



February 7, 2022

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13: 34-35)

Dear Rev. Fathers, Deacons, Matushki and faithful,

Christ is in our midst! He is and ever shall be! Welcome to the 58th Diocesan Assembly. We are blessed to have Fr. Innocent Neal and the faithful of Holy Trinity to host us this year. Thank you. As we have completed another year and enter into the new, it is appropriate to evaluate and reflect on 2021. The past year was difficult and challenging on many levels, perhaps full of stress, anxiety, fear, depression, loneliness, isolation and personal loss for some. Many were affected physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Our clergy were greatly strained with trying to meet the needs of the faithful who were all at different places in their own struggles. In a number of parishes the laity stepped up to assist with ministry to the faithful in a variety of ways, as was and is appropriate. Hopefully, this lay participation in ministry will continue. We are truly blessed with dedicated clergy and laity. Therein lies the true wealth and assets of every parish and the Diocese as well.

We have many challenges before us and we must clarify in our hearts and minds our priorities. Our Chancellor, the V. Rev. Fr. Martin Browne presented us with an excellent overview of our current situation. We can no longer continue as though things will remain unchanged. The clock only moves forward. There is a shortage of clergy throughout the OCA, we have a number of parishes with a large percentage of the faithful over 65, few under that age and declining membership. *This is something money cannot fix!* Without a concerted effort on the parish level to attract and retain new members, we need those parishes to honestly assess their options. Examine your census demographics and consider where the parish will be in five years if nothing changes. Some parishes may have already passed the point of no return. As our elderly clergy begin to retire, we will likely not be able to have a priest at every parish regularly. Be kind to your priests, supportive appreciative and encouraging. We will eventually see parishes unable to properly and legally administer their own affairs and / or populate a parish council in accordance with their own bylaws, etc.

As we ponder our mission as a Church, to share the Gospel, our blessed hope in the Resurrection and to be a light within the local community, we must always remain focused on personally growing in our faith and our relationship with the Lord. He is the Source of Life. We must rise above parochialism, i.e., a limited commitment involving a particular parish and realize we need Christ, the Church and the Sacraments. We, as a Diocese will not abandon the faithful, but we require your cooperation in order to do so effectively, without burning out our limited clergy. By the Grace of God, clergy of parishes which continue to provide in-person adult education, continue to receive new members consistently. Growth, even in the last two years remained possible because people are searching for meaning and what lies beyond this life.



325 N. Walnut Street * Bath, Pennsylvania 18014-1201
Telephone: 484.281.3406 * <http://www.doepa.org> * Email: dioceseoepa@gmail.com
Chancellor: V. Rev. Raymond Martin Browne * Mobile: 570.906.1388
Diocesan Treasurer: Mark Linnehan* treasurer@doepa.org

"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." Augustine

The strain of the past two years contributed to people becoming more easily agitated, less tolerant and testier. Let us remember the words of our Lord, 'they will know you are my disciples by your love for one another.' As we are gathered together as the Church, let us be kind, loving, patient and respectful. Since coming to the Diocese, we have always enjoyed our gatherings and time of fellowship. Let us enjoy being together and work together for the building up of the Church.

I want to welcome Fr Nikolai Breckinridge to the Diocese. He was received this year from the Archdiocese of Western Pennsylvania. He has faithfully served the same parish for almost 10 years, as well as served on their Diocesan Council and on the Metropolitan Council. Let us also congratulate the V. Rev. Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk on the completion of his doctorate in Liturgical Theology. He worked tirelessly in completing his doctorate without neglecting his parish or the Deanery. On a sadder note, this past year the Mitered Archpriests Fr. Daniel Ressetar and Fr. Eugene Pianovich reposed in the Lord. The V. Rev. Michael Slovesko also recently reposed. He served several Diocesan parishes while on loan to us from the Carpatho-Russia Diocese. May their Memory be Eternal. They were all good and faithful servants.

Parish visits were more limited this past year and as in the past my visitation schedule is on line. Though it does not show private meetings with clergy, laity, parish councils and parish assemblies, etc. The Holy Synod Meetings were primarily via Zoom and more numerous than usual. Our Diocesan Council meetings were all in person.

I want to thank, Carmen Hodson our administrative assistant for the excellent job she continues to faithfully do. Our Diocesan Council elected three years ago were wonderful to work with and though we do not always agree everyone has always been respectful of one another. The diversity of opinion is healthy and challenging. I am most grateful for their commitment and labors on behalf of the Church and our Diocese. Any who would like to continue, I fully endorse. Finally, I must thank the V. Rev. Fr. Martin Browne, our Chancellor, who goes out of his way to be supportive, continues doing an exceptional job and offering wise advice and our Deans, the V. Rev. Frs. Nicholas Solak, Victor Gorodenchuk and Timothy Hojnicky, whose tireless efforts take a heavy load off of my back. Given the shortage of clergy much falls on their backs and they all go above and beyond my expectations in caring for the clergy and the faithful.

Let us continue to reach out to our fellow parishioners and the surrounding community so that the Lord will be glorified! Let us be mindful of those who are suffering from loneliness, depression, isolation, anxiety and stress. As St. John the Theologian says in his First Epistle, "*Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.*"

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania