

WILL WE INCREASE THE TALENT GIVEN TO US OR WILL WE BURY IT?

This is an important time in the life of our Diocese. Tomorrow we will be making a decision on whether we want to embrace another method of funding the work of our Diocese. Before discussing that, I need to update you on that work. Two years ago I spoke to you about where I would like to see our Diocese go in terms of vision and direction. “Sowing the seeds of the gospel in the age of the New Normal” was the theme of my address.

What have we done thus far as a Diocese in the process to make this vision a reality? There are several areas I would like to address, Support of Clergy, Parishes, and Missions, Family Support, and Youth Events.

Support of Clergy and Parishes, and Missions

During my parish visits, I make a point to have dinner on the Diocese with the Priest and his Matushka as part of the visit. This is my small way of staying connected and being able to say thanks. I also make a habit of informally meeting with church council members, or with youth groups when possible. I have found these times to be most beneficial to me.

In the last few years, we have been able to provide financial support for several clergy needing therapy who could not afford it or in one case split the cost of the therapy 50%. We were also able to provide some short-term assistance with for a clergyman rent until he could move into a more suitable residence.

Finally by the end of the year I will introduce the “St. John of Chicago” award. This will be a Diocesan award to priests who have served for 45+ years and have been known for their remarkable service in particular to the Diocese as well as the rest of the OCA. The award consists of a jeweled cross with the icon of St. John in the middle. Two of the awards will be presented by the end of the year.

In two parishes that have been in decline we have supplemented the income of clergy involving \$10,000 to \$15,000 grants. This is because there has been a focus on a growth oriented, mission oriented approach. The church under the guidance of the priest is seeking a new direction and not maintaining the status quo. The vision is not to just keep the doors open. The parishes are seeking to serve the local community and to take the gospel to new areas

In the St. Macrina’s Late Vocation Program and in other scenarios, I have established a policy of splitting the cost of Psychological evaluations with parishes for people in the program on track to become deacons or others seeking the priesthood. These evaluations can cost anywhere from \$800 to \$1500 depending on the area. Health insurance won’t cover them. It doesn’t make sense to put the cost of this on the candidate as they are already paying for the St. Macrina classes. By splitting the cost 50/50 with the parish the

person to be ordained may be serving, it eases the burden on everyone. This year alone I have ordained five people to the Diaconate. Fr. Elijah Mueller will update you more the work of St. Macrina's in his report.

Finally for our priests serving in missions or parishes in decline we have been able to provide small gifts of \$500 to \$1000 as a small way of acknowledging their sacrifice. There was a three-hour mission retreat held yesterday with expenses being covered by the Diocese. Two presentations were offered followed by discussion.

Regarding mission work, the Diocese in the last two years has established two chapel communities under a mother parish. We are also exploring the prospect of planting a mission in Farmington, MO. We hope to utilize the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church Desloge, MO as a location as it has been unused for the last two years. Desloge is a 10 to 15 minute drive to Farmington. Our Mission Committee chaired by Joe Kormos (Parish and Mission Development Consultant) is working to be more thoughtful and strategic in terms of identifying areas for further mission planting. We meet 4 to 6 times a year.

Family Life Activity

In January of 2017 I issued an Encyclical on Family life outlining a vision of understanding the family as a little church and speaking to the development of a Diocesan Website devoted to family life. In April of this year, "Orthodox Family Life" went on line. This continues to be a developing project. We are slowly adding more features to this. This could take another year or two before it is where I would like it to be. Thus far, here are the features of the website:

- Weekly short reflections by me on various aspects of family life, contemporary issues, spirituality, fasting and the like
- Guest articles by people addressing similar issues
- Live Stream sessions with Fr. Jacob Van Sickle and I through U Tube where I can speak directly to family life issues with people in the Diocese. They in turn can submit questions through a chat forum. These are being done every 6 weeks depending on my travel schedule.
- We have been able to supply some small stipends to people who submit articles and to those who have an ongoing role in the development of the website.
- Listing of resources related to family life, announcements on family life retreats/events
- Thanks to the team of "Orthodox Family Life" who is making this possible:
 - Editorial Board
 - Bishop Paul
 - Fr. Jacob Van Sickle (Family Page Manager)
 - Janet Ames
 - Adam Lockridge
 - Consulting Editor: Fr. John Matusiak (DOM Communications)
 - Webmaster: Stacy Sennott

Youth Activity

Since 2016 the Diocese has actively been involved in three youth events. In July of 2016 we co-sponsored a Youth Retreat with FOCA at its annual convention in Chicago. In October of 2017 the Diocese held a "Virtual Youth Retreat" with our youth in four locations in the Diocese. The topic focused on the Youth Vision Statement presented at the 2015 All American Council in Atlanta. This attracted close to 60 registrants. Using modern technology, I was able to speak to these locations and all the groups saw and interacted with each other. I think this vehicle was more successful in bringing kids together in a non-camp setting than trying to bring people together in one location. In November of 2018 another "Virtual Youth Retreat" on the theme #IAMORTHODOX will be held in six locations (Chicago, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Detroit, and Cleveland, and Dayton). I want to thank Fr. Benjamin Tucci for all of the work he has done to make these events happen.

Speaking of Camp, during the month of July and early August, of this year, I visited St. Vladimir's Camp in Farmdale, OH, the Minneapolis Pan Orthodox Camp, and the Kansas City Pan Orthodox Camp. Next year my plan will be to visit St. John's Camp and the Chicago Deanery Camp. It is hard to get to all of them each year. It was wonderful to be at all these camps. I am always amazed to see the bonds of friendship that are built and sustained through these camp experiences.

