

**Archbishop Nikon's Report to the Annual Assembly – Diocese of New England
October 2014 - Holy Dormition Orthodox Church – Cumberland RI**

In the book, The Resurrection and Modern Man, Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch reflects on the Word of God.

“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.”

What I believe is a most important statement for us as Clergy, as laity, as men, as women, as a diocese, is that all of us are servants.

A servant is a person who is obedient to a master, and we are obedient to Christ and his command to teach all nations about the good news. Our Missionary mindset is fueled by our desire to bring Christ to individuals, indeed to a World that is yearning and searching. In Orthodoxy, our search is fulfilled in a lifelong relationship with Christ and a life of obedience to Christ's commandments.

Following a lecture many years ago given by Archbishop Dmitri, of blessed memory, someone asked him “You want people to change our whole lifestyle?” the Archbishop simply responded "Yes".

Over the past year, the faithful of our Diocese have continued to serve Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and by His grace our lives continue to be changed as we say “Yes” to the will of God.

Fr. Spero Page

Fr. Spero Page of the Albanian Archdiocese fell asleep in the Lord in his retirement after having served many years. It was good that some of our DNE clergy participated in the funeral services for a brother priest in our sister diocese.

May his memory be eternal.

Assembly of Canonical Bishops

This year the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America gathered in Dallas, TX September 15th thru the 18th. Inasmuch as the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross was the Sunday preceding the assembly, I celebrated the Feast at St. Seraphim Cathedral in Dallas along with several members of our Synod including: Bishop David of Alaska; Bishop Alejo of Mexico; and Archbishop Melchisedek of Pittsburg.

Along with the regular business of the Assembly, members discussed possible ways to rectify the anomalies that exist here in America prior to the great council scheduled for 2016 in Constantinople.

As part of the agenda we heard reports from many of the agencies that operate under the auspices of the Assembly. Such as: IOCC, OCMC, Orthodox Christian Education Commission, OCF (our

College Campus Ministry), Orthodox Boy and Girl Scouts, Prison Ministry, and The Department of Internet Ministry through the Orthodox Christian Network. During the departmental reports, we heard a chilling statistic about Orthodox youth: for every seven young adults from our parishes that go off to college, six will never enter an Orthodox church again. The youth are not our future; the unborn are our future. The youth are our present and we must do a better job of making disciples of our children if we hope to make disciples of all nations. We have to ascertain what we are doing wrong or what we are not doing and what we can do to strengthen the Christian faith of our young people.

Statements regarding the crisis in the Middle East as well as the OCA Synod's statement regarding the proposed restructuring plan for all of the Orthodox churches in America are posted on the OCA web site.

Archbishop Anastasios

Twice this year I have been invited by Abp Anastasios to join him for very special events in Albania and the USA. 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 Burch, my chancellor in the Diocese of the South and I attended a dinner with the Archbishop and other dignitaries.

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

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

His Beatitude Anastasios also made time in his busy schedule to visit St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church in New York. Following proper protocol His Beatitude called me on Saturday evening asking a blessing to visit St. Nicholas. So at nine in the evening I called Fr. Nathan Preston, the pastor of St Nicholas Church advising him that he would be having two special visitors to church that next morning, archbishop Anastasios and Metropolitan Joan of Korca. As the Archbishop put it so beautifully, he wanted to visit family.

The activities were marred slightly by a few members of a group called "Albanian Roots" who oppose Archbishop Anastasios based solely on the fact that he was born and raised in Greece and not in Albania. The group planned a demonstration against the Archbishop at Fordham and Metropolitan Joan of Korca and I met with them to try to understand what the protest was about. We explained to them, or rather tried to teach them how the church elects bishops, and stressed that Archbishop Anastasios should, if anything, be evaluated on his work and not on his country of origin, for we are known by our deeds. This did not move them and they persisted with a demonstration that was sparsely attended.

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

My travel arrangements required me to change planes in Constantinople and I did not want to miss the opportunity to visit the Phanar and Highia Sofia, but the hassle of having to go through customs in Turkey somewhat tempered my enthusiasm until I learned that Fr John Parker would also be attending this event as a member of the Board of OCMC. Fr. John Parker is the head of our OCA's department of Evangelization and a priest in my Southern Diocese. You may remember that Fr Parker addressed our assembly previously. I immediately enlisted him to serve as my sub-deacon and take care of the mundane items, such as hotel reservations and dragging luggage around.

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

While in Constantinople the Patriarch offered Fr Parker and me very gracious Orthodox hospitality, inviting us to lunch with his synod on three occasions, and providing 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 at the Phanar. And we were treated to a private audience with the Patriarch in his office.

Perhaps the most moving and interesting moment of the trip was a visit to one of the churches in Constantinople that has the only icon of the Theotokos wearing a white garment. It is known as the icon of The Unwedded Bride.

Holy Synod

The Holy Synod of the OCA meets twice a year as the canons prescribe. Additional meetings are called as needed and we rotate members of the Lessor Synod to participate in the Metropolitan Council meetings. In addition, we try to hold a Synodal retreat annually. At the invitation of Bishop Irene of Canada, the Synodal retreat took place in Ottawa, Canada shortly after my travels to Albania. At the time of this writing three of our dioceses were without a ruling hierarch: the Diocese of the Midwest; the Diocese of Canada and the Diocese of the South.

The Midwest Diocese did indeed hold their nomination assembly as did the Archdiocese of Canada, both fairly recently.

