

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

At the end of the 20th century, the evangelistic task is still regarded by many as a kind of sermon addressed to the world. However, evangelism is better understood and served not by placing the Gospel over against the world, but by seeking ways of relating the Gospel to the existential needs of the world. In Orthodox liturgical practice, in which the Eucharist is central, the world is brought to the Church in the forms of the natural elements, the cultural riches of the local community, or the everyday preoccupations of the faithful. Our liturgical and sacramental tradition clearly indicates that the Church's mission is not literally throwing the Gospel into the face of the world, but rather seeking first to understand what every human being longs for, and then seeing how, through the Word and the Sacrament, the Church can respond to those needs or heal any infirmities.

Georges Lemopoulos in "Come, Our Light, and Illumine our Darkness:
Reflections of Evangelism from an Orthodox Perspective"¹

Introduction

I want to thank His Eminence Archbishop Michael for the appointment as the Director of the Commission on Missions and Evangelism. I appreciate the trust he has placed in me in the absolutely critical area of Church and parish life. Many of you are familiar with my experience and expertise in this area over the past 25 years of my priesthood. As new (and returning) priest in the Diocese, I appreciate the trust placed in me by His Eminence.

Let me state outright, there is no singularly more critical task of a priest and a parish than that of mission and evangelism. It is the life blood of the parish and the very foundation of what we do as Orthodox Christians. Without mission and evangelism, the Church withers away, turns inward and forgets the very Gospel imperative to preach the Gospel to all nations. Every parish, every priest, every individual must be an evangelist and an apostle. Where this happens, the Church blossoms and becomes an image of the Gospel.

I do not have the magic wand that will suddenly turn every parish and individual into an evangelist but we can begin to acquire the "mind" of a missionary. I see my task in the coming year to assist all of us in acquiring that mind and to learn to use the tools that Christ and His Church gave to each and every one of us.

Acquiring the Mind

Therefore, for the Orthodox, the missionary life and structure of every parish is key to practicing the proclamation of Christ today. For the responsibility of every believer does not end at the geographical

¹ Georges Lemopoulos, "Come, Our Light, and Illumine Our Darkness!: Reflections on Evangelism from an Orthodox Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 87, no. 346 (July 1998): 324.

and cultural borders of the community in which he or she lives, but extends to other communities, including people who do not know the Gospel.

Fr. Ion Bria
*The Liturgy After the Liturgy*²

Over the next year there will be some goals which will lead us to acquiring the “Mind of Mission”.

1. Begin 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. There is so much experience and talent in the Diocese and we must know what we have to work with before we can begin any other projects.
2. Publish a quarterly newsletter which will allow people to share experience, thoughts and tools. I will ask some of you to contribute to the newsletter so that we can mutually benefit from the vast experience in this Diocese. I expect the first issue will be out before the end of the year.
3. The mission parishes of the diocese will meet quarterly with me to discuss their own unique perspectives and challenges. These meetings will allow a greater interaction among the missions and allow them to see their mission in a broader perspective to the work of the Diocese
4. 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. I would like to hold the first one after the Lenten season in 2020.
5. Begin a process of examining the Diocese for 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

The local Church, the diocese, the parish, but also every other form of expression of ecclesial life, such as monasteries, religious organizations, missionary societies, various small informal missionary groups and communities constantly remain open and fulfill their duty within society to radiate the love and glory of Christ to the whole of humanity for the sake of the entire human race (oikoumene), always receiving and offering the Gospel.

Archbishop Anastasios of Albania
*Mission in Christ's Way*³

Ultimately the responsibility for missions and evangelism rests in our hands as priests, lay people and communities. No program or teaching will allow us to acquire the “Mind of Mission.” Rather our witness to the Truth of Jesus Christ and His Gospel to a world that is in serious need of it will allow the light to shine on those who sat in darkness (*Matthew 4:16*). I look forward to working with all of you in the future.

²Ion Bria, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1996), 31.

³Yannoulatos, Anastasios. *Mission in Christ's Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Press, 2010, 149-151.