

Diocese of New England – Archbishop’s Report to the Assembly

Hartford, CT 2018

OPENING QUOTE

It is common to hear people refer to the Apostle Thomas as “doubting Thomas.” We all have doubts, this is only natural. However, St. Thomas’ words “Unless I see His hand, the wounds from the nails, and put my hand in His side, I will not believe,” (John 20:25) can lead us from doubt to deeper faith. Instead of thinking about the wounds in Jesus hands and in his side as materialistic evidence to prove Christ’s resurrection, see the wounds of Christ as a sign of mystery. Any number of Jewish men in Palestine during the first century may have had scars on their hands and their sides. It was a brutal time. However, our Lord didn’t endure the cross, the nails and the spear in order to prove anything...at least not in the worldly sense of proving. If this were the case, then why didn’t Jesus appear face to face with Pilate and Herod and the Chief Priests, showing them his wounds and saying, “Ha! You see. You thought you could kill me. But you failed, and I have won.” No, when Christ showed his hands and his side to Thomas, He invited Thomas to participate in the mystery of the Crucifixion. Following Christ, confessing Christ’s resurrection, is not an act of reasoning alone. Rather, Christ offers us not only his hands and his side, but he offers us his entire body, broken for us for the remission of sins. And it is precisely by communing with Christ in this way, by allowing his wounds and his suffering to be our own, that we become members of the Body of Christ, indeed His Holy Church.

HOLY SYNOD

In addition to our scheduled Fall and Spring meetings the Holy Synod held its annual retreat at the Monastery of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Rives Junction, Michigan. This year’s retreat was indeed a retreat in which the Synod had an opportunity to pray and reflect. While there are always some pastoral issues that must to be addressed when the Synod meets, we were all grateful for this time of spiritual retreat: a time for prayer, meditation along with a full cycle of services.

We were fortunate to have, His Grace ANTHONY, the Antiochian Bishop of Toledo as a retreat master and we were most appreciative of his presentations. This coupled with the full cycle of monastic services were a welcome change to some of our daily schedules at home.

Our Synod participated in the last nine gatherings of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of America, and there was some discussion among the Synod, during the retreat, as to whether or not our full participation is necessary since the process seems to be moving so very slowly. Ultimately, however, we concluded that our participation in these meetings is worthwhile and that God willing, we may be able to contribute positively to the overall good of Orthodoxy in America. The 9th meeting of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops of America was held earlier this month in Cleveland, OH.

Although we were one short of a quorum necessary for voting at the assembly there were no items presented that would have necessitated a vote. We had good discussion and reviewed and received the reports that were presented. In addition a message from the assembly of bishops to the faithful in the United States was distributed and published on our website.

Prior to the opening of the Bishops Assembly in Cleveland, I arranged with Fr. John Lojes to visit my Albanian mission parish of Shen E Prempte or better known as St. Paraskeve in Cleveland.

The Holy Synod has begun the preliminary plans for the 50th Anniversary of Autocephaly. Archbishop Benjamin is spearheading plans for the celebration and has asked that one member of each diocese be assigned to work with him. Fr. James Parnell is our representative on this committee.

I have just returned from the Fall session of the Holy Synod. For the first time the synod met with the chancellors and treasurers good discussion during this first meeting and all felt it would be a good practice for the treasurers and chancellors to meet on a regular basis.

As a reminder the Holy Synod has a policy on parishes accepting bequests, it would be a good idea for pastors and parish councils to take the time to review this policy.

In addition few other items were presented during this most recent meeting that you should be aware of:

Social media: Posting of photos especially of children can be a problem so if photos are to be taken a sign so stating should be posted. Also if there are youth gatherings or summer camps a statement that photos will be taken should also be posted.

Pastoral guidance through social media is prohibited.

Disclosure information is now part of NH law.

PASTORAL CHANGES & ORDINATIONS

Fr. John Jillions is for the time being “on loan” to me and the Diocese of New England from the Omophor of His Beatitude TIKHON until the end of the year. He is assigned as rector of Holy Ghost church in Bridgeport CT while continuing to serve as OCA Chancellor.

