

2019 Diocesan Assembly – Philadelphia Deanery Report

Philadelphia Deanery of our Diocese is comprised of nine parishes. We are blessed to have eight of these parishes to be served by a full-time clergy. Our parishes actively participate in the life of the Orthodox Church in our area. This past year our Deanery held Sunday of Orthodoxy celebration and the Church of Holy Assumption hosted one of Lenten Vespers services. In September the clergy and their families gathered for Deanery picnic and had wonderful time in fellowship.

Below are the reports from each parish in the Deanery.

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Pottstown, PA

Many exciting things happened in 2018 at Holy Trinity. Father John continued his monthly Bible study and our monthly Children's Sundays, which featured many new Epistle readers, ranging in age from 12 all the way down to 7 years old. Our church school program continued to flourish with new young ones joining the program. Many plays were performed by the church school students throughout the year including the annual Yolka.

During the Lenten Season the parish chose to support a mission parish in Pakistan that was trying to raise funds to build a small church in a country that does not support Christianity. Our generous parishioners donated over \$1500 to this effort. This Advent the parish collected food to support two needy families in the local school district. The parish continues to provide a meal for the needy on the 5th Friday of the month at the Pottstown Cluster of Churches. In the Fall a new outreach group was formed, St. John of Kronstadt Commission, and they hope to engage the parish in many new outreach programs.

Holy Trinity was visited by His Eminence Archbishop Mark in August for the celebration of the 90th Anniversary of the parish. It was a wonderful day and a festive banquet was held in the parish hall following Hierarchical Liturgy.

Throughout the year the parish held its three annual fundraisers, the Spring Bazaar, Fall Bazaar and Christmas Cookie Sale along with a few small pirogue sales. Months of preparation went into all of these and we are so thankful for all the hard work from our parishioners.

We also completed many new projects including: New Oil tanks to replace failing ones, new garage doors at the church and rectory, refurbished sacristy- new paint, vestment racks, blinds and storage shelves, purchase of a new icon for the church hall, electric wiring and panel upgrades at the church and rectory, yard cleanup and landscape work at the rectory, new donated lights at front of church, AC unit replaced at church after it failed, a complete roof replacement after shingle damage and multiple leaks and we hired an architect to draw up plans for a new basement entrance to allow easier access for those who have difficulty with stairs (construction to take place in 2019)

We are grateful to all our wonderful parishioners for all their continued hard work and support.

St. Mark's Orthodox Church, Wrightstown, PA

This year we took our first steps toward a parish plant development that envisages a new multipurpose building adjacent to the current church, which will be expanded to accommodate our growing population. These steps included parish meeting approval to move forward with the site plan we had commissioned and was followed by a series of meetings and presentations with the Local Township during which we secured additional approval required to move forward. Our next step is to complete this initial process and then commission architectural drawings for both structures and go from there. This was also the last full year of mortgage payments for the original mortgage that provided the funds for the facility we have had since 1988. We look forward to a mortgage burning and initiation of our next phase of development when the archbishop makes his annual pastoral visit in June.

During his visit this year on the Sunday of All Saints, Archbishop Mark met with our parish council, church school and our sisterhood as well as presiding at Vespers and celebrating the Divine Liturgy. During the Divine Liturgy he ordained seminarian Silouan Burns to the subdiaconate and diaconate, a first in our parish history. As usual, a meal followed with the opportunity for His Eminence to greet parishioners one on one. He also visited us during Bright Week, on Bright Monday celebrating the Divine Liturgy with us and tonsuring Dustin Joseph Crosby a Reader. During the year we also welcomed Frs. Emmanuel Pratsinakis and Kosta Petrogeorge who served when Fr. Martin was away on vacation.

Our church school continued to provide a Preschool option for children and moms on Thursdays, having gone back to Sundays last year. Additionally, our Primary and Middle School group as well as our Teen group meets on Sundays. Together the Church School spearheaded several projects during the year, while one student, John Yates, made his Eagle Scout project the design and building of a trail and icon shrine on the property as a place to "come apart" and prayerfully enjoy the beauty and solitude of our natural environment. Archbishop Mark blessed the commencement of this work on his visit in June and will bless the completed trail and shrine when he returns in the Spring. The collective projects done by the church school were Veterans Recognition Program on Veterans Day which included handmade icons of the patron saints of our parish veterans made by the preschool and primary school students and presentations by the high school students on those same saints.

Our parish outreach continues in our ongoing relationship with Wrightstown Food Cupboard as well as regular contributions to the Philadelphia Breakfast Mission at Easter and Thanksgiving. St. Mark's also has its regular presence at Bucks County Jail on Wednesday evenings, as well as regularly attending meetings at the John Jay Institute located at Cairn University in Langhorne. Services are offered on a monthly basis at Harborview in Doylestown and The Birches in Newtown and we are currently investigating the possibility of offering other services at additional nursing facilities in the area.

