

Address of the Most Reverend DANIEL
Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest
to the Annual Diocesan Assembly
Saint Nicholas Church, Mogadore, Ohio
October 7, 2024 - Saints Sergius and Bacchus of Syria

Beloved Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of our God-protected Diocese,
Delegates, Guests, and Observers:
Glory to Jesus Christ!

It is with great gratitude to the Triune God that I greet you and welcome you to the 2024 annual Diocesan Assembly, convoked in this Temple dedicated to our Father Among the Saints Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, the Wonderworker, “a rule of faith, a model of meekness, and a teacher of temperance.” We seek his heavenly intercession during our time together. We have also just prayed the *Akathist* to the Mother of God venerated in her *Tikhvin Icon*. She is the heavenly protectress, sovereign Lady and Queen of our Diocese, of the Flock of Her Son in this corner of the sheepfold. And, coming before her in prayer, we offer our thanks for the motherly guidance and protection she extends to all of our parish communities, to our families and loved ones, and indeed, to each and every one of us. May She continue to guide, guard, and protect us all!

In his first epistle, the Holy Apostle Peter writes to the early Christian community living in Asia Minor. He refers to his audience as “the chosen pilgrims of the diaspora.” Meaning those away from their native lands and, even more significantly, interpreted by the Church to mean all of us who sojourn on earth in this “vallis lacrimarum,” this “valley of tears.” He speaks to us who are “away from the Lord” as Saint Paul says, in this earthly exile.

The Apostle Peter writes: “You *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

These words speak beautifully to us as the One Church of Christ gathered into one body, one holy nation, and called into one community of faith. These

words speak to us and can be applied to us, in this place and throughout this week as we gather expressing, revealing, manifesting the Church as it sojourns in the Diocese of the Midwest, in these twelve states of the Midwest.

Of course, Saint Peter's words and the imagery he uses are reminiscent of the Old Testament language used to describe Israel. And we, gathered here today and even more visibly on Wednesday as we gather for the Divine Liturgy, are a full expression of the New Israel, making its way to its true homeland which is the Kingdom of Heaven—just as God's Chosen People, the Hebrews, sojourned for 40 years as they made their way from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. Saint Paul reminds us of our own sojourning through this world in his epistle to the Philippians as he writes: "...our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20).

During their desert wanderings, the people of Israel were of their way to a set destination: the Promised Land. Although the people had a sense of focus and destination, normal, daily life continued. It was not one long, endless, joyous procession across the Red Sea and then through the desert for forty years. People suffered the desert heat by day and the cold of the desert nights. They lived, died, married, suffered, hungered and thirsted, fought, struggled, mourned and rejoiced, worshipped, doubted and hoped for forty years. Their daily lives and daily human experiences were part of their journey.

AND SO, as we continue our earthly sojourn through these days and time, we, the Church, continue our life and our divinely entrusted mission of bearing witness to the Good News of freedom and of eternal life in the Kingdom that has been revealed to us and is yet to come.

Having served as your bishop, shepherd, and servant for over two years now, I continue to feel greatly blessed to have been called to serve and lead this Diocese of the Orthodox Church in America in its continuing sojourn, this

adventure in which the ongoing and ceaseless work of the Gospel is so evident and so vibrantly lived and celebrated.

Diocesan Updates:

I would like now to take a moment to reflect upon the past year in our Diocese, which means reflecting upon all of you and all of our faithful who gather in worship and mission throughout this far-flung corner of the Lord's Vineyard. During this past year, our local church received many blessings from on high, suffered losses, experienced gains, and has been faced with new challenges. Throughout this ongoing sojourn, our Diocese has remained faithful and true to the Faith handed down through the Ages. We have celebrated the presence of Christ among us. We have lived and proclaimed the Gospel, and have ministered to those who are already a part of this family we call Church as well as to the many who have come to us asking the deeper questions of faith and life that can only be found in the fullness of Faith that is Holy Orthodoxy.

