

Bishop's Report - Diocese of the South – Dallas, Texas July 2014

The new creation comes not from the world of cause and effect nor from the will of man, but from God, and from Him alone. It is remarkable that this statement, “Behold I make all things new,” is the only one in Revelation which is made by Him “who sits on the throne.”

All other revelations of this book are given to John by an angel, **“a fellow servant like yourself”** (Rev 22:8-9); or else they are proclaimed by Jesus Christ (Rev 1:11 and 22:16)

If we search the New Testament for the moments in which the Father himself speaks, we find only three:

1. The “moment” of Christ’s baptism: “Behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17, Mk 1:11 and Lk 3:22).
2. The “moment” of the Transfiguration: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; listen to Him” (Mt 17:5, Mk 9:7, Lk 9:35 cf 2Pt 1:17-18).
3. The “moment” rather the supreme “hour” of Holy Pascha, when all things are recreated by the Event of the New Creation: “Then a voice came from Heaven saying, “I have glorified Him, and I will glorify Him again” (Jn 12:28-30). Jesus then adds, “It is not for me that this voice was heard but for you” (Jn 12:30).

From: The Resurrection and Modern Man by
Ignatius IV Patriarch of Antioch

This excerpt is certainly a reminder but what I believe is a most important statement for us as clergy, as laity, as men as women, as a diocese, is the sentence made stating that all of us are **“a fellow servant like yourself.”**

A servant from a dictionary interpretation is a person who is devoted to or guided by something. That something for us is Christ and his command to teach all nations about the good news. Our missionary mind set is a mind set fueled by our desire to bring Christ to individuals, indeed to a world yearning and searching.

In Orthodoxy that search ends, and what begins is a life-long relationship with Christ and a life-long manner of living.

Following a lecture many years ago given by Archbishop Dmitri, one of the comments to him was “you want people to change our whole lifestyle, the Archbishop simply responded “yes”.

Archbishop Dmitri

It was my hope that during this assembly we would be able to bring Archbishop Dmitri to his final resting place at St. Seraphim’s Cathedral. There are however some complications of which you are aware. The law provides that only a next of kin may approve the transfer of a body from one place to another. The Archbishop’s not having a “next of kin” means that his attorney may appoint a next of kin and have that approved by the court. Following that process, the appointed next of kin will have to petition the court for the approval of the transfer; following this appeal to the court and its approval, an application is usually made by the funeral director since they are the ones that would actually make the transfer.

It is my hope then that perhaps at our clergy conference in February we can be in a position to finally bring Archbishop Dmitri home. As you can see, the chapel still needs a lot of work before completion.

Special Nominating Assembly

My responsibility as locum tenens requires that I call a special assembly for us to nominate a candidate for episcopal election by the Holy Synod. In truth, canonically that is what a locum tenens does. I have been given a blessing from the Holy Synod to ordain and continue the work necessary for the diocese until such a time that a candidate or candidates can be presented to you for nomination. At long last I am in a position to call such an assembly.

Inasmuch as we are a widespread diocese, the next time we will gather together as a diocese is the clergy conference usually held in February.

Therefore, I ask that a half day during our clergy conference be set aside so that we can hold a nomination assembly. This appears to be the most cost effective manner for us to make a nomination, and the name of our nominee can then be presented to the Holy Synod, hopefully at their Spring session that is usually held in March.

Ordinations and Assignments

Kevin Rigdon was ordained to the holy priesthood in Oak Ridge, TN in February.

Fr Dn. Peter Runyon was ordained to the holy diaconate (just before this assembly).

Also, I ordained our own Nicholas Roth to the Holy Priesthood at SVOTS on behalf of Metropolitan TIKHON.

At our last assembly we were glad to be assigning Fr Stephen Lourie to Holy Spirit Parish in Venice, FL.

Since then...

Fr Adam Sexton was received into the DOS from EPA and is serving at St Andrew in Ashland, VA.

Fr. Sergious Gerken was received into our diocese from the Diocese of New England, and is serving at St Raphael in Inverness, FL.

