

**Bishop's Report to the
Archdiocesan Assembly
Worcester,
Massachusetts
September 2007**



For what does it profit
a man to gain the whole
world and lose his soul?

I begin with this passage as a reminder that we as
Orthodox Christians are called to save souls.

In truth, God has called us to be his ambassadors to
a world with ever changing values and *mores*. He calls us
to serve and save a world that is in need of the never
changing, eternal, holy and divine.

Sometimes we forget that this is our purpose, this is
our destiny, and this is why we are here. This is why we
gather.



I remember very well a statement made by one of
the pastors who attended an All American Council for the
first time

He was a convert to Orthodoxy and a friend of his,
also a convert, were rooming together and following the
discussions they gave each other the high five.

They told us why:

“You people don’t discuss and debate Christ. You
don’t discuss and debate the doctrines of the
Church.

“You people gather and what they debate is whether
or not everyone has to pay 5 more dollars a year or
not.”

Christ and the doctrines are never discussed.

These are the never changing values and *mores* that
are the foundation of all Orthodox Churches worldwide.
They have not been altered in any way, shape or form,
from the time Christ and the Apostles.

**Following the last assembly:
the National Church**

Following last year’s assembly the Holy Synod met
and we were given some information regarding the
financial aberrations within the OCA. These preliminary
reports were followed by a joint meeting of the
Metropolitan Council and the Holy Synod.

It is quite gratifying to see that the representatives to
the Metropolitan Council from our Archdiocese and the
Diocese of New England are in contact with each other
and have worked together at these meetings.

Our Clergy representative, Fr. Sergei Bouteneff, and
lay representative, Bill Peters, have been doing a
wonderful job representing not only us – but the church at
large. Together with the clergy representative from the
Diocese of New England Fr. Mark Sherman and the lay
representative from the New England Diocese, Deacon
John Zarras, they make a wonderful combination.

At the last meeting of the Metropolitan Council Fr.
Mark Sherman and Bill Peters were elected to the
church’s Ethics committee.

It is also interesting to note that it was pointed out to
me by Deacon John Zarras that we, together with the
representatives from New England carry very important
and in many cases the swing votes on many issues. The
fact being, in his words “Your grace, You are the only
bishop of a diocese that has four votes on the
Metropolitan Council.”

The acceptance of Best Practices for Non-Profit
Organizations has been adopted and recently we can
begin to see some significant additions and changes
already taking place.

The independent audits on the church finances have
already been posted on the OCA website. Certainly more
has to be done and the Holy Synod will be meeting next
month to address issues that continue to hamper growth.

Unfortunately, the crisis had become all consuming
for some in our church so that real growth and the real
work of the church had come to a screeching halt, due to
our frail nature.

We seem to forget that the church, from its beginning
lived through and worked through crisis after crisis. All we
have to do is look at the
religious regeneration that
has occurred in Albania
and in all of the former
Communist countries.

The church is
resurrecting to be even
stronger than it was before. I believe that we too, once



the crisis is past, the Orthodox Church in America will be stronger and more pro-active in our missionary zeal.

Already many changes have occurred to insure that this type of thing does not happen again. There is new personal financial statement are audited by independent outside auditors and we have begun again to be placed back on the right track. This is evidenced by the up to date audited reports have been listed on the national church webpage.

It will take time to build a trust that was lost, a lot of time, but I am encouraged that the process has begun to regain and rebuild that sense of trust.

As an ethnic diocese, many of the parishes in our Archdiocese do not seem affected. But we must remember when one part of the body of Chris suffers, the whole church suffers. Of course we have our differences of opinion, but financially we are stable, full disclosure is presented not only at our assemblies but at our diocesan council meetings.

Following the last assembly: The Archdiocese

Our investment committee following the directives of our assembly is reasonable and very low-risk, with prudent, fiscal responsibility and wise stewardship.

Our treasurer, Cindy Vasil Brown as always presented a full and transparent financial report at our diocesan council meetings and at our assemblies.



I want to mention again that it was pointed out to me by other hierarchs how lucky I am to have Cindy as a treasurer.

What concerns me a little bit is that this information is not transmitted by the parish representatives to their respective parish councils. Following our diocesan

council meetings the information is too often not transmitted to the general membership at their annual and semi-annual meetings.

