

Department of Interfaith and Inter-Orthodox Relations Report, April 5, 2017
Chairman, Archpriest Thomas Zain

The mission of our department is to interact with and attend various meetings, dialogues and conferences with other Orthodox Christian, non-Orthodox and non-Christian bodies.

The department was formerly chaired by Archpriest Olof Scott who retired two years ago. Last year, His Eminence appointed me to chair this department. Since that time I have attended several meetings and conferences, mostly in the Greater New York area and tried to make our presence known, especially with regard to the Christian plight in the Middle East.

Most recently, in early March I attended and spoke at a CCT (Christian Churches Together) conference in Newark, NJ on Persecuted Christians. The conference consisted of about 40 church leaders from all over the country who are members of this body.

We have a minimal travel budget, however, if we are to be serious about this work, having given minimal time to this department, I would suggest a change in the structure in the department take place going forward. Right now, this department encompasses three different areas, interactions with other Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox jurisdictions, interactions with the various councils like CCT, NCCC, etc. and the various dialogues like the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, etc. In both the OCA and the GOA, this position is a full-time, or almost full-time position and is definitely like a full-time job if we are interested in being known. Rather than make it a full-time position for us, I would suggest a team effort going forward with myself handling the Inter-Orthodox relations and Middle Eastern concerns area (e.g. plight of Middle Eastern Christians) and one or two other people handling the other areas who have the time to attend many of the dialogues and conferences around the country. For example, we need to find a priest who has an interest in this area and has a small or medium size parish with someone to fill-in for him like a retired priest so that he could attend meetings of behalf of the department. This would be an ideal situation.

I say this for the following reason: The representatives in these groups all know and have relationships with each other. We lose out and lose our seat at the table when we either do not send representatives to these conferences at all or we send someone different, that is, a local priest every time to save money rather than them seeing the same face every time. This prevents us from building relationships with the others who all know each other and see each other at each meeting. As a result, when they want an Orthodox representative at the table to speak about something, it is almost always someone from another Orthodox jurisdiction, even when the discussion is about the Christians of the Middle East.

As such, I would suggest discussing the revamping of this department with His Eminence and setting a budgetary goal based on his wishes and desires for this

department going forward. If there are no changes, then the budget can remain the same at \$6,000 which covers our travel to various meetings as well as memberships in the various ecumenical groups to which we belong and/or support.

In Christ,

Archpriest Thomas Zain
Chairman