

2021 Diocesan Assembly – Philadelphia Deanery Report

In the beginning of the year a number of priests and the faithful of our parishes were able to be together on January 26 for the celebration of the Blessing of Waters at the Cooper River and for the Sunday of Orthodoxy celebration.

Besides difficulties with the pandemic, our Deanery had a sad event of closing of Holy Trinity Church in Catasauqua. Holy Trinity was the oldest church in our Deanery, founded in 1898, with St. Alexis Toth serving there at the beginning of its history. We want to thank Fr. Timothy Hasencz who for many years served this parish and the parishioners for their financial support and dedication in taking care of the church property through the life of the parish.

While we had an experience of closing a parish in our area, we had also a joy of opening a new parish: Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring Mission currently holding services at 500 Summerton Ave, Philadelphia, PA. The establishment of this parish was a result of a dedicated effort by St. Stephen Cathedral to minister to the Russian-speaking immigrant population of Philadelphia and Bucks and Montgomery Counties. The parish is led by Fr. Nikolai Gulin and have been able to have full cycle of services in Slavonic since March of 2020.

We are looking forward to the time when we will be able to resume proper life of our parishes and to hold various events on the Deanery level.

Below are the reports from some of the parishes in the Deanery.

St. Mark's Orthodox Church, Wrightstown, PA

(Fr. Martin Browne)

The year at St. Mark's was one of continuing ongoing projects, namely exploring physical expansion by engaging an architect and doing a parish wide survey assessing the facility. This was accomplished via Zoom conferences, phone calls, and in person meetings when they were possible. Additionally, we undertook a major construction project in the Church, installing French drains around the foundation perimeter, and remediating water damage. We also put a new roof on the church building and had some major grounds projects undertaken as well. We had one baptism and one Chrismation and welcomed several new members. While we did not livestream, we have been working on setting ourselves up for having an online presence moving forward.

Since reopening on Pentecost we have had full attendance on Sundays and better attendance at Vespers on Saturdays. It is easier to be full these days as the protocols for Covid have further limited our already limited space. Our parish is very grateful to those parishes in our diocese along with the monastic communities of Holy Transfiguration in Ellwood City and St. Tikhon's Monastery who have been livestreaming since the lockdown. We know your services are a lifeline for our own parishioners who have been unable to attend in person. We look forward to living and worshipping in the usual manner with our brothers and sisters in Christ in our deanery and diocese.

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

(Fr. Mark Koczak)

With the covid virus this year, this report will mention five phases as follows:

January through early March-Phase 1

March through early May-phase 2

May- Phase 3

June through end of November-Phase 4

December-phase 5

Liturgical and Sacramental Life: We have had a very active community during this year. Attendance has been dictated by the virus. During Phase 1, we were approaching 50 at Sunday Divine Liturgy and had 30 House blessings.

During Phase 2 we had weekly Prescantified Liturgies during Lent, Sunday Liturgies and the services of the last part of Holy Week and Pascha, 10 at each service.

During Phase 3, we split the parish into thirds and had 25+ at each service.

During Phase 4, starting at Pentecost, we approached mid 40s.

And finally we are currently serving a Liturgy on Saturdays with about 15 and on Sunday with about 25.

We have about 7 regular members not attending due to covid. All major services are being streamed.

We have had 3 funerals, 2 adult Chrismations and 2 Baptism/Chrismations and 1 Marriage Crowning during this past year.

Education: Our monthly Bible study has maintained 15-20 in attendance with zoom now the majority.

We had a six-part adult class on our website on Church Time during Phase 1.

We have had a weekly interview style adult class on our website and YouTube with 29 episodes during this year.

Charities: Our parish has supported over ten charities this year including two local food banks, one Thanksgiving food bank donation of \$450 for turkeys. 25 back packs for area school children in August, liaison with the Female Veterans shelter, liaison with the local male Homeless Veterans center and other smaller projects. Our grateful thanks to Mat. Janine and Deacon Michael for their leadership.

Facilities: Covid put our parish on hold for some newer projects now being restarted by our property community.

Most importantly, after over two years, we have a new roof and new sidewalk next to the church building. Painting of the cupolas is pending weather.

Our parish has been very blessed this year through the covid pandemic. This year so far we have 4 pregnant members and one very soon to be a convert.

St. Stephen Orthodox Cathedral, Philadelphia, PA

(Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk)

The beginning of the year 2020 was marked by a significant change in the life of our parish community. After almost ten years of efforts to reach out to the Russian-speaking population of our area, our Diocese was able to open a new mission, the Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring. At the foundation of this new mission were the faithful, led by Fr. Nikolai Gulin, who over these years participated in the Slavonic services at St. Stephen's. We are blessed that we at St. Stephen's had an opportunity to be at the beginning of this mission and will continue to pray for the blessings of God on this new community.

After the formation of the Russian-speaking parish in our area we at St. Stephen's continue to focus our attention on being a pan-Orthodox parish community, welcoming all those who desire to worship our Lord Jesus Christ. Since the resumption of the public services in June we continue to get good attendance at our church services, broadcasting to those who cannot be with us. During the summer months and into the Fall we also held regular outdoor Saturday Vespers service. In spite of the pandemic, we have a number of inquirers that began to attend during this year and we have regular catechetical instructions led by Fr. Deacon Nathan Clausson.

Other parishes of the Philadelphia Deanery:

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, (Coatesville, PA), Fr. Stephen Miller.

St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church, (Wilmington, DE), Fr. Barnabas Favel.

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, (Pottstown, PA), Fr. John Edward.

St. Herman of Alaska, (Gradyville, PA), Fr. John Perich.

Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring, (Philadelphia, PA), Fr. Nikolai Gulin.