I know it is always a joy to see all of you and the interaction between our parish representatives on a social level. This adds to the sense of family.

However, all of us are here representing parishes.

By all means, feast and enjoy these days of friendship and fellowship, but by your oath, you are responsible to transmit all of the information to your parish councils and to the parish membership at large.

It was gratifying to see that our differences in financial planning were resolved amicably at our last assembly. This previous statement was written following our assembly last year. I remember as a youngster attending assemblies with my father and the discussions always turned to “who is a member”. This question was asked almost 30 years ago and 20 years ago and seems to come up discussed and answered periodically. During this past year the question arises, yet again. It appears as if all of our parishes agree on a policy and when it is working well, we continue uninhibited as good stewards in His vineyard. However, when the policy no longer suits some of us, we end up spending hours upon hours trying to determine this again or rather hope to change the policy again and again.

The answer is simple –The Gospel commands us to “to go and baptize all nations” - a member is any baptized Orthodox Christian –then an addendum is added by some stating something like, a member in good standing in any parish is any member who pledges or contributes to the local parish via dues, pledge, etc.

Even this does not appear to make sense to many as some of our parishes set minimum pledges. I most certainly understand that this may become a necessity, but in truth belies the whole idea of “pledge” and the Gospel commands of Christ. I do not believe that you as representatives of your respective parishes put your parish in financial jeopardy but we cannot put the work of Christ in jeopardy either.

We are certainly aware of the fiduciary difficulties facing our parishes with increased immigration and demands on the parish, the pastors, the membership and the parish councils especially in reference to serving the needs and spiritual aspects for our new comers who for the most part have not fully understood the system of “freedom of religion”.

Freedom costs. It costs in terms of personal commitment of our recourses. Good stewardship means the offering of our time, talent and financial resources.

This applies to all of us. When parishes set arbitrary guidelines we end up undermining ourselves and undermine the message of the Gospel.

Come and see, come and become a part of the body of Christ is our calling. Come and support by giving of ourselves and the rest follows.

It must become for all of us a mind-set, not a minimum dollar set.

Of course we need funds to operate on the parish level, the diocesan level and the national level. This is a given once we have truly embraced Christ.

We must be the examples in order for this to happen.

I know that the crisis on the national church level had some in our Archdiocese express concern in reference to our involvement in the OCA and the particulars as to our relationship. Fears and rumors run rampant. Let me assure you that as an Archdiocese we operate in canonical conjunction and union with the only self governing Orthodox Church on this continent.

This is in keeping with proper canonical order, yet as an Archdiocese we have full control over our Archdiocese. No one can interfere in the internal operations of our Archdiocese. We enjoy a certain level of autonomy.

In order for all of you to fully understand our relationship I have copies of our original agreement with the OCA, signed by his Beatitude, Metropolitan IRENEY of Blessed memory and our Bishop STEPHEN of Blessed memory.

The agreement that still stands was signed in 1971, and witnessed by Archbishop KIPRIAN, also of Blessed memory, who was secretary of the Holy Synod at that time.

You will all have copies following my report.

Again, these copies were not printed to add more for your personal files to carry home. They are provided for you to relate proper information to misled or misinformed members of our respective parishes.

Importance of inter church relations

Following our Assembly last year in Michigan, during the sessions of the Holy Synod, His Beatitude noted the

importance of our contacts with the other Orthodox churches throughout the world. He cited His Eminence



Archbishop NATHANIEL, fostering better communication between the OCA and the Church of Romania, Archbishop Krill, of blessed memory and the Church of Bulgaria,

Bishop Nikolai and the Church of Serbia, and myself and the Church of Albania.

Albanian Ambassador at Cathedral

In November at St. George Cathedral we greeted the new Ambassador from Albania to the US.

That same day Fr. Gallic gave a similar presentation on our contribution to providing chaplain services to our fighting men and women in the US Armed Forces. As Fr. Gallick pointed out our men and women fought along with Albanian soldiers and this was enthusiastically confirmed by the ambassador.

Patriarch NIKON on Uniformity

Uniformity: this is yet another subject that we like to spend a lot of time discussing.

