

The Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
The Right Reverend Tikhon, Bishop of Philadelphia

December 2, 2010

To the Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania,

Christ is in our midst!

I would like to express my thanks to the clergy and lay delegates, guests and observers, who participated in the work of our recent Diocesan Assembly held at St. Nicholas Church in Bethlehem on November 19-20, 2010. I was very pleased with the level of open and honest dialogue and with the fruitful discussions engaged in at the various sessions. Over the past few years, I have been increasingly encouraged by the overall sense of community that has been developing at our Assemblies, without which we will not be able to address the many critical issues that face our Diocese.

We made some important decisions concerning some of those critical issues and I would like to highlight some of them in this letter in order to encourage their timely implementation.

1. Parish Revitalization Committee . The central challenge that we face as a Diocese is the spiritual and financial health of our parishes. This has been a topic of discussion for many years, but each passing year makes it more imperative for us to engage in some definitive action in this area. Over the past year, a concrete proposal to address the crisis facing our parishes has been discussed by our clergy and by the Diocesan Council. This proposal was also presented at our Assembly and, following much discussion, a resolution was passed calling for the formation of a Parish Revitalization Committee. I am presently working on appointing members to this Committee and will post their names on our website by the end of this year. As approved by the Assembly, this Committee will be charged with the following tasks:

- to pursue a method of revitalization of parishes within the diocese;
- to present that method to the Diocesan Council;
- to implement that method in at least one parish;
- and report the results at the next Diocesan Assembly.

2. Parish Administration . The path to revitalization can only be taken if *all things are done decently and in order* as St Paul writes in another context [cf. I Corinthians 14:40]. Part of this order involves our parishes' compliance with the many administrative requirements of the Church. Although most of us are familiar with these requirements, it is important to constantly remind ourselves about them and to hold ourselves accountable for them. As a result, our Assembly formally and unanimously adopted a list of administrative requirements relating to the Orthodox Church in America and to the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania. This list is attached for your review and as a reminder of those areas that require **annual compliance**:

- Submission of parish census
- Submission of Parish Meeting reports, including:
 - minutes of the meeting
 - election results
 - financial reports and operating budget
 - clergy compensation review
- Compliance with *Policies, Standards and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct*.
- Monthly payment of parish assessments

Other items on that list include those that, although not necessarily annually, do require compliance:

- Updated parish governing documents (by-laws or charters)
- Clergy compensation package procedures
- Hierarchical approval for major building projects
- Adherence to the OCA Guidelines for Mission.

3. Clergy Compensation. At our Assembly, I drew attention to one of the above administrative issues in particular: clergy compensation. A clergy compensation review was discussed following the 2009 Assembly and an updated review was distributed at this year' s Assembly, along with a list of median incomes for each of our parishes in their respective counties. I am attaching these again for your records and for implementation by each of our parishes. I would remind our parishes that my reaffirmation of the importance of the ministry of our clergy and their families, which should be reflected in their proper compensation, was accepted by acclamation by the Assembly. I will continue to monitor our parishes' compliance with the OCA clergy compensation guidelines and have instructed my Deans to follow through on this matter with the parishes in their deaneries.

4. Proportional Giving . It is not only clergy compensation that is important to our growth as a Church, but also parish " compensation." The funding of our parishes and the stewardship required to do so adequately were the subject of another resolution presented by the Philadelphia Deanery. This resolution called for the abandonment of the system of assessment-based budget and funding to one based on parish tithing by the year 2018. This resolution was approved by the Assembly and I have attached the text of the full resolution. We are now bound to strive for the implementation of this resolution as a

diocese, so there is important work and education that will need to be undertaken if this goal is to be accomplished. I ask all the clergy and the faithful of the Diocese to prayerfully reflect on the most fruitful means by which we can accomplish this goal and to continue to develop their stewardship.

As a final note, I would like to emphasize that all of these administrative issues are important in and of themselves, but they are also important in the larger context of our missionary work of spreading of the Gospel of salvation. Just as we are personally more productive if we are spiritually, mentally and physically fit, so our diocese (its parishes, clergy and faithful) will be more productive, that is, grow in life, health and stability, if our lives are well ordered in every aspect. I thank all of you for your input and participation in our discussions at the Assembly, and I look forward to continuing our common work of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Eastern Pennsylvania.

With my archpastoral blessings, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ TIKHON

Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania