

49th DOS ASSEMBLY
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Chancellor's Report
Diocese of the South, Orthodox Church in America

Your Eminence, Your Grace, Reverend Fathers, Deacons, Delegates, and beloved brothers and sisters in Christ:

The work of the Chancery Office is, by design, largely unseen. Much of it consists of correspondence, consultation, difficult conversations, clergy support, questions of parish governance, legal and canonical concerns, policy development, records, documentation, and the steady effort to assist the Diocesan Bishop in maintaining the good order of the Diocese.

Most of this work occurs behind the scenes. Much of it is responsive, and some of it arises from genuinely difficult or urgent circumstances. Yet all of it is increasingly important.

This year, however, I believe it is appropriate to begin from a broader perspective.

From the Chancellor's perspective, one begins to see patterns. Individual questions reveal larger themes. Seemingly unrelated events point toward common challenges. One gains a nearly unique vantage point—not because the Chancellor sees everything, but because many of the Diocese's points of contact eventually converge in this office.

The Diocese of the South has entered an unprecedented stage of growth, maturity, and responsibility.

Our growth has been extraordinary. Existing parishes are flourishing, some even “bursting at the seams”. Missions, mission stations, and chapels continue to emerge. Inquirers and catechumens are arriving in remarkable numbers. Young families are filling our churches. Vocations are increasing. New properties are being acquired. Buildings are being renovated. Clergy are being asked to carry increasingly heavy pastoral responsibilities.

These are blessings for which we give thanks to Almighty God. Yet every blessing carries responsibilities.

Growth exposes weaknesses that were less visible when the Diocese was smaller. Administrative practices that were once sufficient now require greater consistency. Informal customs must gradually become sound policies. Documentation, communication, legal prudence, clergy formation, parish governance, and pastoral accountability become increasingly important—not because we wish to become bureaucratic, but because good order serves the Gospel.

The purpose of administration within the Church is never administration itself. It is to preserve the freedom of the Church to proclaim Christ, celebrate the Holy Mysteries, protect the vulnerable, support her clergy, resolve conflict justly, receive the stranger, and continue her missionary work in peace.

We are being asked to move from a largely reactive administrative culture toward a more stable, documented, and anticipatory one. This is not because we wish to become corporate in spirit. It

is because the pastoral work now entrusted to us requires greater clarity, consistency, and accountability.

Good administration is not the opposite of pastoral care. Done rightly, it is one of the conditions that allows pastoral care to endure. Saint Paul's instruction that "all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40) is not a call to bureaucracy, but to an order that serves for edification in the Body of Christ.

Our Allegiance Is to Christ

The Diocese of the South does not exist in isolation from either the wider world or the wider Orthodox Church.

The war in Ukraine, the strained relationships among Orthodox Churches, the resurgence of ethnic and national polemics, political polarization, ideological movements of every kind, and the relentless pressures of digital communication and the "online world" all find their way into parish life. They arrive through family histories, ethnic loyalties, social media, podcasts, online personalities, political movements, and the anxieties and temptations of our age.

It is not my place as Chancellor to address these matters as questions of ecclesiastical policy. Those responsibilities belong properly to our bishops and to the Holy Synod. Nor does the Chancellor speak in the place of the Diocesan Bishop.

Yet it is appropriate to observe that these realities have pastoral consequences.

They affect our clergy. They affect our parishioners. They affect our parish councils. They affect our catechumens. They affect our inquirers. They also affect the tone of our sermons, our conversations, our correspondence, and the atmosphere within our communities.

The Orthodox Church in America occupies a remarkable and, in some respects, virtually unique position within world Orthodoxy. We have inherited the Orthodox faith through particular historical and cultural traditions, yet we are not called to function as the ecclesiastical extension of any nation-state.

We are not called to sanctify the political ambitions of any government or the ideological commitments of any movement. We are not required to import into our parishes every polemic, grievance, or conflict of the wider Orthodox world.

