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Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All-America and Canada

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

“To evangelize is to proclaim the good news of the risen Christ, to announce that the gospel of salvation, that eternal life in God’s kingdom, is truly with us - here and now - in the life of the world.” These are the opening words of the study papers of the Eighth All-American Council on Evangelization.

The Department of Missions of the Orthodox Church in America has been in existence since 1974. Since then, the department has tried to assist all dioceses of the Orthodox Church in America in their efforts to establish new missions. The main thrust of this department’s work has been the preparation of materials for the Annual Mission Appeals and the distribution of monies generated from these appeals. By request, the department has also assisted in the establishment of mission parishes by passing on successful approaches to mission development, distributing liturgical items, attending diocesan assemblies and making field trips to learn firsthand the struggles and concerns of people involved in missions.

Over these years, the members of the Department of Missions have heard from many people - time and time again - the need for the establishment of guidelines for missions. The department has tried to meet this need with “Stages of Community Development.” This guideline is general, and is to be implemented in all dioceses of the Orthodox Church in America. “Stages of Community Development” can be a valuable and effective tool to “normalize” the process of establishing new mission parishes in an orderly and systematic manner anywhere throughout the North American continent.

A vital part of the process of evangelization is to have a sanctified people gather together in a common place of worship to hear the Word of God and to partake of the Sacrament of His Kingdom. “Stages of Community Development” can aid that process.

With love in Christ,

+ **THEODOSIUS**
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STAGES OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Guidelines for Missions

The following are definitions of the four types of local church communities which exist in the Orthodox Church in America. It is usual for a community to progress through categories one, two and three before finally being recognized as a fully self-supporting parish. While some very small communities may never progress beyond category one, it should be noted that categories two and three are transitory stages with limited durations. In all instances, the status of a community is determined by the diocesan bishop after thorough study and consultation with the diocesan Department of Missions and the district deans. The diocesan Department of Missions may vary from diocese to diocese, but in general it consists of the diocesan bishop, the diocesan chancellor, the district dean and at least an equal number of concerned laypersons.

I MISSION STATION STATUS

A “mission station” is an outreach ministry of a single parish, group of parishes, deanery or diocese to a group of faithful (generally less than 25 pledging individuals) established with the knowledge and blessing of the diocesan bishop. A mission station may be established because (a) the faithful live at a distance from an established parish which makes active participation in the sacramental and communal life of the Church difficult, if not impossible; or (b) there is a legitimate need to establish another community in the same general area as another parish.

If more than one priest is involved in ministering to a mission station on a rotating basis, one of their number is appointed priest-in-charge by the diocesan bishop. In lieu of a mission council, a local lay coordinator is appointed by the diocesan bishop upon the recommendation of the priest-in-charge.

No antimins, chrism or metrical books are issued to a mission station, but are provided by the celebrating priest. Sacraments are registered in the metrical books of the parish of the celebrating priest with a copy sent to the diocesan chancery office.

Financial assistance to a mission station comes from the mission station’s membership and the sponsoring body (parish, group of parishes, deanery or diocese). Accounts for mission stations may be opened for necessary financial transactions, titled: “Orthodox Mission of the Diocese of _____, city, state.” Federal ID numbers and state tax exemption numbers will be those of the diocese.

Monthly reports on the progress of a mission station must be sent by the priest-in-charge and the local lay coordinator to the diocesan chancery office with a copy to the diocesan Department of Missions. Every six months the diocesan bishop reviews the status of the mission station with the diocesan Department of Missions to determine if the community should be graduated to a provisional mission, remain a mission station or be disbanded.

The priest-in-charge and the local lay coordinator of a mission station are invited to all diocesan assemblies, but not to All-American Councils.

II PROVISIONAL MISSION STATUS

A “provisional mission” is an outreach ministry of a single parish, group of parishes, deanery or diocese to a group of faithful (no less than 25 pledging individuals) established with the knowledge and blessing of the diocesan bishop. Provisional mission status is granted for a period of time not to exceed three years - at which time it will be graduated to mission status or revert to mission station status.

