

Out of Obedience to Bishop THOMAS, I reluctantly handed over this class project from my time in Seminary. It was Fr. Boniface's expressed desire not to share this outside of my class experience.

These are his words:

When Otherwise, please keep this as a class project. I dread to see this getting loose on the internet.

AND IF that ever happened I would want to sit down and do a great deal more editing.

Thank you for keeping this a class project only.

Yours in Christ,

Father B.

Out of Respect for Fr. Boniface's wishes regarding this presentation, please do not disseminate without the written blessing of Bishop THOMAS.



From the Wisdom of Fr. Boniface Black

When Starting a Mission: Consider these Things
An Interview with Fr. Boniface Black

Respectfully
Submitted by
Fr. Gabriel Tannous

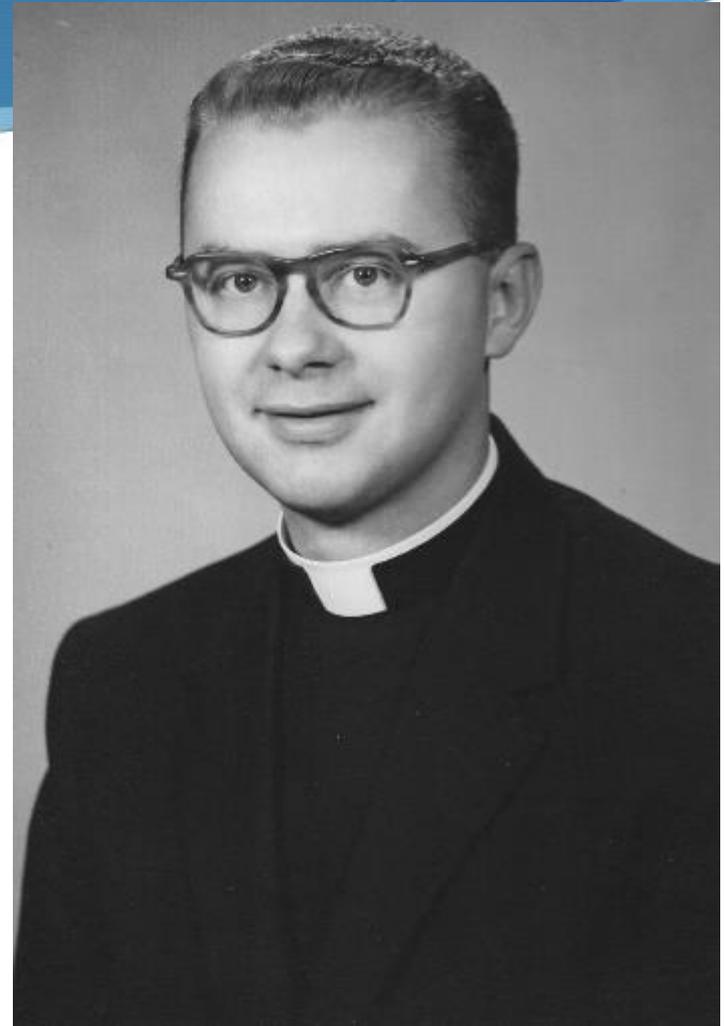


25 Questions

- ◆ I drove down to Delaware to Interview Father Boniface Black in his condo before Lent in 2013.
- ◆ Prior to visiting him, I had sent him 25 Questions to consider.
- ◆ I was going to interview him but he opted to read all of the questions himself and answer them into a recorder.
- ◆ He asked that his voice not be heard. You will understand why.
- ◆ He also asked that this information not be released until after his falling asleep. Bishop THOMAS requested I release this information February 2018.
- ◆ I paraphrased most of his comments.
- ◆ My clarifying questions are in blue and are a reflection of how I remembered him from being in his church for 20+ years.

Who were your main influences in shaping your Christian worldview?

- ◆ My Mother
- ◆ My Pastor in Illinois was from Germany, he had a charming accent, he was always on the job.
- ◆ I always liked church, I always stayed in church.
- ◆ Your Pastor always worked, is that why you always worked?
- ◆ Probably. This is my life. This is what I do.



How and when did you understand that you and your family were to be Orthodox?