Indeed, this is one of the great privileges of our life in America. We are a small Church, largely unknown to the wider culture and possessing little worldly influence. Precisely because we are not beholden to political power or national ambition, we are free to proclaim the Gospel with clarity and to call every nation—including our own—to repentance before Christ. As the Apostle reminds us, "God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Our allegiance is to Jesus Christ, to His Holy Gospel, to His Church, and to the salvation of the souls entrusted to us. This freedom is both a gift and a responsibility. Saint Paul reminds us:

"You, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

Freedom can become license. It can become self-assertion, ideological experimentation, or the multiplication of private opinions. But rightly received, it can also become what the Apostle calls “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

The freedom we enjoy as Orthodox Christians in America frees us to preach Christ more clearly, not to become less disciplined. It frees us from subservience to nationalism, factionalism, and political passions. It frees us to proclaim the Gospel without fear and to receive all people without demanding that they first adopt our personal causes, anxieties, or loyalties.

However, in such a climate, clergy must exercise extraordinary sobriety.

The priest is not merely a private man with opinions. He is a public minister of the Gospel. His words carry pastoral weight whether they are spoken from the ambo, in a parish meeting, in private correspondence, in a clergy gathering, in a text message, or online.

A priest may believe that he is speaking candidly, prophetically, or zealously, while those entrusted to his care may experience his words as anger, intimidation, contempt, or factional provocation.

We must therefore recover the spiritual discipline of proportion.

Not every controversy requires a priest’s opinion. Not every provocation deserves a response. Not every online debate advances the Kingdom of God. Not every public disagreement requires a clerical intervention. Not every display of zeal is evidence of courage.

The servant of Christ is called to proclaim the Gospel before he is called to win arguments.

Saint James exhorts us: “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:19–20).

Saint Paul likewise reminds Timothy: “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition” (2 Timothy 2:24–25). These are not merely private virtues. They are pastoral requirements.

We must certainly speak the truth. But the truth must be given as medicine, not as a weapon.

We must defend the faith. But we must not confuse the defense of the faith with the defense of our own irritations, loyalties, anxieties, or preferred narratives.

We must be men of conviction, but conviction must be joined to self-control. “For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5). That apostolic word should govern every aspect of our diocesan life.

The Character of the Clergy

When Saint Paul describes those who are to lead the Church, he begins not with talent, forcefulness, charisma, administrative competence, rhetorical skill, or ideological clarity.

He begins with character.

In his epistles to Timothy and Titus, the bishop—and, by extension, every presbyter entrusted with the care of souls—is to be blameless, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, gentle, not quarrelsome, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, just, holy, and self-controlled.

These are not suggestions. They are qualifications.

They remain as necessary today as they were in the apostolic age. Perhaps more.

Our clergy must therefore cultivate sobriety, discernment, discretion, restraint, patience, gentleness, and what the Fathers would call dispassion.

Every email matters. Every text message matters. Every social media post matters. Every parish meeting matters. Every sermon matters. Every casual conversation matters.

In an age that easily confuses visibility with ministry, clergy must also resist the temptation to measure pastoral effectiveness by audience, reach, recognition, or online influence. Public prominence is not the same as the care of souls. A priest's first responsibility is not to cultivate a platform, but to know, love, pray for, teach, and patiently accompany the people actually entrusted to him. No virtual presence can replace the ordinary, embodied work of listening, visiting, encouraging, comforting, correcting, praying with, and simply being present to another person in times of joy and sorrow, repentance and thanksgiving, illness and health, birth and death.

Each has the potential either to build up the Body of Christ or to deepen division.

The Apostle writes: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

A priest's anger can make a parish angry and anxious. A priest's obsessions can become a parish's obsessions. A priest's factional loyalties can become a parish's factional loyalties. A priest's online polemics can form catechumens more powerfully than his formal catechetical instruction.

Conversely, a priest's sobriety, patience, hospitality, prayerfulness, love of the divine services, and gentleness can teach a parish how to breathe again.

The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—is not ornamental. It is essential to the Church's witness (Galatians 5:22–23).

Philoxenia: The Love of the Stranger

Among Saint Paul's requirements for clergy is one that deserves renewed attention. The bishop must be hospitable. The Greek word is *philoxenos*—literally, "a lover of the stranger."

This is more than friendliness. It is more than good manners. It is more than organizing a coffee hour.

It is a pastoral disposition. It is a way of seeing the other person in Christ.

Hospitality means receiving the stranger, the inquirer, the wounded, the confused, the poor, the inconvenient, the socially awkward, the immigrant, the lonely, the ideologically burdened, and the spiritually hungry without immediately turning them into an ally, an opponent, a project, or a problem.

