

Allow me to begin by expressing how touched I was at the outpouring of prayers, letters, cards and support from both clergy and laity alike as I was addressing personal medical issues. For our whole lives both my wife and I were rather private people; however the situation now required that my clergy and faithful be fully aware of my health concerns. I was deeply touched by your concern and attention during this time of treatment that will continue until the end of October. Once the treatment is complete, I look forward to a complete recovery in a couple more months.

I especially wish to thank Father John Kreta, our Chancellor, who took on many of my responsibilities during the time of treatment. His attention to details was most appreciated. I was especially moved when he volunteered to go to rally since I was unable to make that trip this year to spend some time with our Rally-ers. It was a surprise to receive a call from the chapel on a cell phone. (I don't know how father got a signal up there) but to have my kids sing to me via the cell phone was quite touching. It actually brought tears to my eyes. I asked father to stop by on the way home to fill me in on the rally activities and over lunch perhaps I heard the most moving words that came from him. He looked at me with a gleam in his eye and said "we have a bishop that can't hear and can't talk...it doesn't get any better than that!"

Another memorable incident during this past year was my visit to one of the parishes and the very young men were a little upset since the parish council greets the bishop with bread and salt, the girls get to greet the bishop with flowers and they wanted to greet the bishop with something as well. The next morning I was greeted with the traditional bread and salt, flowers from the young ladies and candy bars from the young men. That was very nice, I wonder if I can decree that as a policy.

This year one of the important celebrations occurred at our own Holy Trinity Cathedral in Boston, as we gave thanks to God for ten decades of ministering the gospel. It has been an exciting year, not only on our own diocesan level, but the national church level. Additionally change is underway that has local and worldwide implications as we move toward fulfilling the hopes and dreams of a fully integrated Orthodox church in America.

### **Episcopal Assembly**

The first Episcopal Assembly was held in New York during this past year. All the bishops in America gathered for this assembly to address issues that will hopefully lead to the next Great Council, called by the Ecumenical Patriarch, BARTHOLOMEW, which is tentatively scheduled for 2013. I remind you that much work has to be done in preparation for such a council. This will include taking small steps, guided by careful study, and thoughtful consideration of every facet of the life of Orthodoxy in America. The last effort to convene a Pan-Orthodox council or congress was made in the 1920's. Not all of the Orthodox churches participated. The results of the meeting were controversial. Clearly, the preparatory work for a Great Council in the near future will require much care.

The first topic addressed by the Assembly was to establish a registry of canonical bishops in America as well as canonical clergy in America. While this may seem odd, it is in fact necessary, because according

to Google, there are more than seven hundred groups that call themselves “orthodox.” In short, not every group that calls itself “orthodox” is indeed Orthodox.

The second major item that we addressed at the Episcopal Assembly was to request that the Ecumenical Patriarch accept our proposal to separate the Canadian Bishops into their own assembly and the bishops of Mexico and Central and South America into another assembly. A slight complication to this plan is that some of our bishops would have to attend multiple Episcopal Assemblies. For instance, Archbishop Nathaniel of the Romanian Episcopate of the OCA is a member of our synod and has parishes in both the United States and Canada. The Bulgarian Diocese also has parishes in the US and in Canada. In other words, bishops having pastoral responsibilities in more than one region should have the right to participate in more than one Episcopal Assembly.

A slight fly in the ointment is us, and by us I mean the Orthodox Church in America. As you know, we received autocephaly from our mother church in 1970, and in most situations, all churches would come under the authority of the local autocephalous church. Historically, this worked well when an entire people were evangelized at one time, like the Baptism of Rus. However, the American situation is quite unique since the Orthodox presence in the Americas is largely a result of multiple waves of immigration from different Orthodox countries. While the OCA has received autocephaly from its Mother Church, the same is not true for the other churches. It has been suggested that the OCA request from the Moscow Patriarchate a re-definition of our autocephaly as “maximal autonomy”, so that all of the churches in the US can relate to one another on a more level playing field.

