



January 22, 2020

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

Glory be to Jesus Christ! Welcome to our Diocesan Assembly. We are most grateful to Fr. Stephen Vernak and the faithful of Christ the Saviour 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 guest this evening, the V. Rev. Thomas Soroka. He has much to speak about and unfortunately, he will not be able to cover every aspect of revitalizing parishes. Tonight, he will be planting the seeds for ongoing discussion. Hopefully, you will find him a valuable resource for developing a vision and long term plan for your parishes. Fr Thomas also agreed to give the homily tomorrow for you to get to know him better. Hopefully, after his presentation you will visit with him and get more seeds of inspiration to carry back to your parish.

Fr Thomas' presentation is quite timely as it is focused on mission as the purpose of parish life, not merely maintenance. The world and consequently the church is in a much different place than it was when most of our parishes were founded and has rapidly changed in recent decades. Maintenance is ultimately impossible without renewal which means we must put mission first.

We need to carefully look at the health of our parishes and ask, "Are they in maintenance mode or do they have a vision for mission? i.e., "Is there a vision?" "Is there charitable work being done?" (*Although many parishes do not specifically list charitable outreach in their budget, we were able to provide our attorney with a list of the charitable giving from most of our parishes.*) "Is there any effort to grow the parish?" "Is there a Full Liturgical Cycle? Is there regular Adult education actively being taught? Is there a Church School and education on stewardship? Is there adequate leadership left to change the course? Is the priest providing vision and leadership, or is he allowed to lead at all? And if not, why not? And are the obstacles preventing these things surmountable. Simply surviving or maintaining a building is not a goal or a vision, it is basically a denial that a parish is dying and a betrayal of our Lord's Command to go into all the world and make disciples!

Countless resources are wasted by simply being in maintenance (hospice) mode with a focus on maintaining a building above all else. *The Church is the people and not limited to a parish or a building.* Over the last several years, I have seen people work at fundraisers, but miss Sunday Liturgy to go to a casino. On another occasion, I was told we were at church all week, we do not have time to do everything (*meaning come to services, receive the Sacraments, engage in adult education, etc.*). We will not resolve this tonight, but I would challenge you to go back to your parishes and have serious discussions on MISSION VS. MAINTENANCE. We must seriously evaluate our priorities. Hopefully, Fr. Thomas Soroka will help inspire this process.

This past summer, our camp program resumed after some reorganization. The V. Rev. Fr. Timothy Hojnicky works closely with the Youth Directors to insure each volunteer and counselor is an active member of an Orthodox Church, in good standing and has the recommendation of their parish



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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

priest. Katya Hubiak, Dimitri Ressetar, David Drobish and Rebecca Oliver worked closely with Fr Timothy. They did a great job and we had a wonderful program thanks to their labors and that our dedicated volunteers and counselors. We are working diligently to insure the Orthodoxy of the Program, as well as, transparency and accountability in all aspects as one of the ministries of the Diocese. Two of our Diocesan Council members will review the old financial records and all financial records will be reviewed by treasurer and our auditors as we move forward.

As always, my visitation schedule is on line. Though it does not show private meetings with clergy, laity, parish councils or parish assemblies, and meetings with attorneys, etc. As in the past, I attended our Holy Synod gatherings, the Board meetings for Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, three 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 have engaged the services of Web solutions to develop a new web site for the Diocese. Hopefully, in the coming months we will start the transition.

I want to thank, Matushka Ashley Joyner, our former administrative assistant and Carmen Hodson, our new administrative assistant for keeping us organized. Secondly, I am grateful to our Diocesan Council for their commitment and labors on behalf of the Church and our Diocese. Finally, I must thank the V. Rev. Fr. Martin Browne, our Chancellor, and our Deans, the V. Rev. Frs. Nicholas Solak, Victor Gorodenchuk and Timothy Hojnicky, whose tireless efforts take a heavy load off of my back. They should be paid three times what we give them for their travel, time and pastoral care of the various vacant parishes.

The majority of the renovation work on the Chancery is coming to a close. We now have a very beautiful Chapel with furnishings made by Doug Cain and Icons donated by St. Nikolai Mission in Alliance, OH. Great Lent is upon us! Let us use the time of Lent to grow ever closer to Christ. If you have never attended the services or engaged in the Fast as prescribed by the Church and have issues in your life that you cannot overcome, embrace the gift of Great Lent. The Church in her wisdom gives us the time of Great Lent as a prescription, i.e., a medicine for the healing of our souls. Let us take that precious time to focus more on prayer, Scripture, and the reading of the Fathers of the Church, May God be merciful to me a sinner.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

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