The increase in blessings that we have seen, especially in this past year, is a beautiful and certain sign that the Lord is blessing us, calling us, and inspiring us, to move forward and to face new challenges and new opportunities in proclaiming the fullness of the Apostolic Faith.

Highlights and Notable Evens of the Past Year

Parish Visitations:

As you have often heard me say, visiting our parish communities is the highlight and the most rewarding and uplifting part of the archpastoral ministry. In the past two years I have been able to visit well over two thirds of our communities and look forward to closing that gap within the next few months.

To gather in prayer and fellowship with the clergy of the diocese and with the faithful within the local parish families is a true blessing. I am happy to note that, for the most part, our parishes are seeing an increase in growth, indeed

this is a significant aspect of life in our Diocese—something for which we are grateful and something which we should not take for granted. Responding with hospitality, love, the certainty of our faith and the beauty of the Divine Services is key in the ongoing work of evangelization- and this should and does take place primarily on the parish level, in your communities, in your parish churches.

Parish visits are often planned to coincide with special parish anniversaries, including the following which were observed in the past year: Saint Michael the Archangel, St Louis, 115 years; Protection of the Holy Virgin, Royalton, IL, 115 years; Saint Demetrius, Jackson, MI, 55 years; Saint Nicholas, Mentor, 50 years; Saint Luke, Palos Hills, 40 years. And during my visit to Saint Nicholas Mission, Pella, IA, for its 20th anniversary, I was able to visit the newly purchased and first permanent building of the parish community. I want to also mention that several of our parishes are in the position of having to plan for larger temples and bigger spaces in which to gather. Some are literally “bursting at the seams.”

Ordinations:

To meet the needs of our communities, both now and in the future, we must continue to support our clergy and clergy must continue to support one another and all of us must continue to actively support and encourage vocations to ordained ministry in the Church. I want to note that in the past year, I have celebrated the ordinations of three priests for our Diocese: These new priests are Priest John York, assigned to Holy Trinity Church, Detroit, Priest Phillip Dage, assigned to Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral, Detroit, and Priest Peter Ries, assigned to Holy Myrrhbearers Church in St Cloud (which was also elevated to the status of a parish this year). I have also celebrated the ordinations of three new deacons: Deacon John Eller, serving at Holy Annunciation, Saint James, MO, Deacon Justin Hickman, serving as deacon and leading the mission of Saint Raphael in Quincy, IL, and Deacon Lazarus Der-Ghazarian, serving at Holy Trinity Church, Detroit.

Clergy Awards: In keeping with the tradition of recognizing priests at various points of their priestly service, many of our priestly brothers have received both Diocesan and Synodal Awards during this past year. I often present these awards during parish visits; some have opted for them to be given this week, during our celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Wednesday. You can find the list of this year's awards on our diocesan website. However, I do want to make mention of two awards: this year the dignity of wearing the mitre was awarded by the Holy Synod to Archpriest John Zdinak and Archpriest Andrew Morbey. Many years to them and to all those who have received awards in the past twelve months!

Clergy transfers into the Diocese of the Midwest:

In addition to those already mentioned, since our last Diocesan Assembly we have welcomed several priests from other Dioceses into the presbyterate of the Diocese of the Midwest. These include Father Nikolai Lochmatow, assigned as Dean of Saint George Cathedral, Chicago; Father Daniel Greeson, assigned as Rector of Saints Peter and Paul Church, Burr Ridge, IL, and Father Paul Hodge, new Rector at Holy Trinity Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Retirements:

The past year also saw six priests requesting and being granted retirement. These are Archpriest Andrew Clements, Archpriest Richard Flom, Archpriest Paul Albert, Archpriest Lev Kopistiansky, Archpriest Andrew Jaye, and Archpriest Jonathan Proctor. We pray especially for the good health and healing of Father Jonathan as he faces health challenges and we pray that all these priests, who have served the Church for so many years, will enjoy the reward of a happy and healthy retirement and that the Lord Himself will be the recompense for their dedicated service to the Diocese of the Midwest and, indeed, to the entire Church.

