

REPORT of METROPOLITAN TIKHON

Archdiocese of Washington Diocesan Assembly
St Matthew Orthodox Church, Columbia, Maryland
November 16, 2013

To the Clergy and Delegates of the Diocesan Assembly:

Christ is in our midst!

I would like to express my deep regret at not being with you today due to my ill health. I am nevertheless pleased to report that my latest x-ray was clear and the pneumonia seems to have been effectively treated by the antibiotics. Nevertheless, my lungs are still irritated and the doctor has prescribed further rest for me in order to fully recover. I am grateful for your continued prayers and understanding. The past two weeks have been a reminder to me of the importance of pacing oneself in this hectic world that we live in and of devoting the necessary attention to one's own spiritual, mental and physical well-being.

In accordance with the OCA Statute, I have appointed Fr. Gregory Safchuk to preside at this Diocesan Assembly. I will also be available by telephone should there be any immediate issues that require an action or a blessing on my part. In addition, I am willing to answer any broader questions that the clergy or delegates might raise during today's deliberations and am prepared to answer them in writing at an appropriate time.

GENERAL THOUGHTS

As you know, this past Thursday marked the first anniversary of my election as Primate of the Orthodox Church in America. I will speak a little more about happenings on the national and international level later in this report. First, I would like to offer some reflections on my past year as Archbishop of Washington and as your diocesan bishop. While the demands of the primatial office have certainly been heavy, I have tried to fulfill my promise to you at last year's Assembly that I would take my responsibilities as a diocesan bishop as seriously as my other duties and that I would not neglect the diocese and her needs.

Over the past year, I have been more or less successful in maintaining a presence here in the Archdiocese. I have made a pastoral visit to every parish and mission at least once and I was working on a second round of visits. My goal still remains **to visit each parish at least twice each year**. At the same time, I feel that it is important to expand beyond these individual pastoral visits and to develop a stronger sense of our diocesan identity and mission. For this, I ask for the help of all of you and offer my willingness to participate in the life of our parishes and missions beyond the formal hierarchical visits.

Compared to the other dioceses of the Orthodox Church in America, ours is geographically and numerically small. Yet, from my visits over the past year, I have a strong sense that

we are nevertheless not much different from the other dioceses: we have a strong group of clergy and a great pool of laypeople which place a wealth of **experience and talent** at our disposal; we also face the same challenges that most of the rest of the Church is facing: declining membership, a transient population, lack of funds and all the cares of modern life. I am confident that the next year will provide us with many opportunities to use our talents to tackle the challenge that will confront us.

If there is one overarching goal that I would propose for our diocese over the next year, it would be to focus on **action**. Our meetings and gatherings are important to our life in the Church, but they should only serve as momentary pauses in our on-going work: a time to reflect upon previous actions and to prepare for future ones. Fifteen years ago, I made a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain and one of the monastics told me: “Wherever you are, you must act according to the Word of God and according to the Fathers. You should read the Word of God, and pray for enlightenment, strength and knowledge, but above all, you must act upon that knowledge.”

I ask for your support in taking the common actions that will help our diocese to grow and will help us be a living witness to the light of Christ and to the healing offered by the Holy Orthodox Church. I see this action as taking place in two major areas within our Archdiocese: clergy health and parish health.

CLERGY BROTHERHOOD AND HEALTH

As the Diocesan Bishop, the spiritual, emotional and physical **health** of my clergy is of primary importance to me, and along with this, the need to foster a better sense of clergy **brotherhood**. Both of these are related, as the personal health of each clergy contributes to an overall sense of communion with the brothers and a strong brotherhood strengthens each priest in his and his family’s own struggles and challenges.

To help in these areas, I have proposed the following to our clergy:

1) I will be scheduling **bi-monthly meetings** with all the clergy, to be held on a rotating basis at varying places within the Archdiocese. These will be opportunities to gather on a more informal basis for discussion with the bishop. There will not necessarily be any agenda, although certain specific topics may be relevant. The first of these was to have been held yesterday during our clergy retreat. Although I was not there, I had forwarded a number of questions to be raised for discussion and it is my understanding that a good discussion took place and we will follow up on those discussions at our next meeting.

