

OPENING QUOTE

Fr Alexander Schmemmann wrote:

*“Chrismation gives us the positive power and grace to be Christians, to act as Christians to build together the church of God and be responsible participants in the life of the church. In this sacrament we pray that the newly baptized be: ‘an honorable member of God’s Church,’ a consecrated vessel,’ ‘a child of light,’ ‘an heir of God’s kingdom,’ that ‘having preserved the gift of the Holy Spirit and increased the measure of grace committed unto him, he may receive the prize of his high calling and be numbered with the first born whose names are written in heaven’”.*¹

Brothers and sisters, as we gather together to reflect on our life as the Church, we do so with a clear focus on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we gather as members of the Body of Christ. One of the key questions for us is how do we allow the gift of the Holy Spirit to burn brightly within all of us? In what ways are we truly living out our vocation to be children of light?

Report Introduction

Since my consecration in 2002 it has been my practice to write two annual reports: one for the Diocesan Assembly of New England and one for the Assembly of the Albanian Archdiocese. During the four and a half years that I served as *locum tenens* of the Diocese of the South I also wrote a third annual report. This year, since much of the information I shall report pertains to both the Diocese of New England and the Albanian Archdiocese I decided that I would streamline the process and write one report that I would share with both Dioceses.

The Diocese of New England and the Albanian Archdiocese continue to work closely together. We have participated in each others’ assemblies; members of the Albanian Archdiocese continue to participate in "Youth Rally, " our one week Youth Camp of the Diocese of New England; and by doing this we allow relationships and collaboration to grow and flourish.

During the past years our chancellors, deans, and treasurers have been in communication, often on a monthly basis. Therefore, I felt for the sake of expediency and as an aid to build up closer relationships that one report would suffice. In a few places items in the report may pertain to one diocese or the other but even in this way we are blessed to stay informed of what is occurring in our sister diocese.

HOLY SYNOD

Metropolitan Tikhon celebrated the Sunday of Orthodoxy Divine Liturgy at the Phanar in Constantinople with Patriarch Bartholomew along with several members of the Patriarch’s synod. Although there were mixed interpretations about the invitation it was a first for any of our OCA primates, and personally I believe it was a positive first step.

¹ "Clergy and Laity in the Orthodox Church" (Orthodox Life, 1) (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1959). <http://www.schmemmann.org/byhim/clergyandlaityinthechurch.html>

The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America met at the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Monastery in Michigan for our annual retreat which was a time of spiritual renewal interspersed with business meetings. The Synod met with personnel from SMPAC (Sexual Misconduct Policy Advisory Committee) and ORSMA (Office of Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations) to review the work of these two departments. The committee chairs introduced what they referred to as “role play” where, difficult situations can be simulated in a safe environment, and participants can learn how to properly respond. We were also updated on current and pending allegations. The goal for both SMPAC and ORSMA is to have a mental health or social work professional serve as a Victim’s Advocate in each diocese. This demonstrates our commitment to the impartial investigation of sexual misconduct allegations, and minimizes the possibility for a conflict of interest that might arise if clergy investigate brother clergy.

It is sometimes confusing these days when everything appears to be abbreviated and only initials or letters are used. ORSMA, spelled O-R-S-M-A stands for the Office for Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations and SMPAC, spelled S-M-P-A-C stands for Sexual Misconduct Policy Advisory Committee. I sometimes wonder if for the sake of expediency my own title may be reduced from Archbishop of Boston, New England and the Albanian Archdiocese to simply, B-O-B “BOB”, for short, standing for Bishop of Boston.

The Synod also discussed procedures that are to be followed in so-called C-I-S (Clergy in Crisis) situations such as alcohol or substance abuse.

