

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am writing to you through the pages of our community bulletin to keep you properly informed about recent events that have transpired in the life of our parish. Although my tenure as pastor here is temporary, I nonetheless am convinced that communicating the truth is always vital in the process of healing and reconciliation that must follow for St. Athanasius Parish to continue being a saving presence in the lives of its people. During the time I am with you, therefore, dialogue, as well as full and open discussions, will be the hallmark of my brief service to the parish.

I would be less than candid if I did not acknowledge that our parish has suffered grievously under the controversy that has unfolded over the recent two months. As a result, some parishioners have reacted with anger and hostility; others are bewildered, confused, and ambivalent; and still others are reluctant to involve themselves in a situation of seeming spiritual warfare. Finally, there are those who perceive the present situation as an opportunity to mark a new and more effective beginning in the life of our parish. These differing attitudes reflect the different perspectives which people bring to the judgments they make, and are perfectly natural and understandable.

But, I firmly believe that the lack of accurate information available to us has led to this confusion of attitudes. In the vacuum, social media has rushed to fill the void. As a result, inaccurate impressions are regarded as established facts, opinions become verifiable truths and rumors and whisperings become the topic of the day. The reason for this lack of information is the fact that His Eminence and the Metropolis have remained silent in the face of the criticism and recriminations. What is supremely important, however, is for all of us to understand the reasons for this resolute silence.

As you have all learned, Fr. Kastanas chose to file suit in the Superior Court of the Commonwealth seeking an injunction against the Metropolis to prevent it from accessing the contents of the computer used by Fr. Kastanas to conduct parish business and found in his office. Without belaboring the legal arguments that were presented and are a matter of public record, I am reporting to you that on Thursday, September 1, 2017, the judge issued a decision that denied the injunction as sought by Fr. Kastanas and instead ordered that two priests from the Metropolis access and inspect the computer to determine what information would be considered Church business and therefore will be removed from the computer, following which the computer itself would be returned to Fr. Kastanas. The Metropolis has proposed a detailed protocol so that the judicial Order can be implemented with all deliberate speed. It includes an independent third-party examination of the computer to ensure that its integrity has not been compromised and that no information is accidentally lost while reviewing its contents. Since this process is ongoing and incomplete, the Metropolis has been specifically advised to refrain from any comments that might complicate the issues now before the Court. Unfortunately, media accounts of the judicial Order have been misleading, and those operating in the social media world have felt no obligation to correctly inform nor similarly to show respect towards an ongoing legal process.

There is however, one final dimension to the silence of the Metropolis. Throughout its two-thousand year history, the church has confronted countless controversies involving its faith and governance. It has,

therefore, established a host of canons, procedures, and institutions, such as spiritual courts, some of which date from the fourth century, to examine and settle many of these issues.

The matter at hand will also be submitted to that process. The Metropolitan, however, is determined that while this issue will be submitted to the full authority of the church, that process will be characterized by neutrality, objectivity, scrupulous fairness, and absolute respect for the rights of Fr. Kastanas. In the interim, the canon law required the Metropolitan to suspend Fr. Kastanas from all priestly duties.

When these civil legal and ecclesiastical processes are fully concluded, I have received the personal assurance of the Metropolitan that a transparent report of the facts will be made public. At that time, I fully expect that the Metropolitan's ultimate decision will be seen as necessary, proportionate, supportive of the mission of the church, and in the best interests both of the parish of St. Athanasius, as well as the common good.

My dear brothers and sisters, while judgments of guilt or innocence, consequence or exoneration are not ours to make, we nonetheless have a vital role to play in moving forward. It is our responsibility to ensure the continued progress and vitality of the parish of St. Athanasius. We are called upon to ensure that our church will be a continuing saving presence in our lives and the lives of our children and succeeding generations. Someday, each of us in turn, will stand before the seat of judgment. There the righteous judge will ask, "In the hour of your church's greatest need, did you loyally and steadfastly stand with her, or did you abandon her out of anger or indifference?" At that awesome moment, I believe all of us will want to be able to answer the former and not the latter, for we shall surely be held accountable for our decision.

I am happy to be able to report to you that many people have already answered that question in the affirmative and as a result, all the ministries of our parish are doing well. Stella and Kathy continue to faithfully serve in our office and are available to help you in every possible way. When our Sunday School Director and faculty chose to resign, 14 people hastened to volunteer, and we have a full faculty. In addition, the Rev. Dr. Anton Vrame, the Director of the Archdiocese Department of Religious Education helped us to ensure that our curriculum reflects current best practices.

Our Greek School, under the direction of Eleni Giannaki and a faculty accredited by the New England Federation of Greek School Teachers, began its teaching program on Monday, September 18, 2017.

Our Little Halos Program has a full complement of students and is in the capable hands of Argyro Nikoletos and her staff. I have visited them often and the children seem delighted by their participation.

The GOYA held its organizational meeting after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, September 17, and with 40 young people present, elected a new slate of officers and is planning a full year's program of activities that will include joint functions with our sister parishes of Lexington and Woburn.

Our Philoptochos chapter of St. Barbara, led by President, Crystal Iakovou, and most of her executive board, held a successful organizational meeting and has begun the planning for a complimentary function that will

afford us the opportunity to enjoy one another's fellowship and will include a town hall style meeting where your questions can be candidly answered and your apprehensions laid to rest.

I was particularly delighted to learn that St. Athanasius was an inclusive parish. As a result of that commitment, we have for some time coordinated the P.E.A.C.E. Ministry, which encourages our special needs children and young adults to participate in the life of our community. We are very fortunate to have Althea Ioakimidis direct this program, and we hope to be networking with our sister parishes in Woburn, Lexington, Braintree, and Weston to enrich and strengthen its outreach.

I am also pleased to be able to report that our Pine Street Inn commitment remains steadfast and that for the month of September, we faithfully prepared, delivered, and served our customary meal.

Our senior choir returned after the summer break and under the direction of Stella Pathiakis is once again singing the responses of the Divine Liturgy. We are also making active plans to establish a youth choir in our parish.

We remain grateful to Vasilios Meimaris, who faithfully drove weekly from Cape Cod to chant at our services during the entire month of August. Now our cantor's stand is in the faithful and capable hands of Dimitris Manolakis and Spiros Prois, who serve with love, devotion, and great reverence for the worship services of our parish. At the same time, the liturgy is served by a full complement of fine young altar boys, including several new boys who have asked to join the ranks of altar servers.

In August, we embarked on a project to de-clutter and deep clean the entire church—Altar, sacristy, and nave, and that project is now nearing completion. We are also about to embark on a drive to restore and re-gild all of the chalices, patens, and altar vessels that are badly worn from years of constant use. If you feel called to this mission, you will have the opportunity to sponsor an object and donate the cost of its restoration.

Finally, I intend to ask the Parish Council to form a Strategic Planning Committee, which will, through systematic analysis and careful study, formulate both a short term and long-term plan of action to make our parish a more effective presence in our lives.

I hope that this lengthy letter has served to dispel some of the misinformation that has proliferated around us, has allayed your concerns about unfolding events, and will encourage you to join us in the God-pleasing task of ensuring that St. Athanasius Parish remains a shining beacon, which lights and guides our individual pilgrimage journey toward a life lived ever closer to God. Upon your return, be assured that you will be warmly embraced and joyfully welcomed to our team of faithful stewards of God's grace and providence.

With every wish for your continued good health and with love in Christ Jesus, I close.

With warmest personal regards,
Rev. Fr. Andrew Demotses