

Church Ministries / Departments

Department of Evangelization

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Accomplishments/Progress Since the 13th All-American Council

The Department of Evangelization is a new department within The Orthodox Church in America. It was created after the last All-American Council by combining the Missions Unit and the Church Growth Unit. Its function is to assist the dioceses, parishes, and missions in their evangelizing efforts for overall Church growth. Representatives from each diocese of The Orthodox Church in America assist the department. There is also a seven-member committee that works on all programs and initiatives.

The major work of the department can be divided into two areas: missions and church revitalization. Each of these areas has individual programs and initiatives that the department promotes and operates. The major focus has been not only reorganization but operation of ongoing projects. These programs and their accomplishments are recounted below.

Missions

♦ Church Planting Grant Program (CPGP)

This has been a very successful and visible part of the department's work. Since the program's inception, nearly 20 missions have successfully transitioned from mission to parish status. The program provides matching funding for qualified missions in order for them to have a full-time resident priest. The missions provide \$15,000, which is matched by the OCA and its Mission Appeal held in February annually. Missions may apply for participation in the program for up to three years. The number of grants awarded each year is determined by the amount of funds raised by the appeal. Applications from eligible communities are accepted prior to August 31 each year.

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Since the 13th All-American Council, the following missions have been on and completed the CPGP:

Archangel Gabriel Mission, Ashland, OR
Holy Transfiguration Mission, Raleigh, NC
Holy Trinity Church, Stroudsburg, PA
St. Anne Mission, Knoxville, TN
St. Mary Magdalene Mission, Merced, CA
St. Seraphim Mission, Toronto, ON

The following missions are currently on the CPGP:

All Saints of Alaska Mission, Victoria, BC
Holy Ascension Mission, Mount Pleasant, SC
St. Athanasius Mission, Nicholasville, KY
St. Herman of Alaska Mission, Port Townsend, WA
St. John of Kronstadt Mission, Lincoln, NE

- ◆ **Mission Handbook**

A new Mission Handbook was released this year by the department which had been in development for three years. It is a practical guide to establishing and nurturing missions in the OCA and because of limited funding, currently only available for downloading from the OCA web site. It is hoped that in the near future, funding will be available for hard copies to be available for purchase from OCPC.

- ◆ **Evangelization Conference**

In 2003 and 2004, the department held evangelization conferences that gathered experts in different areas of Church life. The themes of the conferences reflected the ongoing issues and concerns in the life of the OCA. For any conferences hosted by the department, clergy and laity are both invited to attend. The 2003 conference was held at the Life Giving Spring Retreat Center in Boulder City, NV, focusing on missions and mission life. The 2004 conference was held at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, NY, and focused on parish revitalization and the related issues that face established parishes. The department hopes to host a similar conference in 2006, focusing again on missions and mission life.

- ◆ **Retreats, Seminars, and Visitations**

The department's members attend various functions throughout the year to assist and offer analysis of a mission's growth and development. They visit missions throughout North America and teach seminars at Orthodox seminaries and diocesan assemblies, as well as at retreats throughout the many deaneries and parishes in the OCA. All department members participate according to their area of expertise and interest (with an eye to geographic proximity). Since the 13th All-American Council, more than 30 retreats, seminars, and visitations have been attended by department members. Resources from these events produced by department members are available on the OCA web site.

Parish Revitalization

- ◆ **Boot Camp**

The Boot Camp Program for the OCA has been temporarily suspended while new techniques and issues are explored and evaluated. While there have been no boot camps since the last All-American Council, it is expected that a report on this program will be prepared later in 2005 with suggestions for possible future implementation.

- ◆ **Demographic Study**

The department produced a complete demographic study of all parishes and missions in the OCA which was distributed to all dioceses. This information provided valuable insight into the growth and statistics of the OCA since the granting of autocephaly.

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- ◆ **Individual Retreats**

Members of the department have visited various dioceses and parishes throughout North America for selective seminars and talks held to assist parishes in understanding revitalization and growth. There are plans for new programs in addition to the more than 20 such visits since the last All-American Council.

The department has come a long way since its inception three years ago. Since that time, there has been work in many areas; reports on that work are only now being released. However, many other projects are delayed because of limited funding which translates to limited travel and retreats. The OCA Mission Appeal brings in a consistent amount of funding for those communities on the CPGP. With a more generous response to the appeal, more funds would be available to help more missions.

Plans for the Future

The Department of Evangelization has set forth ambitious plans for the next three years. The plans call for an increase in our mission work as well as the long-awaited expanded plans for parish revitalization. A brief survey of these plans follows.

