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**THE DIOCESE OF THE SOUTH
2009 DOS ASSEMBLY
ATLANTA, GA
July 23, 2009**

Report of the Chancellor

Your Beatitude, Reverend Fathers, Monastics, Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

I would first like to thank the Local Committee for this 2009 Assembly of the Diocese of the South for their tireless efforts in making this year's Assembly a joyous and blessed gathering and to our friends here at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral for providing their excellent facilities for our worship and our meetings.

Since being appointed by Metropolitan Jonah to the position of Chancellor of the Diocese of the South I have been charged by His Beatitude to assist in coordinating work inside the DOS between the Chancery office and His Beatitude as Locum Tenens. My position as Chancellor is not one of decision or policy making rather to coordinate and assist. In some ways my work has not changed significantly from that of being the chancery assistant in that coordination duties and assisting the work of His Eminence were daily duties. Fostering communication between deans and members of the diocesan council were and continue to be part of my responsibilities.

Since coming to the DOS under His Eminence, Archbishop Dmitri three years ago, enhancing the profile of the Dallas chancery with more timely communication via phone and email has, we hope, helped to create a greater sense of connectiveness on practical matters between parishes and the chancery. Given the wide expanse of the DOS and the isolation that a parish and priest might feel, being available to answer a question or direct communication to the bishop in an expeditious manner is a high priority for the chancery staff.

His Beatitude, as our Locum Tenens, and given the reality of his many duties as Metropolitan, has asked that DOS communications to him come through the Dallas chancery. Of course anyone is welcome to contact His Beatitude directly, but with the volume of calls and emails he receives

daily, using the Chancery as a contact point may yield a more timely response, especially when time is of the essence.

One of the most cost effective and most powerful methods the DOS has used in the last three years is the DOS website. Viewership continues to grow and in anticipation of greater exposure in the future, a total redesign of the DOS website has taken place. Working with Orthodox Web Solutions, the DOS website is now positioned to utilize video and audio modules more effectively to better communicate with those inside and outside the DOS. Fr. Stephen Freeman's Blog "Glory To God For All Things" will be a daily feature on the new website. We also encourage all clergy in the DOS to contribute articles to the website.

There will be staff changes in the chancery starting this September when Archpriest Basil Zebrun will assume full-time duties as rector of St Barbara Church in Fort Worth. His loss to the chancery will be significant given his institutional history of the DOS and the pastoral insights he brings to our work. I will personally miss him a great deal because he is a friend and fellow classmate at St Vladimir's Seminary.

The chancery team, in my estimation, is anchored by Mr. Milos Konjevich, DOS Treasurer and Administrator. There is no doubt that Milos' contributions to the financial health of the DOS can not be underestimated. His decades of experience working for the FDIC coupled with his missionary zeal makes him an invaluable member of the Diocese. We are blessed to have such a person as a true steward of our diocesan finances.

Of course our love for His Beatitude is sincere and we look to him for direction on matters pastoral, parochial, and administrative. All of us working in the Chancery understand and accept that we serve at the pleasure of the bishop. We serve as long as we are of value to him and to the Church. There can never be, nor is there, any sense of proprietary right to our positions. This humbling and freely accepted reality helps to keep us focused on the work and not ourselves.

The DOS continues to grow evidenced by the need for a new deanery in south Texas. Deaneries serve to better administrate the work of the Gospel, thus if there are ways to gerrymander deanery boundaries so that they can be more effective, such ideas are considered.

One can read from the various deanery reports that the emphasis on planting new missions and assisting parishes striving to grow are top priorities of the DOS administration. Funding new missions with mission planting grants, helping reduce the cost of mission and parish debt by leveraging the power of the Tithe to reinvest DOS income back to the missions and parishes of the DOS are fundamental principles used to redistribute DOS finances where they are needed most to help promote missionary growth and parish development.

What marks this diocese as different from other dioceses is that we consider your Tithes to be held in trust by the DOS for use in other communities, or if needed, back to your community

when a need arises. We are in a partnership with you to spread the Gospel and bring the Orthodox faith to areas of this diocese where there is little or no Orthodox witness.

As stated above, the key to this is the Tithe. You will be hearing us talk about a “real Tithe” and what a powerful means it can be to transform the work of the DOS. When the DOS was created it was on the principal of the Tithe and for a time the communities in this Diocese did not have to concern themselves with the OCA Assessment. The Tithe covered that obligation in the diocese. Unfortunately when the OCA Assessment continued to grow it took a larger percentage of diocesan funds to service that obligation and thus a decision was made to pass along the collection of the Assessment to the parishes so that the diocesan budget would not be impacted so negatively. The result of this decision has been years in which smaller communities have had to manage their Tithe to the diocese so as to manage their OCA Assessment obligation. This has caused communities to make decisions about what monies they will Tithe to the diocese and what they can pay against the Assessment while maintaining local cashflow to do the necessary work in the parish.

Yet, despite this reality, Tithes have consistently increased and in the last three years we have seen a dramatic increase in Tithe gifts which makes it possible for the DOS to increase the level of financial support (25%) back to our missions and parishes. I ask that you refer to the Report of the Treasurer and listen carefully to what Milos will present later today. He will detail what is meant by a “real Tithe” and with DOS communities offering a “real Tithe” we project that it would no longer be necessary for parishes to collect the OCA Assessment, thus freeing communities to not make membership decisions on purely financial grounds. Thus we ask, “if there was a way that you would not have to count heads and be bothered with the OCA head tax, would you be interested?” I think we would all agree the answer is “Yes” and the “real Tithe” will make that possible.

We will be considering some important changes to the DOS Uniform Parish Bylaws at this Assembly. These changes were first introduced in the aftermath of the Atlanta court case involving St Mary of Egypt’s attempt to leave the OCA and join ROCOR. I wish to thank the members of the Diocesan Council for their review of the proposed Uniform Parish Bylaw changes, and in particular, Archpriest Dmitri Cozby and Mr. Ray Lanier, Esq. who worked on the original document and have been instrumental in our efforts to resurrect this unfinished business and act on it at the Assembly. Judge Lanier will make the Bylaws presentation later today.

Finally, at most importantly, we are a diocese without a ruling hierarch. We are blessed to have His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah as our Locum Tenens until such time as the Lord reveals to us who our next bishop will be. His Beatitude has set up an Episcopal Search Committee composed of the diocesan chancellor and the diocesan deans. If suitable candidates are discovered prior to next year’s Diocesan Assembly we may need to call a special Diocesan Assembly to nominate a candidate or candidates to the Holy Synod for their consideration. Please keep this in mind and share this possibility with your respective parish councils especially for budgetary purposes.

In closing, I wish to thank His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah for his confidence in me, to the members of the Chancery staff, to the deans and members of the Diocesan Council and to all of you gathered here, especially my wife Kathy, who keeps me grounded.

God bless you all.

Archpriest Joseph Fester, Chancellor
The Diocese of the South