



To all Clergy and Lay Delegates of the 46th Diocesan Assembly and All Midwest Diocesan Parish Councils:

With the blessing of His Eminence and at his request, I am writing to you about an important proposal for consideration at the upcoming Annual Midwest Diocesan Assembly.

We ask your approval for a premium of \$10 per member for the next two years to support the ongoing work of our new Parish Health Ministry. This premium will be in addition to the standard per capita assessment which covers our normal operating budget. The premium would apply for two years only. At the 2009 Diocesan Assembly the body will review progress and decide whether to continue funding this position or not. Perhaps we will be blessed with growth in our Diocesan census and be able to fund this effort within our normal operating budget. Or, perhaps other funding mechanisms may be found.

Delegates should be prepared to address this issue at the Assembly. A complete report will be presented to the assembly with examples of the work and developments accomplished thus far. With this in mind, I would like you to know that both His Eminence and I, along with the Diocesan Council, support this proposal.

I would like to take a moment to review the background behind this position and the progress made to date.

Taking Action

After years of discussion at Diocesan Assemblies, in June of 2006 the Diocesan Council confronted facts. The Diocese had shrunk 22% since 1998 and 51% of parishes had declined by 15% or more. Using surpluses from previous budget cycles, the Council, with a hearty endorsement from Archbishop JOB, took action to create a Parish Health Ministry. Joseph Kormos was asked to head this ministry on a paid, though part time basis through the end of 2007 after which new funding, via the Diocesan Assessment would be sought. This is the proposal that delegates will be asked to support.

A Work in Progress

The first step was to develop a vision that focused on encouraging and enabling parish health, vibrancy and vitality. *Helping parishes to strengthen their ability to live a life in Christ was and is the key principle underlying this ministry.*

It was clearly understood that the Parish Health Ministry *by itself* could not make parishes healthier and it certainly could not cause them to grow. The Ministry could, however, energize activity and conversation, work to build tools and methods for improved parish administration, and share sound practices – what is working and why - among parishes. In short we saw – and continue to see - this Ministry's job as one of "*stimulating*" healthy parish effort. Part coordinator, part 'idea person', part manager, part "connector", part workshop leader, and even part cheer leader, the Parish Health Ministry was a work in progress in its initial year.

A Successful First Year

I am pleased to report to you that by the time of our 2007 Assembly in Cleveland, the successful results of a substantial number of Parish Health Ministry projects will be shared with delegates. Parish leaders have regularly received issues of the Parish Pulse e-newsletter and a parish

health ministry webpage offers numerous new articles on topics ranging from communications practices to stewardship. A sparkling “Intro to Orthodoxy” Powerpoint class is beginning to be used in parishes. Recommendations for improved clergy compensation, and a plan for training lay catechists will be discussed along with a parish audit manual and a parish handbook for implementing the OCA Sexual misconduct policy in parishes. The first fruits of a new effort to help lay persons become more effective at Evangelization will be shared. Four parishes will have hosted parish health and vision workshops and three deanery workshops will be complete or scheduled. (A thorough summary of this year’s activities can be found at http://midwestdiocese.org/files/Parish_Health_report_for_Assembly.pdf)

This Ministry is beginning to stimulate our Diocese.

It is also the only activity in our Diocese which actively attempts to help all parishes. Our Mission Grants Program assists new communities – but this ministry is our only effort to build vitality in all parishes.

Building on a Good Start

We have only scratched the surface on the positive stimulation that can result from this ministry. We now need to face the issue of continuing funding for this position. Unlike so many proposals in the past, we have had the luxury to see the potential for this Diocesan ministry from its work over the past year. As I personally state in my Chancellor’s report, on behalf of the Diocesan Administration and Council, we endorse this proposal.

We know parish budgets are tight. We know that this is a bad time for a variety of reasons to ask for money -- but we offer these thoughts for your consideration:

- *If we choose not to continue this ministry, the Diocese will still be shrinking. And, there will be no answer to the question “what are we doing about this?”*
- *If we choose not to continue to fund this activity, and we choose NOT to at least try something else, we are making a choice in favor of the approach that has delivered consistent decline in the past.*
- *Do we believe this past approach – essentially that parishes ‘go it alone’ with little or no assistance in sharing what works and what doesn’t, will now deliver different results? If so why?*

Our desire is to develop a healthy, vibrant Diocese that can equip the saints for the work of the Gospel. Please give this proposal proper prayerful consideration. As His Eminence has quoted so many times in the past; “Insanity is doing things in the same way and expecting different results”. We have begun a good work. I hope and pray that you will desire to continue this good work in the future.

Prayerfully and respectfully,

Archpriest John Zdinak

Chancellor

Diocese of the Midwest