

The clergy of the diocese met for the annual Great Lenten Clergy Conference from March 17-19, 2004 in the presence of the wonderworking Kursk Icon of the Mother of God. A detailed account of the conference by Protopriest John Shaw is presented here. Pictures of the conference are posted below.

The 2004 Lenten Clergy Retreat of the Diocese of Chicago and Detroit (ROCOR) was held, in the presence of the miraculous Kursk Odigitria Icon of the Theotokos, under the leadership of Archbishop Alypy and Bishop Peter, at the cathedral in Des Plaines, IL, from Wednesday, March 4/17 through Friday, March 6/19.

On Tuesday afternoon, March 3/16, there was a meeting of the Diocesan Council, and supper, in the parish hall of the cathedral.

On Wednesday, March 4/17, the conference began with the Presanctified Liturgy, celebrated by Fr. John R. Shaw and Fr. Valery Vovkovsky with singing by the cathedral chanters and the assembled clergy, at 7:30 a.m., followed by breakfast and by the morning and afternoon discussions of church affairs.

The clergy prepared and adopted a statement of support for Metropolitan Laurus' initiatives on overcoming the divisions in the Russian Church, and expressed prayerful hope that agreement and full concelebration may soon be achieved. A statement of support for the suffering Serbian Church, in response to the news of the burning of the monastery, seminary and bishop's house in Prizren, was also addressed to Metropolitan Christofor of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The cathedral sisterhood prepared simple, but excellent, Lenten meals for the clergy.

On Wednesday evening, there was an unction service in the cathedral, attended by a huge crowd of worshippers.

On Thursday, the morning's keynote speaker was Fr. Constantine Botsis of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Chicago (EP), concerning the need for pastoral counselling of couples preparing for holy matrimony in the Orthodox Church, and he shared his experience and the programs that are now being tried out in the Greek Church to prepare couples for marriage.

Fr. Constantine also was present at a Moleben before the Kursk icon in the cathedral.

The afternoon presentation on the same day was by a Greek Orthodox layman, Dr. Ari Christoforides, who is a psychiatrist specializing in marriage counsel, for couples who are experiencing matrimonial problems. Dr. Christoforides gave his insights on how divorces might be avoided.

These presentations were well received by all, and it was felt that the day's talks had been quite helpful and positive.

The day's activities concluded with a Lenten evening service in the cathedral and an Akathist before the Kursk Root Icon, celebrated by Bishop Peter with 8 of the diocesan priests.

On Friday morning, the services began at 7:30 with Matins, celebrated by Fr. Valery Vovkovsky, and the Presanctified Liturgy was celebrated by Bishop Peter with all of the assembled clergy: 15 priests, the cathedral deacon Fr. Julian, and numerous servers.

After the Presanctified Liturgy and trapeza on Friday, March 19, Bishop Peter, Fr. Martin Swanson and Fr. Jeremiah Loch went with the Kursk Root Icon to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Des Plaines, IL.

Vladyka Peter had offered to bring the icon to visit that church, with approximately one hour's notice.

As the icon arrived, the church bells began to ring, and two vested priests with censer awaited at the entrance to the Church. Inside the Church there were some 200-250 parishioners.

The Greek parish priests celebrated a Paraklesis to the Mother of God, and Vladyka Peter spoke about the icon.

All the adults and many children in attendance venerated the icon and were anointed. An hour and a half later, the bells again rang and the icon was censed by the clergy of the Greek Church as it departed.

The resolution of the Clergy Conference, passed unanimously by all clergy in attendance is printed below.

We the clergy of the Chicago-Detroit diocese, having gathered at our Annual Pastoral Conference in Chicago, in the presence of the Miraculous Kursk Icon of the Mother of God, greet our beloved flock this Lenten season and call upon all to continue this Lent in prayer, fasting and repentance.

We give thanks to our Lord for the numerous blessings He has bestowed upon our diocese this past year. Archbishop Alypy's health has been slowly improving, permitting Him to participate in the December Sobor of Bishops. Many priests noted an increase in church attendance and membership, an improvement in church singing, and growth in Church schools and youth groups. Several of our older, more established parishes have received a "second wind" from the influx of new parishioners from Russia. Sadly, a few of our parishes are suffering from demographic changes, but our diocese remains committed to the upkeep of these churches. At the same time, a number of our churches which were small missions only ten to fifteen years ago are now growing, self-sustaining parishes. In other places, we still suffer from a shortage of priests, but we are encouraged by the growth of our new missions. We commend the zeal of our faithful, and call upon you to continue your God-pleasing work. Our parishes and missions have particularly benefited from the Archpastoral visits of Bishop Peter who this past year has visited 20 parishes. May our Lord Jesus Christ continue to guide us in His Holy Vineyard.

