

Your Eminence, Brother clergy and Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Diocesan Center:

Since our last Diocesan Assembly we have seen the completion of the sale of the previous Diocesan Center and the acquisition and move to the new one. Two words describe the process on both ends, long and difficult, but ultimately successful due to the work of many starting with the Archbishop. The relocation places the Diocesan Center in the center of the diocese, more or less, facilitating ease of access for the hierarch, clergy and laity. Previously, meetings had been held throughout the diocese as the South Canaan location was convenient only for those in “the valley.” Additionally, the layout provides for designated office space that is separate from the living/reception area, with access and parking. Currently several projects are underway, most important of which is the completion of what will be the Bishop’s Chapel, about which more will be said when the room is completed.

Clergy Health:

Under the guidance of Fr. Nicholas Solak, our diocesan program of Clergy Peer Learning groups continues in its third year, this being the final year of the Lily Foundation grant for such groups. Because of their undoubted benefit for our own clergy, the diocese is committed to moving forward with this program. We have matched the Lily Grant, as required for the past three years and will continue to provide funds moving forward. Fr. Solak will address this in his report in a more developed way. However, it is appropriate here to congratulate Fr. Nicholas, together with Hieromonk Nikodhim (Preston), for the work they did on behalf of the O.C.A. Department of Pastoral Life to obtain a different grant from Lily for the development of this program throughout the O.C.A. Details of that may be found here: [\\$470,700 Lilly Grant helps establish OCA Clergy and Clergy Wives Peer Learning Groups](#)

Personnel:

Retirements:

This past year has seen the retirement of two long serving and beloved priests of our diocese. Fr. David Shewczyk retired before Great Lent from Holy Trinity in Wilkes-Barre, where he had served for 24 years. Previously Fr. David served in Alden Station and in Simpson. And prior to that, before ordination, he was choir director in Old Forge. His service was not restricted to the parish in that time. He was an adjunct faculty member at St. Tikhon’s seminary in the Department of Pastoral Life, overseeing the seminarian interns at the hospital in Honesdale. He also served as a chaplain at a Forensic Hospital. He and Mat. Sharon have relocated to South Carolina where he serves as a supply priest and continues the transition to retirement. We thank Fr. David for his many faithful and faith filled years of service to the diocese, her faithful, the seminary and monastery, not only in the ways known to us all, but also to God alone.

Fr. David’s retirement was followed by that of Fr. Daniel Kovalak in May from Holy Cross Church in Williamsport, where he and Mat. Myra had spent 39 years of active ministry building (literally and otherwise) the community into the vital expression of Christ’s Holy Orthodox Church that it is. During his time there Fr. Dan was also active in the diocese and on the national level, as was Mat. Myra. Fr. Dan also taught at St. Tikhon’s Seminary in the Department of Pastoral

Life, as well as serving as Wilkes-Barre dean, Diocesan Council member, and Met. Council member. Mat. Myra served also in the Department of Christian Education of the O.C.A and together with Maria Proch was a leading, formative force in providing excellent resources and methods for Christian Education in the diocese as well as beyond. Their retirement is well deserved, though the community feels their departure greatly. In retirement the Kovalaks live in Harrisburg and Fr. Dan is attached to Christ the Saviour parish there, assisting as a supply priest as needed and spending time with their family there and in Wilmington. We are grateful to God that Mat. Myra continues to recover from her difficult and protracted struggle with illness and pray that, together, they may enjoy their retirement.

The other major retirement of the year is at of our Administrative Assistant, Mat. Sandra Kopestonsky. Much more will be said of her work during this assembly. However, having worked with her during her entire time in the Diocesan Center, ten years, a few personal words are in order. The amount of work she did, daily and cumulatively, is staggering. That she did it all with the highest degree of professionalism in every respect is extremely admirable. That she did it all with never failing patience, pleasant word and constant smile, is inspiring. That it all came from her deep, non-ostentatious love for Christ and His Church is not surprising, but for those who have had the blessing to work with her is an excellent example of how Christ wishes us to serve, ordained and non-ordained alike. None of this could have been done without the support of Fr. Stephen, who has been an assiduous, faithful and wise servant of Christ in many diocesan parishes during the same time, filling in where needed. This was supposed to be their retirement. We can never sufficiently express our gratitude to them both. But we can try. And we should. We pray the Lord will grant them an equal number of years in peace and health to enjoy whatever they enjoy in return for their selflessness during these years.

Deaths:

While there were many deaths throughout the diocese this year, two in particular were especially great for us, given that they were unexpected and that these two people played such a great role in the life of the diocese.

The sudden death of Maria Proch is a great loss for her family, but also for our diocese. An active member of St. Basil's in Simpson as well as a member of the diocesan and national educational committees, Maria filled these roles for many years, lending her time and talents as an educator to all. She will be especially remembered for the annual Women's Retreat at St. Tikhon's, which she over saw with great diligence and attentiveness, offering women of the diocese an opportunity to come together and hear from sound sources how to better live their lives as Orthodox Christians, receiving not only instruction but also encouragement. A master teacher, together with Mat. Myra, she offered resources and workshops and was always available for consultation. We offer our deepest condolences to her entire family, especially her mother Marie, and pray that her memory will be eternal!

The other, more recent death, was that of Fr. Joseph Martin, retired dean of Holy Resurrection Cathedral and before that pastor of Holy Trinity in McAdoo for 29 years, during which he served as Frackville Dean and other parishes as needed. An active chaplain at the Veterans Administration hospital in Wilkes-Barre up until the time of his repose, Fr. Joe was also the longest serving member of the Board of Trustees of St. Tikhon's Seminary, only one of many roles he filled there. In retirement he served where and as needed throughout the deanery.