Reposed Clergy:

We also call to remembrance the clergy whom the Lord has called to Himself: His Grace, Bishop Mathias (5/4); Archpriest Moses Berry (1/12); and Archpriest Alexis Fedec (7/14). I also want to remember my eleven predecessors in the See of Chicago in its various iterations who have labored here and are gone to their rest: Archbishop/Metropolitan Leonty, Bishop Dmitri, Dionysius, Bishop Alexis, Bishop Paul, Archbishop/Metropolitan Theophilus, Archbishop John, Bishop Boris, Archbishop Job, Bishop Mathias, and Archbishop Paul. May their memory be eternal!

Seminarians:

The Diocese of the Midwest currently has eight (8) seminarians studying at Saint Vladimir Seminary (3) and Saint Tikhon Seminary (5). This past summer, our seminarians participated in the celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Return of the Tikhvin Icon at Holy Trinity Cathedral, participating as pilgrims and also assisting with the work of set-up, cooking, and assisting the many pilgrims who gathered from throughout the Midwest. The annual seminarians retreat followed in which they were able to spend personal time with me and with some of the local clergy, thus strengthening their ties with and commitment to future service in our Diocese.

I am grateful for these men and am also grateful to their families and to the parishes throughout the Diocese who have responded to the annual September Support our Seminarians Appeal. As you know, the cost of educating priests for the future is high. We support these men financially by having a line item in our budget and through the generous donations of clergy, faithful, and parishes of the Diocese, especially through the S.O.S. (Support our Seminarians) annual appeal. Thank you for this support. The seminarians often mention to me how grateful they are for the way in which our diocese stands behind them and supports.

Making connections within the Diocese is an especially important part of our seminarians' priestly formation. I encourage parishes to continue to support them in whatever other ways may be possible. And to encourage the young

men of your parishes to consider the possibility of serving the Church as a deacon or priest.

New Chapels and Parishes:

Earlier this year, on its Altar Feast, I elevated Holy Myrrhbearers Mission, St. Cloud, MN, to the status of parish. The community has seen wonderful growth, first under the leadership of Father Andrew Jaye, and continues to grow with the priestly service of Father Peter Ries. Additionally, the Saint Macrina the Younger Chapel was established in Waupaca, WI. A new chapel, dedicated to the memory of Saint Maria of Paris was also blessed this past July as part of the blessing and dedication of the newly renovated building of Reconciliation Services in Kansas City, KS.

Saint Theodosius Cathedral Fire:

On Tuesday, May 28, I received the type of phone call that no one wants to receive: Saint Theodosius Cathedral was on fire. Father Jan Czar, the Dean, and Father John Zdinak, the former Dean, called me as they were on their way to the cathedral, defying speed limits and, when they arrived, they saw firetrucks and fire crews battling the fire that had erupted on the cathedral's roof. Thankfully, no one was injured. Thankfully, though damaged, the temple was not destroyed. Thankfully, the parish community has stood strong, resilient and hope-filled and has been working together and worshipping together and looks forward to the day they will once again worship in the restored cathedral. Thank you to Father Jan and the fine example of leadership he has been providing in this difficult chapter of the cathedral's long and brilliant history. Thank you, as well, to all of you and your communities which have been supportive in so many ways: through financial support and through the support of your much-appreciated prayers.

Twentieth Anniversary of the Return of the Tikhvin Icon:

This past June 26th marked the twentieth anniversary of the return of the Wonderworking Tikhvin from our Diocese, where it was guarded for over fifty

years, to the Monastery of the Dormition in the city of Tikhvin, Russia, its home for centuries. To observe this significant anniversary, a special celebration was held at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago. His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON led eight additional hierarchs and hundreds of clergy, monastics, and faithful from throughout the Diocese and beyond in praying the Vigil Service and the Divine Liturgy of the Feast. The Liturgy was followed by a procession through the streets of Chicago to Saint George Cathedral where a closing moleben was sung and a festal luncheon was served. It was a highpoint of the year for our Diocese and, having heard from many who were present, also a source of great blessings. I want to note that on that day I also issued an archpastoral decree (*ukaz*) establishing the feast of the Finding of the Tikhvin Icon as a vigil-rank feast to be celebrated in all the churches, missions, and chapels of the Diocese of the Midwest.

