

WE FORGE ON, 2020 Assembly Address

The above words “We forge on” come from Fr. Thomas Hopko. He often used those words while I was at Seminary. They are the best words I can think of to describe our life in the Diocese at this annual assembly. In between the Pandemic, the tensions over the shootings of some Afro Americans, and the resulting consequences, both have made life stressful and leaving us weary. But we persevere and forge on.

I was saddened to hear about President Trump’s recent covid diagnosis and some of his close staff and senators. I hope and pray for a good recovery to our President, who has been discharged from the hospital, and those who work with him. For me this further reinforces the idea of how important it is to wear a mask and practice social distancing as a way to lessen the likelihood of passing on the virus to others. I have recently shared with many of you that the way forward is not to think we will defeat Covid-19, but how do we learn to live with it? Until there is a vaccine that comes our way, there is no defeating the virus. So in light of learning to live with Covid 19, I would like speak on how we are forging on in the Diocese.

As a way to expand the number of people who can go to church, I have allowed churches to use their hall space for people to attend and live stream the service to the hall. The priest then goes to meet the people in the hall with communion at the church or hall entrance. People still social distance and wear masks as they are indoors. In some cases, we have been able to double the attendance at Sunday liturgy (based on the size of the hall and church). In large churches, this approach may not be necessary. Attendance limits in the church nave currently range from 8 to 60 people.

In late August I also sent out a letter to rectors about church school. Whenever possible it is better for church school to be done outdoors. But with the weather getting colder, it looks as if church school will need to meet indoors (if you aren’t meeting virtually). In those cases classrooms have to be properly disinfected and cleaned, children 5 and over need to wear masks along with teachers, and social distancing needs to be maintained. It would be better to schedule church school on another day than Sunday given liturgy and social hour that takes place.

Finally for a good part of the summer I did bless a social hour with only

refreshments meeting outdoors. Recently I also allowed packaged snacks to be included. This has worked out well. I understand how important it is for people to meet and get caught up with each other on how they are doing. Yet again, with the weather getting colder, we will need to look at how we can safely have social hour indoors. I think we need to treat our halls we gather in as restaurants when it comes to social hour. When you go into a restaurant, you sit at the table to eat your meal, and the masks come off. But when you get up to walk around the masks go on. People need to be seated with appropriate social distancing. For now, we need to continue with hot and cold refreshments, and packaged snacks. In the event there is a need for a special meal, it should be catered and served as a boxed meal to be given per person. So we have come a long way since early April where we basically shut down serving with a skeleton crew of five and live streaming.

One final thing I will be addressing with clergy will be a return to venerating icons and kissing them. However people will need to have a sanitizing wipe to clean the icon and move on to the next icon to sanitize that after venerating the icon with the same wipe. Caution needs to be taken on using painted icons that cannot handle the sanitized wipe. This is a baby step forward from bowing and not touching the icon.

As to how people are responding to this virus, most parishes have the usual gamut of responses. Either people are afraid to go to church no matter what precautions are taken and they are not ready to come back. Or people refuse to go to church because they have to wear a mask. Some have left their parishes to go to other churches where there are no restrictions. I would say the majority of people in our parishes don't particularly like to wear masks, but they understand the need to and why, and thus, freely comply with this directive, and they are supportive.

I resumed travel to visit parishes on July 4th of this year. My previous travel to visit a parish was March 25th. I was visiting parishes in the Chicago area between late March and the end of June. So I had a lot of catching up to do with parishes that I canceled out on and taking care of a backlog of clergy awards that need to be given. Resuming these visits has been very uplifting to me. To get direct feedback from people whether I wanted to hear it or not has been wonderful. I just returned from a visit from St. Paul, in Dayton, which was a great experience. The rector's almost three-year-old daughter befriended me

and I asked her if she wanted to be my buddy and she said yes! In early September I was able to ordain Deacon Phillip Maikkula to the priesthood (my first hierarchical service since Theophany of this year). He is now serving St. Makarios in Hyde Park. I am especially thankful to Mason Baker, my Keleinik who has been a big help in the driving.

