

REPORT OF THE DIOCESAN BISHOP GIVING THOUGHT TO OUR STEPS DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY 2010 DIOCESE OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA 2011-2014

In the book of Proverbs, we read the following: *A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.* With these words, the wise Solomon reminds us of the spiritual importance of preparation.

Preparation is central to all aspects of our life as Orthodox Christians: from our everyday activities to our participation in the most sacred mysteries of the Church. We prepare for the coming day with our morning prayers; we begin every new work with the sign of the Cross; we examine our conscience before confession; we fast before receiving Holy Communion; and we enter into the yearly lenten periods as an anticipation of the Resurrection and eternal life.

As we approach our next assembly, on Nov. 19 and 20th, I would like to call the clergy and faithful of our diocese to focus on this work of spiritual preparation, not only for the business of the assembly (which also is important) but for the greater goal of the spiritual renewal of our diocesan life. The time has come for us to make difficult decisions if we are truly dedicated to our Lord Jesus Christ and His mystical bride, the Holy Church, and if our desire is to live out the fullness of the divine reality of the Kingdom in our personal lives, in our parishes and in our diocese.

Diocesan hierarch. This October 29th marks the fifth year of my installation as the Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania, and I would like to express my commitment to continue serving this wonderful diocese and to devote myself to its growth in Christ. Having spent the last five years getting to know my parishes, my clergy and my faithful, I have learned much from each of them, including an understanding of the spiritual and administrative needs of the diocese. My responsibilities as a member of the Holy Synod, as Rector of St Tikhon's Seminary and as a member of the brotherhood of St Tikhon's Monastery have sometimes taken away from my ability to adequately address those spiritual and administrative needs, but I would like to affirm that my role as your diocesan hierarch remains the most clearly defined and the one in which I am most comfortable. It is my hope to devote myself more fully to the necessary work of the diocese over the next five years in the following ways:

1. Devoting myself to more consistent prayer, fasting and repentance through a renewed commitment to my monastic vows. Also, engaging in more serious study of patristic theology and ascetical literature in order to take a more active teaching role, which is one of the responsibilities of the bishop.
2. Entering into a deeper relationship with my clergy in order to help them personally and to encourage a greater sense of clergy brotherhood and to shepherd their sheep more effectively.
3. Making the pastoral needs of our parishes a priority by fostering inter-parish cooperation and spending more time at my cathedral and in the Philadelphia area.

The Diocesan Administration. Over the past five years, some important changes have taken place in the administration of our Diocese: the position of Chancellor was created, the former position of Secretary/Treasurer was separated and replaced by a Treasurer and an Administrative Assistant; the position of Aide to the Bishop was eliminated and the funds redirected to create the position of Director of Communications. Our Diocesan Assemblies have been expanded to two-day events, the frequency of Diocesan Council meetings has increased and the timeliness of our quarterly financial audits has been regularized. Finally, the Bishop's residence and all diocesan offices have been centralized in our current diocesan center. As we look to the next five years, I would like to propose the following as goals to be fully implemented in our diocese by the year 2014:

1. Creation and implementation of Diocesan By-laws to serve as supplements to the OCA Statute. These by-laws will serve to clarify the functions and responsibilities of the administrative officers, the Diocesan Council, the Diocesan Assembly, etc.
2. Expansion of the positions of Administrative Assistant and Director of Communications to full time positions.
3. Relocation of the Diocesan Center to the Philadelphia area in order to facilitate the missionary and educational work of our diocese and as a means of focusing diocesan energies on the areas with the most potential for growth.

The Diocesan Parishes. By the grace of God, we have the same number of parishes (37) that we had in 2005. At the same time, we have not established any new missions during that period and several of our parishes are facing serious financial situations based on their numbers and their ability and/or willingness to support a priest and the work of the parish. This is a very serious matter that affects the entire diocese and not only those individual parishes. I would like to propose two areas that need development in our parishes over the next five years:

1. **Administrative housekeeping.** Just as an individual prepares for confession by making a thorough self-examination, so our parishes need to provide an accounting of their inner life. This is done through the forwarding of annual meeting minutes, census information, financial reports, budgets and other important documents to the Diocesan Administration. It is important for every member of the diocesan family to comply with this accounting for our parishes to be healthy, to discern their weaknesses and to implement those things that will bring them back to health.
2. **Parish vitality.** At our Diocesan Assembly in November, I will be introducing a proposal to re-define our parishes based on their ability to support a full time priest and a full time existence as a parish. This proposal has been discussed at the Diocesan Council and also among the clergy. It is a way for each parish to acknowledge its real spiritual and financial standing and to provide a way for the diocese to assist our struggling parishes.

The Diocesan Clergy. The priesthood, the diaconate and all of the minor orders of the Church (including missionaries and teachers) are indispensable to the health of our parishes. Although nothing takes place without

the grace of God, the possibility of our participation in that grace would be severely limited without the sacred ministers who serve Christ and His Church faithfully, day in and day out. The priesthood is not an occupation but a sacred calling. Without the clergy, there would be no pastoral visits, no confession and counseling, no baptisms or funerals. In the next five years, the following areas need to be addressed:

Clergy health. I would like to establish a network of spiritual and social support services for the clergy and their families as well as provide more frequent and smaller clergy retreats.

Clergy compensation. Each parish has received a clergy compensation review. I will be forwarding to each parish the median family income for that area and I would every parish to attain that median income for their priest, in accordance with the OCA clergy compensation guidelines.

Clergy brotherhood and Clergy continuing education are also areas that need to be developed.

Communications. Prior to 2004, communication within our diocese was limited to our diocesan magazine, *Alive in Christ*, which was published three times a year at a great cost to the diocese. In 2005 the creation of our diocesan website (doepa.org) introduced a new means of communication. Although the flow of news and information was sporadic at the beginning, the last two years have seen much improvement and timeliness in the posting of news and announcements within our diocese. At the same time, the new technology inspired a re-evaluation of the means by which we communicate with one another. The diocese was surveyed concerning several possible means of communication (website, newsletter, magazine) and the present format of a quarterly magazine of reduced pages was established and seems to be successfully keeping the diocese informed. Goals for the next five years would be:

1. Encouraging all of our parishes to establish their own websites which could be linked to the diocesan website (currently 19 parishes have websites).
2. Encourage more frequent contributions from our parishes to both the Diocesan website and *Alive in Christ*.

Our Diocesan Mission. Whatever gifts we have to share with our Church Community, and however we may be called to exercise the gifts bestowed upon us by the Lord, there is one thing that we all share in common: our Lord Jesus Christ and His divine and life-giving commandments. There are many commandments and many ways for us to fulfill them. But there is one commandment that surpasses the rest, and that is the commandment of love: *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?* Jesus said unto him, *Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* (Matthew 22:36-40)