

Thursday, Sessions 1 & 2

Opening/Agenda/Election of Officers

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 PM with the singing of “O Heavenly King.”

Agenda change: The Compline scheduled for this evening will be replaced with a wine-and-cheese reception.

Officers:

- The proposed chairpersons were Fr. Martin Browne and Larry Skvir.
- The proposed secretaries were Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and Daria Cortese.
- A motion to accept the officers was made by Fr. Nicholas Solak and seconded by Fr. Timothy Cremeens. The motion passed unanimously.

Bishop’s Remarks

- See attached
- Thanks to Fr. Stephen Vernak and community of Christ the Savior for hosting the Assembly..
- Thanks for cohesiveness and cooperation of Diocesan Council over the past year.
- Thanks to Chancellor Fr. Martin Browne and Deans Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and Fr. Nicholas Solak
- Thanks to Joseph Tosca for his work as Diocesan Treasurer. He is willing to speak to all treasurers to give advice and feedback.
- Thanks to Mat. Ashley Joyner for serving as Financial Secretary to our diocese. This is a newly-created position.
- His Eminence stressed the value and necessity of audits and financial transparency.
- Thanks to Mat. Sandra Kopestonsky for organizational skills and labor on behalf of the diocese.

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- She prepares meals, buys groceries, washes guest linens, cares for Vladyka's cats when His Eminence is away and performs many other essential functions.
- May the Lord continue to bless her and Fr. Stephen with good health and many blessed years.
- Clergy peer learning groups and support groups for matushki, organized by Fr. Nicholas Solak, have already given great benefits to many. Clergy do not work in isolation and need the support of their brethren priests.
 - Thanks to Fr. Nicholas for program oversight. It is spreading to other OCA dioceses and other Orthodox jurisdictions in North America.
 - A healthy priest is in a much better position to facilitate a healthy parish.
- Thanks to those who organize the camp programs and retreats for youth. Summer camp staff/volunteers undergo background checks annually, even though they only need to be done once per three years.
- Thanks to Aric Gingo for work in the communications department. A huge source of news for the overall OCA website.
- Thanks to Fr. John Perich for overseeing an exhibit on the 1917 Russian Revolution at Villanova University.
- New format of Alive in Christ, and improved photo quality.
 - Fr. Martin Browne is now acting as editor.
 - Foci: worship, fellowship, service.
 - No more blurry photos, backs of heads, photos of food. Photos should show us as a light to the world.
- Several parishes have upgraded their websites with virtual tours and welcome videos. St. Michael's in Jermyn, Holy Cross, and others.
- Keeping up with current means of communication is crucial to maintaining and fostering relations with youth.
 - Phone book and newspaper ads are outdated. People get their news on the Internet, even more so the youth.

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- We have to educate ourselves on the use of social media. We have to adapt and communicate using channels to which young people have access and which they can understand.
- If we're going to do the work of the Church, we have to stay in the present. The past has great value, but we cannot become stuck in it.
- Thanks to Mat. Myra Kovalak and Maria Proch for Sunday school teacher training.
- Thanks to Fr. Stephen Vernak for organizing guest speakers such as Sister Vassa and Abbot Tryphon. We need to do a better job publishing these events outside of our own diocese. Please also let the diocese know if your parish is organizing a lecture series.
- Challenge: if our parish closed today, would it be missed by the surrounding people in the community? If the community would miss it, what would it miss?
 - We have a good number of parishes that would be missed because they donate to local food banks, participate in soup kitchens and do other charitable work within the community. Other parishes are visiting nursing homes, assisting needy children with winter coats, backpacks, school supplies are other necessities. Other worthy activities include Thanksgiving baskets, honoring veterans, prison ministry, supporting Orthodox mission work, IOCC and campus ministry.
- It is crucial to reach out to college students. Supporting seminaries and seminarians is also vital. Interestingly, the Diocese of the South pays educational debts for graduated seminarians.
- Parishes that are outward-focused are prone to growth. Those that are inward-looking are prone to decline.
 - Cycling through priests every few years is also detrimental. There are some parishes in our diocese that are 100 years old and have churned through 50 priests in that time.
 - A priest must be a leader with vision, not simply a chaplain to tend to the needs of an existing community.
- We have a shortage of clergy in our diocese.
 - We will have at least two transfers and one retirement this year, and one transfer is outside the diocese. We have to work on how we attract priests.