I want to close this phase of my report on Covid 19 by briefly speaking on where we are headed. When I was in Fargo, ND, the last weekend in August, a young girl online, asked me “When is the virus going to be over?” In other words when can we get back to normal? This question came up during my recent visit to Dayton. We all want to get back to normal including myself. However we can’t go back to how it was last year to define normal. A year ago we were all innocent and unaware of Covid 19. We have experienced a radical change in our lives these last seven months (even those churches having little restrictions) and the Pandemic is still not over. We were reminded of this in a very clear way with our Commander and Chief being recently diagnosed with Covid 19 and needing to be hospitalized. It is not possible for us act like this never happened. Instead of going back to define normalcy we need to look forward to see what we will become. As you can see by my above summary we have been taking baby steps to move forward and figure out how we get to a place of being normal. As we move forward, social distancing and wearing a mask will need to continue probably until a vaccine is made available. But to use Fr. Hopko’s words, we will continue to forge on.

I would now like to speak on other aspects of Diocesan life that gives me hope for the future. I remarked in an August video address that the Diocese is not laying down and playing dead. We are truly forging on with some good experiences to share with you.

The Diocesan Web Page starts with an important word, “Equipping the Saints for the Work of Ministry.” It is my thought that in working with the Diocesan Council we are doing just that. There are a few areas I want to speak on.

Liturgical Ministry

I reached out to nine or ten competent music people in our diocese to help formulate an approach to working with our parishes that need help in the way of liturgical music and improving on the quality of singing in our churches. We have had four meetings thus far. A survey was created and shared to find out

from our parishes what their needs are. The results of this survey are still being assessed. Protinica Michelle Jannakos and Khouria Jennifer Sawchak are co-chairing this effort.

Multicultural Ministry

I don't particularly like the term "multicultural", as it doesn't quite address what I am speaking to. On September 29th, I met with nine people from the Diocese of the Midwest of diverse backgrounds, some Hispanic, some Afro Americans, an Asian person, and a couple of White people as well! We basically discussed how our parishes remain mostly white in demographics and that we don't seem to do too well with people who are of black or brown skin. The discussion moved toward adopting an internal approach and looking at our own prejudices we might still harbor however subtle they may be. This led to a need to develop some kind of an educational seminar that might help us to look at this issue. Then an external part needs to focus on providing resources that would better enable our parishes to reach out to people of brown or black color (i.e. musical resources, liturgical books in Spanish etc.). Again this is a work in process. I want to thank Fr. Esteban Vazquez for the leadership he has provided in getting this group together.

Priestly and Mission Development

The Mission Committee has met for quite a while to look at the development of Missions in the Diocese. Currently there is a serious effort going on to start a mission in the South Bend, IN area. There is a former graduate of St. Tikhon's who along with his wife who are living there now. They appear to be highly motivated to do this work and my eventual plan would be to ordain him to continue the development of the mission there. There are about 18 people who have expressed interest in this endeavor. There is also an inquirer's group meeting in the Muncie, IN area that meets for Vespers once a month. At the last service there were 10 people in attendance. We also have plans to start an outreach in Aurora, IL but the Pandemic has made it difficult to proceed.

What has become apparent is that there is a connection between missions, priests who go there to serve them, and new students coming out of seminary. We also have built up a cash reserve from the dividends from the Mission endowment fund. As of today the Missions Special Projects Fund is at about 137K (this does not include special donations temporarily deposited there for special purposes). It is my desire to see this money used for the purpose of

supporting new missions and being able to supplement a priest's income with a yearly stipend (for how long has not been determined).

In order to do this I want to meet with Joe Kormos and our mission committee to tweak the purpose of this group to include priest support. I have not been able to do so yet due to working with other groups. My plan is to meet with this group before the Nativity Fast

Youth Ministry

I would like to see more efforts made in the area of Youth Ministry in conjunction with the Family Ministry web page in the future. Currently Erin Moulton is the Youth Liaison for the Diocese. She works to inform our youth, of activities and events held throughout Orthodox Churches in the Midwest. This is done largely through the Facebook Youth Page for the Midwest. We are also currently looking at another application to help communicate events more efficiently. Along with Erin, Fr. Benjamin Tucci of St. Mary's, and Fr. Jacob Van Sickle (Family Page Director), we are working to make sure we don't duplicate what we are doing with youth and efforts made in the Family Ministry web page.