- ◆ This came over a long period of time, but it came to a head in Philadelphia.
- ◆ They were the most physically wonderful years of my life. Women priests and gender mixing phase had begun in the Lutheran Church. I could see it coming to a head like two trains in the night. So I said, “we have to get out of here.” I had the most beautiful church in Philadelphia, the nicest congregation. It was very hard to make the move, but we did.
- ◆ We didn’t have the internet then. We looked in the phone book and in the encyclopedia wondering what to do? Started with the “Armenian” listing. I called them, and someone answered and said, “You want Antiochian.” I didn’t know anybody, nobody knew me. Eventually, we met Metropolitan PHILIP. We sat down and talked, they investigated us, I suppose, but we got under the umbrella. It was wonderful!

How and when did you understand that you and your family were to be Orthodox?

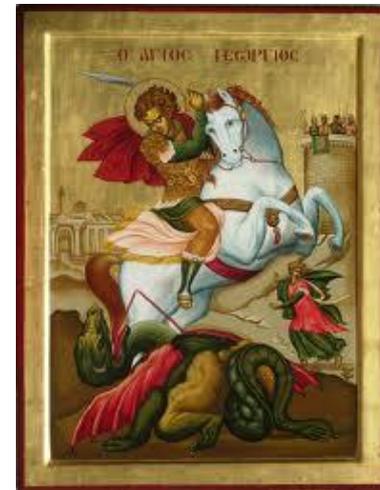
- ◆ We didn't have a lot of money, I took real estate classes, I passed the test. We were counting down, trying to put things in order. We took a vacation with the kids and told them what we were going to do. That we would be leaving and resigning. They didn't believe me. They said, "you will never leave here," "your funeral will be in this church."

- ◆ We had no other place to go! We thought maybe Latin Rite or Uniates, why not just be authentic?

- ◆ I started to practice Real Estate in Red Hill, we barely made it financially for a while. It took time to break in. I liked and enjoyed working in sales, for sure, but it was challenging at times.

- ◆ We had two people come, we met at an Episcopal Church, initially, for a short period of time. We sojourned in a community hall in Prospectville, PA for twelve years. You remember it, the Old Church.

- ◆ We did not pay any rent, but we took care of the major repairs.



- ◆ Didn't Saint George had something to do with this? Oh, Yes, over time. When I was 25 I got an icon of Saint George at a garage sale, I put it in a gold frame, and hung it up in my house. That Icon and Saint George pulled me into the church gradually. Icons, History, Martyrs, the Saints were very influential.

How did you come to find out that you were to start a mission parish?



- ◆ It was the Only thing I could do. And I felt I had the experience.
- ◆ The Archdiocese said here he is, he wants to do this, do it!
- ◆ I'm sure things are different today since the EOC joined the faith, I'm pre-all-of-that.
- ◆ **Did you have a role in the EOC coming in?** No, I didn't know any of those people, but it was a great joy to welcome them.

You once described yourself as having been adopted by Metropolitan PHILIP, how did this understanding affect the mission?

- ◆ I am adopted and honored to be adopted by him!
- ◆ I adore, I believe, and honor Metropolitan PHILIP, he has been very wise in how he handles things, and I agree with him.
- ◆ Metropolitan PHILIP and the Antiochian Clergy took me in. I had two great teachers; now Bishop DEMETRI Khoury and Father Antony Bassoline (Memory Eternal). We would go in the car back and forth to learn the services in Allentown, Wilkes-Barre, and Upper Darby. We had a wonderful relationship with sister Churches and brother Priests.
- ◆ We were given a hand cross from Upper Darby, which has since been recycled to Yorktowne, Virginia Bishop ANTOUN recognized it when he visited Saint Basil's in Virginia. He used that same cross as a priest while serving at Saint George in South Philadelphia (before the church moved to Upper Darby).

What were some of the difficulties that you experienced when starting the mission?

- ◆ The Greek clergy took us in, the Russian Church Abroad took us in, but the OCA did not. Rather, the OCA seemed territorial and apprehensive of me and our Archdiocese.
- ◆ The OCA Bishop, before Bishop HERMAN, would not allow me to serve with his priests. HERMAN told me I was welcome, but I never did, with exception of Orthodoxy Sunday. That was a sad experience for an un-expecting young man, I was 45 then. I have been an Orthodox priest now for 35 years. That was a minor difficulty, looking back at it now, but also educational.
- ◆ We had no money, I was in the real estate business for 7 years, until eventually the Church was strong enough.
- ◆ It was just following that time that we officially became tithers when I was 52, toward the end of those 7 Years. I encourage others to do so. If you do tithe, you will have something to give to others in need.
- ◆ We also had Fr. Paul Finley come and visit us. He held a “tithing workshop” for the Council and interested persons.

