

“What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul...?”

Let us rejoice, brothers and sisters, as we begin a new day, a new year, a renewed vision for our diocese.

Indeed for many months, even years we were on the verge of losing our vision, losing our perspectives, forgetting our responsibilities as Christ's Holy Church. Indeed, we were on the verge of losing our souls. The focus had been on sin, evil, our own and more often our minds were on the sins of others. We cannot allow ourselves to lose our souls.

Certainly the evil one rejoiced when some of the leaders of our church failed and fell into sin, but we cannot allow ourselves to rejoice in another's sins, for then we too lose our souls. As Orthodox Christians, when we see our brothers fall, it is not a time for rejoicing, but a time for action to rescue our fallen brothers armed with love, armed with truth, we are taught to help lead them back to Christ. We are called, always to be Christ controlled, not crowd controlled. For this is the way of salvation. Otherwise we lose our own souls.

I am speaking about the soul of our church, the soul of our diocese. By the Grace of God, in our diocese, we have kept ministering to the faithful, fed the sheep, encouraged the downhearted, and supported the activities and programs that lead to healing in our church.

Certainly there is much for which to be thankful and much to be learned from our experiences in building up the Body of Christ. Thanks be to God, Satan's attempts to divide us and divert our attention from our responsibilities to Christ's Holy Gospel was, for the most part, unsuccessful. We persevered through this past year, working to fulfill our responsibilities as Orthodox Christians. But it has not been easy for anyone.

Many of you may remember my communication to you following our last assembly. My innermost anguish and agony were shared by many as we left with heavy hearts. Three days following our Assembly, I was in Syosset, where I met with His Beatitude Herman and I conveyed to him that our Diocese believed that it would be best for him and our whole church if he exercised his privilege of retiring.

In addition, one week prior to the recent joint meeting of the HS and MC, I wrote a more personal letter to his Beatitude, by personal I mean, I wrote to him as a respected senior hierarch who taught me as I began my Episcopal ministry. In this letter I urged him to retire. I shared this letter with my two chancellors as well as a few of my brother Bishops on the Holy Synod. Later, at the recommendation of those brother bishops, I read that letter at a synod meeting. However, His Beatitude never responded to either my informal or formal requests that he retire.

Although I ruled a diocesan “resolution” insisting that the Metropolitan resign, “out of order”, being fully aware of your concern for him and our church, I followed through with the desires expressed at our assembly by conveying our hearts and sentiments to His Beatitude. Not as a judgment, but as our sincere desire to help our church get back on track.

Reflecting the desire of many to affect meaningful change in the Central Administration, the proposal to withhold contributions to the central administration was revisited at our assembly in 2007, and after long discussion and deliberation, again it was defeated. At this time I reminded our assembly that the resolution of 2006 which I had initiated granting our Diocesan Council authority to withhold, following prescribed guidelines, was still in effect.

Unfortunately, one of the parishes in our diocesan family felt the need to independently withhold their financial stewardship. While their intention may have been to exert pressure on the Chancery, the unfortunate result of this action was that it compromised diocesan finances and more importantly was perceived as an action to separate themselves from the diocesan family. This action has caused much hurt and harm to me personally, and to our diocese at large.

My dear brothers and sisters, throughout the period in which funds were withheld; I approached the situation with love, care and pastoral sensitivity. I took measured steps to ensure that order was maintained in the parish and at no time was the liturgical life of the parish interrupted and the administrative work of the parish was allowed to continue.

When tempers flare, and when we take sides against one another nobody wins. When one parish, for any reason, believes that it has to act in isolation from the rest of the diocesan family, everyone is affected negatively. In this situation, a family quarrel has become public, and in some instances mean and hurtful things have been said in very public forums. This sad chapter in the life of our diocese has affected me personally, it has affected brother clergy, and it has affected many laypeople. Truly, when there is division in the family, when brothers fight with one another, the Devil rejoices. I pray that this kind of discord never again occurs in our diocesan family. I pray that our sister parish rejoins the work of the diocese. I pray that public forums like the Internet and parish bulletins would always be used to build one another up for the work of the Gospel. But, most importantly, I pray that a spirit of Christian love and cooperation would be restored to the Diocese. This cannot happen when we put our own egos and agendas first. Christ must come first, for He alone is perfect and without sin. I am not perfect, our Diocese is not perfect, and none of the clergy or laity are perfect. We are weak, broken and sinful people, trying our best to do the work of Christ for our salvation and for the life of the world. The division and discord that we have experienced cannot continue, I will not allow it to continue, for there is so much work that must be done. So many are suffering. So many are lost. So many in New England are spiritually suffering and dying. There is so very much work to be done! And we cannot do it alone, and more importantly we cannot do it while separated from each other or divided.

Much good work has been accomplished since our last assembly, both on our own Diocesan level and the national level as well; a number of our clergy were recognized for their dedicated service to their communities and to the church at large. In our Diocese and in our parishes, programs proceeded with as much normalcy as possible as we took the time to look at the aspects that affect our diocese in terms of demographics, through the work of our Task Force, giving us valuable statistical information. Simply put, the ministry to our faithful was uninterrupted.

As we all know the Special Investigative Committee report was released and many of you have read it. As their committee has stated it is still a work in progress and there may be items to be clarified in the report. Some of those corrections have appeared in the preliminary minutes that have recently been posted. There is one aspect of this report that needs clarification;

I am referring to an incident that occurred in 2004, that included me, Archbishop Nathaniel and Archbishop Seraphim.....

The preliminary minutes stated that:

Bishop Nikon noted his strong displeasure with the section of the SIC report concerning a visit the he and Archbishops Seraphim and Nathaniel made to Moscow in 2004 at which time Archimandrite Zacchaeus informed them “of Kondratick’s attempt to misappropriate charitable funds.” The report says that the hierarchs did nothing in response; however, Bishop Nikon stated that the three did take action. Bishop Nikon also voiced his disappointment that he was not approached by the SIC to speak about the incident.

The facts are that immediately upon being informed by Archimandrite Zacchaeus of the attempt to misappropriate funds the three of us reported this to His Beatitude, fully expecting that he would address the issue in the appropriate manner since Robert Kondratick served the church under his omophoron.

The OCA Crisis

Although our national church has experienced this crisis over the past several years, some feel that this should not affect us because our diocese is functioning well; our parishes for the most part are functioning well. But, we know that whenever one part of the Body of Christ is injured, the whole Body of Christ suffers. This is true whether it is within our own diocese, national church or sister dioceses. Other Archdioceses in North America have suffered crises, like the GOA, and the Antiochian Archdiocese. We have all experienced crisis in our short 200 year history.

In my capacity as a member of the Holy Synod, it became a responsibility to address this crisis. Naturally, this was difficult since the problems leading to the crisis were multifaceted. It dealt with malfeasance, financial mismanagement and moral failings. And with the new technology the world not only watches, but individuals with limited knowledge of events had the opportunity to offer their opinions over the internet on several websites whether or not they were privy to truthful information. Another complicating factor was that we have proceeded at too slow a pace in bringing the malfeasance to light, and openly addressing the wrongdoing. Communication from the central

administration was often slow in coming, if it came at all. In any crisis, the “fog of war” makes it difficult to discern what is true and what is false.

By the grace of God, the essential issues have been addressed and we are fortunate that we have had stellar representation from our diocese at the Metropolitan Council. The Holy Synod has addressed the issues set before them; the Special Commission, The Special Investigative Committee, the Legal Team and the Ethics Committee have addressed these issues and have come to an agreement on how to proceed.

AAC

Standing in the midst of this unprecedented situation, the whole church is gathering this November in Pittsburgh for the AAC. This council may be the most historic for our young church, as the issues that have plagued us will be addressed, a new Metropolitan will be elected and we will all dedicate ourselves to help whomever is elected to address the difficult tasks he will face.

Many of you know I am the chair of the Pre-Conciliar Commission for this Council and I initiated the Town Hall meetings throughout the US for our faithful at large to participate and offer their perceptions, perspectives and feelings. I was gratified that many of the faithful from our diocese participated in these Town Meetings in preparation of the AAC. Each parish is entitled to their pastor and one delegate to participate in the AAC and I look forward to all of our parishes being represented.

When some individuals and brother hierarchs became despondent over the crisis, I encouraged them by reminding them that there has never been a time in the life of the Church that there was not crisis. The Albanian Archdiocese has experienced four (4) crises that have deeply affected them and yet, this year they celebrated their centennial year.

We have been through much, many are still hurting, and many important decisions need to be made in order for us to continue fulfilling the Great Commission of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the time we have together as a diocese, we have an opportunity to address our most pressing challenges. And we have serious challenges to face, and the work before us is not easy.

But I am not ready to give up on our responsibility to evangelize this land. I am not ready to give up on the Autocephaly granted to us as the OCA. Spreading the Good news of the Gospel is our responsibility, this is our charge, this is our responsibility, and this is our destiny. Though it may seem impossible, “with God all things are possible.” (Mat 19:26)

Youth

We had the greatest participation in years at youth rally, so many of our youth gathering together to learn about the Church and learn about each other.

I always enjoy my time with the youth attending rally. This year we had time to talk with the bishop, and exchange ideas and thoughts and it was gratifying as I arrived to be greeted by several of the sub-deacons in our diocese. I remarked to one of the pastors that his son was having a wonderful time at rally. Later he stated that I did not tell him how great a time he had because ever since he came home from rally he is on the phone with a young lady he met at rally. He is on the phone for hours when his father cannot get him to talk for just a few minutes.

In addition the college students as part of the OCF at UCONN continue to be very active and the group has grown this year to about 20 participants. I continue to visit with students on a regular basis and this is indicative of the dedication we can expect as they move to take on the responsibilities of parish life.

I wish to thank everyone who took the time to attend our special assembly in May so that we could proceed with the sale of our RI property. Unfortunately the committee could not get working until this past August.

In addition there were problems arising since we had a 2000 gallon oil tank buried under the driveway that had to be removed and later tested. Greg Sheshko can give you a more detailed account as he was instrumental in taking care of a lot of the details necessary for the sale.

Highlights

One of the highlights this year was the centennial celebration of Dormition Parish in Cumberland and we are happy to close this most joyous event by holding our Annual Assembly in one of our oldest established parishes.

Recently we celebrated family day in the Connecticut Deanery and this was a most joyful event as we gathered together as family just to spend some time together.

Another joy to see is the inter parish cooperation between parishes of our Diocese and the Albanian Archdiocese. This is especially evident between Holy Annunciation Parish in Maynard, MA and Holy Annunciation in Natick, MA. This same is evident between the two cathedrals in Boston as servers and deacons from Holy Trinity Cathedral have participated in important events during this past year at St George Cathedral.

A Bio-Ethics seminar is being sponsored by St. Nicholas in Salem MA the first session was scheduled for Oct 5th and the second session will take place on November 5th

COLA

As you know our diocese has adopted a COLA obligation in reference to clergy compensation and Greg Sheshko will bring us up to date as to the percentage requirement for the coming year.

We know it is a difficult year and a difficult time as the whole world wrestles with the financial crisis that affects all of us, but this does not exempt us from our fiscal responsibilities.

Communications

Communication between our parishes has become more regular with the publication of ONE Newspaper and I am most appreciative to the work and dedication of Fr. Halvorsen for taking on this responsibility.

It is absolutely necessary for our parishes to inform father of significant events in the life of our parishes, because they serve us not only as information but serve as inspiration and the exchange of ideas are beneficial to our respective ministries.

Fr. David Koles takes care of our website postings and he is most efficient and capable.

O-N-E Stewards

We are most grateful for all who participated in this year's O-N-E Stewards program. With the new contribution level of the "Bishop's Circle" we are nearing our goals for this Diocesan Program. I will be having dinner with the members of the Bishop's Circle as a way to thank them for their participation. And no, I am not doing the cooking.

I mentioned earlier that there have been some pastoral changes and recognition of some of our clergy.

The Ordination of Nicholas Finley took place at Sts Cyril and Methodius in Terryville. The community was most joyful to have him attached to the parish and we are sad to see him leave as he has been transferred to the Diocese of the Mid-West and the omophorion of Abp. JOB.

There were several changes in the diaconal status that alters our voting clergy numbers on the diocesan level:

Deacon Theodore Feldman – Holy Trinity Cathedral – from attached to Assigned

Deacon Anthony Kruge – Three Saints, Ansonia – from attached to Assigned

Deacon Jordan Vargas – Sts. Peter and Paul Mission – Bethel, CT from attached to Assigned

Deacon John Zarras – Christ the Savior – Southbury - from attached to Assigned

Deacon Wm Zachariah Wasuta - Holy Res – Berlin – NH – from attached to Assigned

In the Vineyard

Father Mark Vranes worked to aid those affected by hurricane Ike

Fr. Nicholas Timpko has recovered well and we are happy to see that he is visiting parishes to personally thank the faithful for their support and prayers

Synodal Awards....

As I mentioned earlier several of our clergy were recognized for their work in building up the Body of Christ by our Holy Synod some of these awards have already been bestowed and others await my visitation for the formal ceremony.

V. Rev. Robert Arida	Jeweled Cross
V. Rev. John Bacon	Palitza
V. Rev. Peter Carmichael	Palitza
Rev. Robert Dick	Gold Cross
Rev. John Eissman	Gold Cross
V. Rev. David Koles	Palitza
V. Rev. Vasily Likwar	Synodal Gramota
V. Rev. Mark Sherman	Palitza
Rev. Vadim Pismeney	Gold Cross