Fr Alexis Baldwin is coming to us from DOW and will be serving with Fr Thomas Moore at Holy Apostles as he prepares for a more permanent assignment in the Carolinas' Deanery.

We also anticipate the arrival of Fr Benedict Churchill to the DOS as he transitions to new responsibilities at SVS Press.

Fr. David Balmer was granted retirement during this past year.

Parish and Monastery Highs and Lows

Although we have been moving forward with land purchases for some of our missions, and construction projects, it was necessary for us to close our Safety Harbor mission in Florida. We were very fortunate to have arranged the sale of this property early in 2014. In addition, one of our monasteries and one of our parishes have petitioned to be released to other jurisdictions.

St. Michael the Archangel Monastery in Canones, NM has asked to be released to the Western Serbian Diocese. According to Fr. Silouan and the brotherhood, Bishop Maxim has been helping them and they have petitioned for a canonical release to his jurisdiction. Both Fr. Gerasim and His Beatitude TIKHON have made visitations to the monastery to see if they wish to reconsider

their petition, however, Fr. Silouan and the members of the brotherhood indicate that this would be the best move for them. St Dimitri of Rostov Mission in Los Alamos, NM, has also petitioned to be released to the Bulgarian patriarchal diocese.

Inter diocesan transfers, that is transfers from one diocese to another within the OCA, are not a problem, this is usually done between any two of the hierarchs on our synod. However, inter jurisdictional transfers are done through the Metropolitan. In other words I would be required to transfer those parishes, priests, and monasteries to the Metropolitan and he in turn may release them to another jurisdiction. In consultation with our canonists we were informed that, canonically, only a ruling bishop may make such a transfer, so these will have to wait until we have a nomination, election, consecration if necessary and installation until these requests may occur.

Holy Spirit Parish in Venice Florida is moving forward with their expansion and construction project.

Our Spanish mission of Santos Apostoles is growing under the leadership of Fr. David Wooten. They celebrate at Christ the Savior Cathedral in Miami Lakes, Florida.

Next Sunday Fr. Justin Patterson (who thinks he's a drill sergeant) will lead his congregation of St. Athanasius in procession from their present location to their new facility.

Mission planting efforts continue:

Early this year efforts began in earnest to establish a mission on the north side of the ATL metro area. May God bless the efforts of all those working to bring the Marietta mission to fruition.

Port Saint Lucie

In May of this year it was a pleasure to be in Port St. Lucie with Archbishop Alejo to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and Bless the new iconography and iconostas. Unfortunately, Fr. Ernesto Rios was once again pushing himself too hard and had to be taken to the hospital, this of course made it necessary for Archbishop Alejo and I to fill in for him for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

It is my hope that this incident serves as a warning not only to Fr. Ernesto, but a lesson to all of our clergy to pace themselves.

Sometimes our zeal may in the long run be detrimental to you, your families and your parish communities. As it turned out it took two bishops to cover for Fr. Ernesto. A very rare occurrence to be sure.

Clergy Conference in Denton, TX

Our clergy conference in Denton at St Maximus the Confessor was well attended and the presentations were both informative and inspirational as we cited numerous locations where we perceive missions in the South are most needed. The new expanded facilities made for a most enjoyable conference.

We again express our thanks to Fr Justin and his community for their hospitality.

PSP's

The Policy Standards and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct of the Orthodox Church in America is something that I have spoken about on numerous occasions. Although the policy is always in a state of flux - as ORSMA describes it, a "work in progress" - it is necessary that the policy is read and signed by every parish council on an annual basis. This is required inasmuch as updates are made to the policy as well as the possible changes of personal on our various parish councils. We, the Church, are not of the world but we are in the world. The most recent change to our policy deals with our procedures when registered sex offenders wish to attend our parishes and how these individuals are dealt with by the pastor, parish council members and our congregations at large.

In addition to these procedures, every bishop, priest, deacon, reader, altar server, parish council member, church school teacher, virtually anyone who wears a cassock, anyone who has incidental contact with children must have a background check every three years.

