mark which took place in May. We were excited at this opportunity to be part of planning for this event and to welcome all the honorable guests to the Cathedral at this historic occasion. Later on in the year, in September, our parish also celebrated the 40th Anniversary of the consecration of the Cathedral. His Grace, Bishop Mark, a number of clergy and many parishioners and friends of our parish joined us for this celebration. Having completed this important milestone, our community is looking forward to the work that is ahead of us of preaching the Gospel of our Lord to those who are seeking it and supporting each other in our day-to-day struggles as Christians who are called to live this Gospel in this day and age.

Among other events here at St. Stephen that should be mentioned are the Vacation Church School that we annually hold in the Summer time for the children of our parish. This year once again we were joined by the families from neighboring parish of St. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church. We also provide regular monthly meetings for our teens, with opportunities both for fellowship and for spiritual enrichment. In November we had a successful Fall Food Festival that was attended by many from the neighborhood.

Also, our Parish Council has made specific efforts in implementing Diocesan Revitalization program. We have been conducting regular monthly meeting, inviting everyone from the parish to participate, at which we gradually are going over the Health Inventory Model, discussing how the ideas specified there can be applied to the reality of our life at St. Stephen. These meeting have already produced a number of initiatives that were undertaken that we feel will help us to become a better parish of our Diocese.