

# ARCHDIOCESAN ASSEMBLY REPORT

*WRITTEN BY SAVA DURAN*

“Lord Have Mercy,” says the man next to me as our plane’s tires leap off the ground and into the open air. My excitement begins to come forth as I look out the window and see God’s beautiful creation. I’m looking forward to spending four days of pure excitement, Love, and Joy with Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Monastics, and many laity.

The first person we meet in Saskatoon is lit with joy at recognizing the Deacon by his robes. We are immediately treated to a Tim Horton’s coffee, an event which any and all Canadians look forward to enjoying. We arrive shortly before lunch. The place seems to be deserted, but wait, in one room I hear joyful laughter followed with an air of importance. It is the Clergy Synaxis. No doubt they are discussing important matters. The surprising thing is that they are doing it in such a way that they are having fun. It reminds me of boys in a tree house enjoying each others company. Eventually they all come out for lunch, and the handful of laity join this tree house party.

After lunch many more delegates arrive, none of which I know. Eventually I see Phil and Sid walk through the doors after their 18hr drive. This makes me wonder, “What possess people to travel great lengths to attend such an event?” The atmosphere soon becomes one of a family reunion. People are greeting, hugging, and kissing one another. Conversations are being struck-up and people are being introduced to each other. Excitement builds on excitement. We have the wonderful privilege of celebrating Vespers together, and celebrate we did.

When the deacon and I arrived, the weather was hot and a little humid. By the time Vespers ended, the weather had changed to summer showers. This rain brought dampness to my spirit as I was looking forward to the outdoor barbeque we were supposed to have. I wondered what we were going to do. Fr. Denis Pihach, the Canadian Archdiocesan Chancellor, shouts out with his deep rustic voice “The barbeque will be moved in-doors because of the rain.” Everyone quiets down for the announcement, but, they are right back at their conversations, regardless of the change in weather. There is nothing that will change the mood of this crowd.

We fellowship together with in-door made burgers, salads and really good company. We, about 70 people, eventually are directed to the lounge and are able to carry-on our conversations with a drink.

We eventually attend a St. Vladimir’s Seminary alumni gathering. Dn. Kevin Smith addresses us and speaks about how great and wonderful the experience is at St. Vlad’s. He does mention that if anyone wants to donate money to St. Vladimir’s that they will get a tax receipt which they can use on their Canadian income tax return. He also spoke about some Professors which I’m sure we’ll never meet.

After the presentation, to my surprise, there was a table of cheese and wine waiting for us to consume it. Of course, we all joined in and fellowshiped even more. This goes on further into the night. As bed time approached, I came up with excuses to stay up and continue fellowshiping with these new found family members. Eventually people trickled off to bed, and so too did I. All in all, the first day of the Assembly was really exciting, refreshing, enlightening and most of all joyful. As I lay in bed, my thoughts turned to ways in which I could express and communicate what I saw, what I felt, the relationships I had built in order to share my joy with everyone I know.

I look out the window and see the sun’s rays coming in. I turn to my watch and realize that it is only 06:30, a whole 30min before my alarm clock is to wake me up.

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There is nothing for it. My excitement is renewed, so, I jump out and get ready for the day. It was at Divine Liturgy that I realized how many people there was at this Assembly. There must have been an extra 30 people that showed up sometime during the night or the early morning. The service was of course as beautiful as ever; but what I noticed most was the “blessed bread” that my kids tend to gravitate towards. They were handing out blessed bread 5 to 10 times the size of what I was used to. “WOW.” I immediately thought of all the little ones back at St. Herman’s and wished that they were present to see this. I figured there little minds would not believe me when I attempted to explain this miracle.

We had breakfast in our joyful way. After breaky we meet again and this time it was Bishop Seraphim himself that spoke to the Assembly. He handed his report in which summarized his traveling schedules. He presented the four eligible candidates for Auxiliary Bishop—Protodeacon Cyprian (Robert) Hutcheon, Priestmonk Vladimir (Lysack), Archpriest Denis Pihach, and Higoumene Irene (Rochon).

Fr. Denis submitted his report. There were two important points in the Chancellor’s report:

1. Deans were elected or appointed in all provinces for the first time in 70yrs.
2. Statistics of the Archdiocese:
  - a. 14 Deacons
  - b. 56 Priests
  - c. 3 Bishops
  - d. 14 Non-cleric Monastic
  - e. 25 Missions and Mission Stations (16-English, 9-Slavic/Albanian)
  - f. 38 Active Parishes
  - g. 10 Inactive rural parishes

Other reports were handed in by all deans. The treasurer also handed in his report. The one statistic I would like to share about the treasurer’s report was that St. Herman’s tithing for the 2003 year was fourth among all communities in Canada.

We stopped for a quick lunch and went back to our meetings. We listened to a Youth Report that touched on all youth activities across the country. There were presentations on a Group insurance, St. Vladimir’s Seminary, Saint Arseny Institute, Stewardship, Registered Retirement Plan for church workers, Charities Tax Laws, and on the necessity to assist the Ottawa Cathedral as it has become too small for the parishioners. After all of this we had supper and prepared ourselves for the Keynote Speaker.

Due to the unfortunate illness of his Grace Bishop Job, we found ourselves void of a SPEAKER. The divine Lot fell on our very own Fr. Lawrence Farley. Now, you must forgive me for getting excited about this event, for it did something to me. It jarred my soul and evoked an emotional response. Fr. Lawrence spoke on “Reading over the Shoulders of the Fathers.” Forgive me all for not attempting to reiterate what Fr. Lawrence said, I could never do him justice, but I think that communicating the audiences response provides a good measuring stick (Somebody did record it, and I am presently in the process of accessing this talk so that all can listen to it first hand. Don’t tell Fr. Lawrence!!!).

The audience laughed at all the funny things which we at St. Herman’s are so accustomed to hearing come out of our Father’s mouth. The interesting point was that

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they were laughing much harder, longer, and joyfully than what I was used to. The audience was very intrigued to hear what Fr. Lawrence said; it was as though they were hanging on to every word that came flowing out of his mouth. They were amazed that such a person existed in their midst, frankly, so was I. The audience was stunned by the end of it all; they had definitely had an encounter with Christ through this man's teaching, encouragement, and handle of the Holy Scriptures. By the end of it all, everyone present stood up and clapped, and clapped, and clapped, and clapped. It was as though they did not want it to end, neither did I. I remember a couple of things that went through me as all this clapping was going on: WE DON'T KNOW HOW GOOD WE HAVE IT AT ST. HERMAN'S, and, I SHOULD BE MAKING BETTER USE OF FR. LAWRENCE'S GIFTS. I eventually wiped the tears with my sleeve, as I stood there with a room full of people paralyzed at this amazing encounter. Forgive me. I could go on and on and on. After this event, we enjoyed some fellowship time before going to bed.

Once again the sun beams and my inner excitement beat my alarm clock to the punch. We headed off to Divine Liturgy. We enjoyed each others company at breakfast time. Eventually we went to another business session and discussed Clergy group insurance and some minor guidelines. We broke for lunch and to our surprise Metropolitan Herman showed up. It was a very exciting event. Most of us had not met the Metropolitan before. It was all quiet for 10min. The silence was broken by the call for grace. (A side note to all of us short people; I realized that the Lord does use us vertically challenged folk for great things. The Metropolitan was the same height as I was. My hope was rekindled to accomplish great things).

After lunch we came back for a music workshop. I have to be honest with you all. I did attempt the singing, but I became hopelessly lost; I did learn enough to realize that I have to spend some time learning this stuff. I'm sure it was a blast for people like Matushka Donna and Mother Anna. I did, however, see Phil leave quite quickly.

There was a presentation on External affairs, and there was a Nominations Report submitted. At this time we were also asked to fill out our nominations for Auxiliary Bishop; all people present took part in this. His Grace communicated to us that he would not reveal the outcome of the vote. He would prayerfully consider what we had written on paper and present a candidate to the Holy Synod of Bishops in the Fall. After this was completed, he would reveal the person which would be the Auxiliary. He asked everyone to continue to pray for the 4 candidates and for the Lord's Mercy in this endeavour.

We got ourselves ready for the Banquet. At the Banquet, I had the opportunity to receive a blessing from the Metropolitan. We were instructed to say, "Most Blessed Master Bless." I doubt he even heard me with all the background noise. He blessed me none the same. We were asked to find a table and sit down. A friend and I walked to a table so that we could sit down. We were immediately redirected to a different table; apparently those seats were taken. The deacon eventually joined us and we sat by ourselves making small talk. Everyone in the room stood up as the Metropolitan entered. All sets of eyes were awaiting the place of his seating. He walked straight towards us and sat down at our table. The three of us were shocked out of our socks.

As the meal went on I was able to ask the Metropolitan about the state of the Mexican Church and his visit to it. He became engaged in the conversation and communicated to me that he has to go back down and Consecrate the Altar (he had no idea it had not been done before he left Mexico city), and that they had a person in mind to elect as a Bishop (since they have not had one for many years). I was really

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encouraged to hear that the state in Mexico has been improving. I was equally blessed to hear it from the Metropolitan himself. The Metropolitan eventually addressed the people and retired for the evening. We, however, continued in our fellowship for some time. Eventually we headed off to bed.

In the morning, the Metropolitan served the Primate Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, which both of our clergy took part in. We headed off to brunch and had our final business session. The election of the Archdiocesan Council occurred. Some resolutions were discussed and some passed. The ones that I paid direction to related directly to the youth, and youth ministry. The Assembly unanimously backed these Youth-related resolutions. It was a very powerful statement for on behalf of all the youth in the Archdiocese of Canada.

After all this we had an unexpected event. Bishop Seraphim served a Holy Unction service for a man dying of cancer and his brother. This service was so beautiful, saddening, tearful, and a little Joyful. After some prayers, Bishop Seraphim anointed, with oil, and blessed, with Holy water, the two. The priests that were lined up, I think seven in all, proceeded to do likewise. One by one the Priests anointed and blessed the two. While all of this anointing and blessing was occurring, the rest of the congregation sang "Lord Have Mercy" in a very sombre tone. People broke out in tears. The man whose life was grasped by Cancer covered himself with tears. It was a sight to behold. Right then and there, I realized that the Lord is present even as death approaches.

After this service everyone went to their rooms packed up and got ready to leave. The departing was just as Glorious as the welcoming. The kiss of peace was exchanged, phone numbers and e-mails were exchanged, and a hope of seeing one another was shared. I was overcome by the sense of peace and joy even when I knew that these people, myself included, might not be seeing each other for several years.

I must thank all of you for sending me as your lay delegate to the Assembly. I was so blessed, encouraged, refreshed, renewed, and strengthened by my experiences. The one message that kept on hitting home was that this Church is a Church of Joy; it is the true faith, and I have tasted and seen that the Lord is Good. And so, I have one request from you all: When another Assembly is held, you all will make the effort to be there. Me and my family will certainly be there. The only way you can understand this Joy is by experiencing it. So Please do so.

**CHRIST IS (definitely) IN OUR MIDST!!!**

Your brother in Christ, Sava Duran