

The Diocese of the South

Orthodox Church in America

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2015 Diocesan Assembly

July 20, 2015

18th All-American Council at the Atlanta Hilton, Atlanta, GA

Report of the Chancellor

Your Beatitude, Reverend Fathers and Mothers, Monastics, Brothers and Sisters:
Glory to Jesus Christ! [Glory Forever!]

First of all, I am grateful for this opportunity for our diocesan officers, delegates (both clergy and lay), and observers to the 18th All-American Council to meet for annual Diocese of the South Assembly. As has been our custom during the years of an All-American Council we are simply holding an abbreviated assembly in which we will focus mainly on the statutory business that needs to be accomplished each year. We will look forward to several more opportunities in the coming year to gather as a diocese where we will be able to participate in the usual worship, education, and fellowship which we have come to expect at our assemblies. Among these will of course be the annual Pastoral Conference which will be hosted by St Symeon Orthodox Church in Birmingham, Alabama, but also we hope and pray at the gathering for the re-interment of Archbishop Dmitri in the Memorial Chapel at St Seraphim's Cathedral and the consecration and enthronement of a new diocesan bishop.

The most important development in the life of our diocese since our last regular assembly in Dallas was the calling by Archbishop Nikon of the Special Nominating Assembly this past February at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Miami Lakes, Florida. At this assembly Archimandrite Gerasim [Eliel] was nominated by an overwhelming majority of the delegates and his name was forwarded to the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America for possible election. At the Spring meeting of the Holy Synod Archimandrite Gerasim was not elected, but rather following the pattern of recent nominations, he was appointed the Administrator of the Diocese of the South. While there was certainly disappointment on the part of many that there was no election, we also saw this as a reasonable step in what has been a much longer episcopal search than any of us had hoped. It was also at this meeting, his main work having been accomplished, that Archbishop Nikon decided to step down as the *locum tenens* of the Diocese of the South, and Metropolitan Tikhon took on this responsibility. I want to say publicly (and for the record) how grateful to God we are for the good work that Vladyka Nikon did in the Diocese of the South during the four years he was our *locum tenens*. From our present vantage it is difficult to remember the particular 'recent unpleasantness' of those days, and with what grace and mercy Archbishop Nikon set about bringing healing in our diocese. We look forward to an opportunity, perhaps most fittingly in the context of the consecration of our next bishop, to thank His Eminence and to show some appropriate token of this gratitude.

Transitions, as we are now perhaps too well aware, are challenging times. Metropolitan Tikhon asked me to remain as chancellor when he became our *locum tenens* in March of this year, to work along side and assist Archimandrite Gerasim while he assumed his responsibilities as Administrator and has strived to familiarize himself with the scope of

work involved in effectively leading the Diocese of the South. You (have already heard and) may look to his report for details of the activities in which I have assisted.

In addition to the organization and calling of the Special Nominating Assembly, two of the most important developments in the past year are the implementation of the Deanery Development Reserve by which 25% of our budgeted income is segregated for use by the various deaneries specifically for the developmental needs, which are quite varied throughout of diocese, and the establishment of the new Mississippi River Deanery (formally approved by our Diocesan Council at its June meeting). Both of these actions will serve us well as we continue to develop the very fertile mission field with which God has entrusted us. This continues to put the emphasis on the church at the very local level, as represented by the deanery (both its clergy and faithful), overseen by the bishop (and administrator), and facilitated by the dean and chancellor, to do the work of establishing new missions, redeveloping parishes, implementing building programs, preparing for clergy needs and transitions, and caring for and pastoring the local clergy.

Relative the many other activities of the Chancellor, I continue to consider assisting with clergy assignment, clergy development and all forms of clergy 'transition' to among my top priorities. I am actively working several of our priests as they look toward retirement. I also therefore take seriously our responsibility to identify men for pastoral ministry. To this end we are looking for better ways to assist our seminarians with the financial burdens of seminary. We continue to integrate the seminarians into the life of the diocese, requiring a summer internship within the diocese between the 2nd and 3rd year of seminary, including rising senior and senior students in the DOS Assembly and the Pastoral Conference and, finally, upon graduation from seminary, providing a priest internship of 2 or 3 years for all of our new graduates.

Finally, even through this period of transition, the DOS continues to grow as evidenced by the growth and development of our parishes and missions, the planting of new missions, the many building programs, and the financial strength of the DOS as a whole.

To the faithful priests of the DOS: look to assist your dean and brother clergy in planting and developing missions in churches. To the laity: be involved in these activities on the local level and by looking to serve the diocese as a whole. Strive to develop new missions; strive to develop community with fellow Orthodox Christians; to share in the work of the Gospel --- its joys, its burdens. If I have learned anything in my years within the DOS it is the following: Any 'success' I have experienced has come not through my own efforts but through cooperation in love and humility with others; any failures or setbacks have usually been a result of failing to cooperate, failing to be humble, and failing to love those whom God has put before me.

In closing, I wish to thank His Beatitude, for his confidence in me; Archimandrite Gerasim for his 'obedience to the will of God' in all that he has done in the last several years to bring him to this point as our "Bishop Nominee"; Milos Konjevich about whom nothing more need be said; and my brother deans and clergy, the members of the Diocesan Council and all of you gathered here.

May God bless us all.

Archpriest Marcus C Burch, Chancellor
The Diocese of the South