

# **The Diocese of the South**

**Orthodox Church in America**

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## **2013 Diocesan Council Meeting**

**February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

**St Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church**

### **Update from the Chancellor**

Your Eminence, Reverend Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I would first like to thank Fr Peter Smith, Anya Gill and all of the local friends and faithful of St Mary of Egypt Orthodox Church for organizing and hosting this meeting and the 2013 Pastoral Conference.

I have been charged by His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon, to assist in coordinating the work inside the DOS. This is the most important aspect of the position of Chancellor --- to coordinate and assist in the work of the priests and faithful. We are a large diocese with many regional differences, each with its own set of challenges. In this structure the dean is of great importance, providing often times the most immediate perspective on a given pastoral situation, mission development plan, or personnel issue. Fostering communication between and among the *locum tenens*, the deans, the clergy of the diocese, and members of the diocesan council will continue to be a major portion of my responsibilities. For much of practical aspect of this work I continue to be grateful for the excellent administrative skills of my assistant, Fr Thaddaeus Werner.

The financial model of the DOS continues to be refined by Mr. Milos Konjevich, the DOS Treasurer. I reiterate my comments from the last DOS Assembly. There is no doubt that Milos' contributions to the financial well-being and dynamism of the DOS can not be underestimated. His institutional history and experience working with Vladyka Dmitri coupled with his missionary zeal have made him an invaluable member of the Diocese. Still, we know that even Milos cannot go on forever. Therefore, I have been insistent that Milos begin preparing for a transition which involves, among other things: training someone (or two, or three) to continue his work as Treasurer; developing policies and procedures for the financial programs of the DOS (particularly the Managed Debt Program, the Church Deposit Program, the Planting Grant Program, the Seminary Debt Retirement Program, et al); and preparing for a full financial audit of the DOS. All of this will allow the next treasurer of the DOS to begin his duties with the same trust, integrity and confidence that Milos has earned through years of faithful service.

We are still, almost four years after Vladyka Dmitri's retirement and 18 months after his repose, a diocese without a ruling hierarch. We have been blessed to have His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon, as our Locum Tenens during this tumultuous time. While the Special Assembly scheduled for last summer was postponed, it has not been cancelled. It is my hope that the Special Assembly will take place this summer during our Assembly in Jacksonville, FL. In the meantime the deans have considered several more potential candidates and have interviewed three of them. Of those three, we are presenting two for your consideration and will speak about them in executive session. While we will endeavor to share as much information as possible about any proposed candidates to

the diocese as a whole, these potential candidates will in all likelihood not make extensive visits around the diocese. I also want to emphasize the necessity of maintaining confidentiality during this period in which the Diocesan Council considers these potential candidates and perhaps interviews them.

I want to share a bit with you another aspect of my role as chancellor. By God's grace, even through these difficult and tumultuous times within our church, the DOS has continued to grow as evidenced by the growth and development of our parishes and missions, the planting of new missions, and the financial strength of the DOS as a whole. On the other hand, we are faced with significant challenges and setbacks. The chancellor is called upon to put in hours of time working with the deans on pastoral and missionary aspects of the ministry that we are called to daily in the Diocese of the South.

I will straightforwardly state that not having a ruling bishop who is a pastor to the pastors and a leader of his flock is certainly beginning to take its toll. Archbishop Dmitri was a charismatic, but perhaps even more important, indefatigable worker in the vineyard. We cannot underestimate the role he played in encouraging his priests and people simply by his presence in Dallas and his almost yearly visits to his communities. This is a huge aspect of his ministry that is simply missing in our diocese at present, and perhaps not widely recognized.

In this vacuum created by Archbishop Dmitri's absence, other aspects of the environment in which we as priests labor and attempt to plant missions and grow churches are having a relatively greater impact (although they have been with us all along). Increasingly our priests are being called to lead communities of faithful which must attempt to proclaim the Gospel and Orthodox Christian Tradition to a culture whose institutions are undergoing profound change and even disintegration. While much more could be said, it is enough to note that from my position as chancellor I see the great strain that this puts even on our experienced priests and pastors. Many of our younger, less experienced priests are being tested to the point of their limits. This is exacerbated by the fact that many of them (of us), coming out of this same culture, are not adequately prepared (even with the excellent teaching and training provided by our seminaries) to face the demands of growing missions and nurturing parishes in such an environment. Often times our newly ordained seminarians have simply been placed in missions or parishes not having had a proper formation in their own parish experience before going to seminary, are given little oversight and mentoring, and have less than adequate life experience to begin to tackle the monumental task before them.

Fortunately, we have the ability and means to at least begin to address this. More and more, our deans have been and will be taking responsibility for providing the necessary mentoring of our priests. We have already taken away some of the financial burden associated with being a newly ordained and assigned pastor by providing substantial subsidy of priests' income through the DOS Planting Grant and the Seminarian Debt Retirement Program. Along with developing more consistent guidelines which will assure the sustainability of these programs, we need to consider normative the placement of newly ordained priests as assistants in established parishes within the DOS where they would work with experienced priests for one to three years. Ideally, this would work much like the Planting Grant: a local community would provide a half salary and the DOS would match it. Also, we need to look to place all of our seminarians in 8 to 10 week summer internships between their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year of seminary (additionally, we have already for a few years now been including at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in the annual Pastoral Conference). All of this will serve to provide the

experience, relationships, and practical knowledge our priests need in order to thrive when they do receive assignment as ‘priest-in-charge’ or ‘rector’.

In closing, I am simply going to quote from my Chancellor’s report from this past summer’s assembly:

“I would like to issue a challenge today. Please do not let the recent distractions distract us from the goal of living out our life in Christ. **Many people like to invoke the memory of Vladyka Dmitri. Nothing could honor his memory more than each of us, individually, striving to live out the Gospel to the fullest and, as a diocese, continuing the work of planting missions and developing parishes.** To my brother deans: you are the lynchpins of the diocese. Please take advantage of the strengths of our diocese. The good order and growth of the church depends on your efforts in assisting the priests and faithful in your deaneries to better administer the work of the Gospel. One can read from the various deanery reports that the emphasis on planting new missions and assisting parishes striving to grow continue to be 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 distribute DOS finances where they are needed most to help promote missionary growth and parish development. Assuring that clergy are properly compensated. Let us not rest; let us take advantage of the demographic advantage we have of many major cities within our diocese without Orthodox churches. You need to take the lead in these endeavors. To the faithful...of the DOS: look to assist your dean and ... clergy in planting and developing missions in churches ‘in your neck of the woods’, wherever that is. As you strive do develop new communities; strive to develop community ...; to share in the work of the Gospel --- its joys, its burdens. If I have learned anything in my years within the DOS it is the following: Any ‘success’ I have experienced has come not through my own efforts but through cooperation in love and humility with others; any failures or setbacks have usually been a result of failing to cooperate, failing to be humble, and failing to love those whom God has placed in my path.”

Recommendations for the Diocesan Council:

1. Unencumbered Payroll: Authorize a portion for Chancellory Assistant and for a possible Financial Sec’y.
2. Consider Interviews with the potential episcopal candidates.
3. Authorize funding for Assistant Priest Internships along the lines of Church Planting Grant and help develop guidelines
4. Consider the establishment of a ‘Standing Committee on Finances’ that would work more vigorously toward establishing guidelines for our various programs, help with audit preparation, and provide ongoing ‘external’ oversight to the DOS.

*Archpriest Marcus C Burch*

Archpriest Marcus C Burch, Chancellor  
The Diocese of the South  
January 29, 2013