What are common mistakes priests make when starting a mission?

- ◆ Over Expecting
- ◆ Living with Disappointment
- ◆ Getting Depressed
- ◆ I did none of those, but I can see how it can easily happen.
- ◆ If you are in sales, you know what you are going to get. If you don't sell anything, you won't get anything. It can be brutal. But I enjoyed it and learned a lot.



How does a mission parish deal with financial struggles?

- ◆ Team Work! Build a culture of generosity!
- ◆ We had Yard Sales. We went to “Mall Days.” We went to community events on Saturdays and set up our booth. We introduced falafel, etc., to a lot of people. We had great fellowship and bonding while doing these things.
- ◆ We found good people. One parishioner laid out the structure of the books, budget, bills.
- ◆ Put the people in the parish to work as a team.



Financially, how does a priest take on the responsibility of a Parish, if there isn't a steady income?

- ◆ Get a job! Get to work! It is not demeaning to have a job.
- ◆ At first we had an administrative team. After we had a constitution, we had an official parish council.
- ◆ The Council is a Ministry Team.
- ◆ Talk to them, tell the council what you need.



At what point did the mission shift toward becoming a church?

- ◆ I asked Metropolitan PHILIP once, after we had property, “Sayedna, are we a mission or a Church?” Metropolitan PHILIP responded by saying, “You are a mission, until I tell you otherwise!” I never asked again.
- ◆ After a few years, he said we were a Church. When he said we were a Church, we were a Church.
- ◆ So when the Bishop says so? Yes.



At what point did the mission shift toward becoming a church? continued

- ◆ When Bishop ANTOUN became an Auxiliary Bishop, he started visiting all the missions. He sent a letter, telling us he was going to visit us. He came and gave us a tremendous boost! He let us know that somebody knew we were there!
- ◆ We founded the parish in 1978, and at times we felt like no one knew that we existed.
- ◆ When Bishop ANTOUN wanted to visit us (in 1983), it was tremendous! It made a big difference about people's attitude about church, the Archdiocese, and who they really are.
- ◆ **The Bishop gives us an identity?** Yes! Exactly, he does that!
- ◆ **Did Metropolitan PHILIP visit?** Yes, on three occasions!



At what point did the mission shift toward becoming a church? continued

- After Bishop THOMAS became a Diocesan Bishop in 2005, he has followed Bishop ANTOUN and has continued the same practice of regular visitations of his churches and missions.



How did the church end up in Souderton, PA?

- ◆ There weren't any churches near by, we just claimed that area.
- ◆ We looked for Churches, empty lots, we even put ads in the paper. We couldn't find anything. Two years later, the people called me, asked if we were still looking?
- ◆ It had water and sewer. It was in the middle of a great area!
- ◆ When I was in Philadelphia, I thought Souderton was the End of the World. I was wrong, that's where I ended up.
- ◆ We (the Church) had \$40,000 in the bank. We bought the land for \$150,000, 7 acres. We sold two lots, one lot the Khoriyeh and me, and the second lot to the Khoriyeh's sister (after a few years). Selling the two lots brought our initial cost down to \$50,000.

How did the church end up in Souderton, PA? continued

What about the cemetery? Well that was a different story. The Khoriyeh and I had come into better times financially. There are only two dwellings between these five acres and the church so when we saw the land we thought, “we need to buy that”. Maybe for Senior Housing? We bought it for \$70,000! We didn’t tell anybody about it. After some time, the Church started talking about needing a cemetery and was looking everywhere for land, nothing we looked at was any good.



- ◆ The Khoriyeh and I looked at each other and said, “why don’t we just donate it to the church”? And, so, we did!
- ◆ We didn’t tell anyone initially, we called the Bishop and said, someone wants to donate land for a cemetery. What do you think about that? Immediately, the Bishop said, “take it”!

What is the role of the parish priest with the parish council members?

- ◆ I need to steer you here, listen closely. There is no reason to have trouble with Council People! It is teamwork!
- ◆ My style is directive. We agree with what we want to do, and we do it!
- ◆ I always thought that you had your council members, your president and such, but everyone knew you were the leader!
- ◆ The Chairman always chaired the meetings, he sat to my right.
- ◆ So why do priests have problems with parish council?
- ◆ I don't know. If a council member is not productive, he or she in due time will be voted out.