Although still residing in the CT area Fr. Steven Belonick has retired from active parish assignment in Bridgeport.

During the past year:

- Fr. John Mikitish was assigned as acting rector of St. Nicholas in Pittsfield, MA.
- Moses Locke, our seminarian at St. Tikhon’s Seminary was ordained to the Holy Diaconate.
- Fr. James Robinson will be relocating to the Diocese of the Midwest early this Fall.
- Fr. Michael Westerberg received the honor of wearing the priestly mitre and will be retiring at the end of the year.
- Sub-deacon Jason Green in the Albanian Archdiocese completed his three-year preparatory courses for ordination to the Holy Diaconate at Holy Cross and the required participation in

the Diaconal practicum of the OCA at St. Vladimir's Seminary. He was ordained at Saint George Cathedral on Sunday September 16th of this year.

- Sub Deacons Michael Arida and Nicholas Thornhill from Salem, MA, as well as Deacon Christopher Westrate from Holy Trinity Cathedral participated in the ordination; this marked the first ordination at St George Cathedral for many years.
- Fr Sergei Bouteneff retired from the VA and has been a participant in our CT Deanery as well as serving in many fill in positions in our Connecticut Deanery parishes. We appreciate the many times he has served as a fill in for our parishes in CT. He will act as a fill in at St George Albanian Parish in Trumbull until a permanent pastor can be found.
- Fr. Dennis Rhodes is now formally retired and is in the process of relocating to Philadelphia. In addition to serving three parishes in the Albanian Archdiocese, he has been a permanent part of our Connecticut Deanery and a constant participant in our diocesan Youth Rally.
- We are most grateful for the services of Fr. David Mezywski from St. Vladimir's Seminary who served in both St. Nicholas in Pittsfield and Holy Ghost in Bridgeport.

We still have several vacancies in our diocese, Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Waterbury, CT and are more than appreciative of the attention this community has received from the administrator and Dean of the CT Deanery Fr. John Hopko, as well as Protodeacon Paul Nimchek and Fr. Nicholas Timpko.

Dn William Watusa continues to serve admirably at Holy Resurrection in Berlin, NH. In addition a few of our vacationing clergy from the Boston Deanery have taken the initiative to serve there while on vacation. St. Nicholas in Norwich CT remains vacant but Fr. Vasily Likwar serves as administrator and Fr. Steven Hosking serves Liturgy there on a regular basis.

It is no secret that we have a severe shortage of clergy throughout our diocese with parishes in need of a pastor. This is not a challenge unique to our diocese, as the entire OCA is experiencing a clergy shortage. When considering the looming clergy shortage, I am reminded of a saying in the fundraising world. When people who don't donate, are asked why they do not give, the most common response is, "I was never asked." Along these lines, I would encourage pastors and lay leaders throughout the diocese to talk publicly about vocations, encouraging men and women to consider attending seminary. Additionally, we might consider including a petition in the litany that God would bless vocations and open our hearts to service. We are blessed to have four seminarians from our diocese that we support, however they still have several years of study prior to possible ordination.

YOUTH AND RETREATS

Again this year Youth Rally was at capacity. Last summer and this past Rally a number of our youth from St. Mary's Albanian parish in Worcester also participated as campers. In addition several from the Albanian Archdiocese served as camp counselors.

Rally after Rally dates have already been published so that our youth have the opportunity to meet and interact during the year.

DIOCESAN COUNCIL

At the last meeting of the Diocesan Council I initiated a new department specifically designed to establish procedures or programs in the event a parish with a cemetery closes or ceases to exist. The topic was discussed in depth while the updated Statutes of the OCA were put together but this is an area that falls within the competence of the individual dioceses. Dave Zavednak is the Chair of a new committee that will study possible courses of action that our diocese will have to take in the unfortunate event of a parish closure that involves a parish cemetery.

MISSION UPDATES

Although All Saints of America mission in Salisbury, CT is still a small community, it has reached a level of financial security such that they no longer require a monthly stipend from the diocese.