Our churches must become places where the stranger is genuinely loved.

Where the inquirer is welcomed. Where the catechumen is patiently formed. Where the convert is thoughtfully integrated. Where the cradle Orthodox Christian continues to mature. Where the lonely discover communion. Where the wounded encounter healing. Where immigrants find a home. Where those born in this country encounter not a foreign religious subculture, but the living Body of Christ.

Hospitality, therefore, is not extraneous to ministry. It belongs to the very essence of parish life. In receiving the stranger, we receive Christ Himself: "I was a stranger and you took Me in" (Matthew 25:35).

Parishes as Oases

Our parishes should become little oases in the midst of the surrounding culture.

But our culture is not primarily a desert of scarcity. It is a desert of abundance. Too many choices. Too many opinions. Too many entertainments. Too many identities. Too many causes. Too many screens. Too much information. Too much food. Too much noise. Too much outrage. Too much to do.

Too little silence. Too little prayer. Too little communion.

Many who come to us are not starving because they have had too little. They are exhausted because they have had too much of what cannot save.

To such a world Christ still says: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

The Church must therefore offer something fundamentally different.

Not another political tribe. Not another ideological movement. Not another cultural identity. Not another source of anxiety. Not another arena in which people are sorted, tested, categorized, or drawn into quarrels.

But Christ.

Our parishes must become places where people can learn to become truly human.

Where they learn to pray. Where they encounter beauty. Where they repent. Where they discover stillness. Where they fast. Where they give thanks. Where they are nourished by the Holy Mysteries. Where they find brothers and sisters rather than allies and opponents.

Many who come to our communities have already been wounded by the world: by family breakdown, loneliness, addiction, anger, betrayal, rootlessness, ideological confusion, anxiety, or spiritual hunger.

We must be careful not to deepen those wounds by importing into the Church the very passions from which they need healing.

This does not mean that the Church is indifferent to truth. The Gospel is not vague, and pastoral care is not sentimental. But truth must be offered as medicine. The Church must meet people where they are, not in order to leave them there, but in order to lead them toward repentance, communion, and life in Christ.

Beauty and the Liturgical Life

The center of parish life must always be the liturgical life of the Church. Everything else revolves around it.

The Divine Liturgy. Vespers. Matins. The feasts and fasts. The reading of Holy Scripture. The lives of the saints. Confession. The Holy Mysteries. The ordinary ascetical disciplines of Christian life.

These are not simply activities offered by the parish. They are among the chief means by which Christ forms His people.

For inquirers, catechumens, converts, and cradle Orthodox alike, the liturgical life of the Church teaches us how to pray, how to repent, how to give thanks, how to suffer, how to die, and how to behold the world in the light of the Kingdom of God.

This is why beauty matters. Architecture matters. Iconography matters. Music matters. Vestments matter. Incense matters. Reverence matters.

Anyone who has visited a parish that has labored for liturgical, architectural, musical, and iconographic beauty knows that such things can open the heart, draw people toward prayer, and reveal something of heaven on earth.

But none of these things is an end in itself. Beauty serves formation. Beauty serves repentance. Beauty serves prayer. Beauty serves the Gospel.

It is possible to admire icons without becoming icon-like. It is possible to love chant without learning to pray. It is possible to appreciate liturgical precision while neglecting humility. It is possible to become attached to the visible forms of Orthodoxy while remaining inwardly unchanged.

Many people are drawn to Orthodoxy precisely through its visible depth: its icons, vestments, chant, incense, fasting, ritual order, theological seriousness, and historical continuity. These are good and holy things. Yet it is possible to mistake the signs of depth for depth itself.

Our goal is not aesthetic perfection. Our goal is inward transformation. The Apostle describes this transformation as “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord” and being “transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

As Saint Paul writes: “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Everything in our liturgical life must finally point there.

Liturgical Coherence

The Diocese should aspire not to rigid liturgical uniformity, but to liturgical coherence.

Our parishes need not become identical. Different communities possess different histories. Different musical abilities. Different architectural settings. Different pastoral needs.

Such diversity is healthy. Coherence does not mean sameness.