You place emphasis on being “under the radar,” whereas others might place emphasis on letting “light shine on top of a lampstand,” how has the “under the radar” approach been effective in growing the parish into a healthy Church? It seems counter-intuitive?

- ◆ That’s a good point, whatever you do needs to be useful, multiply, and produce. However, you don’t want to become the expert of the whole Archdiocese.
- ◆ If you have some talent, it will eventually come to light.



You place emphasis on being “under the radar,” whereas others might place emphasis on letting “light shine on top of a lampstand,” how has the under the radar approach been effective in growing the parish into a healthy Church? It seems counter-intuitive? continued

- ◆ **With the most sincere look on his face, Father Boniface said these words:** Here I was, who am I? I am nobody! What do I have to offer? Nothing! So, I always thought it better to be quiet.
- ◆ On that point, during Liturgy, I would always be struck by something you read from the Liturgy of Saint Basil, “for we have done no good deed on earth.” I don’t know if you said it a little louder so that I could hear, but it definitely resonated in my ear.
- ◆ I have no record, no one asked me to come because of my qualifications. No administrative ability or preaching or teaching or doctrinal ability. I am here, I am willing to work. I presented myself. I believe in the Creed. Metropolitan PHILIP took me in! He took me in! He took a chance on me, in my hour of need! He took me in! (Reflecting on Philadelphia) Here I am, I am heartbroken, I am alone, I have no Bishop, except myself. I have no doctrine, no principles! I am trying to save children from being aborted. I am trying to work for peace, help the poor, uphold standards of priests, not priestesses. I am trying to avoid gender mixing. The body was not professing nor promoting these values.

If you were to give advice to a newly minted priest who is called to start a mission, what three things would you stress are the most important to effectively growing a healthy parish?

- ◆ Patience.
- ◆ Have some income.
- ◆ Save money.
- ◆ Have a plan.
- ◆ Have Goals: 1 year, 2 years, 5 years. These can be revised, but they are needed. Maybe God wishes something else.
- ◆ **Not more than 5?** No, our world is unpredictable.



If you were to give advice to a newly minted priest who is called to start a mission, what three things would you stress are the most important to effectively growing a healthy parish? continued

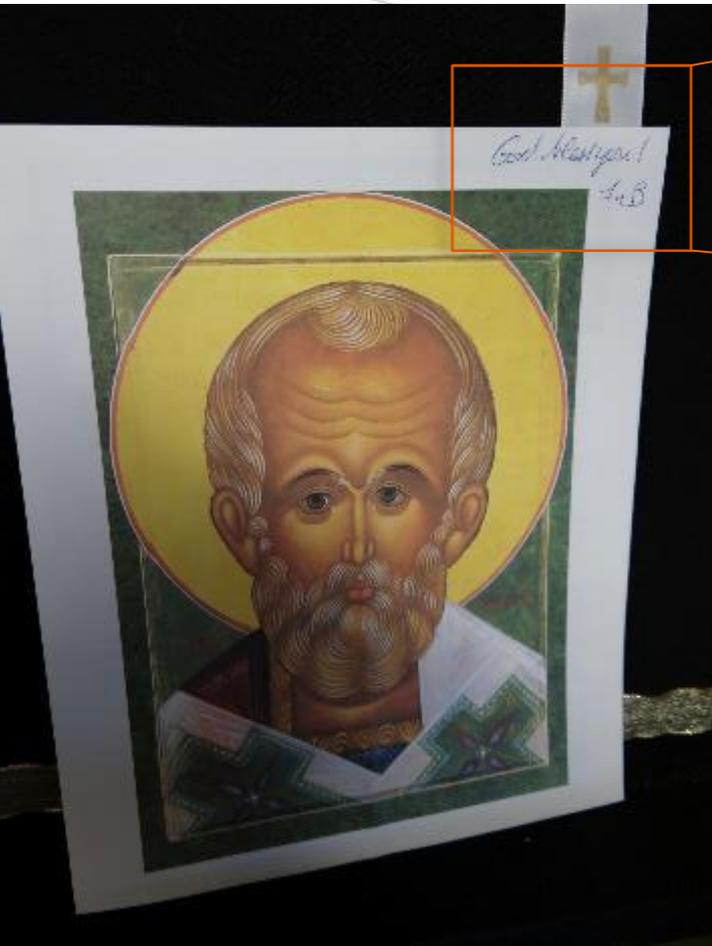
- ◆ Have to have family support! Like in the old days, when the family had a store, everyone had to work at the store.
- ◆ What if the family doesn't buy in? That's sad first of all. Be strong, I had to be strong with my son!
- ◆ You just made him go to church? You never gave him an option? No, and now he is a great Champion of the Order of Saint Ignatius.