2) I have also adapted a **Clergy Questionnaire** which I used in the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania. The purpose of the questionnaire is to provide me, as the diocesan bishop, with information that would help me to better address the needs of my clergy. It is an anonymous questionnaire and is a way for me to get an overall sense of where each of the clergy are and where they might need assistance. I had this questionnaire presented to the clergy yesterday to give them the opportunity to offer their thoughts and suggestions.

On a final note, I would simply ask all the lay delegates present today to remind your respective parishes of the crucial importance of supporting your priest. Although financial support is a large portion of this, I am speaking on the broader level of offering your support for the ministry and labors of the priests and deacons of our parishes and missions, and of actively participating, with your own gifts and talents, in the necessary work of sharing the Gospel, ministering to the poor and outcast and being true reflections of good news of salvation to the world around us.

PARISH DEVELOPMENT AND REVITALIZATION

I have seen first hand the hard work of our clergy and their dedication to the health and growth of their parishes. The challenges of **Parish Development and Revitalization** do not fall exclusively to the clergy. Every member of our parishes and missions is called to assist in this work so that collectively, we can arrive at concrete solutions to help our entire diocese retain its vibrancy and its strength.

The financial difficulties we face are only the concrete expression of our Diocese's and parishes overall health and I believe that it would be helpful for us, as a diocese and as individual parishes and missions, to begin a process of self-evaluation and self-analysis so that we might determine where we are now and where we want to go in terms of our life as a diocese. I hope that this discussion can begin today at our Assembly.

This is an area where we don't have to re-invent the wheel. There are already several Orthodox models available to assist us, such as the Parish Health Inventory Model [PHIM] (developed by Mr. Joe Kormos) and Orthodox Natural Church Development [ONCD] (adapted from the NCD model by Fr. Jonathan Ivanov). My former diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania took the first of these (PHIM) and adapted it to their particular needs within the context of Revitalization Committee.

Our Archdiocese may want to consider one of these options as a basis for further refinement within our parishes. Because we are a small diocese, we may find that a cooperative effort among our parishes and missions might be more effective than each parish tackling the process in isolation. These are just thoughts for us to ponder and hopefully act upon in due time. The purpose of these is not to provide a magic bullet solution but to provide us with a concrete self-evaluation of where we actually are as parishes and communities, which can in turn offer us some hope for moving forward.

A more immediate way for us to engage in the process of revitalization is to take action now in the various **ministries and outreach opportunities** that are already in place in our Archdiocese, such as the Christ House ministry at St Nicholas Cathedral and other local initiatives that are taking place in our parishes. The more we can encourage each other to participate in these worthwhile endeavors, the more we will grow in our common work together and the more the world around us will be introduced to the life of Orthodox Christianity.

I am grateful that there are already many in our small diocese who are actively engaged in this work on the local and OCA level. In particular we should take advantage of the examples offered by Donna Karabin, who is the Chairperson of the OCA's Department of Christian Service and Humanitarian Aid, along with Popadija Kitty Vitko; Matushka Alexandra Safchuk, who is actively involved in the Department of Christian Education; and Fr. Theodore Boback, who is our OCA Dean of Military Chaplains. The OCA Departments, and the clergy and faithful who serve within them, are provided for the benefit of our parishes and diocese. We should both take advantages of the resources they offer us and also make the effort to offer our own contribution to the work they are doing, even if it is in a small way.

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Event though we are a small diocese, we need to make a more concerted effort to be in compliance with the various **administrative requirements** of our Church, on the level of the Central Administration, the Archdiocese and our local parishes and mission. It is difficult to make the appropriate decisions for our diocese and to have an accurate self-assessment of our diocese.

One of the ways we can begin accomplishing this is to make sure that every parish and mission submit various administrative documents to the Archdiocesan Office.