Our mission of Christ the Savior in Bangor Maine is growing and during my recent visit several of their parishioners were tonsured as readers and a few were given the honor of wearing the sub-diaconal orarion.

ALL AMERICAN COUNCIL

At the last few All American Councils each diocese has been asked to present a short video of their activities. This year we were asked to highlight the outreach programs in our diocese in about five minutes. The diocesan videos were shown during the plenary sessions and I was very pleased with our video. A link to our video is posted on the Diocese of New England webpage and Facebook page and on the St. George Cathedral Facebook page. As well as the OCA webpage.

Although the video does not show all of our outreach activities, I believe we have been able to showcase a representative selection of the many of the outreach activities in both dioceses. I worked closely with Deacon Gregory Uhrin for four days on the production of the video. Perhaps he would have been able to produce it more quickly if I were not helping him. As I viewed the video I realized that we are a very active, very busy and very involved in outreach as a diocesan community. I may be prejudiced but I believe our video was one of the best if not the best. At its conclusion I received a nod of approval from several of my brother hierarchs and his beatitude asked if I was the one who chose the music. I responded in the affirmative. I have a few ideas for our next video that I have already shared with our diocesan council.

COLA

According to a vote of the Diocesan Assembly the COLA adjustment for 2019 would be the highest of three indexes from the Board of Labor Statistics. The US City average, the Northeastern Urban average and the Boston, Brocton, Nashua CPI.

- US City average is 2.7
- Northeastern Urban average is 2.7

The Bureau of Labor Statistics is no longer publishing the Boston, Brocton, Nashua figures.

Unless we decide to use an additional index, the COLA adjustment for the Diocese of New England 2019 is 2.7

THANKS AND RECOGNITION

I am often reminded of how much responsibility is involved in the operation of a diocese when we deal with sensitive matters that require confidentiality. Fr. Joseph Gallick and Audra Sullivan have been invaluable assets to the smooth operation of the Albanian Archdiocese. I am deeply grateful for their dedication along with that of our chancellors, Fr John Kreta and Fr Arthur Liolin. By definition, a chancellor's responsibility is to act in the absence of the bishop.

Whenever my responsibilities take me away for long periods of time, our chancellors are usually the contact persons for our clergy especially when dealing with sensitive matters. I truly appreciate their attention to these issues in my absence.

In New England I would be at a loss without the expertise and experience of Fr. John Kreta our Chancellor. I am in contact on a daily basis with Fr. John Kreta who has years of experience serving our mission of All Saints of America and has served as our chancellor for the last decade with expertise and compassion. Fr. John keeps me abreast of important issues that arise while simultaneously sparing me from some of the mundane responsibilities that come across his desk. I am also profoundly grateful for our deans Fr. Vasily Likwar in the Boston Deanery, Fr. John Hopko in the Connecticut Deanery and Fr. Peter Carmichael in the Northern Deanery. I sometimes feel that I lead a sheltered life since our diocese is run so smoothly. This is not so much a result of my efforts but it is more because our clergy are dedicated mentors to new clergy. Our deans and chancellors are seasoned pastors with many years of experience who are responsive to the various needs of parishes, clergy and faithful. They serve the Church and our clergy and their families with experience and sensitivity.

CLOSING QUOTE

“You came into the world to save sinners; therefore You came to save Me also? You came to find and to save him who was lost; therefore You came to seek me too, for I am one of the lost. O Lord, O my God and Creator! I should have come to You as a transgressor of Your law. I should have fallen at Your feet, cast myself down before You, humbly begging forgiveness, pleading with You and craving Your mercy. But You Yourself have come to me, wretched and good-for-nothing servant that I am; my Lord has come to me, His enemy and apostate; my Master has come and has bestowed his love of mankind upon me. Listen my soul: God has come to us.”

— St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, A Treasury of Russian Spirituality¹

¹ <http://www.orthodoxchurchquotes.com/2013/07/12/157/> Accessed on September 10, 2018.