



January 25, 2018

Diocesan Assembly Message

Dear Rev. Frs. Rev. Deacons, Matushki and faithful,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever! A warm welcome to our clergy, matushki, faithful and especially to our guest speaker, Archimandrite Joseph Morris, (Abbot of St Gregory Palamas Monastery in Hayesville, OH), to our 54th Diocesan Assembly of the Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania. Fr. Joseph, as we prepare to enter the period of the Lenten Triodion, we anxiously await your words on having an authentic relationship with Christ. Fr. Barnabas Fravel, our sincere thanks to you, the parish council and faithful of St Michael's for hosting our Assembly.

Since I was elected as your Hierarch, I have worked tirelessly to complete the Orphanage Property subdivision started under Metropolitan Tikhon. After numerous phone calls to the four attorneys, emails, letters and affidavits, I was actually becoming physically ill from the stress. There was absolutely no one guiding, or overseeing the process. The V. Rev. Fr Martin Browne and the V. Rev. Fr Nicholas Solak took the reigns. Finally, on October 19th, 2017, I received a call informing us the closing was scheduled for the 20th of October. We had been told several times over the past several years to close and something else always needed to be done. As of that date we officially own the 1.93 acres and have full title to the Diocesan Center (which can actually be listed on our books as our asset).

As of this date we have received an offer to purchase the property from St. Tikhon's Monastery. Our Diocesan Council has approved the sale and we hope to close on February 01, 2018. Additionally, we have been looking at properties for the last few years attempting to discern a location that is practical, affordable, central, and appropriate, with low crime and potential to appreciate. As the Diocesan Center has been tax exempt, by virtue of it being on Orphanage Property, we have attempted to pursue a course wherein we have a strong possibility of maintaining tax exempt status on the entire facility. This complicated the matter considerably. This involves local townships for zoning and the county assessor for the tax exempt status. Each county applies the state laws for tax exemption differently.

In our search, we have identified a property 7 miles north of St. Nicholas in Bethlehem, already zoned as commercial at 325 N Walnut Street, Bath, PA. You may view the listing on Realtor.com at the following address: https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-detail/325-N-Walnut-St_Bath_PA_18014_M41467-27259) The realtor has submitted a letter of intent, since we do not have a written agreement with St. Tikhon's Monastery at present. We are most grateful to John, Coles, Jr of Christ the Saviour in Harrisburg for assisting us in the sales agreement with St Tikhon's and working with us on pursuing the purchase of a suitable property, as well as tax exempt status.

This could represent a potential savings in property taxes of \$8-12,000 a year. John is a son of Holy Ascencion in Lykens, PA.

I also want to express my appreciation for the cooperation and assistance of our Chancellor, Deans, clergy, parish councils and faithful for updating parish bylaws. Of our 34 parish, we only have six more to complete the process. Additionally, I believe our Diocese has the highest rate of compliance with O.C.A policy for the required background checks.

We have an incredible team with our Diocesan Officers, Diocesan Council and Auditors. Thank you for your hard work and cooperative spirit. I simply could not do this without their full support. While we do not always agree, those who disagree may help us to see something the rest of us have missed. That being said, we have a very cohesive group.

We should also thank our youth workers, Kimberly Metz, Tatiana Bohush, Rdr. Nicholas Macura, the camp staff, volunteers and Fr Timothy Hojnicky for the Winter Teen Retreat and the Summer Camp Program. Due to some issues reported last summer we are tightening the application process, including required clergy referrence forms and addressing chain of command issues on disciplinary matters. Thank you for your cooperation in keeping our youth safe. In order to safeguard previous background checks done for the Camp Program the records have been moved to the Diocesan Center.

This past year was dedicated to "Creating a Mission Mindset." Articles in Alive in Christ and our parish council workshops focused on this theme. Bill Marianes presented us with many challenges as our Diocesan Assembly Speaker as well as a parish council workshop speaker. We were also very blessed to have Sandra Anderson speak about visitation ministry. Ironically, some of our smaller parishes developed this on their own as they had no attached clergy.