1. Parish By-laws on file
2. Annual census numbers submitted
3. Report of Annual Parish Meetings with election results, financial reports and budgets.
4. Compliance with the *Policies, Standards and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct*
5. Written submission of plans for major building, renovation or liturgical art projects.
6. Continuing Education 20 hours with 5 from Central Administration

FINANCES

I will not say much about the financial questions, which I am sure will occupy quite a bit of our discussions today. We are facing some serious financial problems in our Archdiocese, which are directly related to the health of our parishes and missions.

It is important that we take a pastoral and brotherly approach to these issues and not limit them to questions of money. At the same time, those parishes and missions that are struggling need to also need to keep in mind their pastoral and spiritual responsibility to remain faithful to the structures that all parishes are equally responsible for.

One of the items that will be discussed today is a proposal for a **Diocesan Benefactors Fund**. I look forward to hearing the discussion brought about by this proposal and hope that this Assembly will ultimately move forward with this endeavor. Should this proposal be accepted by the Assembly, I am prepared to make my own personal contribution of \$5,000.00 to the fund.

COMMUNICATIONS

One area that is in great need of improvement is the area of communication. In particular, our Archdiocesan website is in need of some attention. Fr. John Parsells has graciously developed and overseen the current website, but there is only so much he can do.

At the same time, the website requires input from the clergy and parishes of our diocese. There is nothing that even a full time communication person can do if he does not have content from throughout our diocese. It would therefore be good if each of our parishes and missions could locate

Another option would be to find one or two individuals who might be willing to volunteer to oversee the website in a more direct and proactive manner. A long term goal might be for us to provide a small salary or stipend to a person who could function in this capacity on a regular basis. But in any case, the need for each parish and mission community to share their good news is paramount.

ARCHDIOCESAN ADMINISTRATION

I have tried to maintain regular contact with the Archdiocesan Officers. We got off to a sporadic start, but we have now established a pattern of a monthly meeting with our Chancellor and Secretary, which we have followed since June. We recently held a teleconference with the participation of our Treasurer, Michael Hydock, in preparation for our recent Diocesan Council and this Assembly.

I must say that I have been very pleased with the work of the officers. **Fr. Gregory Safchuk** has been invaluable as my Chancellor over the past year and it is only reluctantly that I have accepted his request to be relieved of this responsibility. He is a genuine pastor who has care for those he ministers to and this has been evident to me in the many pastoral and administrative matters that we have addressed together over the past year.

Fr. John Vitko, our Diocesan Secretary, has likewise been a wonderful asset and a very competent organizer on many different levels. He has been very able in his communication with the clergy and with the parishes and I am thankful for his contribution to the life of the Archdiocese.

Michael Hydock, our Diocesan Treasurer, was appointed at last year's Assembly for a three year term. Michael is willing to continue in this position but would be grateful for someone to take over at some point. I am not eager to lose his professional and wise advice in matters of finances, but I agree that it would be good for our diocese, if not at this Assembly, then over the next few months, to try to find someone with Michael's competence and skill, who might assist him and be trained by him for future work in the diocese.

Having said all of the above, I would like to announce my appointment of Chancellor. This appointment is not permanent, but I have not defined a term for the position. Nevertheless, I am pleased to appoint Fr. John Vitko as our Archdiocesan Chancellor. Since he is presently the Secretary, I will relieve him of that appointment, and will appoint a new Secretary in the near future.

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

Challenges. Since the turn of the century, the Orthodox Church in America has gone through a great period of turmoil and unrest, weathering difficult periods of financial and administrative upheaval which would affect not only finances and administration, but the entire body of the Church.

Some have made the claim that, because of all these temptations, the Orthodox Church in America has been wounded and has suffered a diminishing of her stature within world Orthodoxy. Perhaps this is so. Nevertheless, it is my conviction that the Orthodox Church in America, though wounded, has remained faithful to Christ and His Holy Church through the steadfastness of her hierarchs and clergy and through the prayers and labors of the faithful.

Hope. This same period of struggle has seen the strengthening of the fiduciary responsibility of the Metropolitan Council and the solidifying of a sense of brotherhood among the bishops. It has forced us to look closely at ourselves and at our institutional structures and attitudes. It has brought us into a new realm of dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters in North America through the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America. Our seminaries continue to prepare clergy and servants not only for the OCA but for all jurisdictions. There are other areas of strength and growth that we could speak about, just as there are other areas of weakness that we could ponder on. But our goal should be to focus on the actions that asked of us by the Lord and by the Church, learning from our mistakes and encouraging each other in what God has blessed us to accomplish.