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- Parishes need to know how to treat their priests and how to properly support and compensate them.
- Parishes should review their clergy compensation situation.

Bishop's Activities

- 72 arch-pastoral visits
- 2 Holy Synod meetings
- Prison ministry conference
- Worked on property issues with the Diocesan Center.
- Presided over the pilgrimage to Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City.
- Blessed Holy Apostles' new building in Mechanicsburg.
- Served at St. Nicolai Orthodox Church, a new mission in Ohio.
- Prepared monthly clergy newsletter.
 - Refer to 2016 calendar on the diocesan website for full list of activities.
 - Check the Google calendars on the diocesan website for arch-pastoral activities, including church visits and office/administrative meetings.
- The Hebrew and Greek words for "to listen" imply obedience.
- This year's theme: Cultivating a Mission Mindset.
 - This year we hope that our Cont. Ed will be focused on facilitating growth and cultivating a mission mindset. Parish workshops and Alive in Christ articles will reinforce this.
 - His Eminence continues to encourage active community outreach. The sheep make the sheep.
 - The priest cannot be solely responsible for bringing new people into the Church. We need to encourage stewardship that supports the work of the Church.

- “To keep doing what we’ve always done and expect to get a different result is the definition of insanity.” -Albert Einstein.
- Thank you for coming. Here’s to a profitable meeting.

Credentials — Fr. John Onofrey

- 2 hierarchs
- 22 lay
- 27 clergy
- 52 total voting
- 6 alternates/ observers
- 1 guest

Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes from the 2016 Diocesan Assembly was made by Fr. John Onofrey and seconded by Fr. John Kowalczyk. The motion passed unanimously.

Chancellor’s Report

- See attached.
- A motion to accept the Chancellor’s Report was made by Fr. John Perich and seconded by Fr. Vladimir Fetcho. The motion passed unanimously.

Deanery Reports

- The deanery reports were posted to the diocesan website before the Assembly.
- A motion to accept them was made by Fr. James Weremedic and seconded by Fr. Daniel Kovalak. The motion passed unanimously.

Metropolitan Council Report

—6th Chancellors and Treasurers meeting took place on January 24th. The agenda included a review of the proportional giving plan. Things are going well in our diocese with regard to percentages and levels of giving.

— Fr. Daniel Kovalak asked if this report was available online before the Assembly. His Eminence replied that it was, although it was posted later than other documents.

— Fr. Timothy Hojnicky gave a recap of the report.

- It is the first time in years that we have had peace in the church, with no pending litigation, rogue bishops and scandals. It was fantastic to see peace in the national church over the past year.
- The 2018 All-American Council will be in St. Louis.
- The Metropolitan's four pillars, originally presented at the 2015 All-American Council in Atlanta, are being fleshed out in more detail. More information is available on the OCA website.

— Fr. Daniel Kovalak asked if there is pending litigation regarding Archbishop +NATHANIEL.

- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky stated that this information will be available shortly, although issues such as this are often reserved for the executive session of the Holy Synod, and much information remains confidential. His Eminence concurred.

— Fr. Daniel Kovalak asked how we plan to pay for the All-American Council under the proportional giving plan.

- Fr. Martin Browne explained that the AAC budget has not yet been finalized due to ongoing negotiations with the hotel.
- The budget proposal asks each diocese to contribute proportionately to funding the AAC, based on the giving proportion that diocese contributes to the OCA. We give 9.5 percent, so the proposal would be for us to pay that percentage of the AAC budget.

— Fr. Nicholas Solak asked if there are current, active investigations into allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct, and if the Office that investigates them is accountable to the Holy Synod.

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- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky replied that yes, the Office is accountable to the Synod, and a great deal of information with regard to such allegations is confidential and dealt with by the hierarchs in executive session.

