

O. N. E.

ORTHODOX NEW ENGLAND

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A New Bishop for Our Diocese – Some Questions and Answers

V. Rev. John Hopko

The Diocese of New England, under the leadership of our *Locum Tenens*, His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON, is now engaged in the process of nominating a man to be considered for election as our new bishop. What are some questions we might have about this process? And what might the answers be to those questions?

Where can I find official information concerning the Diocesan Bishop, as understood in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA)?

When thinking about any matter concerning the official administration of the OCA, the place to begin is the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America, which is the official document that governs its organization and operation. That document can be accessed in full at the official website of the OCA, at this link: <https://www.oca.org/statute>. Article VIII of the Statute is specifically about the Diocesan Bishop, but references to the role of the bishop, and the bishops as a group, appear in almost every part of the Statute.

[In addition to the Statute, His Beatitude issued an archpastoral

letter on July 24, setting out the particular nomination process for our diocese. The letter is available on the diocesan website:

<https://www.dneoca.org>]

What is a *Locum Tenens*?

Locum Tenens is a Latin phrase meaning “placeholder.” In the practice of the OCA, when a diocese does not have in place a duly elected Diocesan bishop, the Holy Synod of Bishops declares “the see” vacant, and the Metropolitan, in his capacity as Primate, appoints a *Locum Tenens*. The role of the *Locum Tenens* is to administer the Diocese until such time as a new, full-time, Diocesan bishop can be elected. In the case of the Diocese of New England, following the death of our beloved archpastor, His Eminence Archbishop NIKON (Memory Eternal!), His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON appointed himself to serve as our *Locum Tenens*.

What is “the see”?

“The see” is a reference to the position of the Diocesan Bishop in his diocese. The term “see” is said to de-

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FORCC: A Tribute to Dedicated Workers

M. Lydia Westerberg

Who are we? What do we believe? How do we share our beliefs? These are the fundamental questions upon which the Fellowship of Orthodox Churches of Connecticut (FORCC) was founded more than 26 years ago and which provide the direction and impetus for the work of FORCC members today.

The vision of FORCC is twofold: It is both external and internal.

1. As Orthodox Christians we are to inform non-Orthodox in our local communities and in our state—all those people in Connecticut who do not know Orthodoxy—about who we are. The Orthodox Church is the one true Apostolic Church.
2. As Orthodox Christians we are to witness as brothers and sisters in Christ, who share a rich diverse tradition exemplified in parishes across Connecticut. We are called to work together across diocesan lines.

The Fellowship of Orthodox Churches of Connecticut recently experienced the loss of three prominent leaders of FORCC whose belief system propelled them to work toward achieving the fundamental vision of FORCC.

The Mitred Archpriest Nicholas Timpko was the parish priest of Three Saints Church in Ansonia, Conn., for 27 years. He also held administrative positions in the deanery and diocese. Without hesitation, he attended the first meeting of FORCC, which was held at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Bridgeport, and from the time of that first meeting he enthusiastically and tirelessly worked as clergy advisor of FORCC.



Throughout the years Fr. Nicholas never failed to attend meetings and workshops and to provide sound leadership and counsel as the members developed plans for church school workshops, for statewide billboards, for speakers on college campuses, for educational programs, for scholarship applications, and for the prison ministry. Fr. Timpko was a soft-spoken person of few words. When he spoke, people listened. He provided wise counsel, encouraged and led his own parish flock to build upon the shared FORCC precepts. Even in declining health and long after his retirement in 2006, Father Nicholas continued to be an ardent FORCC supporter.

Eva Vaniotis from Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church was the energetic church school coordinator of Holy Trinity who also worked on Greek Archdiocesan church school projects. Always her main interest was in educating all Orthodox youth. Eva worked on the Greek Orthodox Oratory contest



motivating students and enlisting FORCC volunteers to help. She designed her summer church school program and invited both Orthodox and non-Orthodox. She developed the FORCC Scholarship applications and the scholarship committees and worked to enlist funding from various community groups to help pay for the scholarship program as well as for all FORCC endeavors. Eva believed in new ideas and helped design and work for the young talent program sponsored by FORCC. She invited everybody to Holy Trinity for these events and made sure to show the best hospitality by advertising the work of FORCC to others and engaging their aid.