In addition, His Beatitude presented a draft document outlining the procedures for the operation of the Holy Synod. The development of this document is in accordance with the OCA Statutes Article II.5aa. I anticipate that during our upcoming Synod meetings we will be viewing these policies as His Beatitude develops them. Metropolitan Tikhon also reiterated the four-pillar plan that he presented at the AAC: Spiritual Life; Outreach; Clergy Health; and Seminary.

Having an opportunity to address these important matters in a more relaxed, retreat style atmosphere was quite beneficial as it gave us an opportunity to reflect on, discuss and pray about these matters in a way that is not always possible during the limited timeframe of regular Synod Meetings.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

During one of the earlier meetings of the Holy Synod this past year Fr. Chad Hatfield reported on the operating costs for St Vladimir’s Seminary. He stated that it costs the seminary approximately \$70,000 to \$75,000 per year to educate each seminarian. However, in order to limit tuition costs for the students, tuition is only \$20,000 to \$25,000 per year. Thus, he urged dioceses and parishes to consider sponsoring seminarians as well as including contributions to the seminaries in diocesan annual budgets.

Both the Diocese of New England and the Albanian Archdiocese have scholarship programs for seminary students. The Diocese of New England also includes contributions to all three seminaries in our annual budget.

The Student Fund of the Albanian Archdiocese established in 1947 supports numerous programs such as OCMC mission programs as well as full seminary tuition for men following a call to ordained ministry, in addition church school teachers seminars and other lay leader programs have been supported by the student fund. The Archdiocese recently added to their budget for the coming year, funds for post graduate studies for clergy. An example of this would be the new hybrid DMin program at St. Vladimir's that uses online education. This was considered as fulfilling part of the OCA's mandate for clergy enrichment programs in each diocese.

The Parish Grant program in the Diocese of New England is especially beneficial to parish communities engaged in outreach programs. A good number of our parishes have found this financial support beneficial and it is our hope that more of our parishes would avail themselves of this opportunity in the coming year.

ORDINATIONS and PASTORAL CHANGES

During this past year Fr Joseph Gall was ordained to the Holy Diaconate and Priesthood and was assigned to St. Nicholas Church in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

Dn. John Mikitish was ordained to the Holy Diaconate and attached to Holy Transfiguration in New Haven, CT. We anticipate his ordination to the priesthood in November. He plans to continue his education in the New Haven area and during this period will continue to be attached to Holy Transfiguration in New Haven.

Fr. John Pawelchak was granted retirement and was transferred to the omophorion of Bishop Paul of Chicago and the Midwest.

Dn. Geana Mircea, attached to Holy Resurrection in Claremont, NH was ordained to the Holy Priesthood and he remains attached to Holy Resurrection Church.

Jason Green and Robert Ngjela of Saint George Cathedral were tonsured as readers. Jason will be continuing his studies at Holy Cross Seminary in preparation for ordination to the diaconate.

Fr. Nicholas Dellerman was transferred from St. Nicholas in Norwich, CT. to Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Philadelphia, PA in the Albanian Archdiocese.

Fr. Scott Mitchell was received into our diocese and he is attached to Christ the Savior Mission in Maine.

With sadness I note the repose of, Fr. Walter Smith who was serving the Nativity of the Virgin Mary parish in Waterbury, CT when he fell asleep in the Lord this past May. Clergy from both the Connecticut and Boston deaneries participated in the services for Fr. Walter and he was laid to rest in the parish's cemetery.

Protodeacon Basil Safchuk who was in retirement in Bethesda, MD, fell asleep in the Lord in July. Funeral services were conducted by his son Fr. Gregory Safchuk at St. Nicholas Church in Salem, MA where protodeacon Basil served for many years. Both local and diocesan clergy participated in the services.

Priftersha Viola Soter wife of Fr. Michael Soter fell asleep in the Lord this past July. Although retired in Florida, the services were held at St Mary's Church in Worcester, MA, prifterisha's home town. Archdiocesan and local clergy participated in the services for priftersha Vi. May their memory be eternal.

