



January 24, 2017

Beloved Fathers, Matushki, Deacons and faithful,

Christ is in our midst! We welcome all our clergy, matushki, the faithful of our Diocese and our guest, Bill Marianes to the 53rd Assembly of the Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania. Mr. Marianes, we look forward to hearing your words as we seek to do Christ's work and to 'Cultivate A Mission Mindset,' in every parish of the Diocese; only in doing so will we fulfill Christ's commission to "go into all the world and make disciples of all people, teaching them to observe all that He has commanded, 'Baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' We also want to thank our host, the V. Rev. Fr. Stephen Vernak and the wonderful people of Christ the Saviour for hosting us and their gracious hospitality!

While our struggles and challenges are very real as a Diocese, we have much for which we are grateful:

- We have peaceful Assemblies and a very cohesive and cooperative Diocesan Council. All may speak their mind and fully participate in the decision-making process as we seek to be good stewards of the Lord's Holy Church.
- Our Officers, the V. Rev. Martin Browne, Chancellor; V. Rev. Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Dean of the Philadelphia Deanery; V. Rev. Fr. Nicholas Solak, Dean of the Wilkes Barre Deanery; the V. Rev. Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Dean of the Frackville Deanery; V. Rev. Fr. Stephen Vernak, our Diocesan Council Secretary and Mr. Joseph Tosca, Treasurer of the Diocese all have their own unique gifts they bring to the table and work incredibly well together for the building up of the Church. Additionally, we added the position of Financial Secretary, Matushka Ashley Joyner, to follow best business practices in separation of responsibilities. We are most grateful for their tireless efforts.
- We are also blessed to have capable auditors, Gregory Polk, Matushka Sharon Hubiak, David Yeosock and Mr. Paul Berdy. Thank you for your labors on behalf of the Church.
- Once again, on behalf of the Diocese I want to thank Matushka Sandra Kopestonsky for her professionalism and organizational skills. The Diocesan office would be in complete disaster without her. Her labors on behalf of the Diocese far exceed our ability to adequately compensate or to thank her for all she does May the Lord bless Matushka Sandra and the V. Rev. Fr. Stephen with good health and many years.
- We are blessed with stable clergy families and blessed to offer Clergy Peer Learning Groups and Peer Learning Groups for the matushki as well. Our thanks to Fr Nicholas Solak for overseeing the program, which provides invaluable support for our clergy and their families. A healthy priest is in a much better position to facilitate a healthy parish. We must invest in our clergy families and insure their wellbeing.
- On behalf of the Diocese, I want to thank Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Kimberly Metz, Reader Nicholas Macura and Tatiana Bohush and the numerous volunteers that minister to our youth in the summer camp program and winter retreat. It takes countless hours to acquire background checks, set up, tear down, plan and prepare. Thank you for your dedication and commitment.

- Communications --- Aric Gingo, continues to do a fine job with Alive in Christ, and the Diocesan Website. We have been reworking Alive in Christ to provide more content and we are finding a good balance. Fr. Martin Browne is now taking on the responsibilities of Editor for Alive in Christ. Fr. Timothy Hojnicky also successfully regained control of the Diocesan Facebook account found at "OCA Diocese of Eastern PA," on Facebook. Please make sure to post your parish outreach and speakers on our page.
- Several of our parishes have significantly upgraded their websites with welcoming videos and 360 degree church tours. Keeping up with current means of communication is crucial to keeping in touch with our youth. *We cannot live in the past. The clock only moves forward. Technology is crucial to keeping in touch with the younger generation, most of whom have never used a phone book, a rotary phone, seen a pay phone or even read a newspaper. We must educate ourselves in the use of social media.*
- Christian Education --- Our thanks to Matushka Myra Kovalak and Maria Proch for their willingness to provide teacher training and organize the women's retreat at St Tikhon's.
- The V. Rev. Fr. Stephen Vernak has organized Fall Speakers for the benefit of the Diocese. This past year, we had Sister Vassa and the year before, Abbot Tryphon. Hopefully, Fr Stephen will continue to do this and we will do better at publicizing these events for maximum impact.