The past year has also been healthy for our Church as a whole. As we noted in our October 2003 resolution, we rejoice at the possibility of reconciliation between the two parts of the Russian Church. The fulfillment of this desire will spiritually benefit our parishes. We note the several positive events which have transpired since our October conference: the successful visit of our delegation to Russia, the Pastoral conference in Nyack, the warm response of our Sobor of Bishops

to His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II, and the announcement of the visit of our First Hierarch Metropolitan Laurus to Russia this May. During the past few months some of our faithful have raised questions and fears concerning reconciliation. For many, however, when informed that the issue is neither “union,” nor “subjugation” but rather mutual reconciliation -- manifested by Eucharistic concelebration -- the fears tend to disappear. We recognize that both the Russian Church Abroad and the Moscow Patriarchate are heirs of the historical Russian Orthodox Church.

The events of the past year have given us hope that full reconciliation between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad will soon take place and that full Liturgical concelebration on all levels will become the norm. Intercommunion among the laity has been the generally accepted *de facto* practice throughout our Church for many years, and we now hope for concelebration among the clergy as well. We acknowledge that there are obstacles to overcome, but at the same time we consider that many arguments against mutual reconciliation have historically been rooted in sentiment, misunderstanding, or in an imprecise comprehension of our Church’s history and purpose. We pray that the commissions established on both sides will work with mutual sincerity and openness, and resolve the remaining issues in a timely manner. We declare our unequivocal trust in our First Hierarch, Metropolitan Laurus: that He will continue to lead our Church in the spirit of our Church’s founders, its original path. May our Metropolitan’s visit to Russia facilitate the long awaited reconciliation of the Russian Church, so that the light of Orthodoxy will shine brightly not only in Russia, but also throughout the entire world.

+Archbishop Alypy
+Bishop Peter
Protopriest Peter Burlakov
Igumen Ioann
Protopriest John Shaw
Protopriest Andrei Alexiev
Protopriest Eugene Grushetsky
Priest Paul Bassett
Priest John Sykaluk
Priest Christopher Stade
Priest Martin Swanson
Priest Jeremiah Loch
Priest Victor Boldewskul
Priest Mark Gilstrap
Priest Thomas Kulp
Priest Michael Carney
Priest Valery Vovkovski
Priest Gregory Joyce, Secretary

The letter to Metropolitan Christopher, the chief Serbian hierarch in the Midwestern Diocese, mentioned in Fr. John Shaw's synopsis above, is presented here:

March 6/19, 2004
42 Martyrs of Ammoria

Your Eminence, Most Reverend Metropolitan Christopher,

We ask your archpastoral blessing!

It is with great sadness that we received word of the latest tragic violence against our Serbian Orthodox brothers in Christ in Prizren. This most recent tragedy is only the latest chapter in the recent history of the international community's extremely poor oversight of Kosovo and their apparent indifference to the systematic destruction of the centuries-old holy sites there. We again extend our deepest sympathies to Your Eminence and all the Serbian Orthodox people, concerning both your continued suffering in Kosovo and regarding the terrible fire that recently took place at the Hilandar Monastery.

The Russian people have always been very close to the Serbian people, and this is especially true of those of us abroad. From the time that His Majesty King Alexander, His Holiness Patriarch Dimitry, and truly all the Serbian people welcomed our émigrés with open arms and brotherly love following the Communist Revolution in Russia, we have held a special place in our hearts for the Serbian people. We truly suffer with you as you suffer today.

As we gathered today in Chicago, IL for our annual Great Lenten Clergy Conference we served an intercessory Moleben before the wonderworking Kursk Icon of the Mother of God, asking the aid of the Mother of God for all the suffering Serbian people. We ask Your holy prayers and hope for God's continued mercy and blessing upon the cross-bearing Serbian Orthodox people – our brothers in Christ.

Asking for Your holy prayers,

+Archbishop Alypy

+Bishop Peter

Protopriest Peter Burlakov

Igumen Ioann

Protopriest John Shaw

Protopriest Andrei Alexiev

Protopriest Eugene Grushetsky

Priest Paul Bassett

Priest John Sykaluk

Priest Christopher Stade

Priest Martin Swanson

Priest Jeremiah Loch

Priest Victor Boldewskul

Priest Mark Gilstrap

Priest Thomas Kulp

Priest Michael Carney

Priest Valery Vovkovski

Priest Gregory Joyce, Secretary