

All American Council, Seattle, WA

Diocese of the South Assembly

During this past year God has continued to pour out His grace upon His Church. We witnessed exciting developments on international and national levels. Most importantly, our communities of faith continue to live and grow in our life as the Holy Church, the Body of Jesus Christ.

First, let me thank you for your prayers, expressed in cards, letters, and emails, over the past year as I addressed personal medical issues, and let me also thank you again for your ongoing prayer and support. While these medical concerns are important, I have continued to fulfill my responsibilities as locum tenens, and only recently have I had to scale back somewhat. On some occasions I decided it best to preside rather than celebrate a full hierarchal Liturgy.

I had a very full schedule this year that included, beyond my duties as locum tenens of the Diocese of the South, my responsibility as Episcopal moderator of the OCA's Pension Board, my participation as a member of the Lesser Synod, and of course my responsibilities for the Diocese of New England and the Albanian Archdiocese.

Collectively these responsibilities required a significant amount of travel, including visits to the New England Cathedral in Boston, the Albanian Cathedral in Boston, and both the Miami Cathedral and Dallas Cathedral in the Diocese of the South. Someone mentioned that I am collecting cathedrals like kids collect bottle caps!

My primary role as locum tenens is to facilitate the process of nominating a candidate to serve as Diocesan Hierarch for the Diocese of the South. This included travel to Dallas on several occasions, in addition to meetings with the Deans and faithful in Miami, Tampa, and Orlando, FL, and Columbia and Charleston, SC. We anticipate that at the earliest, a candidate may be presented in February of 2012, but more likely in July of 2012. The Diocese of the South is very large and mission oriented. It spans a territory equal to the area of Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Germany combined.

This All-American Council in Seattle affords us the opportunity to meet and speak with several of our prospective candidates. It is my hope that we can schedule two or three of these interviews as a face to face encounter always presents the best possible way for us to meet potential archpastors.

Archbishop Dmitri

Archbishop Dmitri, as we all know, fell asleep in the Lord on August 28. He was the founder of our missionary diocese, and his departure from this life has had a profound impact on the faithful here. We have fond memories of his oversight of our Diocese New England and the Albanian Archdiocese for a number of years. Reflecting on Archbishop Dimitri's life's work, it is remarkable to recall that his initial archpastoral responsibilities included the Exarchate of Mexico, which is now a diocese with its own hierarchy.

I had the opportunity to meet with Archbishop Dmitri during several visits to Dallas and he had fond remembrances of his work within the diocese of New England, the same holds true with the Albanian Archdiocese which he also oversaw while taking care of the New England diocese.

We are in the midst of preparing the final resting place for Archbishop Dmitri along side St Seraphim Cathedral in Dallas. We hope to have some drawings available for distribution throughout the Diocese so that many who wish to may participate in this most meaningful addition to our cathedral.

May Archbishop Dimitri's memory be eternal.

Episcopal Assembly

Last year I reported to my other dioceses on the first episcopal assembly and the responsibilities and issues that faced us as 56 bishops throughout the US, Canada and South America met. I told them about our request for redistricting of the Assemblies in this hemisphere which would include one for the American churches, one for the Canadian Churches and to separate, Mexico, Central and South America into their own assemblies.

Not all of the requests were granted in as much as every patriarch must agree when a change such as we requested can be granted. Canada already has its own assembly but the request to have Mexico, Central and South America meet as a separate assembly was not granted.

Some of the items that were discussed were efforts to streamline the activities of the Assembly as each of the bishops were assigned to working committees. These committees covered areas such as: Theological Education; Canon Law; Christian Education, and Pastoral Chaplaincies.

I am, by my request, on the military chaplaincy committee which is chaired by Bishop Isaiah of Denver, who, by the way is a retired US Marine. It is an important committee that works with the chaplain endorsing agencies for both the military and institutional chaplaincy. We did note that the OCA should be the endorsing agency for military chaplains in as much as most military chaplains are OCA clergy. Furthermore, we noted that the OCA has a Dean of chaplains which is essential to maintaining proper pastoral discipline within the military.

No decision was made on any of the chaplaincies issues at this last meeting and Bp. Isaiah has sent several suggestions for our committee to consider. I have shared these suggestions with Fr. Joseph Gallick who is the OCA Deputy Dean of Military Chaplains, so that I will have the benefit of his input at the next assembly.

