

*Diocese of New York and New Jersey
Commission on Mission and Evangelism
2013 Diocesan Assembly, Yonkers, NY*

Archpriest Jonathan Ivanoff

With the blessing and encouragement of His Grace, Bishop +Michael, the Commission on Mission and Evangelism of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey is pursuing a three-prong strategy for diocesan growth and health:

First, *a more focused and aggressive approach to mission planting that will directly involve qualifying newly planted missions for OCA Church Planting Grant [CPG] status within the first two years of the mission's founding. Beginning immediately, no future mission would be established without immediate and adequate diocesan financial support for its assigned clergy.*

Status:

- Holy Apostles Mission, Lansing, NY, was awarded a renewal of the OCA Church Planting Grant for 2014, marking a full upcoming second year as a CPG recipient. While the anticipated visits I wrote about in last year's report could not be realized this year, I hope to make at least one trip if not two in 2014, and keep in close contact with Fr. James as per a stipulation in the 2014 CPG. The effect of the CPG can hopefully be seen in such statistics as attendance, which has literally doubled from a low of 11 this past January to 22 this September, as well as in the various improvements to parish life such as the commendable work Fr. James is undertaking at the local colleges organizing OCFs, and outreach and educational events held at local coffee houses and other sites that can best reach people, which also includes, presently, three inquirers (four catechumens were chrismated within the past year)
- The Orthodox Christian Mission Station of Pottsdam continues to thrive and grow. This past September, they received a visit from His Grace, Bishop Michael, over the course of the Labor Day weekend. Nearly 40, including students from the local university (SUNY Potsdam) attended his Saturday evening talk following Vespers, and about two dozen were at the hierarchical liturgy held in the chapel on Main Street, attached to the home of the mission's founder and primary mover, Dr. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis, who is also a professor of music at the university. The number of attendance is significant as the mission station lost several families to moves over the past year. The chapel continues to be beautified and the networking of contacts and new members continues to grow. At this current rate of growth, I believe they will be ready for a planting grant within two years' time. I remain in phone contact with Jessica quarterly and weekly via email.
- With the assignment full-time of Fr. David Poling to St. Innocent Mission, that parish enters into a new phase of its history that will hopefully bode well for the people there and their community's growth. As of the writing of this report, I am planning to be in the area of Oneonta during October 7-8, and hope to meet personally with Fr. David during that time and talk with him about ways in which the Commission can help him and the parish.

- Also as of the writing of this report, “Operation Princeton” has begun at Mother of God parish in Princeton, NJ. Information on this project was posted prominently on the diocesan website with timely emails encouraging participation sent out by Fr. Ken Stavrevsky many weeks in advance of the two weekends in question. A complete update will not be available until the Diocesan Assembly and will be given there.
- Other mission parishes – St. Nino (Georgian), Staten Island, and Mother of God of Minsk, Brooklyn – form the remainder of the list of mission communities in the diocese and it is my hope to visit with them in 2014.
- Finally, a new section on diocesan missions is under development and will be put up on the diocesan website, hopefully, by the end of October.

Second, *the commission will endeavor to create and aggressively offer adequate resources for those parishes that find themselves in numerical decline. This new ministry of parish health and revitalization will feature both short-term seminars/workshops and long-term solutions and approaches to clergy and laity concerned about the decline of their parish.*

Status:

- An evangelism workshop with the theme, “***Sharing Your Faith***” will be held on Saturday, October 19, 2013 in Clifton, NJ. The presenter will be Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick, who will be presenting material from his book, *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy*. The workshop will endeavor to teach attendees concrete ways, using material from the book and possible role-play, in which to share their faith: both what to say as well as what not to say. Many thanks to Assumption parish in Clifton for hosting this event. Due to the difficulty of many parishes travelling great distances to attend this event, Fr. Stephen and I will discuss having another located in the NYS Deanery as soon as possible.
- I continue to receive inquiries about Orthodox Natural Church Development, or ONCD (<http://oncd.us>), a pan-Orthodox parish revitalization ministry I began 10 years ago. Last year, I reported on the results of a diocesan-wide survey of mission and evangelism parish needs. To recap briefly: Roughly two-thirds of diocesan parishes responded positively to the need for resources, including on-site visits and presentations. Additionally, more than two-thirds expressed interest in further developing parish resources for outreach and evangelization. To accommodate such interest, and to remove any possible burdens on parishes that need but cannot afford to engage in such work with ONCD, I will be removing for next year, 2014, any personal fees associated with this work. Training a team of people at your parish, for example, will only entail the cost of my transportation up to your parish and back, and a \$100 fee for the workbook training materials. If parishes can work together to host such training at the same time for their respective teams, the logistics and costs shared can greatly work to your advantage. The ONCD survey and analytical reports will also be offered at a reduced rate. A limited amount of free coaching will also come with this. If you are interested in learning more about ONCD, please contact me at frjonathan@Hotmail.com.

Third, *future meetings will not only continue to flesh out the details and "next steps" to the above, but also address the general issue of evangelism within the diocese -- both of our own members as well as the evangelization of non-Orthodox persons and communities who may be interested in learning more about the Orthodox Faith and Church.*

I made this same statement last year and must merely update with new dates: “This needs further discussion within the Commission to develop an approach appropriate and adequate to our diocese. This will hopefully be done in 2014 and a report delivered to the Diocesan Assembly next year.” However, it should be noted that a diocesan-wide effort will be challenging at best, and that there is no substitute for effective parish-level or regional cooperative evangelistic outreach. Such a theme will form the center of any such proffered program.

Respectfully Submitted,
Archpriest Jonathan Ivanoff