

**“THAT THEY MAY HAVE
LIFE MORE ABUNDANTLY”:
THE REVITALIZATION OF OUR PARISHES**
REPORT OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP TIKHON
TO THE DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY
2011

INTRODUCTION

My report to the 2010 Diocesan Assembly in Bethlehem bore the title “Giving Thought to our Steps” and offered the outline of a five-year plan for the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania. In this report, I would like to review the steps that we have taken and re-assess our path forward.

Last year, I asked the diocese to consider the need for preparation on a personal and on a Church-wide level. As we gather in Williamsport, I would like for us to give thought to the purpose of our preparation: participation in the divine life which our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, offers to us as a great and immeasurable gift. In the Holy Gospel, Christ the Good Shepherd reminds us that He came that the sheep *might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly* (John 10:10). You and I are those sheep and it is by means of our preparation that we become inheritors of that *abundant life*.

Just as we cannot partake of the life-giving mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ without repentance, confession and prayer, so in our parishes we cannot hope to attain to revitalization (which means “the imparting of new life to something”) without preparation, without acknowledging our brokenness and without a sincere resolve to address the crises that face most of our parishes. We have taken some steps in this direction but we must keep our hands to the plough and do the work that will bring us closer to life and vitality.

My report last year was divided into three sections, corresponding to key areas that require our attention: 1) the Diocesan Administration, 2) Parish Health and 3) Clergy Health. In this report, I would like to review those same three areas and I would ask everyone to reflect on the following questions as we prepare for our Assembly: What can we do to further develop a functional and effective administration and communication? What steps are we prepared to take as a diocese towards the nurturing of active and vibrant parishes? Are we willing to support our priest and the ministries of our own parishes and our sister parishes?

DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATION

My five year plan called for three concrete goals relating to administration: 1) the creation of Diocesan By-laws, 2) the expansion of the positions of Administrative Assistant and Director of Communications to full time and 3) the relocation of the Diocesan Center to the Philadelphia area.

Diocesan By-laws. During the past year, the Diocesan Council reviewed a proposal for Diocesan Assembly procedures for possible use as part of our Diocesan By-laws. This was a small start towards the goal of producing by-laws but it is my intention to continue along this path and further expand those areas in the OCA Statute that are either not covered or require further clarification for our situation. The Chancery has also continued the project of collecting all our parish by-laws, uncovering some old copies in our diocesan files and requesting the most up-to-date copies from parishes. This too is an ongoing project and I would ask all the parishes that have not submitted their by-laws to the Diocesan Center to do so immediately.

Administrative Assistant and Director of Communications. Although our diocese is not yet in a financial position to fund these as full time positions, Matushka Sandy Kopestonsky and Ms. Cindy Davis have, in their respective roles, admirably shown what can be accomplished even at a part-time level. Matushka Sandy offers invaluable service to the diocese by her untiring labors as my Administrative Assistant. Her daily presence at the Diocesan Center (from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) ensures that everything runs smoothly: from the preparation of official correspondence to the compiling of the annual census, from the answering telephone and email messages to the coordination of my schedule. When I am traveling, I know that I can count on Matushka Sandy to preserve the continuity of the work, and when I am in the office, I can always count on her professionalism (and her wonderful cooking). Our diocese should be grateful for her dedicated and faithful service to the Church.

Special recognition also goes to our Communications Director, Cindy Davis, who, in 20 hours or less each week, has been able to prepare quarterly issues of our diocesan magazine, *Alive in Christ*, and has consistently provided regular updates on our diocesan website. Cindy also did a tremendous job with coordinating the lectures of Dr. Tristram Engelhardt, driving him to the various venues, making arrangements with the universities and parishes, and ensuring that every detail was taken care of. Much of the success of these lectures was due to her diligence and in her ability to communicate and advertise in a timely way. Unfortunately for us, Cindy has now found full time employment in her field of study and will need to transition out of her position at the Diocesan Center. I am grateful that she has agreed to remain on in an interim position to help as much as she can with the website, but the current issue of the *Alive in*

Christ will be her last one. She has shown what can be accomplished in the area of communications with a dedicated person in that position.

