



Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America

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*Metropolitan Tikhon, Locum
Tenens of Boston, New England
and the Albanian Archdiocese*

*Very Rev Arthur E. Liolin
Chancellor*

August 6, 2020

Dear Fathers, Parish Chairs, and Archdiocesan Council Members:

First, I hope this communication finds all well with you, your families, and your parishes. As we disused in our May conference call, we continue to move through usual times with the impact of COVID-19 on our parish and personal lives. I am struck by the resilience of those who continue to work for the good of our community, albeit mostly remotely. I also want to take this opportunity to express condolences on the recent passing of two Knights of St. George from Worcester - Louis Pero and William Johns. Lou and Bill were stalwart figures at St. Mary's and at the Archdiocese. While they may be gone, this work and their relentless approach to advancing causes dear to us all will serve as an example for many years to come. May their memories be eternal - I perjetshem kujtimi!

I will use this communication to update you on several key areas for the Archdiocese:

Annual Assembly

After careful consideration, and with the blessing of Metropolitan Tikhon, we are moving the Annual Assembly to a virtual format. This decision is not taken lightly. Working with St. Mary's parish chair Valerie Kerxhalli we considered several options to try to retain an in-person meeting, but the risks presented for an indoor gathering with people coming from multiple regions was too great. We took this extraordinary move to ensure everyone's health and well-being. I appreciate all the efforts of Valerie and our host parish, including the work and research that started immediately after the completion of our last Assembly. An agenda is forthcoming, and we will look to incorporate innovative experiences in our online format.

Archdiocese Administrator

Very shortly we will circulate a job description for the position of Administrator for the Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America. This position will play a key role in maintaining communication between the Archdiocese and parishes and the Archdiocese and the OCA, as well as addressing parish needs, issues, and concerns. The Administrator will also address key items in our strategic plan, focusing on programs devoted to future Archdiocese and parish growth. We expect to conduct interviews for the position this month, and have the Administrator hired prior to our Assembly.

Bishop Selection

I have been in touch with Metropolitan Tikhon regarding progress in the selection of a new bishop for our Archdiocese. While we do not have a firm timeline right now, partly due to uncertainty on when the Holy Synod will next meet, His Beatitude communicated that the candidate vetting process has begun. This is a step preceding the Holy Synod interviewing candidates. I will make sure we have appropriate

time to review candidates at the Archdiocese and parish levels, though that step is premature until we hear from the Holy Synod regarding the worthiness of a candidates/candidates for elevation to the position of bishop. While it is possible that we will vote on a new bishop at the September Assembly, it is more likely that we will have a Special Assembly devoted solely to the topic of our new hierarch.

Clergy

We know that the central item on many of your agendas is a permanent parish priest. I discussed this issue with Metropolitan Tikhon, and in the absence of a permanent bishop he will take a more active role in reviewing parish needs in this area. I suggested a virtual meeting where interested parishes could hear more about the search for clergy, and where the Metropolitan can hear more about your parish needs. We would start with a group session at first, moving to 1:1 sessions with a parish as needed. If you are interested in having representatives of your parish participate in such a session, please email me at the address below.

Reopening

I am happy to see a number of parishes starting the process of welcoming back parishioners in a safe and responsible manner, following months of sharing the liturgy only by live-streaming. I have enjoyed attending the last couple of services at the Cathedral, where the phrase in our liturgy “for the people here present who wait to receive your great and rich mercies” took on new meaning. As a reminder, the Metropolitan must approve a parish’s initial or expansion plan for in-person services. For those who have not yet taken that step, the necessary forms/standards are included on the OCA website. Please do not hesitate to reach out for assistance/guidance on your reopening plans.

Financials

All parishes have experienced a drop in revenue over the last few months, an ongoing situation not fully rectified by gradual parish reopening. The council took the step of limiting fair share contributions for the current fiscal year, and a number of parishes (and the Archdiocese) received PPP disbursements. Please let me know if you would like to discuss ideas on how to restart your financial outreach to parishioners, even if they are not regularly coming to services.

I look forward to continuing conversations with you to hear more about your progress and needs in these uncertain times.

Thank you,

Michael Gregory

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Lay Vice-Chair

Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America

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