

By the mercies of God, beginning in the Fall of 2019, The Diocese of Alaska will leverage the divine history of His Church in Alaska to overcome our most pressing problems.

Ours is a history of missions, evangelism, and spiritual and practical discipleship in the Orthodox Tradition. We will apply the treasures of our history to solve the most pressing problems we face today: the aging and shrinking of our Orthodox parishes, our inability to raise-up the next generation of Orthodox Christians, the prevalence of substance and domestic abuse, the difficulty in building cross-cultural communities, and the inability to defend the faith delivered to the saints while being infected by 21st century culture, society, and economics.

To be specific, The St. Herman Seminary Orthodox Theological Seminary Board of Trustees, the faculty of the Seminary, and I have committed to four priorities:

- (1) Rapidly increase the number of *fully qualified and proven* clergy working in parishes.
- (2) Directly address the number one problem that assaults Alaskans, including clergy: alcoholism.
- (3) Build a rock-solid future for Orthodoxy in Alaska by effectively catechizing young children.
- (4) Accomplish all of that through seamless and uninterrupted teamwork between the seminary and the local parish.

To accomplish these priorities, we have launched three ministry challenges that will be heart and soul of our St. Herman Seminary:

Reader-Excellence Challenge (2019): By deploying *thoroughly* prepared and *thoroughly proven* Readers who are also *entirely proven* leaders of addiction recovery (*The Freedom Challenge*), early childhood catechesis (*Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*), and parish revitalization (*Come-and-See Catechesis*), we will give existing parishes an immediate “shot in the arm” and give existing priests a moment or two to catch their breath. This we have titled, *The Reader-Excellence Challenge...* and it is *very* challenging!

Deacon-Excellence Challenge (2021): Step Two is to deploy *thoroughly capable and thoroughly proven* Deacons. Not only will these Deacon’s be boots-on-the-

ground-ready for all liturgical responsibilities on day one of their return to the parish, they will also be proven leaders of teams, able to accept delegated responsibilities of their priests, able to inspire participation of parishioners, and able to lead teams that take care of all the non-liturgical responsibilities of the parish. We have titled this, *The Deacon-Excellence Challenge* and it will require graduation from *The Reader-Excellence Challenge*.

Priest-Excellence Challenge (2022): Finally, Step Three is *The Priest-Excellence Challenge*. In this phase of the revitalization of Orthodoxy in Alaska, the Candidate (who has graduated from the previous two Challenges) will be immersed in the personal dimensions of the priesthood as well as the deep and wide theological and Traditional dimensions of Orthodox Christianity.

I have two requests: (1) Go to the Seminary website (www.sthermanseminary.org) and read about these exciting initiatives in-depth. (2) Talk with your fellow parishioners about *The Reader-Excellence Challenge* with the intent of your parish applying to send at least one of your number to the Seminary this Fall.

Please notice, we are specifically inviting retired individuals and couples as well as younger adults to apply.

+ DAVID, Archbishop of Sitka and Alaska