I summarized the above activities to illustrate how the Diocese is using its resources to help build up and strengthen people's life in Christ.

Looking Ahead

So what do the coming years hold for us? First I would like the "Orthodox Family Life" website to continue to mature and develop. I want to solicit more guest articles from people to submit for publication on the website related to the theme of the "Family as a Little Church." I would like the quality of the live stream sessions to improve by maybe allowing for people to call in and ask their questions directly. There are many issues this website can continue to address and explore related to family life. But to do this requires resources. The proposed 2019 budget allows for funds to further enable the website to grow and develop.

In the area of Youth I would like to see the Diocese allocate funding for a Youth Liaison in the Diocese. I don't see this as a Youth Director position. But in light of the events at the All American Council related to funding for a Youth Director in the Central Administration, we need to have someone identified here in the Diocese available to work with that person when that comes together. This person could also interact with Youth Ministers in local parishes or deaneries who are promoting events and improve communication in getting the work out about youth events. Finally there was discussion several years ago about developing a "DOM Youth App" that could facilitate communication among our youth. It hasn't gone anywhere yet, but I haven't given up on it.

We have so many talented people in our Diocese who are choir directors, or composers. I believe we have done a poor job of seeking out these people and bringing them together to establish a ministry for Liturgical Music in the Diocese of the Midwest. I would love to see accomplished music people go into small parishes and missions and provide training and support to people leading the music. People often step into these positions with minimal preparation and training. This is a wish list, we have no money allocated for this right now, but it needs to be addressed.

In looking ahead, I finally need to share with you that I need a Kellenik who can regularly travel with me and work in the office for two days. I just turned 65 this year and this body just can't do what it used to do five years ago. The need to work in the office for two days is important. We have many things such as parish reports, financial reports, bylaws updates, and compliance issues with the PSP's of the OCA that require monitoring. I need someone who can oversee all of this. Philip does my correspondence, bookkeeping duties, and event planning. He is currently responsible for PSP compliance issues but this is too much to do. Fr. Joel Wilson has developed a program to assist in monitoring administrative tasks in areas related to compliance of any kind. I would like to see my possible aide use this program as part of his work.

How do we make this happen?

We make this happen by passing the Stewardship proposal, and the 2019 Budget at tomorrow's session. By doing so we will increase our talent. The proposal is a way forward that changes our approach to funding the work of Diocese. It is honest and based on reality. It will enable us to do more than just survive and keep the doors open; to do more than just maintain the status quo. I strongly believe the percentage-giving proposal needs to be the direction we move in. No more worrying about membership numbers and how that will affect the assessment. Last year I spoke to you about funding the Diocese on the two mites of the widow that Jesus speaks about in the gospel. David Batrich spoke to us about stewardship on a personal level. My intent in last year's address and having David Batrich come in was to lay a good foundation for this proposal to be built on. When we approach our stewardship with the heart of the widow with the two mites, and the approach Mr. Batrich spoke of, we can develop a healthy understanding of stewardship in all levels of church life.

The parishes that are doing well in the Diocese teach and encourage healthy stewardship practices. They no longer worry about some sort of minimum donation to prove you are a member in good standing. They just tell their people to do the best they can and they realize giving takes place on different levels. It is not just about money. In taking this approach these parishes seem to end up in the black each year.

The 2019 Budget is forward looking and growth oriented. It seeks to provide resources to improve the ministerial life of the Diocese and keep it healthy. It is growth oriented providing resources to assist clergy, families, and youth, and mission work.

I want to take this time to acknowledge and thank Simeon Morbey (Stewardship Task Force Chair), Michael Strelka, Gerald Roberts, Daria Petrykowski (of blessed memory), Warren Griggs, Dan Herzag, Barry Gluntz, Rob Koncel (Diocesan Treasurer), Fr. Nicholas Finley, and Fr. John Zdinak. They have worked hard over the last three years in developing a method of gathering information for analysis and to get us to the point that we can come to you with this proposal.

The man who buries his talent in the gospel parable

Here is my concern. We need to guard against the person in us that would seek to bury one's talent out of fear and mistrust. This person may have a cynical, mistrustful view towards the world. Thus the temptation to hold on to what one has for fearing of losing it. And because of that tight grip, what one has slips through one's fingers and is lost. This person can exist in a bishop, or his clergy; this person can exist in a parish council, or treasurer; this person can be overly clerical not trusting in lay people; this person can be congregational harboring resentment and mistrust towards clergy.

Concluding remarks

Let us move forward behaving like the people who with faith are dedicated to increasing the talent(s) given them. Let us flee from the temptation to behave and think like the man who buried his talent. Let us continue to approach the work of the Diocese in spirit of the following words of St. Gregory the Great regarding the Parable of the Talents:

"The faithful servant is put in charge of many things after overcoming all the troubles brought him by perishable things. He glories in the eternal joys of his heavenly dwelling. He is brought completely into the joy of his master when he is taken into his eternal home and joined to the company of angels. His inner joy at his gift is such that there is no longer any external perishable thing that can cause him sorrow."

If we can fund and embark on the work of the Diocese with this spirit, I can only see good things happening. Thank you for being so patient with me and bearing with my inadequacies.

With love in Christ, the unworthy +Paul