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Martyr Minos

To the Parishes & Missions of the Michigan Deanery

Dear in Christ Orthodox Brothers & Sisters,

May the Lord bless you!

This letter is to provide you general instruction on the focus of the Michigan parishes and missions, that is, in the interior spiritual life of each parish family. I am aware that in some parishes there are some misconceptions in this regard.

First, the center of the parish must be the Divine Services. The Orthodox Christian parish is a worshipping Eucharist community. I expect our parishes and missions to be just that – and to be an example of authentic Orthodox Christianity to the world around them in serving the Divine Services in their fullness, to the best of each community's ability. The light of Christ must shine forth from you, and this will attract the residents of Michigan that are located near you, but this light of Christ can only be manifest in a worshipping Eucharistic community. Struggle to transform yourselves into the children of God – and do this first and foremost by engaging the Lord in the Divine Services which the Holy Church provides for your edification and salvation, as well as the other Divine Mysteries of the Holy Church.

Second, each parish must, to the best of its abilities, be an active parish. An active parish is an attractive parish. There should be a Church School, a Youth Group, a Sisterhood, a Brotherhood, and other similar structures that engage the faithful in activities outside the Divine Services. Or rather better put, which facilitate the bringing of God's Grace, found so abundantly in the Divine Services, out of the parish church and into the parish family, and from the parish family into the surrounding community. Through these structures each parish family should strive to fulfill the call of our Lord:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Matthew 25:35-36)

And also these words of the Lord:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Third, each parish should, if at all possible, provide social outlets to the parishioners that allow them to build bonds of social friendship beyond the Divine Services and the other structures listed above. Weekly parish meals following the Sunday Divine Liturgy that exemplify hospitality to guests, parish pilgrimages that allow the faithful access to the monastic institutions of our diocese, small building projects that the parish can successfully execute on its own, and even social events and gatherings such as formal balls, dances, concerts, and other such similar assemblies – all to strengthen the bonds of friendship and Christian love within the parish family.

It is understood that not every parish and mission can do all of this immediately, or perhaps even ever. I have listed these instructions in order of their importance. First, the Divine Services. Each parish and mission can and must follow this guidance. Second, active involvement of the faithful. This will be done to the best of the abilities of each. And third, social outlets to strengthen the parish family's bonds. This will also be done to the best of the abilities of each. But each parish and mission should have a goal to fulfill all of these to the best of their abilities. And to the greatest extent that each parish fulfills these goals, to that extent is that parish or mission almost certain to grow and to bring new souls to Christ, and at the same time assure that their temple is the center of a parish family, and not just a building in which people come to light candles and disperse immediately after the services.

Please work closely with your Dean, Fr. Gregory Joyce, on all of these steps. Fr. Gregory is in close contact with me, and can ask my advice as needed.

May our Michigan Deanery continue to grow and prosper through the good example of the faithful of the parishes and missions in the Great Lakes State!

With Love in our Lord Jesus Christ,

+ Archbishop Peter

Peter, Archbishop of Chicago & Mid-America