Our adult education program continues with Mirrors of Truth, our monthly meeting which explores how our Orthodox Christian faith illumines and is illumined by scientific knowledge continues with a developed curriculum that is the fruit of the past three years and offers a way to follow, enter into, repeat areas and topics. Meeting times are posted

in our bulletin and parish calendar, both of which are accessible online at stmarksoca.org. A class on the Psalms is offered on Wednesday mornings following the weekly Akathist service, which includes special prayers for the ill afflicted and a Litya for the Departed. Topical classes and presentations also are offered as needed and possible. In November an afternoon seminar presentation of the O.C.A. documents on preparing for serious illness, end of life and funeral was offered to the entire parish. Lenten and Advent Retreats were offered for the adults and also for the Church School. The Lenten Retreat focused on the Prayer of St. Ephrem in our daily life while the Advent Retreat had as its theme Incarnating the Orthodox Christian Faith. The Church School had their retreat on Lazarus Saturday, which began with Divine Liturgy, lunch, activities, both educational and social and concluded with the Vigil for the Entrance of the Lord into Jerusalem. On the Conception of St. John, September 23 we had a parish picnic which was a great success despite a very wet day. A Tent, good food and the company of friends made up for it.

During the Fall Church School student Sam Regen gave an excellent presentation on Tourette's Syndrome and how to better understand the challenges of those who have this condition. During Great Lent Dr. Cyril Jenkins came and made a presentation on the St. Basil Center for Orthodox Thought and Culture.

Full day Church School retreat for the Dormition of the Theotokos on August 15, included Church Service, lunch, lessons on the Theotokos, hand-picking flowers at a local farm, having the flowers blessed, putting them together into bouquets, and delivering them to parishioners, and social activities such as water balloon games.

St. Herman of Alaska, Gradyville, PA

This year has been a very busy year at St. Herman of Alaska Church with the completion of our extensive Kitchen renovation after much planning and work. During Great Lent we hosted His Eminence Archbishop Mark on Holy and Great Wednesday where we celebrated the Anointing service. One of the highlights of that service was the presence of numerous relics from the Holy Places associated with Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the last days.

Also, on February 17th we co-sponsored, along with Villanova University, the traveling historic musical of the Story of the Gullah people and their quest for freedom during the Civil War. Our Choir participated in this most rewarding performance celebrating President Lincoln and the correlation between him and Czar Alexander II in the freeing of both the slaves and the serfs. The Gullah people visited St Herman's on Cheesefare Sunday. Since their visit we have maintained a great friendship to this day. Father John also prepared the Museum Exhibition for the All American Council held in St. Louis, Mo., late in July as well as the Exhibition "For the Life of the World" at the Metropolitan Museum of the Orthodox Church in America for Memorial Day weekend at the Monastery in May.

Father John delivered the lecture at St Simon's Church in New Brunswick, NJ on the Saints of the American Church and the history of early Black Americans such as Father Raphael Morgan the first Black Orthodox priest in America who hailed from Philadelphia. Fr. John was also leader of the Symposium on the 80th anniversary of St. Tikhon's Seminary in which he spoke of The Many Saints Who walked and Lived There'.

Throughout all these events many of our parishioners worked very hard in assisting our pastor with all these most worthwhile tasks. Our November fest 2018 was the most successful in our parish's history and we are most grateful to our parishioners' families and friends. The culmination of the year was the visit of Archbishop Mark on the Feastday of the Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos by the Righteous Anna December 9, 2018. GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!

Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary Orthodox Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Our parish has been blessed this year with much activity in three areas, namely, the liturgical life of the community, the continuing education of our children and members of all ages and the upkeep of our property which we have been stewards of for the past 105 years.

Our liturgical life has been varied and full during the past year. We have had one Baptism and another very young person born at the end of the year. With much sadness, we have had three parishioners fall asleep in the Lord. We maintain a full liturgical calendar with some increase in Sunday attendance.

We have continued with our vibrant monthly Bible study and our monthly adult education program completing our study of our iconographic program and starting an intensive study of liturgical music. Our church school with almost all of our children in attendance studied the sacraments this year and enjoyed a visit to the Philadelphia Zoo.

During three months of the year, we have had voluntarily work crews restoring and beautifying our venerable church. Over three quarters of our parishioners participated. Because of a major flood in and basement in May, we have also concentrated on restoration of the iconostasis and renewal of our church interior.

Lastly, with much joy we participated with FOCUS in the backpacks for student's program donating over 40 backpacks and now have a continuing relationship with a local veteran's shelter. We visited them after Veterans Day with donations of sheets, homemade hats and scarves and toiletries for all of the residents.

God has blessed us this year with a visit from his Eminence Archbishop Mark and many visitors searching for a genuine spiritual community in south Philadelphia.