This would be a major change for many within the OCA and could be very problematic, as ethnic diocese may opt to return to the authority of the Churches in their mother countries, or align themselves with other jurisdictions such as the Antiochian or Greek or any other.

In my estimation, it is too early to make a dramatic move, such as a transition from autocephaly to maximal autonomy. I will also say that the majority of our Holy Synod is not in favor of any change to our autocephaly at this time. However, the Holy Synod is firmly committed to achieving Orthodox Unity in the US through a process of asking hard questions and considering a wide range of options. Achieving Orthodox unity is not a simple process, and will require prayer, patience and persistence, but by God’s grace we are at the threshold of a new era for Orthodoxy on this continent.

There has been a great amount of speculation and criticism of this process, but most of it has come from individuals who are not privy to the discussions among the hierarchs. It is very important to note that our ultimate goal is to achieve full administrative unity of all Orthodox Christians in North America, so that the Church would conform to the Holy Canons. Should there be any change to the formal status of the OCA it would be done to make this dream a reality, and it would necessarily involve bishops, clergy and laity. In our consideration of these complex matters we are also keenly aware of the relationships between the OCA and the ethnic dioceses, and how this process might affect existing agreements and affiliations. All this is yet to be addressed. But what is important for us to realize, on our diocesan level and on the parish level, is that the various traditions and customs of each community within the OCA are valuable, important and respected. The Holy Synod will not sacrifice any aspect of our Life in Christ. Full administrative unity of the Orthodox in North America would put an end to the fragmentation, the petty rivalry, and the gross inefficiency that now—sadly—characterizes Orthodoxy in North America.

Achieving full, canonical, administrative unity of all Orthodox Christians in the U.S. would be an answer to prayer, giving us a unified voice with which to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now is the time to discern the Will of God, now is the time to be moved by the Holy Spirit, now is the time, with faith, wisdom and humility to ascertain God's plan for achieving full administrative unity of the Orthodox in North America.

This is evidenced by the working draft of five points outlined by the members of the Holy Synod.

### **WORKING DRAFT**

- 1. The OCA understands itself to be a local, indigenous, multi-ethnic, missionary Church, continuing to bring Orthodoxy to Americans.*
- 2. The OCA affirms that it is historically derived from Russian Orthodox Church as a historical reality: as the heir to the Russian Mission of 1794, the Diocese in Sitka, 1843; the Diocese in San Francisco 1870, and its relocation to New York in 1907, and the Autocephaly of 1970.*
- 3. The OCA is a functionally autocephalous Church, electing her own bishops and Primate, without confirmation by any other Synod, maintaining inter-Church relationships with all other Churches,; and consecrates its own chrism, according to the Tomos.*
- 4. The autocephaly will be fulfilled when the OCA is merged into a united Autocephalous American Church, recognized by all, and including all.*
- 5. A united American church is being cast in terms of the Chambesy protocols. The OCA is prepared to work within the Episcopal Assembly in order to realize this goal.*

### **National Church**

The report of the STIC committee of which I was chair was completed and given to a joint session of the HS and MC. This report was released to the whole church.

Although I attended all of the regular meetings of the Holy Synod as well as participated in all of the synodal conference calls I was unable to attend the Synodal retreat held in Colorado Springs (April 27-29).

Archbishop JOB a personal friend and the former bishop of New England, fell asleep in the Lord shortly before Christmas. The whole synod traveled to Chicago for the funeral services and Panakhidas were celebrated in his honor in all of our deaneries. Memory Eternal!

It was a joy for me to attend the consecration of Bishop MICHAEL in New Jersey as he took on the responsibility of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey that has been widowed since the falling asleep in the Lord of Archbishop PETER.

The diocese of the mid-west has selected Archimandrite Matthias as their choice for diocesan bishop and it is expected that the Holy Synod will elect him at their next meeting. The consecration is tentatively scheduled for Friday and Saturday January 28 and 29, 2011.

The Diocese of the South, the Diocese of Alaska and the Bulgarian Diocese are all at different stages of seeking permanent archpastors.

