

• ST NEKTARIOS ORTHODOX CHURCH •  
Pastor's Report • December 2, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Christ is in our Midst!

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God." With these words, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, opens his poem entitled, "God's Grandeur," which speaks of one of the central themes of the Christian life: the theme of glory. As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann was fond of saying, we were created to be doxological and eucharistic beings. We were created to be men and women that offer glory and thanksgiving to God. It is our essential calling. As such, the entirety of our lives as Orthodox Christians is bound up in this pursuit.

Our lives, through a series of unforeseen events have been grafted together to do just this. In God's providence, we find ourselves here in Waxahachie at this place and this time to bear witness to the basic fact of Christian joy: that Christ is risen. And the witness (μαρτυρία) that we make is unique and unrepeatable in the same way that each person is unique and unrepeatable. Our witness as Orthodox Christians in Waxahachie is unique to us but it bears the traits of all true Christians. It is compassionate and full of love.

The mission in Waxahachie began quite some time ago, long before I was ever involved. It was encouraged and supported by many of you, by many priests, and by many faithful Orthodox Christians, but it really came into its own with the celebration of our first Divine Liturgy on July 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. That is, in some ways, as good a birthday as any for our mission. And so, since that time, we have been working hard at putting together a proper place of worship, a place dedicated to being "sacred space." We have worked hard at establishing our common life of prayer and cycle of services. We have begun the even more difficult task of becoming brothers and sisters in Christ. And we have begun to bear witness to our faith to those within this community.

As the priest within this local body, I have tried to be careful to preach the Gospel first and foremost, to encourage us all to go further up and further into the mystery of Christ. I don't want you to be content with being good enough. I don't want you to be content with some knowledge about Orthodoxy. I want us all to be saints. That is why we were all brought here. And that good work is being done.

Some of the milestones that we have seen since our first liturgy include the work on our building with painting, cleaning, supplying furniture, starting a proper iconostasis, acquiring or building liturgical items such as icon stands, an altar, a table of oblation, and their coverings. We were blessed to receive as gifts a chalice and diskos, a seven-branch candle stand, and most recently, a blessing cross from Holy Nativity Monastery. Through the generosity of many of you as well as those sympathetic and supportive of our mission

we commissioned our first patronal icon of St. Nektarios, purchased icons for our iconostasis, and established the beginnings of a proper bookstore. In a remarkably short period of time, we have gathered around ourselves what we need to perform our sacred services with dignity with more than a modicum of beauty.

One of the most important milestones to me personally is the reception of our five catechumens and their desire to be brought into the Orthodox Church. Their fervor for the faith is evident in their willingness to be changed by what they are hearing in catechism and by what they are experiencing in worship. The invocation by St. Paul to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12) is keenly felt by them as we bring to bear the witness of the fullness of the faith.

Quite often, I hear the question, “How’s the mission going?” People are curious how we are handling and managing the challenges of establishing Orthodoxy in an entirely un-Orthodox community. People are curious about our numbers. People are curious if we are “growing” here in Waxahachie. I tend to ignore most of those questions and try rather to focus on the important ones. Are we, each of us, further along the path to deification? Are we beginning to lay aside our selfishness and pride? Are we learning to love? Are we learning to pray? Are we learning how to suffer? In short, are we more Christ-like than when we first began? That is the only measure by which we are held accountable.

The prayer of the second Antiphon during the Divine Liturgy is this: *“O Thou who hast given us grace with one accord to make our common supplications unto Thee, and promised that when two or three are gathered together in Thy name Thou would grant their request: Fulfill now, O Lord, the petitions of Thy servants as may be expedient for them: granting us in this world the knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come, life everlasting.”* That is the prayer of our mission here in Waxahachie. God has gathered us together to make our common supplications. To offer to us the knowledge of His Truth. To offer to us life everlasting.

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

I remain your servant in Christ,

Fr David