— A motion to accept the Metropolitan Council report was made by Fr. Stephen Vernak and seconded by Fr. George Volkovinsky. The motion passed unanimously.

Session 1 concluded at 5:07 PM, followed by dinner and Vespers.

Guest Presentation: The Stewardship Calling — Bill Marianes

- see attached
- The presentation concluded at 9:26 PM, followed by a short Q&A session and a wine-and-cheese reception.

Friday, Session 3

Morning Activities

- The day began with the Divine Liturgy at 8:30 AM. The homilist was Fr. Timothy Hojnicky.
- Brunch was served at 10:40 AM.

Friday Morning Session — Larry Skvir

The meeting was called to order at 11:37 AM.

Agenda change: The Diocesan Center presentation was moved to beginning of session.

Diocesan Property Discussion — Archbishop +MARK

- The orphanage closed in 1973. In 1980, we were given permission to build the Diocesan Center on orphanage property.
- The monastery, seminary, orphanage and, really, the diocese were all together on that one property. We need to separate these entities out and create firewalls for protection in case of legal issues.

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- This disentanglement has been going on for approximately nine years. The property will hopefully be divided soon.
- The Diocesan Center needs to be moved to a more central and convenient location.
- The Seminary may be interested in purchasing the property, but this may not be fiscally feasible if the Seminary cannot locate a donor.
- We need to either vote on this today, to authorize the Diocesan Council to act, or hold a special assembly to vote to relocate the Diocesan Center after the orphanage issues are resolved.
- Fr. Daniel Kovalak asked if we can act before we have the papers in hand. His Eminence suggested a motion to give the Diocesan Council that authority to act once the papers are signed.
- Motion by Fr. Timothy Cremeens: Give the Diocesan Council authorization at the reception of all official documents to dispose of present property and to acquire new property. The motion was seconded by Fr. John Edward.
- Fr. Nicholas Solak asked if the motion includes buying a new property. Answer: yes.
- His Eminence has been looking at properties owned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Philadelphia. Many are in unsafe or otherwise undesirable locations.
 - We do not know how property tax issues will affect selection of a new hierarchical residence.
 - We need space for residence, hospitality and office work.
 - There has been discussion of having a separate office and residence.
- The orphanage building contains mixed archives from the monastery, seminary, diocese and old orphanage. We need to separate these out and give them to their respective entities.
- Fr. John Onofrey suggests giving the Diocesan Council authorization to at least start looking for a new property.
- Concern from the floor: as worded, the motion gives Diocesan Council authorization to sell and buy at any price, so we could wind up in a large debt without any further action from the assembly.

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- His Eminence replied that he is not in favor of anything that puts us in considerable debt. If we can find something in the Harrisburg-Mechanicsburg-Wrightstown area, that might be good.
- Fr. John Onofrey suggested adding a provision that the Diocesan Council would have to submit a potential property to approval before officially purchasing it.
- Floor concern: the motion is too broad because does not include any number ranges. We need a maximum purchase price in the motion.
- Larry Skvir suggested that the Finance Committee might be tasked to forward possible properties to the Diocesan Council (to suggest a maximum purchase price or range).
- Pdcn. Gregory Moser suggests basing prospective purchase range on the fair-market value of the Diocesan Property.
- Modified motion by Fr. Timothy Cremeens: Once the official documents pertaining to diocesan center are in hand, we authorize the Diocesan Council to sell the present property of the diocesan center at fair market value and to investigate and acquire the new property, not to exceed \$450,000, to relocate the diocesan center.
- Floor question: what is the maximum amount of time the property would be on the market at fair-market value before we start lowering the price? Otherwise it could be on the market for another 9 years before someone buys it. Should we add limiting language to the motion?
- Floor concern: appraisal and fair market value are two very different things. Even a certified appraisal can differ significantly from the fair market value. If we say "fair market value," we may be committing ourselves to an ambiguous definition.
- Floor concern: the price of the property is not the only issue. There will also be staffing issues, as Mat. Sandy won't be relocating to the new Diocesan Center. What will it cost to hire a staff person who will fulfill her functions? We need to determine the how, what and when of moving the Diocesan Center before we commit to any sale.
- Concern was expressed from the floor about motion language of "investigate and acquire," as this is akin to signing a blank check.

