

## **Sabbatical and Renewal**

The Archdiocese provides priests with a three month sabbatical for every six years of continued service in the same parish. In 2003 I took my first sabbatical after serving Assumption for eight years. This summer I will be taking my second sabbatical from ministry. A sabbatical is meant to allow a priest time away from ministry in order to renew, reflect and recharge. To a certain extent, every year Lent provides an opportunity for renewal yet it takes place while simultaneously conducting many administrative, pastoral and in my case Metropolis responsibilities as the regional vicar. Please be assured, my sabbatical has nothing to do with my continued ministry here at Assumption. I also am not leaving you alone. Deacon Drew is a phenomenal minister who has shown himself compassionate, caring and available to serve your needs here at Assumption. Deacon Drew will be delivering sermons and assisting Fr. Virgil on Sundays while I am away.

My desire for a sabbatical is based upon my openness to continue to learn from all of you and discover new ways in which we can fulfill our calling from Christ for this community. In order for this to happen, time away devoted to examining the current ministries, exploring what other communities have found successful and spending quality time with other like-minded experienced clergy will equip me to face the coming years with a renewed vision for the changes that lie ahead with the expansion of our community.

In recent years, I have found myself open to thinking “outside of the box” for ways in which we can share this gift we call the Orthodox Church with others. The more one labors in the Lord’s vineyard, the more one sees all the other vineyards. The existence of these various vineyards testifies that God is not limited by that which in our eyes separates us. Of course this is what makes God, God. Sure we have to test all spirits; some may be in fact demonic-driven cloaked as something good. Embarking upon our building program will require an enormous amount of planning community development. This is needed not only so we can maintain the new facilities but also develop the appropriate staff with ministry leaders that can serve the needs of the people. I will spend some time visiting various ministry leaders outside the Orthodox Church for best practices and ideas that can assist us in our community development.

I have been at Assumption for seventeen years and have seen Assumption enriched by the many new members who have joined us along the way. As the composition of Assumption is ever changing our long time members have also blossomed in their faith and have produced amazing fruit of putting that faith into action. Seeing how we respond to those in need or in crisis has been the most inspiring aspect for me serving you as your priest! Everyone treating everyone else as Christ would has always been preached here and witnessing the fruit of that kind of faith is overwhelming at times. This also means that as we as a community evolve and change everything related to church life also responds to these dynamics of development. The sabbatical will allow

me visiting with Orthodox Christians and listening to ways in which we as a church can enhance and respond to these changing dynamics.

My prayers for you all will remain constant during this time away. I will return for the first fifteen days of August and our Feast Day celebration in order to prepare for the coming fall programs here at Assumption.

In Christ's love,  
+Fr. Andrew