YOUTH

As I mentioned earlier in my report, Youth Rally, our one-week summer camp was well attended by participants from both diocese.

In addition, the Syndesmos gathering for Orthodox Youth was held in Slovika this year and Peter Hopko, president of our OCF chapter at UCONN, the University of Connecticut represented our youth. His report is in your assembly booklet.

Sydney Dionis was one of four girls from Worcester that went to volunteer at the Orthodox Summer Camp in Elbassan, Albania.

Crossroads, the Orthodox Program for College and High School students from around the country were hosted at both Holy Trinity Cathedral and Saint George Cathedral.

NEW DOCUMENTS

In order to address issues that may arise from recent changes to marriage laws, the document, *Sincerely Held Religious Belief* (SHRB)² was prepared and written by Judge E. R. Lanier, General Counsel of the OCA. This document articulates in legal terms the OCA's position on marriage. The OCA has been advised that having a document of this kind is essential in light of the Supreme Court decision on same sex marriage as a preventative measure for protecting the interests of parishes and dioceses in the event of potential lawsuits that might arise regarding the rental of parish facilities. There was much discussion about this matter during a meeting of the Holy Synod since many parishes rent their hall facilities as a business or for other purposes such as dinners and meetings. In one case a non-Orthodox couple wanted to rent the nave of a church because the photos would look beautiful for their wedding album.

The document articulates the right of a parish to decide to whom it will rent its facilities, and for what purpose. It also articulates the role of the bishop in approving the rental of parish facilities. For instance, if you wish to rent your hall for a meeting of the local town council or a wedding reception, the bishop may give his blessing to allow such a gathering.

In as much as it is a preventative measure and does not really affect the operation in any of our parishes, I urge our parish councils to sign the document.

² <https://oca.org/holy-synod/statements/stewards-of-the-oca-2016-saint-herman-appeal/statement-of-the-holy-synod-of-the-oca-on-sincerely-held-religious-beliefs>

PARISH BY-LAWS

In the early '50's the Albanian Archdiocesan parishes ratified a uniform constitution of the parishes of the Archdiocese. This was not the case in the territorial dioceses of the OCA. The updated statutes of the OCA, which were approved at the last AAC, require parish by-laws of every parish in the Diocese of New England to be updated and ratified as well as the by-laws and rules of procedure for the Diocese of New England itself. A committee was formed to aid the parishes in this endeavor. I wish to commend the members of the committee for their extensive work in this area.

Presently the committee has completed the recommended updates for the diocesan by-laws. However, only six parishes have availed themselves of the expertise of our committee, and only three of our clergy have made inquiries. It is important to note that the Statutes of the OCA now require that parish by-laws be updated and ratified by the end of 2017. The process for ratification of parish by-laws is as follows:

1. The parish submits its by-laws to the Diocesan By-Law Committee for review according to the updated Statutes of the OCA.
2. The Committee works with the parish to make any necessary recommendations to ensure that parish by-laws conform to the Statutes of the OCA.
3. Once the Committee has confirmed that the parish by-laws conform to the OCA Statutes, they shall be submitted to the Archbishop for his blessing.

If your parish has not yet begun this process, the by law committee is ready to offer assistance.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

Both the Albanian Archdiocese and the Diocese of New England now use the same company to perform background checks on parish employees and volunteers. With this new company individuals can approve background checks through an online service. This dramatically simplifies the process by providing direct interaction with the background check company and adds another level of privacy eliminating the necessity to keep hard copies on file.

At our meeting last week the Holy Synod chose this company as the official OCA background company.

As we have agreed in New England, the Diocese will pay for background checks on priests and deacons and lower ranks of the clergy, but the parish will pay for background checks that are required for other individuals. I recommended the same procedure and policy be used in the Albanian Archdiocese. The costs run between \$25 and \$40 per report depending upon the level of background check needed.

In order to streamline the process both dioceses have established a department of background checks. David Zavednak and Fr Mark Doku chair the departments in the respective dioceses.