There are several levels of background and I am not sure how this will affect our diocesan budget, if at all. Whether the costs of these checks would be carried by our individual parishes or whether they would end up as a line item on our diocesan budget.

Assembly of Canonical Bishops

This year the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America will gather in Dallas September 15 thru the 18th. In as much as the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross is that Sunday before the assembly of bishops, I plan to be at the Cathedral for the celebration, in addition, I have invited any of the members of the synod who are not scheduled anywhere or at their respective cathedrals, to join me on Sunday the 14th at St. Seraphim's Cathedral.. As of this writing Bishop David and Bishop Alejo have indicated that they will be with us at the Cathedral for the Liturgy on Sunday the 14th.

Archbishop Anastasios

Twice this year I have been invited by Abp Anastasios to join him for very special events. In January I had the pleasure of attending the 'Orthodoxy in America' Lecture at Fordham University where he was awarded an honorary doctorate degree of Humane Letters, the highest honor of the University. Following the conferral, His Beatitude delivered the "Orthodoxy in America Lecture" on the topic *Sharing the Good News in a Multi-Religious Country: Theological Reflections on Other Religions*. Following the lecture, Fr Marcus and I attended a dinner with the Archbishop and other dignitaries. While Fr. Thomas Moore stood outside in the frigid weather.

This occasion also offered an opportunity for me to accompany Archbishop Anastasios to make an informal visit to St Vladimir's Seminary.

Earlier that week, Archbishop Demetrios of the GOARC hosted a luncheon in honor of Archbishop Anastasios with representatives of the Orthodox churches here; I was most honored to represent the OCA at this luncheon.

He also made time in his busy schedule to visit one of my Albanian Parishes in New York.

I was invited to participate in the consecration of Resurrection Cathedral in Albania. I felt that this was important for me to attend in as much as all of the Autocephalous churches were invited and all were sending representatives or the primates themselves would be in attendance, including Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW.

As travel arrangements meant that I would be changing planes in Constantinople, I did not want to miss the opportunity to visit the Phanar and Hagia Sofia, but customs in Turkey was a bother on my mind until I learned that Fr John Parker would also be attending this event as a member of the Board of OCMC. I immediately enlisted him to serve as my sub-deacon to take care of the mundane items, and luggage if necessary.

As it turned out, during the last dinner in Albania, I followed proper protocol and asked Patriarch Bartholomew for his blessing to visit the Phanar while we were in Turkey, he asked when I was leaving, I said tomorrow, he replied, then travel with me.

I confess, I felt no guilt whatsoever abandoning Fr Parker in Albania in order for me to travel with the Ecumenical Patriarch.

While in Constantinople he offered Fr Parker and me very gracious Orthodox hospitality, inviting us to lunch with his synod on three occasions, provided us with a guide and driver for our visit to the Orthodox historical places in Constantinople. We were also treated to a tour of the most impressive and inspirational library. As well as some private time with the Patriarch.

Diaconal Vocation Program

We are very fortunate in that we have within our diocese a Diaconal Formation program preparing those who desire to enter the Holy Diaconate. Usually age requirements apply for individuals over the age of 35.

The Miami Diaconal Formation Program, headquartered at Christ the Savior Orthodox Cathedral, completed its first two cycle in May. Three students graduated, earning the Certificate of Diaconal Formation from St. Tikhon's Seminary: Sub deacon Carlos Miranda, Reader Brian Anthony Allen and Christian Doval. During their course of study, they earned 24 advance standing credits from the Seminary in theology, history, Biblical studies, homiletics and liturgics--properly preparing them for future service in the Church.

The Seminary has placed all diaconal programs on temporary hiatus for restructuring. According to Fr. Joseph Lucas, we should resume in the Fall of 2015. We have two students awaiting entry at that time.

Conclusion

In concluding, again with these thoughts from Ignatius IV Patriarch of Antioch:

“We no longer belong to ourselves but we belong to Christ. This is not a matter of some legal contractor moral ideal; it is a mysterious and spiritual reality that encompasses our whole being: mind, soul and spirit.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. Nikon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.