At the same time, our common life is weakened when local practice becomes idiosyncratic, improvised, overly dependent upon personality, or disconnected from the received tradition of the Church.

We have inherited a particular liturgical tradition. We stand broadly within the Russian—or, perhaps better, Eastern Slavic—liturgical inheritance.

That inheritance is not monolithic. It includes the influence of Great Russian, Little Russian, White Russian, Carpatho-Rusyn, and other humble and simple expressions of Orthodox life. These were not only imperial or cathedral traditions. They were also village traditions, parish traditions, missionary traditions, and immigrant traditions. They carried the fullness of the Orthodox faith in ways that ordinary people could receive, inhabit, and hand on.

That humbler and simpler dimension of our inheritance may be especially important for the Church in America.

We are not living in nineteenth-century Russia. We are not living in the sixth-century Eastern Roman Empire. We are not living in any imagined golden age to which we may be tempted to return.

We live in twenty-first-century America, with its own opportunities, temptations, anxieties, liberties, technologies, abundance, loneliness, and spiritual hunger.

Our task is not to recreate another time or place. Our task is to proclaim Jesus Christ clearly in this time and place.

Our liturgical life should therefore be beautiful without becoming theatrical. Traditional without becoming antiquarian. Reverent without becoming self-conscious or overbearing. Ordered without becoming rigid. Accessible without becoming casual.

A humble liturgical life does not mean an impoverished liturgical life. It means a liturgical life that knows what it is for. The services are not performances. They are not clerical projects. They are not antiquarian reconstructions. They are not expressions of nostalgia.

They are the common prayer of the Church and the place where the faithful are formed in Christ.

We should receive our Eastern Slavic inheritance gratefully without turning it into nostalgia. We should love beauty without confusing beauty with theatricality. We should cherish tradition without mistaking maximalism for faithfulness.

We should teach our people the services of the Church without making them anxious about every detail. We should correct, train, and improve our liturgical practice without allowing correction itself to become heavy, fussy, or spiritually distorted.

If our liturgical life does not lead to repentance, mercy, humility, hospitality, generosity, chastity, patience, and love, then we have misunderstood even its most beautiful outward forms.

But when the services are offered with faith, reverence, coherence, and humility, they become what they are meant to be: the school of the Kingdom, the healing of the human person, and the proclamation of Christ crucified and risen in the midst of twenty-first-century America.

Why Administration Matters

These spiritual concerns are not separate from the practical work of the Diocese. They explain why that work matters.

Good records, clear boundaries, responsible communication, clergy discipline, legal prudence, sound parish governance, and diocesan order are not ends in themselves. They exist so that the parish may remain a place of prayer, healing, worship, hospitality, and evangelical clarity.

When good order is absent, the loudest voices, the most anxious personalities, the most aggrieved parties, or the most urgent controversies can begin to define the life of the community.

Many of you have heard me say, somewhat ruefully, “When the bylaws are being quoted, you have already lost the battle.” By this I do not mean that bylaws are unimportant. I mean that no written rule can substitute for trust, charity, healthy relationships, and a shared ecclesial mind. Bylaws become most necessary precisely when these have begun to fail.

Pastoral matters quickly become administrative crises. Parish disagreements become formal complaints. Emotional conflicts become grievance campaigns. Social media disputes become reputational harm. Informal conversations become evidence in threatened legal action.

The work before us is to strengthen diocesan and parish order precisely so that Christ, and not the passions of the moment, remains at the center.

The Work Accomplished During the Past Year

During the past year, the Diocese has taken several important steps toward greater institutional maturity.

Strengthening the Chancery

One of the most important practical developments has been the appointment of a Diocesan Operations Manager, Elias Rehmet, who formally began his work on June 1.

This position was created not simply to relieve the Chancellor of administrative tasks, but to improve continuity, recordkeeping, communications, reporting, compliance, event coordination, and follow-through across the work of the Diocese.

As our Diocese grows, these functions can no longer depend entirely upon informal systems or upon the individual memory and availability of already-busy clergy and officers.

The appointment of an Operations Manager, together with my own transition toward substantially greater diocesan availability effective July 1, should allow the Chancellor's office to become more responsive, more consistent, and less dependent upon scattered correspondence or informal personal systems.