International Relations. My travels abroad were limited over the past year: I travelled to Rome for the Inauguration of Pope Francis and to Russia/Ukraine/Belorus for the celebration of the 1025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. Each event offered an opportunity for me to be present as the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America and to offer the prayers and greetings of the bishops, clergy and faithful of our humble Church in North America. In particular, the gracious invitation of His Holiness, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, offered me an opportunity to serve with the Patriarchs and Representatives of all the Autocephalous Churches. In addition, I was the only North America hierarch present for significant meetings with the Presidents of all three countries: Mr. Vladimir Putin of Russia, Mr. Yanokovich of Ukraine and Mr. Lukashenko of Belorus.

In Kiev, I had the opportunity to briefly greet the outgoing American Ambassador to Ukraine and in Washington, I have also had the opportunity to meet with several

Ambassadors and to offer the willingness of the Orthodox Church in America to dialogue positively on issues that affect us as Orthodox Christians throughout the world.

Sexual Misconduct. Our response to sexual misconduct matters is one of the most critical pastoral and legal issue facing the Church today. Our Archdiocesan Clergy yesterday received a 5-hour long training session in healthy boundaries and it is something that each of us needs to take seriously. I was pleased to be able to present a report of 100% compliance with the Policies Standards and Procedures of the Orthodox Church in America on Sexual Misconduct (PSP) to the Holy Synod. Nevertheless, there are areas where our diocese needs to become more compliant, especially in the area of developing a diocesan wide program of education and training. Within the next few days, the OCA website will be posting a new page which will include the revised PSPs which were adopted by the Holy Synod at its Fall Session several weeks ago. These will need to be adopted by every parish council and read by every person in our parishes who is involved with working with young people. This is an **annual** requirement and we need to get used to making this a normal part of our administrative responsibility as parishes.

My impressions. It has been said that the past year has provided a period of calm and stability. Glory to God for such periods in our often turbulent and difficult lives. In my travels and pastoral visits throughout the OCA, I felt this calm and stability – but I have also felt the zeal and the energy of our clergy and faithful: zeal to do the work of Christ and the energy to sacrifice their own comfort and stability for the sake of the Kingdom. I have perceived a healthy violence that is waiting to take that Kingdom by force. This is reflected in the prayers, words and actions of all those who labor sacrificially for the spreading of the Gospel in the Orthodox Church in America.

CONCLUSIONS

The past 11 months of my primatial ministry have made several things clear to me on a personal level. The first of these things is the need for **prayer**: we cannot hope to accomplish anything good or anything of value, if we do not allow ourselves, individually and as parishes, to pray earnestly in our hearts before the Lord.

The second is the importance of **conciliarity**: there is nothing that one person, whether he be a bishop, priest or small child, can do on his own. The work that is before us as a Diocese, the actions that are required of us, demand that we engage in a radical re-examination of what it means to truly work together for the glory of God.

The third is the need to **slow down**. The OCA's struggles of the last decade have rightfully, at times, required a speedy and direct response. At the same time, there may have been, in the more recent years, an unhealthy sense of urgency and an over-swiftness to address perceived and potential threats or problems. Without neglecting the need to act quickly when appropriate, I think it is crucial that we also remember when we need to take a break.

On one of my yearly visits to my newly-departed Grandmother, I asked her what the secret to her long life consisted of. She replied:

“In the old days, farmworkers lived a long time and in good health because they rested during the day. They worked hard, but they knew when to take a break, and have a little nap under the apple tree.” She pointed out that the work people do today (pushing papers and having meetings) is perhaps even more difficult than farm work because people are falsely led into the notion that they can do it for a long time without a break.

So I would end by exhorting all of us to focus on the actions that we need to take over the next year, but to approach these actions with prayer, with love and respect for one another and with an appreciation of when it might be good for us to take a break.