Challenges

An Important Question We Need to Ask!

If Our Parish Closed Today, Would It Be Missed By the Surrounding People? Why or Why Not?

In reviewing parish minutes and the Deanery reports, we have a number of parishes that would be missed by the local community because:

1. They support the local food banks.
2. They provide meals to the homeless and needy and even support a local mobile soup kitchen.
3. They assist needy children with backpacks, school supplies, winter coats and Christmas gifts.
4. They provide Thanksgiving Baskets.
5. They honor our Veterans.
6. The parishioners, as well as the priest, minister to the sick and shut-ins, as well as those in the prisons.
7. They support the Orthodox Mission work.
8. They support International Orthodox Christian Charities, which also works domestically in disaster relief.
9. Our clergy minister to the local college students.
10. The ministry of museum exhibits and capable speakers arranged by Fr John Perich and his parishioners at Villanova expose large numbers of people to the Orthodox Faith.
11. A number of parishes sponsor lecture series to engage the public.
12. A number of parishes support a seminarian and / or the seminaries.



13. Holy Trinity in Pottstown hosted a Syrian Refugee Dinner, which brought an awareness that there are Orthodox Christians and other Christian people in the Middle East, who need our prayers and assistance.
14. The parishes that are stable or growing are known to be welcoming, open, friendly, charitable, peaceful, and culturally diverse and the priest as well as his family stay for years because they are cared for, respected and loved.

Statistically, parishes that are outward focused are more prone to growth. Parishes that are inward focused are rapidly declining.

Parishes that devour clergy decline.

There is a real concern about a shortage of clergy presently in the Diocese. We have at least two potential transfers and at least one retirement, the V. Rev. Michael Hatrak, who has covered two parishes for many years, Minersville and St. Clair. Additionally, we have St. Mary's in Coaldale vacant since July and Assumption in Philadelphia vacant for almost two years. Our Wilkes Barre Deanery also has a significant number of vacancies and supply priests are difficult to come by. We will do our best to provide clergy, but we need our parishes to do their best to care for their priests and their families.

First priority will need to be given to those parishes following the OCA compensation guidelines as well as have a history of retaining priests.

BROAD STROKES OF MY ACTIVITIES

Over the past year,

- Made 72 Archpastoral visits to the various parishes of the Diocese
- Attended Two Holy Synod Meetings,
- Attended Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry Board Meetings as the Liaison for the Assembly of Bishops.
- Made numerous phone calls to Attorneys, John Krisa, Ephrem Legaspi, Brett Woodburn, John Petorak, Fr. Sergius, Judge Ray Lanier and Metropolitan Tikhon regarding the property issues surrounding the Diocesan Center.
- Presided over the Pilgrimage at Holy Transfiguration in Ellwood City, PA
- Blessed Holy Apostles' new building.
- Served at St. Nikolai Orthodox Church, Alliance, OH
- Prepare a monthly Clergy Newsletter
- For the full record of public activities and events, you may refer to the 2016 Calendar posted under Diocesan Assembly 2017
- Additionally, there were numerous meetings of a private nature that is not reflected on the calendar.

This year, we will focus specifically on “Cultivating a Mission Mindset.” Our efforts will be directed towards providing:

- Continuing Education for our clergy to facilitate growth.
- Parish Council Workshops on the mission of the Church and Christian Stewardship of time, treasure and talent.
- Articles for Alive in Christ will reinforce the theme.
- Encourage active outreach and ministry to the surrounding community
- Encouraging Stewardship that supports the work of the Church in spreading the Gospel.

We cannot keep doing what we have always done and expect a different result. If our parishes want to thrive, we need to do a thorough inventory of our priorities and work together for the Glory of God and the building up of the Body of Christ!

Your unworthy Father in Christ,

+ Mark

+ Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania