

During this past year God has continued to pour out His grace upon His Church. We witnessed exciting developments on international, national and the local diocesan level. Programs have been initiated on the diocesan and parish level to help us focus more clearly on the health and life of our parishes. 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 each of you for your prayers, cards and letters over the past year as I addressed personal medical issues, and let me thank you again and for your ongoing prayer and support. While these medical concerns are important, I have continued to visit parishes, 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 my duties as Episcopal moderator of the OCA's Pension Board, my participation as a member of the Lesser Synod, and my responsibilities for the Diocese of New England, the Albanian Archdiocese and the Diocese of the South which I serve as locum tenens.

Collectively, these responsibilities required a significant amount of travel., including visitations 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 Hierarchy 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, Orlando, Florida, Columbia, SC 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.

I am most fortunate that in all three dioceses I have dedicated and competent chancellors to support the work of the bishop and I am in computer and phone contact with all three on almost a daily basis.

Archbishop Dmitri

Archbishop Dmitri, of the Diocese of the South, fell asleep in the Lord on August 28. He was actually the founder of that missionary diocese, and his departure from this life has had a profound impact on the faithful there. We have fond memories of his oversight of our diocese 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 our diocese. The same holds true with the Albanian Archdiocese which he also oversaw while taking care of our diocese.

May Archbishop Dimitri's memory be eternal.

Episcopal Assembly

Last year I reported 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 you 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 Bishop

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. Golitzin was elected for the Bulgarian Diocese. The dates of his consecration have yet to be announced.

Pastoral and Parish Changes

Holy Ghost in Bridgeport, CT and St Mary's in Waterbury, CT did not have full time pastors during this past year. Filling these vacancies has been a difficult task since both communities have specific needs and finding the right person to fill them takes time and careful consideration.

It appeared that a candidate to serve in Waterbury had been found, however that pastor had recently opted to stay in his present position, it is my hope that St. Mary's will soon have a full time pastor.

Holy Ghost in Bridgeport is still in the process of finding a suitable pastor as well. Because the parish has

not had to go through this process for many years, there was some resistance to the pastoral search process that has been in effect in our diocese for decades.

The process is rather simple. I interview prospective candidates for any position along with the Dean and Chancellor. If I feel that a candidate is suitable then he is then sent to a community to be interviewed by the parish council. If it appears that the priest and the parish faithful can work well together, then he is assigned by the bishop.

Several wonderful celebrations have occurred in a few of our parishes during this past year. Most recently was the centennial celebration at Ss. Peter and Paul in Meriden, CT. His Beatitude was present as well as Bishop Melchezidek, who served as pastor of Ss. Peter and Paul for many years.

In addition was the ground breaking ceremony in Pittsfield, MA as that community is now in the process of building a new church for its growing community. Our Prayers and Blessings for both celebrations was a highlight of the past year's activities.

Our mission station in Maine has enjoyed regular pastoral services and reader services during this past year giving it a solid foundation to build upon. Our thanks to Fr. Kreta for maintaining this and providing this schedule of services for that budding community.

Inter Diocesan Relationships

A close working relationship has developed between the two cathedrals in Boston which works well especially during major feast day celebrations when I make every effort to be at both Cathedrals. Serving at both cathedrals can at times become a bit taxing, but is still workable.

All clergy in both our Diocese and the Albanian Archdiocese annually update our joint diptychs.

This year it was gratifying to see that several parishioners from St George in Trumbull, CT participated in the Diocese of New England Youth Rally. This is the one week Summer Camp sponsored by the diocese of New England and Fr. John Hopko as youth director has done a marvelous job.

Annunciation parish in Maynard and Annunciation parish in Natick continue to have a good working relationship in scheduling my visitations as both parishes share the same Patronal Feast Day. Fr. Robert Dick and Fr Joseph Gallick seem to always work out a reasonable and workable schedule.

Now serving as a priest in the Albanian Archdiocese Fr Dennis Rhodes is a welcome guest in the CT Deanery meetings of the Diocese of New England.

I am blessed to work with three extraordinarily competent chancellors, Fr. John Kreta in the Diocese of New England, Fr Arthur Liolin in the Albanian Archdiocese, and Fr. Marcus Burch the chancellor I appointed in the Diocese of the South.

Youth Ministry

The Diocesan Youth Rally (or youth camp); my regular meetings with Orthodox students at the University of CT; and the annual visitation of participants in the Crossroads youth program to our

cathedrals in Boston are just some of the youth activities in the Diocese.

This past year while visiting one of my parishes in the Northern Deanery, I had the opportunity to meet with our Orthodox youth at Dartmouth as well.

COLA

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics issued the New England Consumer Price Index card recently.

The percent change from July 2010 for the US City average is 3.6% and the increase for the Boston-Brocton-Nashua region is 3.4%.

By vote of the 2007 Diocesan Assembly the cost of living increase will be the highest of three, therefore the 2012 COLA for clergy in New England will be 3.6%

Health

Early last year there was a tumor discovered on my vocal cords. It was removed and then I received radiation treatments. As you may remember I had one of our clergy read my report at our last assembly.

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, for many of our parishes 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. 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 illness 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 wish to express my thanks to all of you for the commitment and dedication that you have exhibited in all of the areas for which you have accepted responsibility. I would especially like to thank those who work with the Parish Grant program, O-N-E stewards; our Treasurer and our Youth Director; Fr. Robert Dick and Dn John Zarras our representatives to the Metropolitan Council; and the members of the Diocesan Council. Particular thanks are due to all of the Deans in light of all the issues that I have placed in their laps and Fr David Koles for his excellent handling of our web site.

Again our thanks go to Fr John Kreta for his extraordinary help with our mission station in Maine.

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fr Nikon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "F" and "N".