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- Fr. John Onofrey reminded the Assembly that the Diocesan Council was elected by our diocese to make decisions, and sometimes those decisions need to be made without consulting everyone.
- The Diocesan Assembly authorizes the Diocesan Council to acquire and dispose of property.
- Fr. Dan Kovalak asked if it is the intention to have another Council meeting before anything is purchased?
 - His Eminence stated that if necessary the Diocesan Council can have an emergency meeting with 48 hours' notice.
- Fr. Stephen Vernak expressed support for adding a provision of "without incurring debt."
- Floor question: if we add the aforementioned provision, what happens if we wind up needing to go into debt? Answer: would need to have another vote via special assembly.
- The motion passed with one abstention.
- Fr. Nicholas Solak suggested that if the required documents are not produced within 14 days, the legal people should be called before the next Diocesan Council meeting to give an accounting of why the documents haven't yet materialized.

Credentials — Fr. John Onofrey

- 27 clergy delegates
- 26 lay delegates
- 4 Diocesan Council members
- 57 total votes
- 11 alternates/ observers
- 0 guests

Treasury Report — Joseph Tosca

- Thanks to Mat. Ashley Joyner and Fr. Ignatius Gauvain.
- Thanks to all parishes for submitting various reports
- Thanks to Mat. Sandy Kopestonsky for all of her support.
- The diocese has made great progress in correcting parochial arrears. Some outstanding balances have been forgiven. Other parishes are on payment plans to reduce or eliminate their outstanding balances within three years. \$42,617 is currently owed.
- His Eminence met with the Pottstown parish council, and they came up with a proposal that we would forgive the diocesan portion of their debt, but allow the diocese to recoup the \$10,207 paid to the OCA on the parish's behalf. As of this week, the parish submitted a check in this amount, as well as another check for the first three months of this year.
- Progress toward moving to tithing: some parishes have jumped from giving level 1 to giving level 5.
 - The basis of the form was the form approved at the 2016 Diocesan Assembly, but it has been further revised and refined. The current form only allows for levels 2-5, as level 1 ended last year. This year every parish should be at least at level 2.
 - We would like all parishes to submit this form for 2017. Some have already done so.
 - If you complete the form in Excel, the spreadsheet does the calculations for you. If you cannot open Excel files, you will receive a PDF, but have to do the calculations manually.
- Giving level breakdown:
 - The monastery remains at level 1. Six parishes have already declared level 2 for this year.
 - 10 additional parishes may also be at Level 2, but have not yet had their annual meetings.
 - 19 parishes are at level 5 or above at this point.

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- His Eminence thanked Old Forge for submitting a tithe of an extra \$3,000 based on an unexpected \$30,000 surplus.
- Parishes are still required to submit their financial reports.
- If your parish has its annual meeting before its fiscal year ends, please do NOT submit the prior year's financial reports. They are effectively useless because they're already a year old.
- Account balance summary: see attached.
- Please reach out if your parish doesn't know how to do computerized finance with QuickBooks, etc.
- Floor suggestion: identify a pool of people with the technological expertise to help parishes learn how to do their finances, including electronic banking, etc.
- Larry Skvir called for applause for the excellent presentation.
- A motion to approve the report was made by Fr. Stephen Vernak and seconded by Dcn. Seraphim Reynolds. The motion passed unanimously.

Auditors' Report

- See attached.
- Larry Skvir read the report in the absence of the auditors.
- A motion to accept the report was made by Fr. John Kowalczyk and seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak. The motion passed unanimously.

2017 Budget Proposal — Joseph Tosca

- see attached.
- A motion to approve the proposed budget was made by Fr. John Onofrey and seconded by Fr. Jason Franchak. The motion passed unanimously.