### **Pastoral Changes**

A number of changes have taken place relative to our clergy and our parishes during the last year.

- Fr. Mark Sherman attained the age of reason and *opted to* retire leaving St Nicholas in Salem vacant. Fr. Mark still avails himself where needed within the diocese and for special projects when his experience and expertise is called for.
- At his request, Fr. Vadim Pismnney was released to ROCOR, leaving Holy Ghost parish in Bridgeport vacant.
- Fr. Steven Voytovich requested to be released from St Alexis in Clinton to pursue pastoral work out side of the church in secular ministerial areas.
- Fr. Michael Roshak was released from the pastorate of Three Saints in Ansonia, leaving that community vacant.
- Fr. Dennis Rhodes opted to return to his *Albanian roots* and requested to be transferred to St George in Trumbull CT in the Albanian Archdiocese which had been vacant following the retirement of Fr Sergei Bouteneff. This means that Nativity of the Holy Virgin Mary Church in Waterbury is now vacant.
- Fr. Theophan Whitfield, a graduate of St. Vladimir's has assumed the pastorate of St Nicholas Church in Salem.
- Fr Patrick Burns, with the blessing of the Bulgarian Bishop Joseph, and his release to the OCA will soon assume the pastorate of Three Saints Church in Ansonia.
- Fr Joseph Ervin is covering the needs of Holy Ghost Church in Bridgeport and the search for a permanent pastor for both Holy Ghost in Bridgeport and St Mary's in Waterbury is well under way.
- Fr Nicholas Timpko is currently serving at St Mary's in Waterbury.
- Fr. Steven Hosking was ordained to the Holy priesthood and has been assigned as rector of St Alexis Church in Clinton.

Addressing all of these changes would have been almost impossible without the help and work of both the Boston Dean, Fr. Robert Arida and the Connecticut Dean, Fr Vladimir Aleandro, both of whom worked closely with our Chancellor, Fr. John Kreta.

Protodeacon Simeon "Sam" Kopcha of Ss. Cyril and Methodius Church in Terryville reposed in the Lord. He served in numerous capacities, and was an exemplary servant of the Church. Together with his wife Eva, he gave generously—in a truly loving and self-sacrificial manner—of his time, talents and treasure, not only to his home parish, but also to our diocese, the Orthodox Church in America their parishes and institutions. Memory Eternal!

Recently we were most fortunate that each deanery has had, or will have, an ordination this year. In CT Dn. Steven Hosking was ordained to the Holy priesthood and is rector of St Alexis in Clinton, CT; at the end of September Jeffrey Frate was ordained to the Holy Diaconate and is attached to Holy Trinity Cathedral in Boston; and on Sunday, right here in Claremont, Alexis Roystogeyev will be ordained to the Holy Diaconate. We give thanks to God for these ordinations in each of our deaneries as they provide a most fitting and hopeful close to the year.

## **COLA**

In 2007 our Diocesan Assembly approved a resolution that the cost-of-living increase for the New England Diocesan clergy will be the highest percent increase from among three July Consumer Price Indices issued by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. In July 2010 the percent increases were:

Boston Consumer Price Index (CPI) --- 1.3%

Northeast Region CPI--- 1.6%

US city average CPI--- 1.2%

For 2011 the mandated cost-of-living increase will be 1.6%.

## **Seminarians**

During this past year we had four seminarians. Dn. Jeffrey Frate, from Holy Trinity Cathedral completed his studies at Holy Cross Seminary; Fr. Theophan Whitfield from Christ the Savior in Southbury, CT completed his studies at St. Vladimir's Seminary as did Justin DuMoulin from Holy Resurrection in Claremont, NH and Andrew Boyd from Saint Alexis in Clinton, CT who is continuing his studies at St. Vladimir's. I anticipate that others will soon be entering seminary. I did have the opportunity to take a trip to St. Vladimir's where I met, and had dinner, with several of our seminarians studying there.

It was a pleasure for me this year to participate in the diaconal liturgical practicum at St. Vladimir's as deacons and sub-deacons learned the intricacies of serving a hierarchal liturgy.