The celebration held in Chicago was brought to fulfillment when, at the invitation of His Grace Bishop Mstislav of Tikhon, I participated in the anniversary celebration held at the Monastery in Tikhvin. To return to the Monastery after having been there when the Icon was transferred there twenty years ago was a great personal blessing. I was accompanied on that pilgrimage by Archpriest Alexander Garklavs, Priest Alexander Koranda, and Reader Justinian Tatoes, my kelenik.

If not already the case, it is my hope that all the parishes and missions of our Diocese will obtain a copy of the *Tikhvin* Icon of the Mother of God for veneration in our temples and as a reminder that the Diocese has been dedicated to the Mother of God under this special title and as venerated in this Holy Icon. The Chancery staff is available to help facilitate this.

Reconciliation Services:

On Saturday, July 20, I had the joy of blessing the newly renovated building at Reconciliation Services in Kansas City. This included the blessing of the new chapel, dedicated in name of Saint Maria of Paris. On Monday, the 22nd, I also offered the prayer for the official ribbon cutting re-opening the building

and marking its return as the home for this important and historic ministry. If you do not know about Reconciliation Services, I invite you to do some research. Although not officially a ministry of the Orthodox Church or of the Diocese of the Midwest, its work and ministry are deeply rooted in Orthodox values. Many of our local clergy and faithful are directly involved in its work, including its director and CEO, Archpriest Justin Mathews. In addition to the very comprehensive level of services offered to the public, Reconciliation Services is also a very visible witness to the Orthodox Church serving in the midst of the world.

Dakota Mission District, Saint Andrew of Crete Ministry, Saint Macrina Institute, Youth Ministry, and Camps:

There are many other activities, ministries, and projects taking place in our Diocese, such as the Dakota Mission District, Saint Andrew of Crete Music Ministry, Saint Macrina Institute, Clergy Wives Outreach, Youth Ministry, and our Diocesan Camps. I will not go into those now as reports are being provided about these and other areas of Diocesan life during our time together this week.

I have not covered everything that is happening within the Diocese; as I just mentioned, reports and presentations will be given throughout our time together. However, this brief highlight of life in our Diocese over these past twelve months is reflective of what has taken place throughout its long history. Allow me to note that the clergy and faithful of our Diocese are significantly involved on all the usual levels of parish and diocesan life and also in a wide array of outward-looking social ministries and services. Our priests, deacons, and lay faithful are incredibly involved, indeed, leading the various parish, diocesan, and national groups that are meeting the needs of a large number of our brothers and sisters in need. I will also mention here organizations which, while not specifically diocesan, are served largely by our own clergy and faithful: Reconciliation Services, FOCUS, St Herman House, OCAMPR, IOCC and OCMC, Project Mexico, the annual Parish Life Conference,

prison and jail ministry, ZOE for Life, promoting the sanctity of human life and the dignity of each human person, soup kitchens, ministry to the homeless, etc.

Restructuring of Diocesan Offices, Departments, and Ministries:

We are richly blessed in the Diocese of the Midwest. We have an immense treasure of talent and resources and are thus able to be involved and lead in so many areas of Church life and mission. Colloquially speaking, there is a lot on our diocesan plate. As a way to be more efficient in ministering the Diocese and, thus, better minister to every aspect of it, the Chancery Office, the Deans, and several consultants throughout the Diocese have recently been involved in a process aimed at providing a more defined and effective structure for the Chancery Office, diocesan departments, ministries, and organizations.

