

ADDRESS OF THE BISHOP
54th DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY
Atlanta, Georgia
July 20, 2015

It is an honor for me to stand before you today to offer my first report as your Diocesan Bishop to this 54th Annual Assembly of the Diocese of the Midwest.

Since arriving here in August of 2014 and with my recent consecration in December of 2014, my life has drastically changed. Prior to August of last year, I led a very simple life owning little and was the priest of a small church in Toledo. I now oversee over 75 parishes. I travel constantly; lots of people come to me asking for blessings to do certain things and asking for direction on various matters. So I am still going through an adjustment phase in this new life I have embarked upon. I would like to begin by making some general comments on life in our diocese.

What I have most enjoyed thus far in my episcopal ministry has been parish visitation. I have really made an effort to get to know the parish as opposed to just going to do Vespers on Saturday, Liturgy on Sunday, and then leave after having a bagel or a donut. My visitations have involved taking the priest and his wife out to dinner, meeting with the parish council, and visiting outreach programs related to the Church. I even visited the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland last April. I was awarded a cheese hat when I went to Green Bay in March! What I have learned in all of these visits is that there is a lot of good will in our diocese. I am very grateful for the kindness and hospitality that has been extended to me by everyone whether clergy or lay people. This has helped a whole lot when having to deal with the downside of traveling; lugging luggage around and dealing with late flights. There is a lot of good work being done by many parishes in the diocese by very dedicated people of which I am thankful to God for. By the late winter of next year I will have visited every parish in the diocese at least once. I would now like to turn to some specific issues.

At the Diocesan Council Meeting in January of this year, I identified four areas of concern that need attention in the short term. I would like to report on those four areas in terms of progress.

The sexual misconduct guidelines of the OCA

We are nearing the end of phase one of implementing the Guidelines on Sexual Misconduct issued by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America. That phase consists of obtaining background checks on all priests and deacons of the diocese. I am very pleased with the response here. This phase will be coming to a close in September of this year. After that those who have not obtained those checks will be contacted directly to firmly address this concern. Phase two will involve obtaining background checks on the minor orders in the church (sub-deacons and readers). The last phase will involve developing an overall screening program for church school and

youth workers. I would like to see this begin sometime in spring of 2016. We are still waiting to hear from Cindy Heise of ORSMA* regarding what this screening program involves. But that clarification will come well before we start phase three of the implementation. To help us in this process we had Bob Koory, legal consultant to SMPAC*, and Cindy Heise come to our Clergy Convocation last May to educate us on the importance of these Guidelines and why we need to have them as part of our parish life.

*Office of Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations

*Sexual Misconduct Policy Advisory Committee

Stewardship and finances

The 2012 Diocesan Assembly passed a resolution to investigate the idea of moving to a proportional giving formula as a way to support the life of the Diocese as opposed to a per capita head tax. In March of this year a committee was formed to follow up on this resolution. Simeon Morbey is the chairperson of the workgroup. Fr. Nicholas Finley, Daria Petrykowski, Gerald Roberts, and Warren Griggs were also appointed. Since last May the group has been meeting regularly and Fr. Nicholas Finley will give a summary of that work later on in today's meeting. I am looking forward to that continued work. I have one observation to make. If we do move to a proportional giving formula, this will not work unless people practice this same way of giving in their local parishes. There will be an important discussion on this same topic during the sessions of this week's All American Council.

Mission Committee

There will be a concerted effort in the next three to six months to get the Mission Committee back in operation. Last April two people, Fr. Joel Weir, and Gator Greenwill attended an intense Mission Training School in Detroit offered by the Central Administration. We hope to utilize what they learned from that experience in the development of new missions, and ongoing growth of current missions. During the All American Council the Mission Group will meet to continue its work. Joe Kormos will be joining us to help the Mission Committee in terms of whether we adopt a structure similar to what was used in the past or whether a new direction is needed. Fr. Tom Mueller continues as the chairperson of this committee.

Relationship between the Diocese and Christ the Savior Church

In the last year the Bishop along with the Diocesan Council has begun to explore a separation of Christ the Savior from the Diocese with it possibly resulting in a long-term plan of the Diocese relocating elsewhere. Earlier in the year with the Bishop's blessing, the Diocesan Council authorized the Chancellor of the Diocese to contact Christ the Savior with an offer to purchase the church and the adjoining residence from the Diocese. Christ the Savior did not accept that initial offer. However Christ the Savior has indicated a willingness to form a group to meet with Diocesan Council members to further look at other options that can be considered.

I wish to make some comments here. Over the years I realize there have been concerns raised over the nature of the relationship between the Diocese and Christ the Savior. But there are a couple of things that need to be clarified. This is a diocesan issue.

Archbishop Job of blessed memory did have a vision and he had strong convictions about pursuing the La Salle Street property in the late 1990's. The Diocese approved his desire to purchase the property for \$1 and expend the needed funds to renovate it. Both Archbishop Job and Bishop Matthias gave clear direction to maintain the current reality. As you know Archbishop Job directed Christ the Savior to begin a major iconography project that is now complete. The funds for doing this were all generated by Christ the Savior (about \$300,000). I bring these things up to call people's attention to the fact that Christ the Savior is not the problem here. In the year I have been here I have heard comments made that Christ the Savior is getting a "free ride." I reject that notion and have actively worked to discourage that kind of characterization of the issue. Christ the Savior has experienced significant growth over the last seven years. I attend services there and I see a very energetic community that gives sacrificially to make things work.

I realize as your bishop I have blessed a plan that may take us in a different path from the direction of our previous hierarchs. Two main issues motivate me. First, there is a stewardship issue. Since obtaining the property in the late 1990's the diocese has spent over 1.8 million dollars on the maintenance, renovation, and improvement of the church and the residential building. The diocese in 2008 took out a two hundred fifty thousand dollar loan for necessary repairs/renovation to take place. More work will probably be required but I can't speak with any authority here. In light of other needs our diocesan budget is responsible for; can we address those needs and continue as we are? I don't believe so. We are taking on more than we can chew at this point. The second issue is that Christ the Savior is a growing community. I believe they can make better use of the residential building next door for their use instead of diocesan use. I see a lot of potential for continued growth to occur with Christ the Savior taking on the complete care and of the church and residence as its "steward." Given these two realities, this is what I want to see happen.

I strongly endorse the continued dialogue between Christ the Savior and the Diocesan Council over the possible sale of the church and residence and resulting in the separation of Christ the Savior from the Diocese. I will not bless any solution that would involve the Diocese selling the church and/or the residence that would adversely impact on Christ the Savior. I see nothing good coming out of that option. Dependent on what transpires in dialogue between Christ the Savior and the Diocese, my thinking might change in the future.

Liturgical matters

At this point I am still not prepared to issue any diocesan wide directives on such matters. I think I need another year of learning through dialogue and visitation of parishes to better understand the current dynamics of the Midwest Diocese. Should any clergy have questions about liturgical practices in their church and require direction,

they are to contact me directly and I will address those issues with them. There are however some thoughts I have on certain values or principles that will guide me in addressing liturgical order in the Diocese.