I want to share a few thoughts in reference to a certain Patriarch Nikon, who shares my name – both of us named for St. Nikon. In Church history, depending on the angle that one takes, the Nikonian reforms were a blessing or a curse to the church at large.

But whatever your perspective on these reforms is, I wanted to share the following about his conversations with other hierarchs of the day in reference to uniformity.

At the very start of his activity as a reformer (1655), Nikon submitted to Patriarch Paisios of Constantinople a long list of perplexing points concerning ritual.

He received a comprehensive reply written by Meletios Syrigos. Syrigos frankly and clearly expressed the view that only central and essential matters of faith required uniformity and unity, while diversity and differences in the "ecclesiastical ceremonies" [*chinoposledovani*] and in the formal aspects of the liturgy were perfectly tolerable, and indeed historically inevitable. After all, ceremony and liturgical regulation only gradually became intertwined. They had not been created at a single stroke. And a great deal in the Church ceremony depended upon the "pleasure of the superior."

For the time being, that last statement refers to me.



One should not conclude that our Orthodox faith is being perverted if some possess a Church ceremony which differs slightly in nonessentials but not in the articles of faith, if on the central and essential matter conformity with the Holy Orthodox Church is preserved.

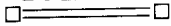
Pension Plan

I continue to serve as Episcopal moderator of the OCA's Pension Plan. The plan now has assets exceeding 25 million dollars and is operated totally independent of the National Church's budget. In effect it is its own entity for operational purposes. Recently, the addition of the housing allowance was added with the blessing of the Metropolitan Council. This enabled a better return for all of the church workers when it comes to retirement benefits. The Plan is a defined benefit plan.

Holy Synod

I continue to represent us as a member of the Holy Synod and this year I am a member of the lesser Synod. The Lesser Synod meets more frequently than the Synod and there are permanent

NEW!



members and a rotating basis for some. The permanent members are the Metropolitan, The Secretary of the Synod, in this case Archbishop Serafim of Ottawa and Canada, the third was Archbishop Kyrill of Blessed Memory and the next in line would be Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas and the South. But in recognition of his age, Archbishop Nathaniel of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate replaced him. Rounding out the permanent membership is Archbishop Job of the Mid-west.

Inter Diocesan Visitations

I don't know why this is but I always seem to receive invitations to head north during the winter months. In late January I was invited to represent the Orthodox at a Colloquium for Anglican and Episcopal clergy and laity in Detroit Michigan. The program was sponsored by Archbishop Nathaniel and His Grace Bishop Tikhon of Eastern Pennsylvania was also present.

It was quite an interesting experience where Anglican and Episcopal clergy and laity gathered to hear presentations by both. Some of the protestant individuals were just beginning their journey into Orthodoxy, some had already converted and yet others were guiding their entire congregations into Orthodoxy.

The Orthodox clergy that were formally protestant serving OCA parishes relayed their experiences and as I spoke with some of them, it was gratifying to learn that a number of their parishes have Albanian members that had relocated. The most striking accounts however were given by a former Episcopal Priest who had gone to seminary, studied was ordained and assigned to a very lucrative parish in the Carolinas. He found Orthodoxy, pack up his family and went to seminary again and is now serving that small mission. But perhaps the most compelling account was an Anglican Priest. This was a female minister in the Anglican Church. Came to the knowledge of Orthodoxy and converted to Orthodoxy.



She now lives some two or three hours away from the nearest Orthodox Church. It is amazing when one thinks that this woman gave up her livelihood for the faith.

During our deliberations we will discuss simple things like, should we have dues of 85 or 185 dollars, or do we count members. But how many of us here are willing to give up their livelihood for Orthodoxy.

I thought to myself, how many of us are that committed, that dedicated, that convinced that the truth of the Orthodox faith is the only one that will withstand the gates of hell.

Perhaps this is not a fair question to ask you, but it is most certainly a fair question to ask ourselves. We must look into our hearts and ask that question. If the answer is maybe or I don't know, then it is time to rededicate ourselves, re-confirm ourselves into the depth and fullness of God's revelation to us.....Perhaps I do not want to give up my livelihood, but I most certainly want to feel that yearning for our faith.