PSP COMPLIANCE

The Policies, Standards and Procedures³ dealing with sexual misconduct provide the basic framework for protecting those whom God has called us to serve, especially our children. Thus,

³ <https://oca.org/about/sexual-misconduct>

it is essential for all who minister, serve and volunteer in the Church to take the time to read and understand the PSPs. Also, each member of the parish council is required to read the PSPs. In order to document that this requirement has been met, the minutes of the parish council must reflect that the PSPs have been read and that all Parish Council members have signed a document stating that they have read the PSPs. The OCA is unequivocally committed to protecting every member of the parish and ensuring safe environments. Formal acknowledgement of the PSPs is the first step towards protecting those we are called to serve as well as protecting the parish should any incident occur. The reason for reading and understanding the PSPs is that it protects the church should any litigation occur. Without a formal affirmation of the PSPs and documented efforts to implement them, the parish, and the diocese would be even more vulnerable to litigation and criminal prosecution should any abuse occur.

Therefore, I urge that all parish council members, both those who are long-serving and those who are newly appointed, read and understand the PSPs during the first meeting or prior to the first meeting of the parish council. The purpose for reading them each year is that the PSPs are "a work in progress" that constantly seek to protect the innocent and provide safe environments in a changing world. Thus, changes may have occurred since the last printing. This is especially true since both dioceses encompass multiple states and the procedures required may differ from state to state.

In the past both the full and short version of the document have been distributed to our clergy, yet we still have some that have not signed a form indicating compliance. As a sign of your commitment to providing a safe environment within Christ's Holy Church, please read the PSPs and sign the document attesting that you have done so. Do it for your children, for our children.

FINANCIAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEES

During the past few years both dioceses received substantial funds due in some cases to unfortunate circumstances, such as the sale of the former property of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Parish in Chelsea, MA in the Diocese of New England; and the fire at the Albanian parish of St. John the Baptist in Boston. In such situations our responsibility is to wisely distribute and manage these financial gifts to support parish growth and outreach programs in our respective dioceses.

Financial investment committees of the Diocesan Council of New England and the Albanian Archdiocesan Council presented their prospectus and policies which represent a conservative approach to investments that embody the best practices of good stewardship. Both proposals were approved by the respective diocesan councils.

Both Financial Investment Committees are to be commended for their efforts to implement robust policies and procedures to wisely use these gifts for the up building of the Church.

COLA

For the Diocese of New England according to a vote of our Diocesan Assembly the COLA adjustment for 2017 would be the highest of three indexes from the Board of Labor Statistics for September 2016.

- US City average is .8 %
- Northeastern Urban average is .8 %
- Boston, Brocton, Nashua CPI is 1.5 %

Therefore the COLA adjustment for the Diocese of New England 2017 is 1.5%

As of the date of this report the Albanian Archdiocese does not have a formal COLA policy, however a number of our parishes are using the New England Diocese policy as a guideline.

HIGHLIGHTS

Sts Peter and Paul Albanian Orthodox Church in Philadelphia celebrated their centennial year. St John the Baptist Church that suffered the loss of their church building due to a fire observed the third annual commemoration of the fire and have responded to God's call to a new stage in the life of their community. The parishioners have invested the insurance benefit and the proceeds from the sale of the property in the work of the Church throughout the Albanian Archdiocese as well as at St George Cathedral. Celebrating the contribution that the St. John the Baptist community has made, the Theophany Chapel located in Saint George Cathedral was renamed the St John the Baptist Chapel and the parishioners have formally become members of Saint George Cathedral.

It was a meaningful and celebratory year for many parishes in the Diocese of New England as Holy Annunciation in Maynard, MA; St. Nicholas in Pittsfield, MA; Holy Trinity in Willimantic, CT; and Ss. Peter and Paul in Springfield, MA all celebrated their centennial anniversary of witnessing to the Gospel.