How does the church maintain attendance by its people?

- ◆ As many people as possible, they have to have a job to do. Sometimes you give a person a job to do, and they don't do it or can't do it.
- ◆ I like the ministry team approach. When you have a ministry team approach, a task can end and a new task can begin.
- ◆ Give everyone a job, they might not do it well, but as much as possible give them a job.
- ◆ Sometimes the job is a prayer assignment.
- ◆ Keep good records: keep every name, address, phone, and email of every person you meet. Constantly update. Use reverse directory, internet to get information, if needed.
- ◆ Do not hesitate to follow up.

One of the things I noticed you always did was send a bulletin in the mail to the parishioners who were not in attendance, you would always add a little note on the corner, how were you able to do this? Why was this effective?



- ◆ It was effective because it makes the person feel you care.
- ◆ It is one thing to say, you were missed (that's a bit cold), it is better to say, how are you? Make it personal, because people like to talk about themselves.
- ◆ But how were you able to remember who was there or not? People sit in the same spots pretty much, so you know.
- ◆ Pray for your people, remember where they stand.
- ◆ Send cards, phone calls, you need to have a prayerful relationship.

I oftentimes describe you as the “retired priest who started a mission in Delaware,” how fair a characterization is this?

- Well I guess it is true!
- I have helped start many missions, but none as directly as this one here.



What things have you done differently in Delaware, than you did in Pennsylvania? What have you done similarly in Delaware?



- ◆ Almost everything similarly.
- ◆ In Delaware, I learned that you really need a priest there sooner. We limped along for seven years, until I came here when I retired in March 2009.
- ◆ Built the church within the ten years.

We used to be like soldiers in the Altar serving with you, how were you able to instill this value into us?

- Well, I thought it was a privilege to be there, not everyone can be here with us. Work together as brothers.
- We are in there as equals, and as brothers.



What is the role of the priest's wife in a mission parish?

- ◆ She has to allow other people to be involved with the women. She has to have one job, that is enough. She can't be in every committee.
- ◆ It is nice to have your wife working with you, and understanding what you do.
- ◆ Be able to discuss things with her.
- ◆ The Priest and wife are a "Ministry Team".



How important is the music to the life of a parish?



- Very Important!

- “The Byzantine Project” by Metropolitan PHILIP and Basil Kazan is Great! Use that material.

- What does a person want? What does a community want?

- People want English

- A place to park

- Sunday School

- A half decent sermon

- A half decent choir

- They want social interaction

- People need to feel accepted

- Everyone needs to be greeted and affirmed



How important is the iconography to the life of a parish?



- Very Important!
- We can teach with Icons
- We can show Icons
- Make Sermons around Icons
- People want to see Icons in church
- Better yet, I learned this from Bishop BASIL one time. He would notice people standing before the Icons and praying in front of the Icons; I'm sure for a long time.
- People want to see icons, but just as much so, a living icon.

How did you start a Sunday School Program? Is this important?

- ◆ It's on my list, you know.
- ◆ God sent the the right people.
- ◆ We have a tremendous Sunday School program at Saint Andrew's and a tremendous Sunday School and Youth program at Saint Philip's.
- ◆ People ask that a lot, if you have Sunday School. Families with children ask me that.



How did you start a Sunday School Program?

Is this important? continued

- ◆ We have only have had two people ask me about Vespers here, having Vespers is one of our goals.
- ◆ I think the 12 Great Feasts are very important, also some other special days. Lenten services are important.
- ◆ Great and Holy Week at least have one service every day.
- ◆ I also like Lazarus Saturday as a time for education, confession, family participation, and helping get ready for Palm Sunday.
- ◆ Overall, I tend towards services which bring a larger group of people together for fellowship and community building.
- ◆ I also plan to add a Bible Study within this coming year.
- ◆ For years, at Saint Philip's, we have had seasonal and weekly "Catechumens and Inquirers Group"- Fall, Winter, Spring (After Pascha). Open the doors. They come.
- ◆ Remember, we are not a Monastery, we are a parish church.