Eva's work spanned years in her own life, which would be considered retirement years by many. In her late seventies and well into her eighties and nineties, she travelled across the state and always showed a big smile and spoke kind words. Her eyes would light up whenever she talked about young students' accomplishments. Eva's health forced her to slow down in recent years. Eva was "a young" ninety-nine when she died this past spring.

Along with Eva Vaniotis and Father Nicholas, William, "Bill" Balamaci attended the first FORCC meeting, and, as they say, "He never looked back." As president of FORCC, Bill's consistent

visionary outlook set the tone and direction of FORCC. Bill believed in the importance of camaraderie and year after year worked behind the scenes on the FORCC benefit banquet. A businessman himself, Bill knew the value of money and he tirelessly contacted numerous businesses to contribute to the work of FORCC. When FORCC was approached to help sponsor Frederica Mathewes-Green at the Yale Divinity School, Bill seized upon the idea and arranged for a chartered bus of Orthodox and non-Orthodox to attend. A parishioner, a council officer and member of St. Dimitrie Orthodox Church in Easton, he was steadfast in his faith. Bill always knew who he was, where he was headed, and how to get there. He knew that Orthodoxy in this land can be salvation for all, but it is the Orthodox Christians who have to make their faith known.

It has been a privilege and an honor for me to have known these giants of the faith, to have worshipped with them, to have laughed with them and to have worked with them. While we pray for the departed, I think Father Nicholas and Eva and Bill are probably praying for us as we continue the work of the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians.

Memory Eternal!

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Bishop from I

rive from the Latin word for seat (*sedes*), and to refer to the formal seat on which the bishop sits when in his cathedral. The cathedral is the primary church of the Diocese, and the word *cathedra*, from which the word cathedral derives, is both the Latin and Greek word for the large, formal, chair in which the bishop sits. In any case, all these terms are interconnected.

What is the process by which a new bishop is elected for the Diocese?

The process for electing a new bishop for the diocese is defined and described in Article VIII of the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America. (Article VIII can be viewed at this link: <https://www.oca.org/statute/article-viii> .) In summary that process works as follows:

A special Diocesan Assembly is convened to nominate a candidate. The candidate must be a celibate (never-married or presently widowed) Orthodox Christian man of at least 35 years of age, who has no impediments to his service as a bishop.

It is not permissible to nominate a man who is already a Diocesan Bishop elsewhere. That man already has his responsibilities. (The OCA Holy Synod of Bishops has been known in the past to transfer a bishop from one diocese to another, if such an action seems, for weighty reasons, to be proper. Our Diocese of New England has, at least twice, had a bishop transferred away from us to another diocese of the OCA.)

At the time of his nomination, the nominee does not have to be an



ordained person—pious laymen have been elected as bishops, and subsequently gone through all the steps necessary to be consecrated to the episcopacy. (Saint Ambrose of Milan was famously elected to be a bishop while still a catechumen, not yet a baptized Christian. This took place in AD 374. He was subsequently baptized, and then, over the course of seven days, went through all the steps necessary to be consecrated a bishop.) The nominee must be willing to take at least preliminary monastic vows, and he must be willing to accept consecration to the episcopacy.

Consecration of a bishop takes place during the Divine Liturgy. Bishops are consecrated by other bishops. Usually this consecration is accomplished by, at minimum, three other bishops. Before being consecrated a bishop nowadays, one must have been a tonsured Reader, a set-apart Subdeacon, an ordained Deacon, and be, presently, an ordained Priest in good standing. One must, also, as mentioned already, have taken at least preliminary monastic vows—that is why the bishop dresses in a monastic habit. For further information about the stages of monasticism, as implemented at Saint Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, which is the monastery where many of our OCA bishops are en-

St. Alexis, Clinton's annual "Souper Bowl"

Below: This year we could not have our annual Souper Bowl Chili/Chowder Cookoff on Super Bowl Sunday. To make up for the missed Souper Bowl, we had a Chili Cook-off on February 23rd. This year there were seven very delicious entries. Every year the chilis get better and better. This year's winner was Sharon Hanson who made an outstanding chicken chili. Shown in the photo is Father Steven Hosking presenting the Souper Bowl trophy to Sharon Hanson. All proceeds were donated to the IOCC.

