

# KOINONIA: A Publication of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

Evangelism in the Time of the  
Pandemic 1  
When the Going Gets Tough 2  
Ways to Reach in and Out 2  
From the Life of St. Cyprian of  
Carthage 3  
St. Simeon Mission  
Transitions 4

## EVANGELISM IN THE TIME OF THE PANDEMIC by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

*“See how they love one another”*  
**Tertullian Apologies**

These are certainly interesting times: parishioners in quarantine, restricted access to church, reduced liturgical services, social distancing, limited contact with parishioners, and an overall sense of isolation. Hardly a recipe for effective evangelism. Yet this is precisely the time for evangelism because the circumstances have opened up ways to do creative evangelism in a manner we could not have imagined. I maintain that this is precisely the greatest moment for us to reach out.

There are many tools that we can utilize during this time. Live-streamed services have opened up to a whole new group of people the beauty of the Orthodox liturgical life. While not a substitute for actual in-person services, more people are able to experience a service, in some measure, than before. Our own people are watching services that they otherwise would not



“Good News” to all who are seeking, especially those who have never even considered the Church. Use the tools!

Evangelism in the time of a pandemic, however, is ultimately about reaching out and showing how we love others. Tertullian made this observation during a time of great persecution of Christians. Their greatest witness to the truth of their faith was how they took care of each other when the non-Christians had abandoned each other out of fear. The goal remains unchanged: love one another, reach out to one another, take care of one another, be a witness for the truth of the Orthodox Christian Faith, whether virtually or in any manner we can make happen in person. Use the tools to reach your community and keep them engaged so that when the time for full reopening happens, we can say that we did all we could to keep our parishioners connected and bring the Gospel to our communities.

have attended. Other opportunities such as online classes and talks can further engage people in and outside the parish.

Clergy and parishioners are endeavoring to reach out to their parishioners in a more coordinated and systematic manner. We are breaking through the isolation by maintaining phone calls, video chats, emails, websites, video coffee hours and classes, and social media. We have been given some incredible resources which can be used creatively and purposefully. We need to use all of them to bring the

## When the Going Gets Tough

*“We put no obstacle in any one’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way...”*

**II Cor 6:3-4**

The early Church grew at an amazingly rapid rate. What is more amazing, however, is the fact that the Church grew at all, given

- The understandably primitive forms of communication and transportation which existed;
- The official persecution designed to destroy the Church internally as well as externally; and
- The various conflicts, heresies, and jealousy which periodically surfaced.



The desire to evangelize was so strong that every obstacle, including death itself, was overcome – and the Church grew.

Today’s Church is not faced with the same obstacles encountered by the apostles. Nevertheless, there are a variety of obstacles, both internal and external, which inhibit the Church’s growth. Before growth can take place, these obstacles must be overcome.

**From Fr. John Matusiak in *Church Growth and Evangelization*, OCA (1986), p. 20.**

## Ways to Reach In and Out

### For the Parish

Have you discussed and submitted a re-opening plan to your bishop? Are you ready?

Does your parish have an up-to-date directory of members and those associated with the parish?

Do the parish clergy, lay leaders and volunteers regularly and frequently contact all the members and the friends of the parish?

Have you contacted the nursing homes and hospitals to educate yourself on visitation policy? Do you maintain contact with the homebound and those in care facilities and make sure there is nothing unusual about their circumstances?

Do you have a regular parish mass email in place? Are you sending out regular emails to keep everyone up-to-date?

Do you have a parish website and is it updated regularly and frequently?

Are you using social media to keep in touch with the parish and keep members informed of the updates?

Is your parish live-streaming services, classes, and other events?

Is your parish utilizing video chats to conduct meetings, classes and social events such as virtual coffee hour?

Do you have parishioners assigned to help other parish members stay connected who do not have the equipment or ability to use computers or social media?

Can you acquire computers or tablets for the use of people who do not have them or cannot afford them?

Have you established a fund to assist those parishioners who are in crisis with rent, food and other needs?

Are you aware of who is sick, out of a job and in general need or in crisis?

### For the Community

Is your social media accessible to the general public?

Can it be easily found and is it identifiable?

Do you have a current message on the answering machine and do you return the calls?

Have you been in contact with the local authorities on guidelines and directives pertaining to churches?

Are you in contact with local organizations to know their needs and events that the parish can safely help to meet, such as food banks, clothing drives, and local shelters?

Are you contact with national organizations concerning their needs such as a Blood Drive for the Red Cross, International Orthodox Christian Charities, etc?

Are you able to host local events such as testing sites or activities to assist local health care workers, first responders and other such critical workers?

Are you in touch with other local parishes who also may be in need of assistance?

Are you participating in community chats with local government personnel and civil leaders?

Are you praying for those in need and encouraging the parish community to pray?

Are you researching other opportunities to assist people in the community?

Have you asked members of the parish if they know of any local needs or issues that can be addressed by the parish community?

Have you spoken with the neighbors and local businesses around the parish and learned how you can assist and support them?