Report on Clergy Peer Groups — Fr. Nicholas Solak

- In December 2015 the diocese received a \$25,000 matching grant to begin a clergy peer learning program.
 - The groups bring together small groups of clergy and trained facilitators to share wisdom, learning, struggles, and challenges of parish ministry in a time of exponential change.
 - Groups meet for a full day once every three months.
 - The focus is on the practical aspects of parish ministry.
 - Isolation and burnout are major occupational hazards of parish ministry.
- Interest in these peer learning groups has spread throughout the OCA.
- Some priests are reluctant to participate because of experiences in the church that have led to a lack of trust in the Church and in fellow clergy.
- We are halfway through the grant period. The program was free for the first year. In this second year, participants are asked to bring \$250 from their parish's clergy continuing education budget to help sustain the program beyond the grant period.
- Archbishop +MARK is pleased that this program has started in our diocese.
 - Demographically, 1,500 evangelical Protestant ministers leave the ministry on a monthly basis. Our seminaries have also done studies, and found that a higher number than we would care to see have also graduated from seminary, been ordained and then eventually left the priesthood.
 - Ministry can be very hard on priests, matushki and their children. The Church has a responsibility to assist them, to take care for the clergy we have.
- The Lilly Foundation also has a Clergy Renewal Program. Parishes apply to give their priests a four-month sabbatical.
 - Each grant is \$50,000. Of that, \$15,000 is for the parish to pay expenses incurred in the priest's absence. The remainder goes to the priest, to pay his expenses during the period.
 - Fr. Nicholas' parish applied for and received the grant. He will be taking a four-month sabbatical this year. Please speak with Fr. Nicholas about this if interested.

- A motion to approve the report was made by Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk and seconded by Fr. John Edward. The motion passed unanimously.

Finance Committee — Pdn. Sergei Kapral

- There was no report submitted prior to the Assembly.
- For the past 2-1/2 years the Committee has sought to help...
- A motion to accept the report was made by Fr. Steven Vernak and seconded by Fr. Daniel Kovalak. The motion passed unanimously.

Diocesan Council Secretary's Report

- continued from last night.
- Archbishop +MARK thanked Fr. Stephen Vernak for his hard work as Secretary.
- A motion to accept the report was made by Fr. Daniel Kovalak and seconded by Fr. David Shewczyk. The motion passed unanimously.

Other Reports

- **Communications:**
 - Aric Gingo was unavailable due to a funeral.
 - Archbishop +MARK stated that our website has a lot of dead ends that need to be cleaned up, and some linked documents need to be more easily accessed. Archpriest John Matusiak, who writes a lot for the OCA website, uses our diocesan website as a source for current information.
 - Fr. Martin Browne stated that we did put out a talent survey several years ago, and requested parishes to submit names of individuals who are willing to share particular talents with the diocese. The response was underwhelming.
 - Fr. Martin reiterates the standing request for each parish to put it out there in this week's or next week's bulletin.

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- We have to recruit young people to participate in our parish and diocesan communications. Don't limit it to Facebook: consider Snapchat, Instagram, SMS and other channels of communications.
- As we have the young people disseminate the message, they are also receiving the message. This is similar to the theological education experienced by choir members.
- **Office of Church School Programs and Curriculum**
 - The report was published online before the Assembly.
 - No representatives were in attendance.
- **Clergy Health**
 - The report was published online before the Assembly.
 - No representatives were in attendance.
- **Liturgical Life — Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk**
 - The Committee reviews questions people have about liturgical life. If you have such questions, please let Fr. Victor know.
 - Projects include developing materials for the major feasts and Pascha. Committee needs help, so if you are available, please speak with Fr. Victor. Publishing and formatting help are particularly needed.
 - The Committee is also working on a standardized Panikhida book that will allow for parochial uniformity for funerals and memorials.
- **Missions — Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk**
 - Mission funds are going to Holy Apostles in Mechanicsburg and the Russian mission outreach at St. Stephen's Cathedral.
 - Northeast Philadelphia has a strong Russian population, and the Cathedral has been offering Slavonic services for them for the past eight or nine years.
 - Both liturgies take place at the same time and enjoy a single coffee hour afterwards, so the entire congregation can socialize and get to know one another better.

