

REPORT OF THE MINNEAPOLIS DEANERY TO THE 62<sup>ND</sup> ASSEMBLY, DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST (OCA)  
BURR RIDGE, IL, OCT 2-4

Archpriest Paul Wesche, District Dean

1 Following upon my report to the Diocesan Assembly in Baltimore a year ago, the last time that it was held  
2 in July 2022, His Eminence and our Diocesan Chancellor met with Fr William Rettig (Holy Resurrection,  
3 Fargo, ND) and me to begin putting together a Summit meeting to craft a strategic vision for evangelizing  
4 the Dakotas, 'a field ripe for harvest.' That Summit was held in February, 2023, in Fargo, ND, in the nave of  
5 Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church in Fargo. The sun was shining brightly on a thick blanket of months-  
6 old snow; but a tunnel had been dug out by the Fargo Faithful From the parking lot to the Front door of  
7 the Church, and the meetings of the Summit proceeded as planned and on time. The meeting was called  
8 a Summit because our diocesan hierarch and our diocesan chancellor were present. More than thirty  
9 clergy and laity from Orthodox communities in the Dakotas and the North Woods of Minnesota were also  
10 present.

11 The outcome of the Summit in Fargo in February (the meeting itself has been described in some detail in  
12 an article posted on our Diocesan website last February. Fr Alex K complains that the article was too long;  
13 it broke his computer) was the establishment of the Dakotas Mission District under the omophorion of our  
14 hierarch, His Eminence, Archbishop Daniel. The DMD embraces the Antiochian Orthodox community in  
15 Bismarck, and the OCA communities in Minot and Fargo, ND, and the newly established chapel in Pierre,  
16 SD, attached to the altar of St Herman's (OCA) in South Minneapolis. But the boundaries of the DMD are  
17 porous. They welcome into their gates as well the community in Bemidji, a fairly recently established  
18 chapel attached to the altar of St Mary's Cathedral in Minneapolis, and the Serbian Orthodox community  
19 in Chisholm, MN. Since the Summit, the DMD has also opened its gates northward to southern Canada, as  
20 well as westward to the Antiochian missions that have been established in Rapid City, IA, and in Gillette,  
21 WY (and even farther west to Thermopolis, WY! All served by Fr Joseph Olas with the Antiochian  
22 Archdiocese). Since the Summit, the DMD has also received within its gates the Antiochian Orthodox  
23 communities in Sioux City, Iowa. All of this illustrates the DMD's readiness to embrace any Orthodox  
24 community in the DMD's "Land-in-between" that would wish to join in the common work of Our LORD's  
25 Gospel to evangelize the Dakotas (and beyond), because they are fields ripe for harvest.

26 To clarify, the DMD is a district established for this specific missionary/evangelistic purpose within the  
27 Minneapolis Deanery of the Diocese of the Midwest, OCA. It is under the omophorion of Archbishop  
28 Daniel; but the mission of the DMD is a collaborative effort of all the jurisdictions represented in the DMD  
29 and their respective hierarchs. The DMD is thereby an inter-jurisdictional initiative; or rather, it is an  
30 initiative of all the churches of the DMD with their hierarchs working together as the one, holy, catholic,  
31 and apostolic Church in this specific territory under the omophorion of the OCA hierarch of Chicago and  
32 the Midwest.

33 At the February Summit in Fargo, a Clergy-Laity working group of about eight clergy and laity was drawn  
34 from all those present for the purpose of organizing and facilitating events and activities that would bring  
35 together the faithful of the Orthodox communities scattered throughout the DMD's 'Land in-between.'  
36 The Clergy-Laity group works to cultivate and nurture the Eucharistic communion that unites us by putting  
37 together events and activities that would bring the Orthodox communities of the DMD together on a  
38 regular basis. Such events have already begun to happen, and have already left a positive imprint on the  
39 morale and spirit of the Orthodox communities in the DMD.

40 The Clergy-Laity working group functions as an administrative body in the DMD. But, the backbone of the  
41 DMD's ecclesial character and functionality is the Clergy Collegium. This body includes all the clergy,  
42 together with their wives, of the DMD. The Clergy Collegium was formally put together in July; a president  
43 was elected/appointed by acclamation (Dn James Ferrenberg of Holy Resurrection in Fargo), and the first  
44 meeting of the Clergy Collegium was held in Minot, ND, just over a week ago, Tues-Thurs, Sept 19-21,  
45 2023. Both His Eminence, Archbishop Daniel, and Fr Paul Jannakos, our Diocesan Chancellor were present.