New Bishops

On April 30, Bishop Matthias was consecrated for the Diocese of the Mid-West.; I was privileged to participate in his consecration the week following Pascha.

At the recent meeting of the Holy Synod, Fr. Alexander Golitzin was elected for the Bulgarian Diocese. The dates of his consecration have yet to be announced.

Highlights

During this short period of my responsibility in the South two wonderful occasions that I was privy to participate in was the tenth anniversary of St Maximus the Confessor in Denton, TX. The occasion included several addresses by His Beatitude, a glorious celebration of the Divine Liturgy followed by a banquet attended by parishioners, friends, as well as local faithful.

Although I was unable to be in attendance, the consecration of the new church building in Port St Lucie, FL, was another glorious celebration for us in the diocese.

We know when one part of the body of Christ suffers, the whole church suffers; and when one part of the body of Christ rejoices, the whole church rejoices.

These two occasions have given cause for the whole church to rejoice.

Health

Early last year there was a tumor discovered on my vocal cords. It was removed and then I received radiation treatments.

However, a recent PET scan revealed that some issues related to the cancer were affecting the voice box and lymph nodes. This required surgery that was completed just a few weeks ago. As of this date, the healing process has begun and I anticipate a full recovery over the next few months.

My voice may not be very strong until the healing is complete, but I place the highest priority upon parish visitation and providing archpastoral guidance. Pastors must be present for their flock, in the liturgical services, in meetings, and through various forms of communication. Yet, pastors must also maintain their physical health so that they can continue to serve in these various capacities. Balancing these two priorities can be difficult, and over the past year I have attempted to walk this narrow path. By your prayers, I shall continue to do so.

Recently some other medical issues, unrelated to my earlier cancer treatment, have arisen which require medical intervention. Although I am by nature a private person I felt that you were entitled to know the issues facing your hierarch so I sent our clergy an update. My desire is to maintain some personal privacy while also keeping you informed of how I am doing. Should you have any specific questions regarding these matters, I would ask you to speak directly with your parish priest so that we can avoid rumor and speculation.

The medical issues are being addressed and I anticipate full recovery in a relatively short time although the voice issues will take a little more time to heal.

I am keenly aware that my wellbeing directly affects the ongoing life of the Diocese, and I know that illness can evoke anxiety and fear. Illness is a serious challenge that we face as individuals, as communities, and as the Body of Christ. In his book **On the Priesthood** St. John Chrysostom reminds us that the Body of Christ is more susceptible to illness, and slower to heal than our physical bodies. This resonates in our Diocese and our Church, for many of our parishes and missions, and indeed the whole of our Church, are suffering in different ways. Yet, when we struggle with illness of any kind—physical or spiritual—we place these struggles at the foot of the Cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, firm in the faith that the Hand of God is at work in every aspect of our lives, both in sickness and in health, and in the life of the Church. We stand firm in our faith that God’s grace is sufficient for us, and that His power is made perfect in our weakness. (2 Cor 12:9). On a diocesan level, on a parish level, and on an individual level we face our illnesses and we look to Christ the Physician of our Souls, so that in Him, we may find true and lasting health.

Thanks and Recognition

I am most fortunate that in all three dioceses for which I have responsibility I have dedicated and competent chancellors to support the work of the bishop, and I am in email and phone contact with all three on almost a daily basis. Fr John Kreta, in the Diocese of New England, Fr. Arthur Liolin in the Albanian Archdiocese and your own Fr Marcus Burch, the chancellor I appointed.

I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to all of you --- the clergy and laity of the Diocese of the South --- for the commitment and dedication that you have exhibited in all of the areas for which you have accepted responsibility.

Allow me to close with these thoughts from the Elder Philotheos Zervakos:

“The work that you do is spiritual, but force yourself to study one or two chapters from Holy Scripture, the lives of the saints, the writings of the fathers, and other teachers of the church.

Also do not neglect the duty of prayer and as much as possible fast and be temperate, but above all, have forcefulness, for the kingdom of Heaven is gained by force and given to those who have forced themselves upon it.....”

In other words, it is our task, by God's grace and through our diligence, to BE the voice, the hands and the feet of Christ in this world. As Christ comes more fully alive in us, we bring Christ to others, and bring others to Christ.

May the Blessings of the Lord be with all of you.