My own transition toward an approximately eighty-percent diocesan and twenty-percent parish allocation is intended to strengthen diocesan responsiveness without abandoning the pastoral and liturgical grounding that parish service provides.

This is not merely a change in schedule. It reflects the reality that the scope of diocesan work has become too broad and too complex to be handled principally around the edges of parish ministry.

Financial and Administrative Oversight

The Diocese remains financially stable, while the scale and complexity of its work continue to increase.

The growth of assessed contributions reflects real growth in parish life. The tithe remains the principal means by which our common diocesan work is sustained.

At the same time, increased capital projects, seminarian support, development work, property acquisition, and diocesan operations require stronger forecasting, more professional oversight, and clearer communication.

We have strengthened outside accounting and advisory support. We have continued our partnership with OCCIF. We have assisted parishes with building acquisitions, renovations, and financial planning.

We have begun developing a more coherent approach to seminary support and scholarship assistance.

These developments reflect a Diocese entering a more mature financial phase. The issue is not simply "more giving." It is the stewardship of increasingly complex responsibilities.

Pastoral and Governance Guidance

We have continued the necessary work of moving from informal expectations toward clearer diocesan guidance in areas where inconsistency places clergy, parishes, and the faithful at risk.

Pastoral guidance concerning divorce and the care of the faithful has already helped standardize expectations and reduce improvisation.

Work continues on uniform parish bylaws; revision and clarification of diocesan bylaws; mission and chapel structures; clergy retirement; sabbaticals; social media and clergy communications; catechesis and catechist formation; parish governance; the role of deans; and legal and administrative protocols.

Not every matter requires a policy. But where uncertainty repeatedly produces confusion, inconsistency, or risk, clear guidance becomes necessary.

Clergy Formation and Placement

We also continue to make progress toward a fuller system of clergy formation. Our responsibility does not end when a man is accepted into seminary or ordained.

We must discern carefully before seminary. We must support seminarians during their formation. We must identify healthy parishes in which our seminarians can undertake meaningful summer internships.

We must find realistic placements. We must provide mentoring. We must establish post-seminary pastoral residencies where possible. We must sustain priests and their families over the course of a lifetime of service.

We are gradually moving toward a more complete formation ecosystem: discernment, seminary, internship, placement, residency, mentoring, continuing formation, and long-term support.

This is one of the Diocese's greatest strategic needs.

We can recruit men. We can encourage vocations. We can send students to seminary. But unless we also prepare healthy parishes to receive them and experienced clergy to mentor them, our formation work will remain incomplete.

Psychological and vocational assessments are not infallible, but they can help us identify concerns, clarify expectations, and strengthen discernment when used carefully and realistically.

Clergy Families and Sustainability

The Diocese's growth has increased the burden placed upon clergy and their families.

Pastoral care, catechesis, hospital visitation, administration, conflict, building projects, communications, and digital accessibility have all expanded.

The inclusion of a clergy-wives component in the 2026 Pastoral Conference, with the assistance of Matushka Carrie Foley, was an important step toward stronger support for clergy families.

We must continue to normalize healthy boundaries, time away, realistic workload expectations, sabbaticals, and the recognition that clergy family life is not incidental to priestly sustainability.

My own application for a six-month Lilly Foundation sabbatical in 2027 belongs within this larger concern. Regardless of the outcome, we should encourage a diocesan culture in which sabbaticals are understood not as indulgences, but as legitimate tools for renewal and longevity when properly planned and supported.

Legal and Pastoral Risk

The Diocese has faced a changed legal and pastoral environment.

After many years in which major legal entanglements were relatively rare, we have now encountered multiple matters involving threatened legal action, allegations of misconduct, property questions, parish disputes, restraining orders, and high-conflict communications.

These realities are never merely operational. They are spiritual and pastoral crises whenever they occur. They require prompt and consistent reporting, careful documentation, appropriate legal consultation, support for those affected, disciplined process, clear pastoral boundaries, protection of the vulnerable, and fairness to all concerned.

The accomplishment here is not that these cases have occurred. It is that the Diocese has become more deliberate, more alert, and more disciplined in responding to them.

It is important to remember: charity does not require administrative naiveté. Mercy does not require poor documentation. Compassion does not require the abandonment of healthy boundaries.