Vincent Melesko

rolled as monks, please see this link: <https://www.stots.edu/article/The+Monastic+Grades> .)

Once the Diocese nominates a candidate, he is examined by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), under the chairmanship of the Metropolitan. Once the Synod examines the candidate, they either elect him or refuse to elect him as the new bishop. (If refusal of the nominee occurs, then the Diocese must reconvene an Assembly in order to nominate a different candidate.)

If, for whatever reason, the Diocese fails to nominate a candidate, the Holy Synod does have the right and privilege to elect their own choice as the duly elected Diocesan bishop.

Once elected by the Holy Synod, the bishop-elect proceeds through whatever steps are necessary for him to serve as bishop, including formal episcopal consecration by his fellow bishops at a Divine Liturgy, and then

is formally enthroned as the new Diocesan hierarch. Upon consecration as a bishop, or if already a bishop, the bishop-elect has all the prerogatives of Diocesan bishop, even if not yet formally enthroned.

All the above being said, in the Orthodox Church generally speaking, bishops are elected by bishops, from among eligible candidates identified by the existing bishops. Thus, strictly speaking, nomination by the Diocese is not absolutely necessary. The OCA Statute does specify a nomination process, but this is a local procedure of the OCA, not a universal (or even common) Orthodox practice—and, even in the OCA, the canonical election of a bishop is accomplished by the Holy Synod of Bishops.

What is the practical role of the Diocesan Bishop?

The exact "competencies" of a Diocesan Bishop are laid out in the OCA Statute. (Competencies, in this context, mean the actions that the

Diocesan bishop has the authority to accomplish.) These competencies include the right and responsibility to guide and lead the faithful of the Diocese as Christians, to open and close parishes and institutions in the Diocese, to convene and preside over Diocesan meetings, to have ultimate say about the management of the Diocese's material possessions, to ordain and assign clergy to their duties, to provide antimensia for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, to exercise ecclesiastical discipline over



the members of the Diocese as might be necessary, to provide essential and even binding guidance in times of difficulty and crisis, to adjudicate difficult issues as regards the pastoral care of the clergy and faithful, and to visit the people and places of the Diocese at his initiative in order to exercise oversight over the Diocese and its faithful people. This is not an exhaustive list.

What are antimensia, and why are they essential to the life of the Church?

The *antimensia* are the special cloths, on which are depicted representations of Our Lord Jesus Christ lying dead in His Tomb, on which the Divine Liturgy must and can only be celebrated. This cloth is consecrated and signed by the bishop himself, indicating his spiritual blessing and spiritual presence among the people when the Divine Liturgy is celebrated. A priest cannot serve the Divine Liturgy without an antimension, because the antimension connects the priest to the bishop, and the bishop in turn connects the priest and the local community that he is serving to the whole Church, across space and through time.

In a broader sense, what does the Diocesan Bishop do for the Diocese?

One of the most important things that the Diocesan Bishop does for the Diocese is connect the clergy and people of the Diocese to the entire Church, in every time and place.

When we see our bishop, we know that we are part of the worldwide communion and fellowship of the entity known most often in the world as “the Eastern Orthodox Church,” but what we would simply call “the Church.”

In this present time, our Diocesan bishop is in communion and fellowship with the other bishops of the OCA, and our OCA bishop are in communion and fellowship with all the canonical Orthodox bishops in the United States, and all those bishops are in communion and fellowship with all the canonical Orthodox bishops throughout the world. When any one Orthodox bishop formally addresses any other Orthodox bishop, he addresses him as “my brother and concelebrant.” This phrase means that these two men can go to Church together, and celebrate the Divine Liturgy together, and receive Holy Communion together. There is no stronger bond between any two humans than the sacramental bond made perfect in the common reception of Holy Communion. We are made one in Holy Communion with God and with each other, our fellow communicants. Every division is overcome in the act of Holy Communion.