A provisional mission may be served by a number of priests on a rotating basis, one of whom is appointed priest-in-charge by the diocesan bishop, or if it is financially able, it may be assigned its own pastor. A mission council is appointed by the diocesan bishop upon the recommendation of the priest-in-charge or the pastor, or it may be elected by the provisional mission’s membership with the diocesan bishop’s approval.

A provisional mission is now placed under the protection of a heavenly patron by the diocesan bishop. The community may then seek the approval of the diocesan bishop to incorporate with the civil authorities and acquire property. The charter (and the by-laws) of a provisional mission must be in agreement with the diocesan by-laws and the normal statute of the Orthodox Church in America and must be approved by the diocesan bishop. In dioceses where diocesan charters and by-laws are already adopted as a norm, a provisional mission will automatically accept them. If a provisional mission is assigned its own pastor, antimins, chrism and metrical books are issued.

Records, previously kept at the diocesan chancery office, are turned over to the pastor’s office. Federal ID numbers and state tax exempt numbers are now registered in the name of the provisional mission.

Financial assistance to a provisional mission comes from the provisional mission’s membership and the sponsoring body (parish, group of parishes, deanery or diocese). In addition, it is eligible to receive, without charge, Christian education materials, liturgical music and service books from the diocesan Department of Missions and ecclesiastical items from the inventory maintained by the diocese. The diocese may request financial aid for a provisional mission from the Orthodox Church’ in America in accordance with the financial guidelines set by the Orthodox Church in America Department of Missions.

Monthly reports on the progress of a provisional mission are sent by the priest-in-charge or pastor and the local mission council to the diocesan bishop with a copy to the diocesan Department of Missions. Every six months the diocesan bishop reviews the status of a provisional mission with the diocesan Department of Missions to determine if it should be graduated to mission status, remain a provisional mission, or revert to mission station status.

A community granted provisional mission status is listed in the annual Yearbook and Church Directory of the Orthodox Church in America, and it sends delegates to diocesan assemblies and All-American Church Councils in accordance with diocesan by-laws and the normal statute of the Orthodox Church in America.

III MISSION STATUS

A “mission” is a local church community of more than 25 pledging individuals, which is served by its own pastor, established with the knowledge and blessing of the diocesan bishop. Mission status is granted for a period of time not to exceed three years, at which time it will be graduated to parish status or revert to provisional mission status. The community is led by its pastor and an elected mission council which has been approved by the diocesan bishop.

Financial assistance to a mission comes from the mission’s membership and the sponsoring body (parish, group of parishes, deanery or diocese). The diocese may also request financial aid for a mission from the Orthodox Church in America in accordance with the financial guidelines set by the Orthodox Church in America Department of Missions. In addition, it is eligible to receive, without charge, Christian education materials, liturgical music and service books from the diocesan Department of Missions and ecclesiastical items from the inventory maintained by the diocese. If the community has not already begun raising money to purchase its own property, it will do so now.

A community granted mission status is listed in the annual Yearbook and Church Directory of the Orthodox Church in America, and it sends delegates to diocesan assemblies and All-American Church Councils in accordance with diocesan by-laws and the normal statute of the Orthodox Church in America.

IV PARISH STATUS

A “parish” is a local church community of at least 50 pledging individuals, which is served by its own full-time pastor and established with the knowledge and blessing of the diocesan bishop. It worships in its own facilities, has housing available for its pastor, is able to compensate its pastor fully without his having to resort to outside employment, and is able to meet its own expenses and financial obligations to the diocese and the Orthodox Church in America without outside assistance from a sponsoring body. A community granted parish status is listed in the annual Yearbook and Church Directory of the Orthodox Church in America, and it sends delegates to diocesan assemblies and All-American Church Councils in accordance with diocesan by-laws and the normal statute of the Orthodox Church in America.