When I was a priest in the diocese for 13 years, I did perform Vespereal Liturgies and Baptismal Liturgies on a regular basis. I don't have a problem with them myself. However from my experience in the Bulgarian Diocese in the OCA, I have learned to become more "pastoral" and less "dogmatic" in discerning the appropriateness of those services. Thus once I do issue any directives here, they will emphasize the pastoral dimension of the use of those services and the need for me to trust that the priest of the parish knows his people and what is best for them. Secondly good order and consistency will be important in what I come up with. Thus, I want to see one order for a Vespereal Liturgy or a Baptismal Liturgy and not several different versions of it. I would like to see one authorized "You" form for services, and one authorized "Thou" form; not two or three different versions of them. I don't know how I am going to get there yet, but at least I wanted to let you know my current thinking. Finally, I do believe that priests should respect previous practices of a parish when they become newly assigned to one. Thus if the parish prays in the "You" form that needs to be respected not changed. The same goes for parishes that pray in the "Thou" form. Musical traditions and church school practices need to be respected and not immediately changed. Whether it is in language, music, or church school, change should only happen after a long period of time where the priest has established a pastoral relationship with their parish and has earned the trust of the parish. It should be addressed in a hierarchical/conciliar manner and not just by the priest or parish dictating the change. Time needs to be given to prepare people for change before implementing change.

Eventually I will also speak to the issue of clergy attire and dress. With the advent of the Sexual Misconduct Guidelines, I offer the following that will impact on matters of attire in the tonsuring of readers and ordination of sub-deacons. I have already given directives to readers I tonsure that they only wear their cassock on days they are fulfilling their ministry to be a reader. When it comes to sub-deacons I will only ordain someone to the sub-diaconate if they intend to function as one in a hierarchical service. I will still bless someone to wear the orarion but will direct him to wear it as servers do in the byzantine practice. I will view him as a senior altar server and not as a sub-deacon blessed to wear the orarion. I know many have been blessed to wear the orarion as a sub-deacon by previous bishops. I need to do some more thinking about how I will address that. If you have any questions to ask here please do. We recently did a workshop in Livonia, MI on training people to serve hierarchical liturgies. I was very pleased with this. It took three hours to complete. That even allowed time for people to practice vesting with the long omophorion; the greatest challenge to being a sub-deacon! I would like to see this happen in all of our deaneries. One is scheduled for Chicago in October of this year.

Other areas to focus on

In the future I would like to see our diocesan assembly and clergy convocation take on a more spiritual/educational focus as part of our time together. We have made some strides in doing so with the convocation in that we have agendas planned for the next four years. This will enable us to plan better and locate speakers in advance as opposed to doing so at the last minute.

We need to take a look at how we store our various files and documents. I have concerns that they are not stored in a proper environment. We need to make use of digitalizing our documents to lessen the space they take up. We have been in communication with Nicholas Groves who did archive work for the Diocese several years ago. He has submitted a report as to how we can proceed on this topic in the next two years. I would like see us follow through on that report. We need to make more frequent use of the internet to have meetings on line related to diocesan projects and life. Two things have been done to further assist here. We now use Cisco Web Ex for web meetings that seem to work better than Skype. Secondly we have improved our internet connections to decrease the prospect of video freezing and audio disruption.

Finally, today and in the years to come our church faces a challenge in how we bear witness to the Gospel of our Lord in a world that has becoming increasingly more diverse, polarized, and secular; where many may no longer believe and accept traditional church teachings on various issues. The polarization greatly concerns me. I am troubled by extreme viewpoints that ally church teaching with one's political ideology and judge others as not being "Orthodox" because they don't believe in that political ideology. Jesus was neither a "conservative" nor a "liberal" and yet he was both a "conservative" and a "liberal." He was neither a "capitalist" nor a "socialist" and was both a "capitalist" and a "socialist." In regards to the recent Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage, I want to hold both my recent statement on the issue in conjunction with Metropolitan Tikhon's statement issued several days after I shared mine. One without the other is incomplete.

I wish to end here by expressing my thankfulness to the Chancellor, Deans, and Diocesan Secretary for their hard work and support in overseeing the many needs of the life of our Diocese. Thanks to all the clergy and parishes that have been so kind to me. I only hope that I can continue to behave in a manner that will enable me to earn your trust and make it easier for you to give me your obedience; especially as I embark on providing more active direction regarding the life of our diocese in the years to come.

+Paul, Bishop of Chicago, Diocese of the Midwest