- ◆ **Mission Box Program**

With the approval of the Holy Synod, the department is completing plans for missions to purchase new items in “boxes” that are divided into liturgical, musical, and educational packages. The boxes can be purchased together or separately by mission communities or donated by established parishes that wish to help newer communities. This will ensure that each mission will have the finest items that can be obtained at a reasonable price.

- ◆ **Mission School**

Plans will be submitted to His Beatitude and the Holy Synod after the All-American Council for a proposed one-week mission school to be held each year. Designed to help all clergy assigned to missions as well as CPGP recipients will be required to attend the fully-funded school. The school will also be available for clergy serving in established parishes. The focus will be to train mission clergy in areas of evangelism, leadership, organization, and operation of a mission.

- ◆ **Theology of Mission Textbook**

This book, which is currently being written, will focus on the mission theology of the Orthodox Church. It is hoped that the book will become a standard textbook for the study of missions, both in theology and history, with a particular focus on the OCA.

- ◆ **Parish Revitalization Handbook**

The second volume of the Evangelization handbook is currently in outline form and will be presented to His Beatitude and the Holy Synod for review in 2006. Focusing on the practical aspects of parish revitalization, growth, and problems found in established or declining parishes, this volume is meant as a companion to the handbook on missions and will be produced in the same manner as the first volume.

- ◆ **Evangelization Conference**

The department hopes to host a third conference in 2006 in a centrally located city, focusing on the theme of missions and mission life. The department hopes to alternate themes and locations each year according to the consensus of the Church.

- ◆ **OCA Endowment Fund**

The department is reviewing ways to work with the Department of Stewardship and the Development Office to expand the existing OCA endowment for missions. Funds from the endowment would benefit the newer missions, their operation, and the support of programs and initiatives. With a fully-funded endowment, the department would be able to complete more projects. A long-term goal, now being explored, would be to establish a sizable fund that could be used to assist missions with mortgages and low-interest loans.

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- ◆ **Parish Revitalization Grant**

Currently the department is looking into ways in which selected declining parishes may receive funding and assistance toward revitalization. Such a grant program would operate in a similar manner to the CPGP, with specific criteria and goals required for participation.

- ◆ **Sister Church Program**

The department is looking for ways to expand the number of missions receiving assistance in getting a full-time resident priest. Studies have clearly demonstrated that this critical “ingredient” decreases the time of transition from mission to parish status. One possible method is to match established parishes with fledgling missions that cannot meet the criteria of the CPGP. The program would operate in the exact same way as the CPGP.

- ◆ **Hundred Cities**

The department has collected information from across North America to produce a list of the next 100 cities or locations where missions should be proactively planted. After this list is reviewed and approved, it will be disseminated to the dioceses for their information and use.

- ◆ **Other Plans**

There are, in the planning stage or already in existence, other programs and initiatives to assist the Church in the evangelization effort. These include study papers, articles, and seminars. There are also plans to increase funding of the CPGP and provide other assistance for missions in the future.

All of these ambitious plans will require three things: time, effort, and money. While some programs cost very little to start, others will require a significant investment over the long term. Yet all of them will enable the department to better react to needs and challenges and, more important, be proactive in presenting solutions to the challenges of the future.

Accountability

One of the more remarkable aspects of the department’s work is that the investment has resulted in proven successes. For example, 94% of all monies raised through the OCA Missions Appeal goes directly into the mission communities across North America. In turn these missions grow into self-supporting parishes that pay assessments and support the appeal themselves. This is a positive way of investing money in such work, resulting in many healthy parishes. This in turn provides strong, growing communities throughout The Orthodox Church in America.

While the budget for the department is small and, as such, can only fund a limited number of projects, many of the projects are low-cost (e.g., the Mission Handbook) or are self-funded (e.g., the Evangelization Conference). As the department continues to develop, there will be a need for more resources to help provide the materials that parishes need. There should be a goal of having a full-time, salaried national evangelization director who would have direct oversight of the programs for monitoring, implementation, and teaching.

The department works well with other departments and institutions - with the seminaries and the local diocesan contacts. From its beginnings, the department was expected to only assist with diocesan affairs when approached, and to provide material and programs that are better prepared from the Central Church instead of locally. The most effective evangelization efforts always come from local faithful working locally, and the department strongly encourages this method. The more that local communities utilize the evangelization resources produced on the national level, the more effective their efforts can be.

Furthermore, the department understands that it must respond to the specific needs of the local parish and not through one uniform plan for all communities. It is the information received from individual parishes, missions, and dioceses that guides the work of the department. The success of the department is found in the increasing number of growing missions, recovering parishes, and the effective tools provided for use in the local parish. All of this will ensure a healthy and growing Orthodox Church in America.