

13/12/2023

Trans-continental visit of the Archdiocesan District of Adelaide to Church of Saint Nicholas in Darwin and Coober Pedy



With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, His Grace Bishop Silouan of Sinope has embarked on a trans-continental visit of the vast District of Adelaide with a small group of travellers. The first leg of this journey included Coober Pedy and Alice Springs, while the second leg criss-crossed the country through Tennant Creek, Mount Isa and Katherine, finally ending with the first-ever Divine Liturgy in Kununurra on Saturday 2nd of December 2023 . After the Divine Liturgy, the travellers made their way on the third and final leg of the journey.

Darwin is the capital of the Northern Territory and northernmost major city in all of Australia, with a metropolitan area that incorporates around 140,000. It has hot dry

winters and hot wet summers and is a significant city geographically in Australia – being a gateway to Asia and having a significant mining, tourism and defence economy. Darwin has a significant Greek population, with up to 16,000 people of Greek descent (many of whom are from Kalymnos).

Darwin has two Orthodox churches – the Church of St Savvas of Kalymnos (founded earlier in 2023) and the original Church of St Nicholas in Darwin CBD. Having come so close and with the feast day of St Nicholas approaching, the group had aimed to be in Darwin to celebrate the patronal feast on the Sunday before (3rd of December). Despite the fact that a fire enroute along the return trip from Kununurra (via Katherine) turned the nominally 9-hour journey into a 12-hour journey, the travellers eventually arrived in time for His Grace to celebrate the Divine Liturgy with local parish priest, Fr Joel Xanthos, co-celebrated by fellow traveller Fr Jeremy Krieg (CEO Greek Welfare Centre SA). His Grace addressed the people, conveying the blessings of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia. The Parish hosted a luncheon in their hall after the service where we were also blessed by Fr Christos Tsoraklidis from St Savvas. Both the service and the luncheon were very well attended. His Grace was able to present awards for long service for some of the community members.



After the luncheon, the travellers started the long trip home, stopping for overnight stays in Katherine and Alice Springs, with the goal of being in Coober Pedy to celebrate the Vespers for the feast of St Nicholas on the evening on Tuesday 5th of December 2023. This also included another brief stop at Tennant Creek to again visit Mr George Konidaris, to meet his son Dimitri and his family (who had been sick and unable to attend at the group's last visit). Another highlight was when Fr Jeremy was approached by a police car in the small town of Elliott (250km North of Tennant Creek). A young Māori police officer stepped out, and Father was starting

to become nervous until he was greeted with a very warm “Your blessing, Father!” The police officer (named Radovan/Randal) had himself become a member of the Serbian Orthodox Church in his native New Zealand and knew Fr Chris Tsoraklidis in Palmerston where his family were living and worshipping. He was excited to see Orthodox clergy in such a remote area and was keen to be contacted (and to help contact others whom he knew in the area) for the next time the group came through Tennant Creek. This bodes well for a possible return to the town in the future.

Unfortunately, the group did not reach Coober Pedy in time for Vespers as originally intended due to some mechanical issues – with the mercury hitting 45°C that evening, this may have been an act of divine mercy and providence! After arriving in the early hours of the 6th they were able, by the grace of God, prepare for the liturgy on that morning. Thus, on the morning of St Nicholas day (6th of December), the parish of Coober Pedy was blessed to have a Divine Liturgy celebrated on the actual day of its patronal feast – the first time in many years. A dozen people gathered for the Liturgy, including resident monk Fr John Eslick, with His Grace conveying the love and blessings of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia to them all. From there, the group made the final 9hr trip back to Adelaide.

And so it was that after travelling 8,500km in 13 days (an average of 650km/day) and having conducted seven Divine Liturgies in seven separate towns (some of them for the first time ever), across four different states – making one large sign of the Cross across the whole District of Adelaide – and having given away all of their stock of Orthodox books, icons and devotional items, His Grace with his intrepid support crew finally arrived home, by the grace of God, safe and sound. Truly everyone felt that they had gained more from the experience than they had given and had felt the blessings of God being poured out upon all. Having now had the blessing of visiting and scouting out these remote places (a form of “spiritual reconnaissance”), His Grace is keen to revisit and spend more time in each area, tailoring the support according to each’s needs.