Youth

I continue to meet with the OCF, that is the Orthodox Christian Fellowship, the campus ministry for all Orthodox. I usually attend the meetings at the University of CT. This is a very active group that sponsors lectures and seminars on campus that are usually open to the public. It is their way of outreach and witnessing. At these meetings there are usually non-Orthodox students that have shown some interest in Orthodoxy. To have the benefit of fellow students who are active in the church as well as have an Orthodox bishop to exchange thoughts and ideas in an informal atmosphere is beneficial to both the individual and the bishop.

In addition I greeted the students from CrossRoads when they visited our cathedral.

Crossroads is a program where Orthodox high school and college students from around the country travel to Mass, stay at Holy Cross Seminary for lectures and visitations to numerous churches around the Metropolitan area.

The Deaneries and Visitations

The Massachusetts Deanery continues to hold the Akathist services on Friday evenings and I am most pleased to be present with our parishes during the Great Lenten Period. In order to keep a balance I make every effort to attend Pre-Sanctified Liturgies in our New England Diocese parishes on Wednesday evenings During Great Lent and the Albanian parishes on Friday evenings.

Holy Week is mostly reserved for my cathedrals in Boston. This is in keeping with Episcopal norms, regulations and canons of the Holy Orthodox Church.

I wish to express my thanks to you for your prayers and support when my mother fell asleep in the Lord. The family was most appreciative as well.

In addition to the regular visitations when my schedule permits I enjoy being with our faithful on other occasions that have a more social atmosphere. A dinner honoring the ladies of St Mary's in Worcester and the Rusicat celebration sponsored by the Daughters of Saint George Cathedral were both occasions that I did not have the opportunity to participate in last year.

Following the Pentecost celebration at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Boston I traveled to St. Tikhon's Monastery for the annual pilgrimage there where I was asked to be the guest homilist.

I do regret not have the opportunity to visit our mission station in Folsom California this past year but Fr. Theodore Sakellar has kept in contact with me offering updates on his activities.

His new job places in a better and closer location to his home and the mission station. Fr. Nektarios Rozidilla works with him and is also helping with the mission efforts in other parts of California for the Antiochian Archdiocese.

Recently Fr. Theodore called because new individuals are converting to Orthodoxy in his mission parish and he was in need of Holy Chrism. This is a sign of growth and is an inspiration to all of us.



Anniversary

To my surprise, already five years had passed since my consecration as bishop. This occasion was marked by a celebration with both clergy and laity from both the Diocese of New England and our Archdiocese. It was quite gratifying to see so many, mingling in a relaxed atmosphere. It was so good to see people meeting old friends and making new ones. A few even said with a bit of surprise "I didn't know he was your bishop too".

This was nice to hear but indicates that we need more interaction with each other and more occasions like this one.

Several of our parishes do have a good working relationship and take into consideration each others needs. Two are the cathedrals in Boston, Fr. Robert Arida of Holy Trinity Cathedral and Fr. Arthur Liolin of Saint George Cathedral do have and have had for a number of years good working inter diocesan relationship.

Another fine example of this type of relationship is Holy Annunciation Albanian Orthodox Church in Natick, MA and Holy Annunciation Church of Maynard Mass. Since they share the same patronal feast celebration, good inter parish relationships are evident between these two parishes and it was quite evidenced at the

anniversary celebration when the pastors and faithful of both parishes sat together.

In late June I traveled to Pittsburg for the funeral services of Archbishop Kyrill of Blessed memory. I have a kinship and closeness to him, in as much as we share a similar experience as hierarchs. As Bishop of Pittsburg and Western Pennsylvania, he also was the ruling bishop of the Bulgarian Diocese of the OCA. Both he and I are the only ones who have both ethnic and territorial diocese to fit into our schedules.

As I had stated in my last report I do not want my visitations to be simply ceremonial in nature. Along with some time alone with the pastor, meeting with the parish council at some point during my visitations as well as time with the church school children is an ideal way fosters a more familiar atmosphere between the bishop and the parishioners.



In a number of cases this has worked very well and in other areas some work is needed in scheduling optimum time during archpastoral visitations.

When these meetings have been possible it has been so gratifying to see firsthand how dedicated our clergy are to their parish communities as well as our parish councils and laymen who are so committed to fostering our Orthodox and faith within and outside of their communities.