In addition, Christ the Savior Church in Southbury, CT celebrated their 25th anniversary.

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHT

I wish to share a personal highlight that occurred during the assembly of the Diocese of the South this past July. As you may be aware the Holy Synod assigned Bishop Alexander of the Bulgarian Diocese as the ruling hierarch of the Diocese of the South.

I was unable to participate in the enthronement of Bishop Alexander since it coincided with the 25th Anniversary of Christ the Savior in Southbury, CT but I was invited to attend the first Assembly of the Diocese of the South with their new ruling hierarch this past July, in Wilmington, NC.

I was quite honored and humbled as well as pleasantly surprised that during the Assembly the first resolution that was passed unanimously and blessed by both His Beatitude Tikhon and Bishop Alexander of the South and the Bulgarian diocese was a resolution recognizing my service to the diocese as locum tenens, and giving me honorary membership in the Diocese of the South.

I believe this is a first in Orthodox history that a ruling hierarch of a diocese would also be given the honor as a member of another diocese. I believe this speaks well of the Diocese of New England and the Albanian Archdiocese who were so gracious to support me during the years that I served three dioceses, and it also fosters ongoing relationships as I have the opportunity to visit

parishes in the South. It was a blessing for me to be with the faithful of the Diocese of the South during their first Assembly with their new ruling bishop who succeeds Archbishop Dmitri of blessed memory. Although not specifically ordered to do so, in light of this extraordinary honor I feel obligated to visit the South during the upcoming winter months.

THANKS AND RECOGNITION

Fr. Joseph Gallick and Audra Sullivan have been invaluable assets to the smooth operation of our Archdiocese. Both are tireless competent and efficient. One does not realize how much responsibility is involved in the operation of a diocese while maintaining confidentiality in sometimes very sensitive matters. I more than appreciate their dedication along with that of our chancellor Fr Arthur Liolin. By definition a chancellor's responsibility is to act in the absence of the bishop. Inasmuch as my responsibilities take me away for long periods of time he is usually the contact person for our clergy especially when dealing with sensitive matters. I am most appreciative of his 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, along with our deans Fr. Vasily Likwar in the Boston Deanery, Fr. David Koles in the Connecticut Deanery and Fr. Peter Carmichael in the Northern Deanery. I sometimes feel I lead a sheltered life as our diocese is run so smoothly; not so much as a result of my efforts but because our clergy are dedicated mentors to new clergy, and our deans, and chancellors are seasoned men with many years of experience who are sensitive to both the needs of parishes and the needs of our clergy and faithful. They serve the Church and our clergy and their families with the benefit of both experience and sensitivity.

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 sensitivity for the clergy and faithful in our diocese as well as keeping me abreast of important issues that arise while simultaneously sparing me from some of the mundane responsibilities that come across his desk.

Fr. Liolin in the Albanian Archdiocese has served for more than forty years dealing with archdiocesan and pastoral issues as well as international and immigrant issues that are so common in the ethnic dioceses of the OCA. We are more than fortunate to have them in leadership responsibilities and I consider them a gift to me personally and to our respective dioceses.

CLOSING QUOTE

Permit me to close with another quote from Fr. Alexander Schmemmann:

*"All prayers in the Orthodox Church are always written in terms of the plural we. We offer, we pray, we thank, we adore, we enter, we ascend, we receive. The layman is in a very direct way the co-celebrant of the priest, the latter offering to God the prayers of the Church, representing all people, speaking on their behalf."*⁴

⁴ "Clergy and Laity in the Orthodox Church" (Orthodox Life, 1) (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1959). <http://www.schmemmann.org/byhim/clergyandlaityinthechurch.html>

Every last one of us, from the newly baptized infant to the Archbishop are co-laborers in the Vineyard of the Lord. We are called to live as God's family, as children of light, adopted sons and daughters of the King of Glory. May God bless, guide and strengthen us in our work.