

CHANCELLOR'S REPORT TO DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY JANUARY 26-27, 2017

This past year has been one of transition and renewal. The transition has been in personnel, a new chancellor and new treasurers, along with a major shift in the means by which we support the work of the diocese and the Central Administration of the O.C.A along with a new governing Statute of the O.C.A that requires us to reconsider how we live as a church in the parish and in diocesan settings. Renewal has taken place on many fronts: spiritual, administrative, educational and formative. And as is inevitably the case in times of transition and renewal, things don't always go as hoped for, though things have gone well overall.

Parishes are the places where the church lives in localities. But parishes, in themselves, do not constitute the church. No man is an island, neither is any parish. Together we all share the life of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and so the health of one is the health of all. Conversely, the sickness of one is the sickness of all. Our life is common, a communion in faith and love, not only or even mainly in legal, corporate terms. The bylaws, incorporation documents and statutes are necessary and helpful if and when they reflect the theological truth of the Church's life, offer ways to practically obey the Divine Commandments and fulfill the mission of the church, each and every one, and are followed by all as a mark of Christian discipleship and responsibility. Both the new proportional giving support and the new Statute have required us all to reconsider, adapt, and when necessary revise our governing documents within our parishes. This exercise, while seemingly tedious and irrelevant to some, is essential for regular and honorable administration, but also in providing ways to deal with irregular, unusual situations. Moreover, they provide lines of communication between different dimensions of Church life for the purpose of mutual support, guidance and assistance, not control. Some parishes have successfully revised their bylaws; some are in the process, and others find the task challenging. If parishes wish assistance, assistance is available from the deans and myself. Make a phone call or send an email, and we will be happy to come and meet with you, answer questions and alleviate concerns. We are all required to bring our bylaws into compliance with the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America by the end of 2017, though it is already the governing document of the entire Church, having been approved overwhelmingly at the All American Council in Atlanta in the summer of 2015. What the Parish Meeting is to the Parish, the All American Council is to the entire O.C.A.

On the proportional giving approach, all I can report is that due to the excellent work of Fr. Ignatius Gauvain in preparation for last year's Assembly, together with our Finance Committee and Melanie Ringa, Treasurer of the O.C.A, we were in the best possible position to begin this new, but actually ancient practice of proportional giving. Carrying it forward has been the responsibility of our no-longer-new treasurer, Mr. Joseph Tosca, who has acquainted himself superbly in all areas of the treasurer's job. We are also blessed to have the assistance of Mat. Ashley Joyner as our Financial Secretary, having divided the duties of the office, a decision which has proven quite fruitful in terms of accuracy, efficiency, responsiveness and thoroughness in the completion of the responsibility of the treasurer's office. I have always advocated for competent laypeople to take on that responsibility, among

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others, and am gratified to see that it is doing so well for the diocese. We have an immense wealth of personal talent in our diocese which needs to be revealed by those who are aware of it, all of it. God gives talents for purposes; some we know we need and can benefit from, others we do not know until we encounter the talent. I strongly encourage all the lay people to make their pastors aware of their talents and expertise and encourage the pastors to share this information with the diocese. On a visit to one of our parishes I saw that they have posted a list on their bulletin board of parishioners who are willing to assist other parishioners with their professional knowledge. I encourage each of our parishes to do this, and hopefully share this information with the diocese at large.

As noted, the transition to the new proportional giving approach has proven challenging for all, some more than others. On the surface these challenges are technical, related to formulas and deadlines and specific reports, but on a deeper level the challenge is one of a new vision, new that is in comparison to the most recent vision of parish and diocesan life. To everyone's credit, all have sought to respond as best as they can. In the process many have discovered weaknesses in their parish life that was there but went unrecognized or was let be. These weaknesses should not be a source of fear, shame or isolation, as is the temptation, but an opportunity to reach out for assistance, to experience the truth we rhetorically repeat so often, *brothers and sisters in Christ*. We are brothers and sisters and we are called to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Let us see the challenges of the transition as an opportunity to grow together, and avoid the diabolic temptation to grow more apart, to isolate ourselves from one another, recognizing in ourselves the truth of St. Paul's words "My power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9).

We are looking forward to a year of missionary renewal. Every parish is a mission because every parish has a mission: the same mission to make disciples of all nations. For each community in our diocese that renewal requires spiritual renewal within our parish focusing on worship, education and service. On a diocesan level it requires prayerful discernment of how best to use the resources that now remain in our diocese due to the change in supporting the central administration for renewal of existing parishes and missions and the establishment of new missions. It is over a decade since we had a mission in the diocese and we are overdue. There are many challenges to such an endeavor, but it is not optional, it is necessary.

I am very grateful to all those in the Diocesan Administration and in the parishes with whom I have had the blessing to work this past year. I look forward to the year to come. I ask for your forgiveness for my failures and offer you profound thanks for your patience, and look forward to a fruitful Diocesan Assembly.

Yours in Christ

V. Rev. Raymond M. Browne, Diocesan Chancellor