Relocation to Philadelphia. The third administrative element in my five-year plan was the relocation of the Diocesan Center to Philadelphia or to another central location within the diocese. Several options have been considered, including space in the RBO offices in Philadelphia, one of the rectories at St Mary's Church in Philadelphia and a vacant Roman Catholic Rectory in the Bethlehem area. Much of this exploration is preliminary and is dependent on the resolution of the situation of our Diocesan Center in South Canaan. The work of the Children's Home Board has continued, although at a slower pace than might be hoped for, and, by God's grace, we should be moving closer to a conclusion of the matter which will provide the diocese with ownership of the property on which our present diocesan center stands. A survey is presently being completed under the oversight of Mr. David Yeosock, a member of our Diocesan Council who also serves on the Children's Home Board, and a meeting of the Board will be scheduled at the beginning of the new year.

PARISH HEALTH

The five-year plan called for two areas of focus in terms of parish health: 1) administrative housekeeping and 2) parish vitality.

Administrative Housekeeping. At our last Assembly, we took the preparatory step of resolving that all parishes be fully compliant with a number of Diocesan and OCA administrative requirements. Although I am pleased with the progress that has been made in this area, there is much room for improvement. We must remember that the fulfillment of these administrative requirements is not simply an exercise in paperwork generation, but is the necessary foundation upon which we can make informed decisions about revitalization. We must regularly evaluate the life of our parishes in order to concretely address the areas of weakness.

Parishes are required to submit to the Chancery Office a copy of their current Annual Meeting Minutes, their Financial Report and Budget, Census, PSP, Clergy Compensation Review, statistics and Election of Officers. Several of our parishes are non-compliant in these areas and I will continue to withhold my blessing for the new parish council elections until all areas are satisfied. Particular care must be exercised in the area of compliance with the *Policies, Standards and Procedure of the Orthodox Church in America on Sexual Misconduct (PSP)*. Our yearly compliance report, which you can find appended to the Chancellor's Report, was submitted to the OCA Chancery which reflects a lack of full compliance in several areas, including two parishes that did not comply on the fundamental item of signed acceptance of the document. This

compliance must be done on an annual basis, so I expect our Compliance Report for next year to reflect full compliance in every area.

Parish Vitality. The most important work in this area was undertaken by the Revitalization Committee established at the 2010 Diocesan Assembly which began its work in May of this year. The Committee met, and continues to meet, on a regular basis via numerous conference calls and occasional in-person meetings and has accomplished the following:

1. The adoption of a mission statement: *To identify and share the proven approaches, practices and principles for achieving parish health, growth and vibrancy.*
2. The selection of Saint Alexis of Wilkes-Barre, Confessor and Defender of Orthodoxy in North America as a patron saint for the committee and as an intercessor for the entire diocese as it engages in the work of revitalization.
3. The Committee has commissioned special icon cards of St. Alexis to be distributed to all the faithful in the diocese and to be used as a means of outreach and sharing our zeal to see our parishes grow spiritually.
4. The creation of a dedicated page (labeled “Revitalization”) on our diocesan website where information relating to the work of the Committee can be found.
5. The call for the prayers of everyone in the diocese, first, by the offering personal prayers for revitalization and, more specifically, by daily offering a special prayer of intercession to St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre which can be found on the diocesan website. In addition, I have asked every parish to offer an Akathist to Saint Alexis on a monthly basis.
6. The adoption of the *Parish Health Inventory Model* from the Diocese of the Midwest as a template and springboard for the work of revitalization within the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania.

A more detailed presentation of the work of the Revitalization Committee and of the above *Parish Health Inventory Model* will be made in Williamsport.

CLERGY HEALTH

Under the heading of clergy health, there were three areas that I suggested needed development: 1) clergy spiritual/physical health, 2) clergy compensation and 3) clergy brotherhood.

Clergy Health. A clergy workshop was held on September 20 in Stroudsburg which tackled the issue of parish revitalization. At that meeting, I provided the clergy with a questionnaire for personal self-assessment. I have been using the results of those questionnaires to determine the areas of clergy health that need

to be addressed, including a) physical b) spiritual, and c) emotional and d) psychological. I am planning on scheduling a clergy retreat in the near future, which will address the matter of physical health and fitness and the Chancellor and I have begun to compile a list of possible speakers or facilitators.

Clergy Compensation. One of the administrative requirements that we agreed to comply with at our last Assembly was that every parish would undertake an annual review of the clergy salary with the goal of attaining the level of the local median income, and to be in compliance with all aspects of the OCA guidelines on clergy compensation. This is an area that will need to be addressed on an ongoing basis, understanding that many of our parishes are in financial situations that make the above goal difficult to attain. However, we should also remember that this question is not simply a question of financial stability for the clergy but relates to the overall health of our parishes. At our Assembly, we will have the opportunity to review this question in our sessions on revitalization and in our session on the funding of the Church.

Clergy Brotherhood. More effort is needed in the area of fostering a strong clergy brotherhood within our deaneries and I would encourage both the clergy and the faithful of our diocese to make efforts in this direction. As the bishop, I have tried to be more responsive to my clergy by replying to emails and telephone calls more promptly and by attending to diocesan matters in a timely way. I have also begun to meet more regularly with the clergy and their families in an informal setting, such as having tea or dinner, and I hope to increase these opportunities in the coming year.

THE COMING YEAR

This report has concentrated on the work of the past year within our diocese and we will have opportunity at our Assembly in Williamsport to discuss these issues further as well as continue our path forward to revitalization. Some of the issues discussed in this report were also addressed at the All American Council in Seattle and those decisions will also impact our diocese directly.

Strategic Plan. The work of our diocesan Revitalization Committee can be seen as paralleling in some ways the work of the Strategic Plan of the Orthodox Church in America. Our diocese is not alone in facing the struggles of modern life and, for the past three years, the OCA has been engaged in a strategic planning process, which was discussed at length in Seattle. The ongoing work of the strategic plan was endorsed by the delegates and it appears that the many group discussions in Seattle have yielded some concrete proposals that can be implemented in the near future. It is important for us as a Diocese to continue this momentum and apply the positive direction of the strategic plan within our local context.

The Funding of the Church. Last year, we adopted a resolution to move to proportional giving by the year 2018. The recent resolution of the All American Council has “fast-forwarded” the timing of this question by calling for an (as yet undetermined) process for reducing the Central Administration assessment over the next three years. In his report to this Assembly, our Treasurer, Fr. Martin Browne, has offered some concrete suggestions for our diocese to reflect upon. I would ask all of the delegates to consider these very carefully and be prepared to discuss them in Williamsport.

Diocesan Talent Bank. One of the recommendations of the Treasurer is for the establishment of a Diocesan Talent Bank, which would identify professionals and experts in various disciplines within our own diocese. In light of Fr. Martin’s own proposed resignation (which I have not accepted at this time), and also in light of our need to replace our Director of Communications, I am endorsing this idea for a Diocesan Talent Bank, which will be of assistance both to our Diocesan Administration and to all of our parishes. We have many talented people and we need to recognize their work and, more importantly, ask them to offer those talents for the health of our parishes and our diocese.

CONCLUSION

Finally, I would like to conclude with a final note of thanks for the invaluable help of my administrative staff: our Chancellor, Fr. John Kowalczyk, our Treasurer, Fr. Martin Browne, our Administrative Assistant, Matushka Alexandra Kopestonsky and our Director of Communications, Ms. Cindy Davis. I am also grateful for the advice and input of my Deans, Fr. Michael Hatrak, Fr. Daniel Kovalak and Fr. David Mahaffey and from the professional and wise guidance offered by the members of the Diocesan Council. Likewise, I am appreciative of the true brotherhood offered by clergy and their families and for the prayers, love and support of all the faithful of our wonderful diocese. May the Lord Jesus Christ inspire us to continue to be co-laborers in His vineyard so that together we might become worthy inheritors of His Eternal Life.