The Diocese does not need to become governed by fear of litigation. But neither can we continue to treat legal and compliance questions as rare exceptions.

Deans and Deaneries

The role of our deans has become increasingly important. The deans are often the first to see parish stress, clergy strain, emerging conflict, succession concerns, or mission opportunities.

They serve as an essential bridge between local communities and the diocesan administration.

Work with the deans has increasingly focused on parish stability, early identification of governance concerns, clergy support, growth outpacing clergy availability, retired clergy and parish transitions, deanery reporting, mission planning, and legal and liability concerns.

The Diocese must continue clarifying the role, expectations, accountability, method of selection, and appropriate remuneration of deans.

Where possible, the dean should serve in a parish with sufficient clerical and administrative support, including a second priest where circumstances permit. The Diocesan Pastoral Residency Program may help provide such support in appropriate settings.

This need not be resolved hastily. But it should be resolved coherently.

Communications and Institutional Memory

The Diocese has also continued work on its communications infrastructure. Consideration of diocesan management software, the redesign of the diocesan website, a clearer policy library, more reliable reporting cycles, and centralized records are all parts of the same larger need.

A growing Diocese cannot rely indefinitely upon scattered emails, personal files, remembered precedents, and informal networks. We need systems that preserve institutional memory and make reliable information available to those who need it.

The proposed skills clearinghouse for Diocesan Council members and other faithful is another encouraging step. The Diocese possesses considerable professional expertise among its clergy and laity. We should become more intentional about identifying and using that expertise.

The Work Before Us

Several priorities now stand clearly before the Diocese.

Governance and Bylaws

The first is governance. We must continue the necessary work on diocesan and parish bylaws.

This includes uniform parish bylaws; diocesan bylaws; mission-to-parish transitions; dependency chapels; the role of parish councils; the role and selection of deans; and clear lines of diocesan and local responsibility.

The purpose is not to centralize every decision. It is to ensure that parishes, missions, deaneries, and diocesan officers understand their responsibilities and function within a coherent ecclesial order.

A parish is not simply a voluntary association. A parish council is not an independent corporate board. A mission is not merely a group of people who have begun meeting.

Our governance must reflect the life, authority, and order of the Church.

Clergy Sustainability and Placement

The second priority is clergy sustainability and placement. Our growth is outpacing our clergy capacity.

We must therefore address not only recruitment, but retention. Not only seminary admissions, but placement. Not only ordination, but mentoring. Not only service, but sustainability.

This includes seminary support, including scholarships where appropriate; seminarian internships; post-seminary pastoral residencies; second-priest placements; realistic compensation; clergy-family health; sabbaticals; retirement; parish succession; the healthy use of retired clergy; and support for priests serving increasingly large and complex communities.

A Diocese cannot sustain missionary growth by relying indefinitely upon heroic overextension.

Legal, Compliance, and Risk Discipline

The third priority is legal and administrative discipline.

We need more consistent legal counsel; clergy education concerning common legal risks; stronger records practices; clear reporting procedures; responsible use of electronic communications; and careful attention to insurance, property review, employment matters, youth protection, misconduct policies, facility-use agreements, leases, and contracts.

In many cases, our vulnerability is not that the wrong decision was made, but that the right decision was made informally, communicated poorly, or insufficiently documented.

Clergy should not attempt to manage significant legal matters casually or alone. Attorney letters, subpoenas, threats of litigation, law enforcement contact, allegations of abuse, restraining orders, or serious insurance matters must be reported promptly through the proper diocesan channels.

Catechesis and Integration

The fourth priority is catechesis and integration.

The extraordinary number of inquirers and catechumens is a gift. But they do not form themselves—or at least they should not.

In many of our communities, newly received converts and even catechumens inevitably begin influencing inquirers, not through any formal appointment, but through friendships, conversations, and online interaction.

This makes intentional catechesis and integration all the more important.

Inquirers must be received, catechized, healed, and integrated. Otherwise, the same energy that brings people into the Church can become destabilizing.

The number of inquirers requires more than additional classes. It requires a coherent culture of reception, formation, hospitality, liturgical participation, and gradual integration into parish life.