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- The Russian contingent of the Cathedral is trying to figure out what's next. Some are interested in forming a separate parish. They are exploring and leaving many options open.

- **Health Insurance**

- The report was published online before the Assembly.
- Fr. John Onofrey suggested negotiating, as a diocese, for a better health plan, rather than many parishes using separate plans.
- His Eminence stated that participation numbers include some seminary professors and some monastics. We have fairly low parish participation.
- Fr. Nicholas Solak said he receives a 1099 from his parish, and then pays Social Security tax based on that 1099. Having to pay for his own health insurance out of those 1099 funds has increased his reportable income and therefore increased his Social Security payments.

- **Mechanicsburg building project — Fr. Timothy Hojniki**

- The building is finished. Glory to God!
- The first bucket of dirt was dug in July 2015. The first service in the new building took place on October 1st, 2016 — the Feast of the Protection of the Theotokos.
- The faithful of Holy Apostles also celebrated Nativity and Theophany in the new space.
- The mortgage payment is about \$10,000 a month. Holy Apostles is meeting this obligation.
- Please keep the parish in your prayers.

- **Office of Young Adult Activities — Fr. Timothy Hojniki**

- Fr. Daniel Ressetar will be the speaker at the upcoming youth retreat.
- Last year's summer programs very successful.
- A large group of youths also attend Novogodny Ball annually. Last year there were 18 kids from Williamsport in attendance. Thanks for Fr. Daniel Kovalak for bringing them.

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- Larry Skvir stated that some funds from the Novogodny Ball were used to repair the dock at the youth facility.
- A motion to accept the departmental reports was made by Fr. Dan Kovalak and seconded by Jim O'Brien. The motion passed unanimously.

New Business

- Fr. John Nightingale has been hospitalized since April 2016 for neck injuries sustained in a fall. He should hopefully be going home at the end of January.
 - He has regained use of his hands, but requires a wheelchair and needs help with expenses for modifying his home and purchasing a wheelchair van.
 - Matushka Kyra is already caring for her two elderly parents.
 - Given Fr. John's extensive contributions to the Church for many years, including using personal funds to purchase vestments and service books for parishes that could not afford them, His Eminence requests financial support for them.
 - Larry Skvir recommended that we sign a card for Fr. John so he knows we have not forgotten him. Please sign the card before you leave at the end of the session.
- Fr. George Volkovinsky, who is from Belarus, and has just gotten notice that his immigration papers are moving forward.
 - He requires some financial assistance to complete this lengthy and expensive process. He is short about \$3,000.
 - Fr. George's daughter wants to enter the US military, and cannot do that or attend college as a resident until Fr. George's papers are approved. His Eminence requests that we consider donations for this purpose.
 - The upcoming clergy retreat will take place on February 23rd-24th, at the retreat center near Philadelphia. The speaker is Fr. Chad Hatfield. All clergy are encouraged to attend.
 - Fr. Peter Henry asks about alternative fundraising platforms such as GoFundMe. His Eminence noted that GoFundMe takes 4 percent, while the diocese won't take a cut. Contributions made through the diocese are also tax-deductible.

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- The 2018 Annual Assembly will take place in Wilmington, Delaware on January 24th and 25th.
- His Eminence asked if the Annual Assembly should occur in a different deanery each year. Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk expressed support for the idea.
- Question from floor: can we do subsequent Assemblies earlier?
 - Fr. Martin Browne explained that the problem with holding Assemblies earlier is that the fiscal year concludes at end of the December.
 - When we had Assemblies in December, we also encountered sporadic weather problems. There have been no significant weather issues since we moved the Assemblies to January.
- A motion to adjourn the Assembly was made by Fr. Barnabas Fravel and seconded by Fr. Stephen Vernak. The motion passed unanimously.
- The Assembly concluded at 2:37 PM with the singing of “It is Truly Meet.”

Respectfully submitted,

Daria Cortese, Lay Secretary

Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Clergy Secretary