## **Celebrations**

Holy Trinity Cathedral in Boston celebrated their centennial on Pentecost and participating in the celebration were His Grace MELCHISEDEK, a former parishioner of Holy Trinity Cathedral and His Beatitude JONAH who contributed to a most joyous and memorable occasion.

The Memorial Day Pilgrimage to St Tikhon's offered some interesting activities with both former metropolitans serving. Contrary to what you may have heard or read, the Holy Synod did not bless the former metropolitans to serve, and as a matter of fact and a matter of record, the Synod had decided as a first step, that the former metropolitans would be invited to stand in the sanctuary and receive with the rest of the Synod. How this synodal decision was circumvented has yet to be addressed.

## **Diocesan**

An incident involving sexual misconduct was addressed in accordance with our policies on misconduct and we followed our procedures for the benefit of both the accused and the victims. When incidences like this occur, we must be mindful that there are several victims: the individuals directly involved suffer the most, but the parish and the diocese are victims as well.

Because the composition of parish councils change from year to year, it is essential that the sexual misconduct procedures of the OCA be signed by each parish council member on an annual basis.

## **Evangelization and Revitalization**

St. Nicholas Church in Pittsfield MA purchased a beautiful new piece of property to accommodate their growing membership. Christ the Savior in Southbury and Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Waterbury continue to make progress in the Natural Church Development process.

During a meeting with our current deans, it was decided that the position of “Missions Dean” be eliminated. The responsibilities previously handled by the missions dean are very important, but it was determined that missions within each particular deanery would be best addressed and guided by the local dean.

We are fortunate in that there is a good possibility of establishing a viable mission in Maine. I have asked Fr John Kreta to make a preliminary visitation to the community there. They have already invited His Beatitude to serve in that area twice in the last two years.

## **Interdiocesan Relationship**

We are blessed with a good, close working relationship between the Diocese of New England and our brothers and sisters in the Albanian Archdiocese. Deacons and sub-deacons from Holy Trinity Cathedral have served at St. George, the Albanian Cathedral. Holy Annunciation in Maynard and Holy Annunciation in Natick also have worked together especially when planning feast day celebrations. For many years clergy from the Diocese of New England have attended the Albanian Assembly and Albanian clergy have attended ours. This year Fr. John Kreta attended and participated in the Albanian Assembly held last month and we have the General Secretary of the Albanian Archdiocese, Fr. Joseph Gallick participating in ours. Fr. Dennis Rhodes will be actively encouraging the youth from St. George Albanian Church in Trumbull to participate in Rally during the coming year and he will also be introducing the Natural Church Development process there. We have also recently updated our joint diptychs of clergy and clergy wives.

## **Conclusion**

During our assembly over these few days we will receive various reports and attend to the business of the diocese. We will also hear about the strategic plan of the OCA, and about new possibilities for parish growth. Church business is important, and we must keep our house in good order, but our annual assembly is about more than just taking care of business, ultimately it is about coming together as the Body of Christ.

I was recently reading a sermon by St John Chrysostom, and in this sermon, he ponders what Jesus Christ is saying to us today. According to St. John, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is saying “I pursued you, I ran after you, that I might overtake you. I united and joined you to myself.....I not only am mingled with you I am entwined with you....I will have no more division between us....I will that we both be one”

These words are so meaningful for all of us today, not only as we look to our work, but indeed as we contemplate His work, Christ’s work. This gathering, this synaxis of our diocese, is our opportunity to glorify Jesus Christ, to acknowledge God’s gracious action and give testimony to it. “For He is a God at hand, not a God far off”

Tomorrow we will celebrate the Eucharistic Liturgy, and through that liturgy, we are present at the same mystical supper with Christ in the upper room that the Twelve Disciples experienced almost two thousand years ago. Today, we are His disciples, we are given the same responsibilities as they were: to teach, to preach and to care for the poor. But we have the same responsibilities because we have received the same great gift, for we experience the same awe, the same glory, and the same salvation in the Broken Body and Spilled Blood of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Blessings of the Lord be with you all.