Therefore, we need clearer catechetical expectations; better training for catechists; patient formation; careful discernment before reception; greater attention to the integration of converts; pastoral care for long-standing parishioners and lifelong Orthodox Christians, whom we must not lose from sight amid rapid growth; special attention to immigrant communities and the formation of their children in American life; and vigilance against ideological formation masquerading as Orthodox formation.

Converts should not be rushed into teaching, leadership, online influence, or minor orders. They need time to be healed, grounded, and formed in the ordinary disciplines of Orthodox Christian life.

Communications and Institutional Memory

The fifth priority is communications and institutional memory.

We must continue improving our internal communications, the diocesan website, our policy library, annual reporting, centralized records, clergy resources, parish resources, and the responsible use of technology.

Institutional memory is not merely an administrative concern. It protects continuity. It prevents repeated confusion. It helps bishops, diocesan officers, deans, and clergy act with greater consistency.

Missions, Chapels, and Growth

We must also become more coherent in our approach to missions and chapels.

Mission opportunities are increasing. Chapels may offer an important means of responding to geographic growth and local need. But none of this should be romanticized.

A healthy mission or chapel requires stable clergy coverage, realistic finances, local leadership, catechetical capacity, sufficient attendance, sound governance, geographic realism, and a plausible path toward maturity.

The Diocese needs clearer criteria for when to bless, support, pause, combine, redirect, or further develop emerging communities.

Emerging Opportunities

There are also encouraging longer-term opportunities before us.

The continued development of St. Seraphim Cathedral and its surrounding property in Dallas opens the possibility of a future parish and diocesan center. It also offers the possibility of restoring to the Dallas Cathedral something of the central place it held in the early growth and development of the Diocese.

This opportunity will require careful needs assessment, realistic phasing, and broad consultation.

Grant development may also provide appropriate support for clergy formation, mission development, and suitable parish initiatives. Such funding is not a substitute for stewardship. It is a supplement that may allow us to undertake work otherwise beyond the immediate capacity of our parishes and Diocese.

We should also continue drawing upon the professional expertise of the faithful. The Diocese includes men and women with legal, financial, architectural, medical, technological, educational, nonprofit, and administrative experience.

Shared governance requires not merely councils, but the wise use of the gifts God has placed within the Church.

Expectations for Clergy and Parishes

As the Diocese continues to grow, several expectations should become increasingly clear.

Communicate early. Do not wait until a matter has become a crisis.

Use proper channels. In ordinary circumstances, local concerns should move through the rector and dean before becoming diocesan emergencies. When in doubt, reach out.

Document carefully. Make a brief, factual, contemporaneous record of significant events, decisions, and communications.

Respect confidentiality. Parish councils, clergy groups, and digital communication channels must not become vehicles for rumor, speculation, or the unnecessary circulation of sensitive information.

Know your reporting obligations. Clergy and parish leaders should be familiar with the mandated-reporter laws of their state, as well as the applicable state law governing clergy-penitent privilege and its limits. When there is uncertainty, contact the Diocese promptly rather than attempting to interpret these obligations alone.

Do not handle legal matters casually. When counsel, courts, law enforcement, insurance carriers, or formal allegations become involved, clergy and parishes should seek diocesan guidance promptly.

Budget realistically. Growth requires clergy compensation, administrative support, building maintenance, insurance, seminary support, and mission development.

Practice faithful stewardship. Budgeting realistically must be joined to intentional teaching about stewardship. Every parish should help its faithful understand that giving is not merely the payment of bills, but an act of thanksgiving, discipleship, and shared responsibility for the life and mission of the Church. Clergy and parish leaders should speak about stewardship regularly, clearly, and without embarrassment, while modeling generosity themselves.

Catechize patiently. The goal is not simply to increase numbers, but to form Orthodox Christians.

Preserve the peace of the Church. Avoid factionalism, grievance, gossip, and the spiritualization of personal conflict.

Follow diocesan guidance. Policy can sometimes feel cumbersome, but sound policy protects the priest, the parish, the vulnerable, and the mission.

Remain pastoral. Good order must never become coldness. Boundaries must never become contempt. Discipline must never become vengeance. Truth must always be joined to love. Even in moments of conflict, correction should be offered with patience, gentleness, and self-control. The faithful should never fear the temper of their priest, but trust in his steady and fatherly care. As the Apostle reminds us, “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition” (2 Timothy 2:24–25).