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Coatesville, PA

It has been a good year for our parish. We had one Chrismation last summer and will be welcoming several new members this year. We had our annual fund raiser at the Strawberry Festival in June where we provided Greek Style Gyros for many repeat customers. We did two fundraisers with Paschal Breads and Christmas Breads. We also had our St. Nicholas Day Liturgy and dinner with His Eminence Archbishop Mark attending.

St. Stephen Orthodox Cathedral, Philadelphia, PA

During the past year St. Stephen's Cathedral held and participated in a number of events. Some of them are established annual traditions while others were new initiatives by our parishioners.

This past year our Cathedral hosted Sunday of Orthodoxy celebration for the faithful of Philadelphia area. We were especially blessed to have our Diocesan Hierarch, Archbishop Mark, join us both at the Divine Liturgy and at the Vespers service with the Rite of Triumph of Orthodoxy. His Eminence was also with us on Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week, as well as at the Divine Liturgy on Bright Monday. At our Cathedral on this day we hold a special service of the blessing of children's baskets, followed by the Easter Egg Hunt.

As has been a tradition, in January our local FOCA chapter organized the 81st Novogodny Ball, which again drew many Orthodox Christians of the area, especially youth, to the celebration of the New Year.

Our Food Festival, held on the first Saturday of November, was very well attended. Thanks to the hard work of many parishioners, it was another success. This event continues to be a wonderful outreach to our neighboring community and an important opportunity for our parishioners to work together and to get to know each other.

During the year 2018 our parish was involved in a number of special charitable fundraisers, in addition to monthly charity collections that are designated in support of various needs outside of our community. On Palm Sunday we were visited by a representative of St. Elizabeth Convent in Belarus and were able to raise over \$1700 in support of the important work of this monastery. Also, Mat. Margarite Zlatkowski was responsible for organizing second successful Golf outing "Two Holies and a Saint." This event raised \$2000 in support of children's activities of the seminarian families at St. Tikhon's.

We place special emphasize on the work with the youth of our parish. Besides having high enrollment in our Sunday School classes, this year was marked by active work of the Parent Committee. A number of our families have put wonderful efforts into providing monthly opportunities for the children to get together during the year, to have fellowship and fun with each other. In July the youth of our parish participated in a trip to Sight and Sound Theater for the play "Jesus." Besides enjoying the play, we had a chance to meet and to talk with the actor in the title role, who is an Orthodox Christian.

In August we held our annual Vacation Church School with the theme "God's Calling to Serve Our Community." We were able to arrange for those who work in police, fire department, nursing and teaching to share with the children about what inspired them to choose their profession.

Besides these activities, St. Stephen Cathedral continues to offer services both in English and Church Slavonic. We hold regular Catechetical Instructions for those seeking to join the Orthodox Church lead by Reader Nathan Claussen. Every Thursday evening, except for July and August, there is a Bible Study for those interested in deepening their knowledge of Scripture. We continue with our outreach to the Russian community. This part of our parish has been consistently increasing and at this time we are in the process of discerning whether it is God's will for the establishment of a separate parish of our Diocese, specifically dedicated to the service of Russian-speaking residents of North-East Philadelphia and neighboring areas.

Finally, in September of 2019 we will be celebrating the 45th anniversary of the consecration of St. Stephen's Cathedral. As we are preparing to celebrate 45 years of our service to God, we are also looking forward to the future of glorifying our Lord in the

Orthodox way and preaching the Gospel to all those who turn their hearts and their minds to the witness of the Ancient Christian Church.

St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Bethlehem, PA

St. Nicholas Parish has had a very busy year, with a great many things to report. However, I will necessarily need to keep it brief for this context.

Revitalization Committee: During the course of 2018, the Revitalization Committee of St. Nicholas Church has really come into its own, and begun to do wonderful things around the parish. By way of example, our teams under the committee are in the process of re-organizing and expanding our internal and external communications, giving us not only more clarity within the parish, but also aiding in "public relations," and our exposure to the community around us. We are expanding our parish education to include adult education classes (which have been very well attended), lectures, and pan-orthodox events such as Orthodoxy on Tap. Our Active ministry team is also expanding their reach to include Parish Care ministry, which will focus on weekly visitation of all of our sick and homebound parishioners, so that they can feel a sense of continued connection to the parish.

Parish Events: This year saw the return of our "Russian Days" festival in September, which was very well attended. Most recently, we hosted our Christmas Bazaar and Choir concert, both of which brought many people from the surrounding community into the parish.

Charitable giving: This year, St. Nicholas Church has given more than \$15,000 in charitable donations to Seminarians, as well as disaster relief in California and Alaska.

Catechumens: For St. Nicholas Church, the thing that we are currently the most proud of is the fact that we have 15 catechumens who will be brought into the fullness of the Orthodox Church this Spring. Our catechism/inquirers classes have been having average attendance of 20-25, showing that not only are our catechumens interested in learning about the faith, but that our "cradle-Orthodox" members are as well.