New Assignments:

As noted above, both Holy Trinity in Wilkes-Barre and Holy Cross in Williamsport lost their long time pastors. Both of those were filled from within the diocese with the transfer of Fr. Innocent Neal to Holy Trinity from Ss. Peter and Paul in Uniondale, and the transfer of Fr. Seraphim Reynolds from Holy Ascension in Lykens. Both of them were warmly welcomed to their new communities and we look forward to them building on the foundations which have been laid by Fr. David and Fr. Dan.

Mat. Ashley Joyner is currently serving as the Administrative Assistant, following in the footsteps of Mat. Sandra Kopestonsky. She brings to the position many of the same qualities that Mat. Sandy did, professionalism, a pleasant disposition, and an eye for detail. She is also the mother of a toddler and the wife of an active parish priest, Fr. Matthew, Rector of St. Nicholas parish in nearby Bethlehem, our host for the Assembly.

Seminarian Internship Program:

This year marks the first time the diocese has had an internship program for our seminarians to get practical experience in parishes. Under the direction of Fr. Nicholas Solak, all of our current seminarians on the ordination track are assigned and serving in parishes under the supervision of their respective pastors, in addition to meeting regularly with Fr. Nicholas. The goal is to provide priests who have some practical experience of all aspects of parish life that will better equip them in serving in this diocese, as each diocese is unique, as well as the same in many respects.

Ordinations:

Currently there are five seminarians from this diocese, all of whom are at St. Tikhon's. During this past year, His Eminence Archbishop Mark ordained the following seminarians to the diaconate at different parishes in the diocese (Fr. Vjekoslav Jovicic; Dn. Silouan Burns and Dn. Daniel Valentine). While ordinations have been done before in parishes, these were done in parishes where it had never been done before, or not done in a while. Each of the communities, including my own, found the experience to be enriching and look forward to other such ordinations in the future.

Chancellors and Treasurers Meeting:

This year I attended two annual meetings of the O.C.A. Chancellors and Treasurers with Mr. Joseph Tosca, our Diocesan Treasurer, one in January before the last Assembly, which I reported on orally at that meeting, and another in October in conjunction with the Holy Synod of Bishops. Moving forward, these meetings will be in October with the Holy Synod. The idea had been discussed previously and was presented to the Holy Synod who endorsed it and sought to make it happen originally in May, but October proved feasible. We met in the morning together and discussed issues related to declining parishes, priest shortage and training of seminarians. It was an honest, fruitful discussion that began a dialogue that will hopefully prove as beneficial as the meetings among the chancellors and treasurers themselves, which we had also. We also discussed the reorganization of the chancery staff.

Further details about all this may be found here: [Holy Synod concludes Fall 2018 Session](#)

Continuing Education

Clergy Retreats:

Pre-Lenten: Was held at the St. Francis Spiritual Center in Aston on the theme of the Prayer of St. Ephrem as a guide throughout the year.

Pre Advent: His Grace Bishop Anthony gave an extremely well received retreat on understanding the religious atmosphere in which we are called to serve as pastors, preachers and teachers. These were recorded and made available to the clergy. Many thanks to Fr. Stephen Vernak and Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church in Harrisburg for making the recordings and making them available.

Seminars/Workshops:

We have continued to offer a variety of opportunities for parishes and clergy to continue to educate themselves on a variety of topics: theological, pastoral, administrative. The year ended with a presentation by Mat. Mary Buletza on financial issues relative to priests and parishes in Bethlehem on December 15th. Despite the timing challenges over twenty clergy and lay representatives of parishes throughout the diocese were present and the response to Mat. Mary's presentation was extremely positive. We hope to have her return this year, after Pascha, so that others may benefit from the information she has to offer. Fr. John Edwards has taken over responsibility for this office and will be working with the administration to offer a good mix of theological, pastoral and administrative related workshops in the coming year.

While there is more I could comment on, it is best to let other department heads give more complete reports. What I do not want to leave unsaid is the high degree of competency among our clergy and lay leadership throughout the diocese, which is only surpassed by their commitment reflected in long hours, innovative, though not always novel, approaches to making Christ better known and loved and His people better served. It is an honor and pleasure to work with and serve such people.

In closing, let me note two challenges we need to better address, all of us, in the coming years. We need to identify and develop the lay talent we have in our diocese. That requires knowing our people, on the part of our clergy, and knowing the skills and talents they possess. We must think outside of the box. Professions, training, expertise that traditionally has not been associated with "church" should not be written off, either by those possessing or those pastoring those possessing them. Stewardship requires us to be generous with our talents. Don't wait to be found, brothers and sisters, make us aware of and offer what you have been given. Next, we need to give far greater attention to our youth. Knowing them, listening to them so as to understand the world in which they live, a world radically different than the one I or most of those reading this grew up in. The Church has all that is necessary for every generation, but it is essential to know what the unique needs of this generation are so as to use properly those tools in our spiritual treasury that will best benefit them. Moreover, we need to involve the youth more. Small gestures are good, but they are small. Our youth are full members of the Church by Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Communion. Let's begin to treat them that way. The digital culture is a reality that is not going away. There is much that is wrong with it, but also many opportunities in it and who knows it better than our youth? Here is an area where we can lead

while being led, form by being informed. There are other areas too for our youth to partake more fully of our ministry to the world. Saying we care is one thing, showing it is another. Let us commend ourselves and each other to this good work, and all our lives to Christ our God!

With gratitude for your trust, advice, support and assistance, and sorrow and repentance for my failures and offences toward any,

Yours in Christ,

V. Rev. Raymond M. Browne
Chancellor