The foundation of this process has been a 2004 document developed by His Eminence Archbishop JOB, of blessed memory. Some of you were likely involved in that project. This 2004 document had begun to be implemented and was still in process at the time of Archbishop Job's unexpected repose. It was in light of this re-discovered document and those plans from twenty years ago, that I asked Dr. Alice Woog to form a consulting committee so that we could review, revise as necessary, and implement this re-organization of the Diocese's administrative structure. Alice will be presenting on this work later in the Assembly. I am supportive of and grateful for her work as well as for the input of all those who have been involved.

New Officers & Thank You's:

As you are all aware, the past twelve months have also provided the opportunity for the appointment of new diocesan officers. All are well-known to you, so there is no real need for introductions. With the support of the Deans and the concurrence of the Diocesan Council, I accepted the resignation of Archpriest Paul Jannakos as Chancellor and Rob Koncel as

Diocesan Treasurer. Both served in their respective capacities with professionalism and dignity and commitment to the well-being of our Diocese. As we know, Rob served as Treasurer for well over thirty years. I am grateful for their dedication and work and have issued Diocesan Gramotas as a formal way of the Diocese expressing its deep gratitude for their service.

With the support of the Deans and the concurrence of the Diocesan Council, I appointed Archpriest Herman Kincaid to serve as Diocesan Chancellor. His service in this role began on July 1. This is now a fulltime position. In consulting with the Deans, it was decided that the time for a fulltime Chancellor has definitely come, given the size and brisk activity of the Diocese of the Midwest. I am grateful to Father Herman for taking on the burdens of this office. Also, Priest Esteban Vazquez was appointed as Vice Chancellor. During the time of transition as I took on the responsibility of Diocesan Bishop and familiarized myself with the Diocese, the effectiveness of his work and his attention to details were extremely beneficial; he continues to play a significant role in the daily administration of the Diocese. Priest Nikolai Lochmatow, Dean of Saint George Cathedral, has been appointed as corporate secretary and, three days a week, also serves as Secretary to the Archbishop.

Priest Alexander Koranda continues to serve as Communications Director. He is assisted in this by Priest Joel Wilson. Last, but not least, in view of the retirement of Rob Koncel from his role as Diocesan Treasurer, with the concurrence of the Diocesan Council, I have appointed Subdeacon Dimitri Pletz as Diocesan Treasurer. He may be known to some of you, having served as Treasurer of OCCIF (Orthodox Christian Capital Investment Fund), as a member of the Metropolitan Council from the Diocese of the West, and Metropolitan Council Auditor of the Orthodox Church in America. Subdeacon Dimitri and his family moved from Washington State to Kansas City over a year ago; he is now very involved in the life of Holy Trinity Church, Overland Park.

As you can see, with the Diocesan Officers, the Chancery Office Staff, the Deans, and the Diocesan Council, I am surrounded by a talented team that assists me in fulfilling my role as the Chief Shepherd of the Diocese. I am grateful for them and give thanks for their willingness to serve.

As we gather this week, I am grateful to Father Nicholas Wyslutsky and to the Saint Nicholas community for hosting this year's gathering of clergy and faithful from throughout our beloved Diocese of the Midwest. The temple, hall, and parish grounds provide us with a beautiful setting for the work we are doing here.

Of course, as important and essential for the effective administration of the Diocese as these officers are, it is really your own support and involvement in which I trust and upon which I depend. Please know that I am so very grateful for the clergy in our Diocese who are carrying the heavy load and doing work of fulfilling of the mission of the Local Church which is the proclamation of the Saving Gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation of souls. Thank you. I am grateful to all of you, most especially for your daily fidelity to the work of ministry.

Again, I welcome you to the 63rd Diocesan Assembly. Our discussions, reports, discussions, and conversations will focus on the questions of what it means to be the Church in this time and in this place. And let us remember that this special Midwestern experience of Orthodoxy is an important, though often overlooked component of the larger life, history, legacy, and patrimony of the Church in North America.

Let me simply conclude with the words quoted from the Holy Apostle Peter in his first epistle, the words I quoted at the beginning of this address. May these words assist us as we focus on the work before us at this Assembly: "You *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).