We are most grateful to the V Rev. Fr. Nicholas Solak for starting our Clergy Peer Groups on an interjurisdictional level as a means of brotherly support for our clergy. He has spoken on this topic of clergy care in various Dioceses of the OCA and other jurisdictions. Monies from the grant have also been use to support the matushki and allow them to be a support to each other. Clergy care and care for clergy families should be important to all of us, as a healthy clergy and clergy families is more conducive to a healthy parish. Additionally, the V. Rev. Fr. Stephen Vernak continues to bring in speakers to challenge us, as well as generate interest in our church. This is quite an investment for our Diocese, therefore, I would request that you promote these speakers by posting flyers and inviting friends and relatives. We do not receive the full benefits of these speakers, if we fail to come and fail to invite those outside our church. Thank you Fr Nicholas and Fr Stephen.

At the Chancellor and Treasurer's meeting, Fr Browne heard that all the Dioceses are struggling to find priests. Western Pennsylvania has 11 retirements. Yesterday, Fr Nicholas Solak and I were working with Holy Trinity in Wilkes Barre on a compensation package. Rather than take the median income of where Holy Trinity is located they took the median income from where their faithful live. Thank God for their insight and willingness to take care of their priest. As median income tends to be lower than many states, we need to make sure we offer an attractive compensation package to create interest in our Diocese. Our clergy care is also another factor which some may consider.

Aric Gingo continues to do a wonderful job with the website and Alive in Christ. Fr. Martin is now the Editor and provides wonderful articles. The quality of our publication has increased significantly. We are trying to focus on Worship, Witness, Fellowship and Service. Please be sure to submit quality photos along with a narrative.

I cannot begin to thank Matushka Sandra Kopestonsky enough for her unqualified support of the Diocese and her commitment to go above what is asked of her. She continues to do a tremendous job maintaining Diocesan, parish and clergy records. She has a way of keeping us all on task and insuring what is important get done.

As usual, my schedule has been quite full. The calendar is on our website. I attended the three Holy Synod meetings, the Assembly of Bishops Meeting, Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry Board Meetings twice, four Diocesan Council Meetings as well as private meetings with priests, matushki, parish councils, etc. I remain fully committed to visiting every parish annually and continue to vary the schedule during Great Lent, Holy Week and Pascha (with the help of our Deans). Our Diocesan Demographics by parish may be found on our website. The parishes which are growing are almost keeping pace with the losses from other parishes. Every parish can grow, but it means we must thoroughly examine ourselves and explore new ways of doing things. We cannot keep doing the same thing and expect a different result.

Once again looking over parish budgets, there is generally little specifically earmarked for charity. Nevertheless, the appeal for Fr John Nightingale raised over \$100,000 from within the Diocese and outside as well and Fr George Volkovinsky was able to get his legal status through your contributions. Our parishes and faithful were quite generous with our seminarians and I see numerous activities of a charitable nature reflected in parish reports. While we certainly do not want to toot our own horn or do things for show, our Lord does tell us to let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in Heaven.

In preparation for the All American Council, I would like to circulate a hand out to each table listing Median Income by state. At one point under the old head tax or dues system, 68% of the Diocesan Revenue went to the Central Church. There was no consideration of median income or cost of living by state. Since we have moved to proportional giving the Dioceses of Eastern Pennsylvania, NY/NJ and the Midwest give a larger percentage of their Revenues to the Central Church than other Dioceses. As the median income of Pennsylvania is ranked lower than many other states, it limits us in what we are able to do as a Diocese by contributing a larger percentage of our revenues than Dioceses with Higher Median Incomes. I believe we need to take a strong position at the AAC that ALL Diocese contribute at the same percentage.

This year, I would like to designate as one of renewal and personal growth in Christ! Let us focus on the quality of our prayer life, and meditative reading of the Holy Scripture. As we approach Great Lent, let us commit to embrace the Fast more fully, fasting not only from particular foods,

but from sin as well. St. Mark the Ascetic comments, 'We beg and plead with God to deliver us from our sins, but we love their causes.' Let us seek to guard our eyes, ears and tongues. Let us prepare more adequately for receiving the Holy Mysteries by more frequent Confession. Let us attend as many of the Lenten and Holy Week services, even if we have to go to a different parish. Let us hunger and thirst for Christ. Let us not think of what we are giving up, but what habits and behaviours we are getting rid of.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK

Archbishop of Philadelphia

Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania