

**ANNUAL REPORT OF ST. JOHN'S MONASTERY
TO THE 52nd ASSEMBLY OF THE DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST
OCTOBER 8th, 2013 – LANSING, ILLINOIS**

This is the Report on the Monastery of St. John the Theologian to the Diocesan Assembly of the Midwest for the year October 2nd, 2012 – August 31st, 2013

Sometime before Archbishop Job's death, Fr. Alexander asked for a blessing to seek young and capable monks to continue the monastic life at St. John's Monastery due to the present community's health problems and increasing age. The only monastery that he blessed him to contact was the OCA monastery of St. John in Manton, California. Very soon after this blessing was given, Fr. Jonah, their abbot, was elected bishop of Ft. Worth, Texas, and then chosen to be Metropolitan of the OCA. In the mean time, the brotherhood at Manton, elected a Fr. Meletios (Webber) to be their new superior. Knowing how difficult it is for a community to lose its spiritual father and gain a new one, we decided to wait in asking them for monks to help repopulate our monastery in Hiram. Losing their spiritual father, gaining a new abbot and then losing members of the community would be too much for a young community to go through, so it was decided to wait a year before we would approach the monastery in Manton.

Unfortunately, within that year, our beloved Archbishop Job fell asleep in the Lord and our plans were temporarily put on hold until we elected a new bishop for the diocese. Our new Bishop Matthias enthusiastically approved the plan to get monks from Manton and even contacted Fr. Meletios himself to discuss how this could be accomplished. Fr. Meletios gave a positive response to his request. Thus it was decided that we would visit Manton to acquaint ourselves with the community and so the community could also get to know us. In addition, it was planned that the members of the Manton monastery that were to join us would visit us in Hiram. Yet, before all this could take place, we felt that we needed to have a frank and honest discussion with Fr. Meletios so that everyone would have the same understanding in regards to the future relationship of the two communities. This meeting took place in September of 2012. Unfortunately, during the summer of 2012, the Evil One, who hates all good, sowed the seeds of dissent and discord in the monastery at Manton, and many of the young and healthy monks left, leaving the older ones and some who had health problems behind. In fact, within a few weeks after our discussion, Fr. Meletios resigned as superior and moved back to Europe.

Since the budding plans for getting young monks from Manton did not bear fruit, we looked to a community that was a little over five hours away from us in West Virginia, the Monastery of the Holy Cross. It was at this same time that Fr. Alexander turned 70 in October of 2012 and desired to retire. When our friend, who is an abbess of a monastery of 150 nuns in

Ukraine, heard this, she immediately said, “Why don’t you come here? We have a place for you.” Fr. Alexander and Fr. Daniel visited the monastery in Ukraine for old calendar Christmas as well as Pascha to discuss Fr. Alexander’s retirement and relocation to Ukraine. At that time, it was decided that Fr. Daniel would be released from St. John’s Monastery to accompany Fr. Alexander and be his caregiver and cell attendant. Yet, the question remained—“What would happen to St. John’s Monastery?” The monks at Holy Cross Monastery were contacted in January of 2013 to see if they could take on the responsibility of the monastery in Hiram. They responded with a joyful “YES”! We were informed that a week before we contacted them, their spiritual father, Fr. Seraphim, had been praying to the Holy Mother of God, asking for a solution to the over crowding at their monastery (they had close to 25 in the community with more on the way) and the fact that many of the fathers were looking for a more quiet and peaceful monastic life. They were very willing to come and take over the responsibilities of the monastery on the departure of Fr. Alexander and Fr. Daniel to Ukraine. Even though the Hiram monastery was in the OCA and Holy Cross Monastery was under ROCOR, both communities felt that God’s Hand was directing all these events and everything would work out to His glory.

Our agenda from the beginning was that monastic life would continue at St. John’s. The property had been acquired by “Brother” Ignatius Sudnick in 1942 and was incorporated in 1953 as the “Orthodox Catholic Christian Brotherhood of St. John Divine”. He had hoped to have a monastic brotherhood at St. John’s, but that was not meant to be. Instead, he developed an old age home that flourished there until 1976. He was very happy when a monastic brotherhood was established at St. John’s for it finally fulfilled his earlier dream. He is, in fact, buried in the monastery’s cemetery. After the old age home closed, there were a series of caretakers, which really did not work out. It was even a retreat center for a while. Fr. Alexander arrived in June 1981, with Bishop Boris’ blessing to begin a monastic community. When he arrived the grass in the yard was up to his knees and almost no money in the bank—not even enough to buy enough gas for the lawn mower. Since he had no money, he had to write to friends in Chicago for money to begin a new chapter at St. John’s.

Soon after we had talked with the fathers at Holy Cross, they asked us what would happen to our cars, the bank accounts, the items in our church goods store, etc.? We told them that it would all be theirs. They asked even more questions, as if to say, “This is too good to be true—there has to be a “catch” here somewhere”. We told them that the only “catch” was for them to live the monastic life at St. John’s, generate an income, and maintain the property—activities that are carried on in every monastery. We also said that we had asked them for the following reason: The OCA is a daughter of the Russian Orthodox Church. ROCOR is now in full communion with the Russian Church, thus making her our “sister” church. We felt that if Holy Cross took over the management of St. John’s,

it would be that the monastery had just changed “households” yet remaining within the same family. In addition, knowing our community and their community, we thought it was a healthy “fit”.

Holy Cross Monastery is a very Pan-Orthodox community using English as the liturgical language. The members come from a variety of jurisdictions from the U.S., with some coming from foreign countries. In fact, the first priest-monk that was to be assigned at St. John’s came from an OCA parish in the Diocese of the South. Also, the pilgrims that regularly keep their guesthouse full are from all jurisdictions and from all parts of the States as well as Canada. An Orthodox monastery must be under a canonical Orthodox bishop but, in truth, one may say that Orthodox monasteries are “supra-jurisdictional” since they are composed of a variety of members from different backgrounds and serve a variety of the faithful from all parts of the Orthodox world.

Our next task was to approach the OCA with this proposal. Since our bishop was on a leave of absence, we talked this over with our good friend, Fr. John Zdinak, the chancellor of the diocese. He thought it was a good plan, seeing no other viable alternative. As chancellor, Fr. John has always cared for St. Johns and its future. He has always been very proactive, sharing with both Archbishop Job and Bishop Matthias his concern for St. John’s future since its present members were getting older and there were no young prospects on the horizon. He promised to talk with His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon in February when they were together for a meeting in Chicago. We anticipated some response from Syosset within a few weeks, but were saddened that there was only silence. If the OCA chancery had some workable plan, some viable alternative, we were eager to hear it.

It was also at this time that the monks from Holy Cross, who were selected to possibly repopulate St. John’s, started to visit to acquaint themselves with the day-to-day activities of the monastery. They knew that they had to make a careful study of the place, how things worked, where things were, etc. We couldn’t just leave the “key under the door mat” and expect the new fathers to walk in one day and become responsible for St. John’s the next. Both communities understood that there had to be a workable plan for a seamless transfer of St. John’s to another community.

As the spring progressed, we were informed that both His Beatitude, Metropolitan Hilarion of ROCOR and His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon would be serving together at St. Tikhon’s Pilgrimage at the end of May. Father Alexander wrote an e-mail to Metropolitan Tikhon telling him of his desire to retire as abbot as well as to retire to a monastery in Ukraine. He also stated that he hoped that the two hierarchs could talk about the proposed transfer of the monastery while they were both at the pilgrimage. Although both were present at the pilgrimage, we were saddened that the topic was not brought up for discussion.

We were encouraged to know that the clergy of the Cleveland Deanery supported the proposed transfer. The topic came up during one

of their summer meetings, and most enthusiastically supported the plan, seeing no other viable alternative. St. John's has played an active role in the "Orthodox presence" of Northeast Ohio for two generations: as a home for the elderly, retreat center, and monastery; and they wanted that presence to continue and flourish. They did have two questions: Would they as priests be welcomed to come to the monastery and would the faithful also be able to come as in the past? The fathers at Holy Cross assured us that the OCA priests and pilgrims would always be welcome to come to St. John's just as before.

We were overjoyed in July when we heard that His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon would be visiting us. Now we could have a much needed and open discussion. He said that he was "not opposed to our plan for transfer of the monastery in theory" since the OCA presently had a very good relationship with ROCOR, but it would be "complicated and might involve input from the Holy Synod". Yet, on the other hand, he could not make any decisions on the matter since he was the Metropolitan and this was a diocesan monastery. Also, at this time, Father Alexander again informed His Beatitude of his desire to resign as abbot and retire to a monastery in Ukraine. He also told him the planned date of his retirement and departure. His Beatitude assured Fr. Alexander that his request would not be a problem. His visit was very pleasant and cordial but nothing was decided. He promised he would pray for us and for the final resolution of this proposal. As promised, on August 1st, Fr. Alexander wrote and sent His Grace, Bishop Alexander, and His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon his petition for retirement and transfer to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate.

Our departure date of September 8th was fast approaching and still we had heard nothing from New York. Fr. John Zdinak was constantly telling them that we were "REALLY" leaving and some decisions had to be made. He knew that if we left and no monks were present to take over the monastery, all the responsibility would fall on him and the deanery. That would mean responsibility for insurance bills, taxes, utilities, maintenance, security and salary for a caretaker, etc., but with a greatly reduced income there would soon be no funds for all of that. The only viable plan was for the monks from Holy Cross to come so that there would be a continuity of monastic life at the monastery with young and energetic monks.

As monastics we felt compelled to fulfill our moral and fiduciary responsibilities of what was entrusted to us by Brother Ignatius and all the faithful who had given their time, gifts, and donations to support the monastery's existence over the past 32 years. Therefore, on August 20th, with the blessing of our *Locum Tenens*, His Grace, Bishop Alexander, the board of the not-for-profit Corporation of the Orthodox Catholic Christian Brotherhood of Saint John Divine (also known as St. John's Monastery), elected new board members and officers to replace the soon to retire officers: Fr. Alexander, Fr. Daniel and Fr. Peter Pawlack. The officers newly elected are: His Grace, Bishop George of Mayfield, Fr. Seraphim, Fr.

Alexander and Fr. Nektarios of Holy Cross Monastery. Since the monastery's deed said nothing about the old Russian Metropolia, the OCA, Diocese of the Midwest, Ohio Deanery or Cleveland Deanery, etc., the transfer was made easier and thus completed. The deed was in the name of the not-for-profit corporation. There were also stipulations in the deed that said if the property was not used for religious and other purposes, the property would revert to the Sudnick family.

You have now read the report of the process by which St. John's Monastery came under the *omophor* of His Holiness, Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia. This report is being composed in Mlinov, Ukraine, at the Monastery of the Holy Ascension and you are reading it due to the modern "miracle" of e-mail. Looking back, it is another miracle that within 11 months of Fr. Alexander's desire to retire, that we find ourselves in a monastery in the heart of Volynia—the Holy Land of Ukraine—and that monastic life continues at St. John's Monastery. Only God's Hand could have arranged all these disparate parts of a puzzle to create this final unified whole. In closing, dear brothers and sisters, our friends, we implore you to pray to the most Holy Theotokos—the Mother of God who was entrusted by our Lord to the Holy Apostle and Evangelist, John the Theologian—that she will protect, guide, console, and strengthen the brotherhood of St. John's Monastery, its pilgrims, and all the Orthodox of Northeast Ohio.

Since the last Assembly the following are the major expenditures for maintenance of the monastery:

- 1. The guesthouse has been covered by vinyl siding.**
- 2. The guesthouse outside benches have been replaced and stained.**
- 3. The outside window frames of the guesthouse have been painted.**
- 4. The guest room on the first floor of the monastery has been repaired**
- 5. The plaster of the outer wall, damaged by leaking, has been removed**
- 6. Insulation has been placed into the space where there was nothing before.**
- 7. A new wall was constructed to replace the old one.**
- 8. The walls and ceiling of the room were repainted.**

For the near future:

- 1. The three other rooms in that old section of the monastery will need to be insulated also.**
- 2. The room above the guest room, also damaged by water leaks, will need to have the floor covering (presently tiles) replaced and some plaster work.**
- 3. The shingles on the roof of the main monastery building will need to be replaced within a year.**
- 4. The outside fire escape needs to be repainted.**
- 5. The barn, chapel in the woods, hermitage and riverside building need to be sprayed with wood preservative or painted.**

6. To ensure the longevity of the hermitage's shingles and roof, a tree needs to be cut down that's too close to that building.
7. The roof of the garage will need to be replaced in a year or so.

This year, as in the past, we have welcomed worshipers, pilgrims, and groups to the monastery as well as shoppers to our store. With your help this will continue.

Bless us and forgive us,

**Respectfully submitted, Archimandrite Alexander, former abbot
Retired at Holy Ascension Monastery Mlinov, Ukraine,
with Monk Daniel, cell attendant**