St. Philip is the Mother Church to how many other churches now?

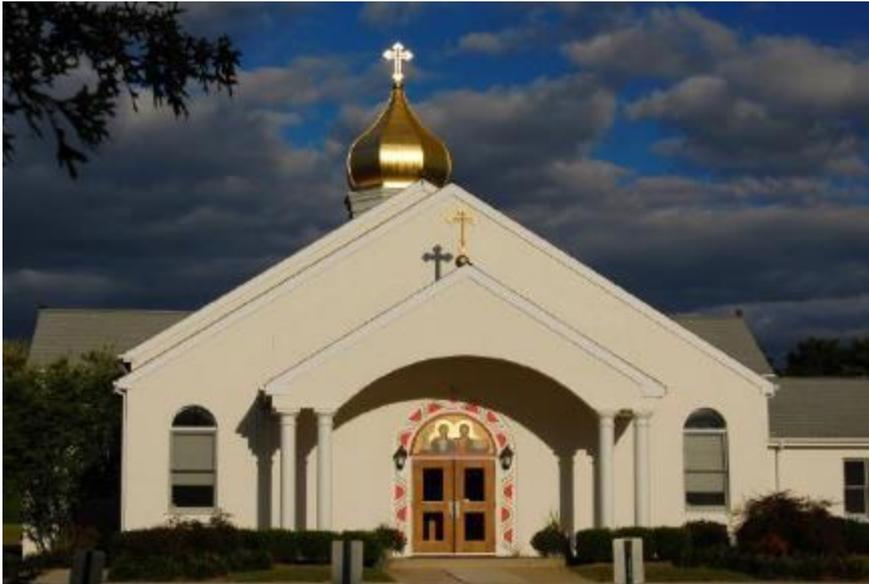


- ◆ I think I can safely say Six, Saint Philip's was the first, and from there, in different ways, five more. With God's help and good people's help.
- ◆ They probably wouldn't be in the Archdiocese today.
- ◆ In 35 Years, and they all have churches now.
- ◆ I am grateful to our present pastor at Saint Philip's, Fr. Noah Bushelli. Fr. Noah has continued to keep the parish positive about missions, missionaries, The Order of Saint Ignatius, Camping, Education, Outreach and a growing list of ministries. This has been a great blessing to me.

Churches that Fr. Boniface has had a hand in establishing to varying degrees.

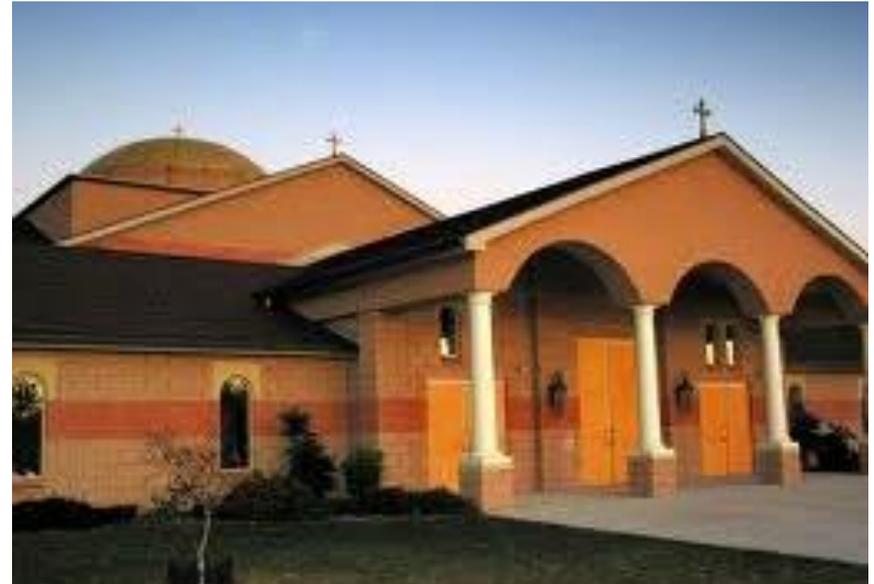
◆ Saint Philip – Souderton, PA

◆ Founded 1978



◆ Saint John Chrysostom – York, PA

◆ Founded 1993



Churches that Fr. Boniface has had a hand in establishing to varying degrees.

- ◆ Saint Mary – Chambersburg, PA

- ◆ Founded 1995

- ◆ Saint Basil – Poquoson, VA

- ◆ Founded 1998



Churches that Fr. Boniface has had a hand in establishing to varying degrees.