The children are wonderful and I believe they enjoy trying to trick the bishop with their questions. On a number of occasions they were well prepared with their written questions, obviously guided and prepared by their church school teachers. All of this activity reiterates the sense of Church as family.

This is so good and we need more of this type of interaction.



As we embark upon our centennial celebration I will visit the grave of Kristaq Dishnica. His death became the catalyst for the establishment of the Albanian Archdiocese in America and honoring the departed is one of the things we are called to do as Orthodox Christians.

The past is something we build upon, review our successes and failures and make decisions based upon our historical experiences. The past is not ours, the future is something we build for, that too is not ours... our time is the present.

God's time is always the present. The present is the time that is given for us to act.

Yes, we have the past, yes we build for the future, but we must concentrate on our action today, the present.

God's time has always been the present.

Ordinations

I was scheduled to travel again to Albania this year for the ordination of Anthony Gjonei.

Anthony was studying at the Shen Vlak in Durres under our student plan. He was married last year and upon graduation looked to be ordained to the Holy Diaconate. This was an important step for him in as much as deacons are paid a stipend by the church of Albania. Although minimal, it does help with ones family financial planning.

The date of the ordination was changed due to Archbishop Anastasios' schedule and I was unable to travel at that time since I had an ordination scheduled the same day in the Northern Deanery of the NE Diocese.

Fr. Mark Doku agreed to go in order to represent me and our Archdiocese. He was well received and I am proud to have him as a representative of our church here in America. I will not go into details of his visit as Fr. Mark will give a presentation later in our assembly.



One of the things that we will be faced with in reference to Dn Anthony is his eventual transfer back to us in the United States. The immigration laws are much more stringent now following the tragedy of 9/11.

Obtaining a visa takes a lot of time. Obtaining a church worker's visa is a lot easier, however that would prohibit him from working in any other arena.

If a regular visa is issued, guarantees must be made as to employment.

This would mean that a parish would have to guarantee position, housing and everything else related to a new immigrant. Although he had lived in the United States, readjusting will take some time and this would also apply to his new wife.

So bringing clergy to the United States is not always a simple as it may appear.

A church worker can work for only our Archdiocese. This may be difficult since the majority of our clergy now have some sort of outside income or some sort of retirement benefit that helps to subsidize the total package.

I will be looking into other areas of immigration for Dn Anthony but I wanted you to be aware of the regulations under which we must operate.

As Promised

At our last assembly I stated that I would spend a few days at our Archdiocesan office to begin straightening out some of our archives. I did this last July with the help of two seminarians, our own seminarian at St. Tikhon's John Brunnett and Ryan Smith, a seminarian who comes from the Diocese of the Mid-West.



His Grace, +NIKON with Seminarian John Brunnett .

Archives can always be in a state of flux, and sometimes duplications and mis-filings occur. Cindy cited that it was difficult to go through some of the Archdiocesan records as they did not appear in order. Well, Cindy, problem solved. All of the financial reports and records are filed in order. The latest being the first and the previous years immediately follow.

I am by nature, normally an orderly and perhaps too orderly individual. I did the same for the archives of the Diocese of New England.

In between reorganizing the files, I attended a special meeting for a few of the bishops was held in South Canaan Pennsylvania as well as a special Synod meeting held the end of July.

This past week I represented us at the NAAC Banquet honoring General Wesley Clark. I also represented the Metropolitan at Gracie Mansion, the residence of the Mayor of New York, for a function honoring His eminence Archbishop Demetrius' on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of his consecration to the episcopacy.

In summation, during the past year we have had representation on national and international levels.

Inter diocesan and inter jurisdictional levels.

- ❖ Social and ethnic initiatives and programs.
- ❖ Youth and youth oriented programs.
- ❖ Archpastoral presence in every parish.
- ❖ Inter diocese relationship building.
- ❖ Hierarchical representation on the Holy Synod.
- ❖ Clergy and Lay representation on national church programs.
- ❖ Mission outreach and development.

That summation has been our first 100 years. We will celebrate that during this whole year in a number of different ways, but, we are called to prepare for and set the tone, and begin our second 100 years – not only for our children and grand-children, but in fulfillment of our Orthodox mission.