I anticipate holding a nomination assembly for the Diocese of the South in February in conjunction with their annual clergy conference. It is my hope that the nominee will be elected by the Holy Synod during our regular Spring Session in March and I would anticipate a consecration in May, should that be necessary.

In this event my responsibility in the South would terminate, and the Diocese of the South would have their own ruling bishop for the upcoming All American Council scheduled for July of 2015 in Atlanta

Earlier this week the Holy Synod met in Syosset for the regular Fall Session. Among other deliberations, Bishop Irenee was elected to serve the Archdiocese of Canada; Fr. Paul Gassios was elected to serve the Diocese of the Midwest. In addition, Igumen Daniel (David) Brum was elected as an auxiliary to Archbishop Benjamin of the Diocese of the West.

As a member of the Holy Synod I accompanied His Beatitude, Metropolitan TIKHON to the memorial services for Metropolitan Philip of the Antiochian Archdiocese at their cathedral in Brooklyn, NY.

PSP's

The Policies, Standards, and Procedures of the Orthodox Church in America on Sexual Misconduct are something that I have spoken about on numerous occasions. In an effort to ensure that the PSP's offer the best protection for all concerned, the Office for Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations of the Orthodox Church in America describes the PSP's as a "work in progress." Thus it is necessary that the policy is read and signed by the members of every parish council on an annual basis. This is required in order to ensure that Church leaders are aware of updates that are made to the Policy, and to make sure that new personnel on our parish councils are aware of the PSP's.

We, the Church are not of the world but we are in the world. The most recent change to the 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. We like to think that we are immune from these situations but since I am currently taking care of three dioceses, I can sadly tell you that during the past year there have been situations dealing with this problem in all three of the diocese that are currently in my care.

In addition to these procedures, the Policy mandates that 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.

I am not sure how this will affect our diocesan budget, if at all, but we will need to make arrangements for how to pay for these mandatory background checks. There are three levels of background checks available from the recommended company. The fees run from \$7 or \$8 up to \$30 for the most comprehensive background check. Cindy Davis, ORSMA coordinator is here at our assembly to speak more specifically about the polices and answer any and all of our questions. Our Diocesan Council has formed a special committee to propose how best to implement the policies in our diocese so that there is uniformity throughout the diocese and to detail what will be done by the diocese in terms of background checks on clergy and what will be the responsibility of the individual parishes.

North Star

As you may have read in one issue of ONE, I am a North Star. On May 14, 2014 I received the North Star Award from the Boy Scouts of America. The North Star award is a limited award bestowed upon those who are not members of the Boy Scouts of America. Only about 30 have been bestowed nationwide. This is the first of such awards given by the Old Colony Council in Massachusetts. The citation reads: "The Boy Scouts of America Old Colony Council present this North Star Award to His Eminence, The Most Reverend Nikon, Archbishop of Boston, New England and the Albanian Archdiocese in recognition of outstanding service to youth." The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetime by instilling in them the Values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law. The award itself is a silver North Star with the Boy Scout insignia in the center. You might have seen the photograph in our ONE Newspaper. The Boy Scouts have done training for our Youth Rally Staff and a few years ago provided the training at our assembly. Our relationship has been mutually beneficial.

Parish Highlights and Initiatives

Part of the Metropolitan Council Strategic Plan of the OCA was the encouragement of programs on the diocesan and parish levels. Several of our communities have initiated outreach programs for which the Diocese has offered grants.. These programs include education of clergy and other outreach programs.

Inter diocesan activities continued again this year with our clergy and laity participation in Youth Rally. Fr. Dennis Rhodes and laity from St. George in Trumbull took active part in Youth Rally and Fr Dennis Rhodes continues to participate in the Connecticut Deanery festivities.

It was difficult for all of us as we closed Nativity of the Virgin Mary parish in Chelsea with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. We are joyful, however, that the building is still used as a church by the Romanian Community that shared the facility for many years.

Our Diocese is not alone in struggles such as this, as many Christian communities in New England, are facing the exceptionally difficult task of closing parishes that are no longer viable. We face these challenges firm in our faith that Christ has built the Church and that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Mt. 16:18)

Within our Diocese, we look forward to several celebrations in the coming year. Holy Resurrection Church in Berlin, NH, will be celebrating their centennial as well as the centennial celebration of Holy Transfiguration in New Haven, CT and a 25th Anniversary celebration for All Saints of America Parish in Salisbury, CT.

COLA

According to a vote of our Diocesan Assembly the COLA adjustment for 2015 would be the highest of three indexes from the Board of Labor Statistics for September 2014.

- Boston, Brockton, Nashua, NH is 1.7
- Northeastern Urban average is 1.3
- US City average is 1.7

Therefore our 2015 COLA adjustment would be the highest of the three, which is 1.7 Percent.

Thanks and Recognition

Our diocese is fortunate and blessed with dedicated clergy and laity who continue to till the soil in this vineyard which God has planted with His right hand. I speak of all of you, dedicated clergy and laity in the diocese. Parish Councils, members of the diocesan Council and I especially wish to thank the work of our seemingly tireless Chancellor, Archpriest John Kreta, our Deans, Fr David Koles, Fr. Vasily Likwar and Fr. Peter Carmichael, for their dedication to me, the Diocese and their own parishes.

Conclusion

In concluding, I would like to return to 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 contract or moral ideal; it is a mysterious and spiritual reality that encompasses our whole being: mind, soul and spirit."