*“Be aware, be creative and be consistent on how the parish maintain contact with one another and the surrounding community. Here are some useful suggestions but we are not limited to these items.”*

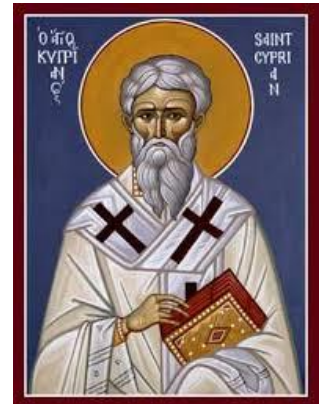
## From the Life of St. Cyprian of Carthage by Pontius the Deacon written around 259 AD

**Chapter 9:** Still, if it seems well, let me glance at the rest. Afterwards there broke out a dreadful plague, and excessive destruction of a hateful disease invaded every house in succession of the trembling populace, carrying off day by day with abrupt attack numberless people, everyone from his own house. All were shuddering, fleeing, shunning the contagion, impiously exposing their own friends, as if with the exclusion of the person who was sure to die of the plague, one could exclude death itself also. Meanwhile there lay about over the whole city, no longer bodies, but the carcasses of many, and, by the contemplation of a lot which in their turn would be theirs, demanded the pity of the passers-by for themselves. No one regarded anything besides his cruel gains. No one trembled at the remembrance of a similar event. No one did to another what he himself wished to experience. In these circumstances, it would be a wrong to pass over what the pontiff of Christ did, who excelled the pontiffs of the world as much in kindly affection as he did in truth of religion. On the people assembled together in one place he first of all urged the benefits of mercy, teaching by examples from divine lessons, how greatly the duties of benevolence avail to deserve well of God. Then afterwards he subjoined, that there was nothing wonderful in our cherishing our own people only with the needed attention of love, but that he might become perfect who would do something more than the publican or the heathen, who, overcoming evil with good, and practicing a clemency which was like the divine clemency, loved even his enemies, who would pray for the salvation of those that persecute him, as the Lord admonishes and exhorts. God continually makes His sun to rise, and from time to time gives showers to nourish the seed, exhibiting all these kindnesses not only to His people, but to aliens also. And if a man professes to be a son of God, why does not he imitate the example of his Father? It becomes us, said he, to answer to our birth; and it is not fitting that those who are evidently born of God should be degenerate, but rather that the propagation of a good Father should be demonstrated in His offspring by

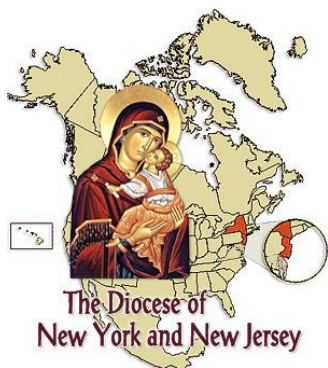
the emulation of His goodness.

*For an excellent analysis of the growth of the early Church in regards to the response of Christians during the time of epidemics see Rodney Stark's The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries (Harper Collins in arrangement with Princeton University Press, 1997)*

*Chapter 4: Epidemics, Networks and Conversion deals with the many cases of the early Church's response to such challenges. He specifically reviews both Cyprian of Carthage's letter and Dionysus of Alexandria's Paschal Letter as well as some very interesting non-Christian sources. As Stark writes: "In contrast, Christianity offered a much more satisfactory account of why terrible times had fallen upon humanity, and it projected a hopeful, even enthusiastic, portrait of the future" (Stark p. 74).*



*“On the people assembled together in one place he first of all urged the benefits of mercy, teaching by examples from divine lessons, how greatly the duties of benevolence avail to deserve well of God..”*



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## St. Simon Mission Transitions by Fr. Samuel Davis



As I write this, we are entering into a new chapter in the history of this missionary effort, our parish, and my vocation. It was three years ago that I began the Masters of Divinity program at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary. Initially the plan was for me to attend for one year and service the mission on a part-time basis. My experience over that year convinced me that I needed to continue the program to its completion. Once I began participating in the education and the spiritual life, I begin to realize the importance of completing my studies.

What I learned and experienced at St. Tikhon's Seminary will have a critical impact on

the missionary effort at St. Simon's Mission, most especially our quest to restore Holy Orthodoxy to Africans in the Diaspora, I am so grateful for being able to complete the entire three years.

Reflecting on this experience there is so much I am thankful for that has benefitted my family and the work of our Mission in the Diocese. While at St. Tikhon's I discovered the life and witness of Archimandrite Raphael Morgan. Archimandrite Raphael was a Jamaican-American who was ordained and served under the Ecumenical Patriarch in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He lived throughout the world and eventually established a parish in Philadelphia. He died in obscurity and only recently was his lost grave rediscovered in Pennsylvania.

Archimandrite Raphael sets an example for us all of the Apostolic witness of suffering for the sake of righteousness.

Archimandrite Raphael not only faced the sin of Racism and Prejudice during the height of the Jim Crow era of our nation's history, but also served during the Spanish Flu Pandemic.

Observing his dedication to the Church and his mission to evangelize Africans in the Diaspora has not only inspired me but also our mission parish in central New Jersey.

We are looking forward to receiving four catechumens by Baptism, and two by Chrismation (my parents!) once the precautionary bans are lifted. There is much work ahead, however, I do know that through prayer and hard work we all can be transformed during this national crisis.



THE VERY REV. FATHER RAPHAEL

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