- ◆ Holy Ascension – West Chester, PA

- ◆ Founded 2003



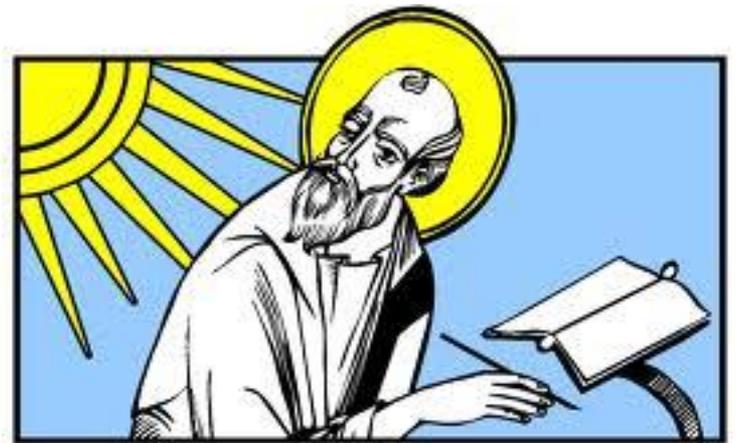
- ◆ Saint Andrew – Lewes, DE

- ◆ Founded 2007



Fellowship of Saint John

- Also, I want to mention that I have been missions coordinator for the Fellowship of Saint John, Eastern Dioceses, for some years. The Fellowship has been very positive about missions support. Here's my chance to say on behalf of the Fellowship ---We are always open to checking up on a lead or any inquiry from some person or group expressing interest in starting a mission. Our Fellowship is currently helping six communities located in DE, MD and VA.



FELLOWSHIP OF SAINT JOHN THE DIVINE

At what point is a church too big, where you need to split it? What are some of the challenges from intentionally splitting the church?

- ◆ I don't like that word-splitting! That could be negative! I like to say, "given birth to."
- ◆ You need about 100 pledging units before you can give birth to a new mission. It's a positive thing.
- ◆ Holy Ascension - We gave them 40 people and \$40,000.
- ◆ **Has Holy Ascension grown?** Yes, to about 100 people now.
- ◆ **Has Saint Philip grown?** Yes, and God gave us everything back.
- ◆ I gave a sermon about this once, but people took it the wrong way, saying I talked too much about money. **You never talked about money!** I know, what I was trying to say was, we gave Holy Ascension 40 people, and \$40,000 and all of the future monies that could come from them. We sacrificed as a parish! God gave us everything back within two years! Giving birth to a new parish was a good thing!



How many current and former priests have you directly influenced?

- ◆ Fr. Gregory, Former: got re-married
- ◆ Fr. Michael Lewis Former: deceased
- ◆ Fr. Peter Pier
- ◆ Fr. Joseph Butts
- ◆ Fr. David Bleam
- ◆ Fr. Adrian Budica
- ◆ Fr. Sava Leida
- ◆ Abbott Joseph Morris
- ◆ Fr. Herman Acker*
- ◆ Fr. Gabriel Tannous*
- ◆ So 2 former, 8 current*
- ◆ Seminarians we worked with as well. Though we didn't bring in.
- ◆ Fr. Stephen Salaris
- ◆ Fr. Andrew Damick
- ◆ Fr. John Hogg
- ◆ Fr. John Oliver
- ◆ Fr. Symeon Kees

List Updated 2018*

Do you have any Extra Advice?

- ◆ When new people come in, embrace them!
- ◆ Love what you do! I am dismayed by priests who complain about other priests, about the bishops, about the people.
- ◆ Some make fun of the people, we can not do that. We have to love the people. We work for God, the Archdiocese, but we also work for the people that put food on our table.
- ◆ Go to confession and ask for penance.
- ◆ Remember, we are here to HELP people along the way to the Kingdom of God and Salvation.

Extra Advice

💧 Regardless, Keep Smiling!



Memory Eternal!

- ◆ Last Living Image of Fr. Boniface taken by my sister Mia Tannous, July 26, 2016.
- ◆ Fr. Boniface reposed in the Lord in the early morning hours of August 7, 2016, He was 84.
- ◆ **Out of Respect for Fr. Boniface's wishes regarding this presentation, please do not disseminate without the written blessing of Bishop THOMAS.**