However, our Diocesan bishop is not only in communion and fellowship with the other bishops who presently sit on their *cathedras* in their dioceses, as he sits on the *cathedra* in our Diocese of New England. Our bishop is also in communion with all the other Orthodox bishops who have ever lived, going back through time two thousand years to the age of the Holy Apostles. The first bishops were consecrated by the Holy Apostles themselves, and then, generation after generation, the bishops consecrated the bishops that followed them. This reality connects every Orthodox bishop to Jesus Christ Himself, He who called the Apostles to their apostolic ministry. This reality—often termed in the Church “Apostolic Succession”—unites all of us Orthodox Christians,

for we all live “under the omophorion” of our bishop, and our bishop connects us to the Church, in all locations and generations.

What does the phrase “under the omophorion of the bishop” mean?

The distinctive vestment of the bishop is the *omophorion*, the broad, scarf-like, vestment that he wears over his shoulders. So, all the faithful clergy and people living under the archpastoral care of any given bishop are said to be living “under his omophorion.”

Why do we show the bishop such honor when he is in our presence? Why do we call him Master? Why do we bow before him? Why do we “place him on a pedestal” in the middle of the Church?

The ways in which we honor the bishop are about the man, for sure, but they are even more so about the office of bishop, which he occupies and makes present among us. Yes, of course, we are meant to honor one another, being the men and women that we are, made in God’s image and likeness. We should be treating each and every fellow human being with the same dignity and honor with which we traditionally treat the bishop. However, we particularly honor the bishop because of his office, his role in uniting us with the whole Church. Also, the bishop in his office, stands in the place of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the present, temporal life of the Church. For the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the one and only bishop, the one and only all-seeing overseer (*episkopos*) of the Church. The Lord Jesus Christ is, as we pray during the Divine Liturgy, not only the Offering and the Receiver of the Offering, He is the Offerer. The bishop when he

stands among us, leading us—especially when presiding at the Divine Liturgy and making the Offering that is the central act of the Liturgy—makes present for us Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest. (So that we do not miss this connection, icons sometimes depict Our Lord Jesus Christ wearing the vestments of a bishop, especially the omophorion.)

What, ultimately, is the role of the Diocesan Bishop?

Ultimately, the role of the bishop is to be the man around whom the clergy and the faithful of the Diocese gather, as if at home with their father. The bishop is the one who leads us along the right path, following Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our bishop does have the right and responsibility of authority, but that authority is to be exercised, not as a tyrant or dictator, but as one who has the best interests of all as the priority which guides his every decision. The burden of the episcopacy is the burden of living and humble service, of loving each and all, just as Our Lord Jesus Christ loves each of us, and us all. The bishop is not meant to drag his flock along behind him. Nor is the bishop meant to drive the flock ahead of him. Rather, the bishop is to walk alongside his flock, attentive to their every step, supporting, guiding, and teaching them.

A wonderful image for the bishop is to be found in the story of Our Lord Jesus Christ’s post-resurrectional appearance to Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus (Luke, Chapter 24). In that case, the Lord walks with his disciples, and talks with his disciples, and enlightens his disciples, and makes their hearts burn within them. Then, finally, He reveals Himself fully to them in the blessing and breaking

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Upcoming

- Aug 31** **Deadline for suggesting candidates for Diocesan Bishop to Fr. John Kreta, Diocesan Chancellor: frjkreta@snet.net**
- Aug 31** **Deadline for contributing to ONE Stewards 2020**
- Sept. 1** **Connecticut Deanery Memorial Service for the anniversary of the repose of His Eminence, Archbishop NIKON, at Three Saints Park, Bethany, Conn.**
- Nov. 6-7** **Diocesan Assembly hosted by St. Nicholas, Salem, Mass. —to be hosted via Zoom meeting**
- TBD** **Separate date for a Special Assembly to nominate a candidate for bishop of the Diocese of New England**