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46 Their physical presence at both the Summit in February and the Clergy Collegium gathering in September  
47 signifies that the commitment of the Diocese to the Orthodox communities in the DMD's 'Land-in-  
48 between' is not theoretical; it is active and intentional. For that reason, the physical presence of our  
49 diocesan hierarch and our diocesan chancellor at the gatherings of the DMD has been simply *huge*, as in  
50 *really, really big!* The *whole* Church has been present because they were there. Their physical presence is  
51 the biggest reason this evangelical initiative has generated such a high level of optimistic excitement in the  
52 clergy and laity of the DMD communities.

53 The primary purpose of the Clergy Collegium is simply to give formal, organized structure to a Clergy  
54 brotherhood (and sisterhood – because it includes the wives!) of all those serving the Church and Her  
55 faithful in the DMD. The intention is for the Clergy Collegium to meet in person annually with, ideally, the  
56 Diocesan Hierarch, the Diocesan Chancellor, and the District Dean, at a venue in the DMD; and beyond  
57 that, to meet on-line as frequently as the clergy decide. As I said, the primary purpose of these gatherings,  
58 both person-to-person and on-line, is simply to foster relationships; but, more than that, it is for the clergy  
59 and their wives to come together in order to assess, to diagnose, to vent, to share, and to come up with  
60 solutions for addressing the challenges that missions on the prairie present.

61 When Fr Paul Jannakos gave his presentation to the Parish Development Forum in Cleveland this last  
62 summer, he spoke, with excitement, on the newly established DMD. Following his presentation, a donor,  
63 wishing to remain anonymous, came forward wanting to fund the circuit riding priest that has been up to  
64 now but an idea in the mind of the Bishop's Council. How to express the joy this totally unexpected act of  
65 Providence has given to the faithful in the DMD! And so a main action item at the 'Synaxis' of the Clergy  
66 Collegium in Minot was putting together a job description, a list of qualifications, and a comprehensive  
67 compensation package for this circuit rider priest – or 'chapel priest' as we are calling him, a position that  
68 is now ready to come down from the clouds and onto the ground as a living reality.

69 The DMD will need funding for all of her ministries and basic needs beyond a compensation package for a  
70 chapel priest. For this, we look for a separate fund of the DMD to be established within the Diocesan  
71 Mission Fund. Donations and disbursements for the work of the DMD thereby will be managed centrally  
72 by the Diocese.

73 To work the fields ripe for harvest in the Dakotas Mission District (of which there is an abundance of  
74 evidence), we are looking for the right man (and his wife) to serve St Peter the Aleut in Minot as its priest.  
75 For, the parish of St Peter the Aleut will play a leading role in this work of evangelizing the Dakotas. The  
76 faithful of St Peter have demonstrated in a number of ways throughout the parish's history their love for  
77 their church. The Clergy Collegium of the DMD believes St Peter's potential to play a leading role in the  
78 work of evangelizing the Dakotas is real. A priest (and his wife) working with the faithful of St Peter (and  
79 also with our diocesan hierarch, our diocesan chancellor, the dean of the Mpls district, the Clergy  
80 Collegium, and the clergy and laity of the Clergy-Laity working group) to cultivate that potential is therefore  
81 critical to implementing the DMD's strategic vision.

82 As I have said somewhere – I think it was at the Summit in February if not in my Dean's report last year –  
83 if, in reading this report, you feel a tug of excitement to join the other clergy (and their wives) in the Clergy  
84 Collegium of the Dakotas Mission District to serve the communities in the DMD as an evangelist missionary  
85 priest, well, maybe it is the LORD of the harvest calling you. Do not hesitate, therefore, to approach His  
86 Eminence, Archbishop Daniel to discern, with his help, the source of that tug! There is work to do in these  
87 fields ripe for harvest; it is the LORD's work, and it is inherently rewarding and fulfilling. And you will not  
88 be working alone. You will have the grace of the Holy Spirit working in you, made incarnate in your brothers  
89 and sisters of the Clergy Collegium supporting you, encouraging you, and working together with you in the  
90 common work of fulfilling Our LORD's command to evangelize the Dakotas, a field ripe for harvest.