As Saint Paul says with characteristic simplicity:

“Let all that you do be done with love” (1 Corinthians 16:14).

Episcopal Transition and Continuity

This year’s Assembly also occurs at a moment of episcopal transition.

We owe profound gratitude to Archbishop Alexander for his decade of service, episcopal oversight, scholarship, and pastoral leadership in the Diocese of the South.

His retirement marks the close of an important chapter in the life of the Diocese. Under his episcopal leadership, the Diocese received stability, good order, thoughtful pastoral oversight, and the steady guidance of a bishop deeply formed by the theological, liturgical, monastic, and spiritual inheritance of the Orthodox Church.

We are grateful for his service and for the many ways in which he has strengthened the Diocese during his tenure.

Still, the nomination and subsequent election of a new Diocesan Bishop will not lessen the work before us, nor should this report be understood as an attempt to bind the hands of the next bishop or to set an agenda apart from episcopal authority.

It is rather an attempt to name, from the Chancellor's vantage point, the pastoral, administrative, legal, and missionary realities that will require attention regardless of who occupies the episcopal throne.

The next season of diocesan life will still require continuity, patience, sobriety, and trust in the canonical process of the Church.

It will require our clergy and faithful to remain focused upon Christ and Him crucified and to resist polemics, factionalism, and ideological captivity, whether these arise from the right or the left.

It will require us to seek a bishop not according to private preference, but according to the needs of the Church and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A Word of Gratitude

Before concluding, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to those with whom I have the privilege of serving in the work of the Diocese.

I am deeply grateful to **His Grace, Bishop Gerasim**, whose wise counsel, pastoral encouragement, and steady support have been invaluable throughout the past year. His willingness to share in the ordinary work of the Diocese has strengthened every aspect of our common ministry.

I likewise wish to thank **Archpriest Jason Foster**, whose leadership, both as Director of Development and as the Dean of the Mississippi Deanery, continues to help position the Diocese for sustainable growth and to assist our parishes and missions in their own development.

My gratitude also extends to **Mary Harkins**, our Treasurer, for her careful stewardship of the Diocese's finances, her sound judgment, and the countless hours she devotes to this work.

I am grateful to **Archpriest Peter Robichau**, our Secretary, whose thoughtful counsel, attention to detail, and faithful service have contributed greatly to the good order of the Diocese.

I have already mentioned **Elias Rehmet**, our new Operations Manager, whose arrival has already begun to strengthen the day-to-day work of the chancery. I would also like to acknowledge **Allison Nix**, whose administrative assistance, organization, and willingness to help have quietly made much of our work possible.

Finally, I thank our deans, clergy, parish councils, and the many faithful throughout the Diocese whose service is often unseen but never unnoticed. The work of the Diocese is truly a shared labor, and I count it a blessing to serve alongside each of you.

Looking Forward

As I move toward serving the Diocese on an increasingly full-time basis, my hope is not that the Chancellor's office becomes larger for its own sake.

My hope is that it becomes more useful. More responsive. More consistent. More supportive of our bishop. More supportive of our clergy. More supportive of our parishes and missions. More capable of preserving institutional memory. More attentive to risk. More available to assist before problems become crises.

Yet none of these is an end in itself. The goal is to establish the degree of order, consistency, and institutional capacity necessary for a growing missionary Diocese to remain pastorally healthy, liturgically coherent, legally prudent, and firmly centered upon Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

Everything must serve the same purpose. That Christ may be proclaimed. That His Church may flourish. That the stranger may be received with love. That the wounded may encounter healing. That the faithful may be formed deeply. That our clergy may serve with sobriety, gentleness, courage, and endurance. That our parishes may become places of beauty, goodness, truth, repentance, and hospitality. That those who enter our doors may encounter not another anxious institution competing for their allegiance, but the peace of the Kingdom of God.

The Diocese of the South has been richly blessed. May we now prove worthy stewards of those blessings. May we proclaim Christ clearly. May we celebrate the divine services with reverence. May we conduct ourselves with sobriety and gentleness. May we love the stranger. May we preserve good order.

And may all that we do—pastoral, liturgical, canonical, financial, legal, and administrative—be done for the sake of Christ and His Gospel, and for the salvation of the souls entrusted to our care.