



January 24, 2019

Dear Rev. Frs., Rev. Proto-deacons, Deacons, Matushki and faithful,

Christ is in our midst! Welcome to our Diocesan Assembly. We are most grateful to Fr. Matthew, Matushka Ashley Joyner and the faithful of St. Nicholas for hosting us. Thank you for your labors in preparation, all the work by various people to prepare and coordinate this wonderful gathering.

We would also like to welcome our guests of honor this evening, the V. Rev. Fr. Stephen and Matushka Sandra Kopestonsky and the V. Rev. Fr. Daniel and Matushka Myra Kovalak. Unfortunately, the V. Rev. Fr. David and Matushka Sharon Shewczyk could not join us. The Diocesan Council decided rather than a speaker this year, we would take pause to recognize and honor these four people for their years of sacrificial service to the Church and most especially the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania. We hope to allow sufficient time for you to visit with them, one another and relax, reminisce and express your personal gratitude for their service later this evening.

As mentioned last year, we accepted the offer to purchase the Diocesan Center from St. Tikhon's Monastery. A week or so before closing, we discovered the Seminary would be purchasing the property. We closed on February 5th. The property we initially identified, last year, as an excellent prospect fell through, but after months looking for something else, more drama, inspections, consultations with attorneys, a zoning hearing, etc. we finally closed on August 16th. This acquisition had no less drama attached to it than the acquisition, as well as the sale of the Diocesan Center, it was just more compressed, but equally stressful. Countless hours went into this process.

I would be remiss, if I did not thank Sandra Tosca, an engineer of St. Michael's in Mt. Carmel and a member of the Diocesan Council for inspecting potential properties and offering her professional opinion as well as assisting with securing a permit for the driveway from Penn Dot. Secondly, we need to thank John McGarrity of St. Nicholas, Bethlehem, for looking at numerous properties with me and giving his professional opinion as a contractor. A simple sentence in a report like this is insufficient to express our gratitude for the hours, time and travel expended in this process.

Our search for a new Diocesan Chancery was hindered by zoning ordinances – ordinances which vary from borough to borough and interpreted differently in each and every one of them. John Coles, Jr., Esq., of Christ the Saviour was of immense help with legal issues pertaining to the sale of the old property, ordinances, variances, zoning codes and the purchase of the new chancery, as well as the sale of six acres of the Moncovich Estate north of Lopez. Every borough made accommodations for adult entertainment, but none had provisions for a Diocesan Chancery / Residence.

We as a Church are blessed to have gifted and talented people who offer their gifts in service of the Church. John Coles is currently working on getting our new chancery recognized as *tax exempt*, after which we will request that all taxes paid at closing be refunded to us. After the purchase of



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"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." Augustine

the new property we had a wonderful showing of volunteers to address landscaping, drywall repair, painting, electrical, plumbing and cleaning. Obtaining appropriate bids from various installers and overseeing the work was quite time consuming. As with any home, there is always something else to do.

This past summer, the summer camp was cancelled by the directors, as they did not feel they had sufficient time to get proper vetting for staff in place before camp. Last fall all three directors submitted their resignations. Nevertheless, we are well on our way in preparing for the coming summer. We are most grateful to the previous directors, Kimberly Metz, Tatiana Bohush and Nicholas Macura for their years of service and cooperation in getting the new directors up to speed. On December 9th I met with Dimitri Ressetar, Katya Hubiak, David Drobish and Rebecca Oliver about the positions. All four submitted comprehensive applications, work and clergy references. They are working closely with Fr Timothy Hojnicky on proper vetting procedures and seeking his direction in preparation for this summer.

As the V. Rev. Fr. Nicholas reported the Clergy Peer Learning has been embraced by the Orthodox Church in America. Fr Nicholas has done a lot of travelling to present our program to other Orthodox jurisdictions and Dioceses within the O.C.A. We are grateful to Fr. Nicholas for his tireless efforts to address clergy and clergy family health and well-being. We will see how things unfold with the central administration in this regard, without ceasing to insure we maintain a viable program of caring for clergy within the Diocese.

Fr. Nicholas Solak has also spearheaded our Seminarian Internship Program. Fr Nicholas will give a verbal report as well as one of our seminarians and his wife, Dn. Silouan Burns and Mat. Emilia. The program allows students to serve more frequently and in a different capacity than at the seminary. Additionally, our program allows them to get practical experience of serving in a parish, meet the various officers of the parish, preach, teach and get to know the people of our Diocese. We currently have five seminarians participating in some capacity in the program: Fr. Vjekoslav Jovicic (Holy Trinity, Stroudsburg); Dn. Silouan Burns (Holy Apostles); Dn. Daniel Valentine (St John the Baptist, Nanticoke); Lawrence Conover (St. Basil, Simpson and St. John the Baptist, Dundaff) and Fr. Michael Shepherd (SS Peter and Paul, Uniondale). Once again, we are grateful to Fr Nicholas for overseeing this wonderful opportunity for the seminarians.

Words cannot express my gratitude to Matushka Sandra Kopestonsky for her tireless efforts to keep us all on task, in order to comply with legal and administrative policies. Her sacrifice of ten years of her personal retirement to serve our Diocese and the Church is above and beyond what anyone could ask or expect. Her assistance in preparing for the move and driving down to set up the office after the move were greatly appreciated.

This past year has been quite challenging. My schedule is on line. Though it does not show private meetings with clergy or laity, parish councils or parish assemblies, time spent looking for a property, meetings with attorneys, calls to boroughs about zoning and meetings with realtors. As in the past, I attended all three Holy Synod gatherings, the All American Council, the Board meetings for Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, four Diocesan Council Meetings and participated in numerous conference calls. Additionally, we continue to search for potential clergy for the Diocese and are very selective.

We are in the process of updating our website. Fr John Matusiak who writes for the O.C.A. website says he visits our website for news as it is generally more up to date than most others. Hopefully, sometime this year, we will see a completely new look with more logical links. We will no longer be publishing "Alive in Christ." As with the O.C.A., we hope to do quarterly newsletters which can be printed out by each parish directly from our website.

I want to thank, our out-going Diocesan Council for their commitment and labors on behalf of the Church and our Diocese. Joe Tosca has done an outstanding job as treasurer as we have been transitioning to proportional giving. Greg Polk, an accountant and one of our auditors said the records were meticulously kept and impeccable. As our treasurer, Joe refused to be compensated. His professionalism and warm smile will be missed as he has informed me he will no longer be serving as treasurer. Finally, I must thank the V. Rev. Fr. Martin Browne, our Chancellor, the V. Rev. Frs. Nicholas Solak, Victor Gorodenchuk and Timothy Hojnicky, whose tireless efforts take a heavy load off of my back and have allowed me to address the many issues associated with the acquisition of the new chancery. They should be paid three times what we give them for their travel, time and pastoral care of the various vacant parishes.

By the Grace of God, I pray we are able to bring the renovations to an end by mid-summer and that I am allowed to focus more on prayer, Scripture, reading of the Fathers of the Church, sermon preparation and being a pastor to our clergy, their families and the faithful. May God be merciful to me a sinner.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

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