Mother Maria of Paris Charitable Ministry of the DOM

Fr Jonathan Lincoln has done a wonderful job organizing and promoting this ministry. Since its inception we have assisted such ministries as Orthodox Detroit Outreach, FOCUS Minnesota, and most recently a donation of 20k made to St. Herman's House (FOCUS Cleveland) to build a greenhouse. Fr. Jonathan can speak to the greenhouse and its purpose if you have any questions. Currently Mother Maria is seeking to raise \$1500 to support an outreach ministry of St. Gregory of Nyssa church in Columbus, OH. The challenge of this ministry is that it has been difficult soliciting donations from people in the Diocese. I don't know the reason for this, but this leads me to discuss the following matter.

Development Director

In all of the above ministry groups that are beginning to form, it is important each group does the following.

- To develop a specific plan of action as to how we are going to do the things we are talking about in each ministry and implement the plan with goals/outcomes.

- How much is it going to cost to fund each ministry?

With that information in hand, I can then go to the Diocesan Council to request we fund a position for a part time Development Director whose focus would be to solicit gifts from sources to fund these ministries. This is not easy work and it takes patience. A Development Director needs to establish relationships with people to present the work of our diocese and solicit support. This could even involve asking people to leave money in their wills for the Diocese to fund this work. But there is no point in doing this without the above bullet points having been accomplished. We currently have 50k in the budget set aside for such a position. But that money (which may too much) won't be utilized until the above has taken place with concrete plans to pursue. Then a Development Director can take that to possible donors in asking for support.

I want to specifically thank Ellyn Gillette, Mary Ann Bobulsky, and Fr. Jacob Van Sickle for the work they did to explore the development of such a position, and to come up with draft of a job description for the Development Director.

Communications Director

We all miss Fr. John Matusiak; we are grateful to God, for his many years of tireless self-sacrificial service in his capacity as Communications Director for the Diocese. May his memory be eternal! But I also want to say how thankful I am that Fr. Alexander Koranda has done such a wonderful job in taking on this position. We have a new web page, with up to date postings, and much material related to Covid resources, and the 50th Autocephaly celebration despite activities being canceled due to the Pandemic. Fr. Alexander has approached this task with enthusiasm, dedication, and creativity. I also want to thank Fr. Herman Kincaid for his oversight of the Diocesan Facebook Page. Finally my thanks to Carrie Sabourin, and Fr. Joel Wilson for the leadership they provided in the formation of our new web page.

Reopening of the former Presentation Monastery in Marshfield, MO

As you know the Assembly will be voting soon on my proposal to reopen the former monastery in Marshfield. You have a detailed report from me dated September 7th that I presented to a Special Meeting of the Diocesan Council on September 15th. The council unanimously supported my proposal.

I have met extensively with Mother Alexandra (Magan) and vetted her before blessing her to go to Marshfield and continue a monastic witness. I have always

believed that we can't be healthy as a Diocese without having monasteries to support us through prayer, worship, work, and hospitality that monasteries offer. In our previous two monasteries I had concerns about how the life was ordered in terms of property, and incorporation. I am determined to see to it these mistakes do not happen again. I am enthusiastically supportive of this plan and encourage all in the Assembly to vote "Yes" on this proposal. We have the designated gift in hand and with it, we can get the monastery off the ground laying a good foundation.

In conclusion, I think life in the Diocese is going on with much good to report and also some difficulties. We are not static, laying down, and playing dead. I grieve over the losses that have come to parishes (regarding people who have left) over this Pandemic. I only wish that people would understand that my motivation in how I have directed the Diocese during this Pandemic has not been motivated by fear or self preservation, but out of love and concern for my fellow brother and sister in Christ. It saddens me to think that has not been good enough for some.

We will continue to take baby steps on the road to finding the normal we seek to establish in our parishes. The work of the Gospel and proclaiming the Good News continues. So my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we forge on.

With love in Christ, the unworthy Archbishop Paul