

Orthodox Church in America - Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania
56th Annual Diocesan Assembly, January 23 – 24, 2020
Christ The Savior Orthodox Church, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Thursday, January 23, 2020

The formal opening of the Assembly began with the singing of *O Heavenly King*.

Presentation of the Agenda

The agenda was approved by general acclamation.

Election of Assembly Officials

- Clergy chair: V. Rev. Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk
- Lay Chair: Stephanie Ristvey
- Clergy Secretary: V. Rev. Fr. Innocent Neal
- Lay Secretary: Denise Distefano

The officials were approved by general acclamation.

Credentials Committee Report - Fr. John Onofrey

- 1 Hierarch
- 27 Clergy
- 30 Lay Delegates
- 2 Diocesan Council Members
- 59 Total Voting Members
- 21 Observers/Alternates

Hierarchical Message

Archbishop Mark's initial remarks supported the theme of Fr. Thomas Soroka's 2020 presentation, by emphasizing "mission" as the purpose of parish life, and not merely "maintenance" of a church facility. Parishes are urged to revitalize and take steps to assess if there is a vision for mission, charitable work, parish growth, a full liturgical cycle, Christian education opportunities for all ages, and pastoral vision and leadership. Fr. Thomas is a valuable resource to the Diocese, and all are encouraged to develop a vision and long-term plan for their parish.

The V. Rev. Fr. Timothy Hojnicky worked closely with Youth Directors, Katya Hubiak, Dimitri Ressetar, David Drobish and Rebecca Oliver to resume, reorganize and complete the Diocese summer camp program. Current volunteers and counselors are active members, in good standing of an Orthodox Church, and have the recommendation of their parish. The team is working to insure the Orthodoxy of the Program, as well as, transparency and accountability of youth ministry program of the Diocese.

Moving forward, all financial records will be reviewed by the Diocesan Council treasurer and auditors.

Throughout the year, His Eminence attended Holy Synod gatherings, board meetings for the Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, three Diocesan Council Meetings, as well as, participation in numerous conference calls. Careful selection of potential clergy for the Diocese continues to of great importance. As always, Archbishop Mark's visitation schedule is available on-line.

Orthodox Web Solutions will develop a new web site for the Diocese. Transition is anticipated occur mid-year.

Thank you to Matushka Ashley Joyner (former administrative assistant) and to Carmen Hodson (new administrative assistant) who keep the administrative work of the Diocese organized. Also, to the Diocesan Council members for their commitment and labors on behalf of the Church and the Diocese. In addition, thank you the V. Rev. Fr. Martin Browne, Chancellor, and the Deans, the V. Rev. Frs. Nicholas Solak, Victor Gorodenchuk and Timothy Hojnicky, whose tireless efforts provide great support.

Most of the renovation work at the Chancery has been completed. The beautiful Chapel contains furnishings made by Doug Cain and Icons donated by St. Nikolai Mission in Alliance, OH. The Diocesan attorney continues to work to secure tax exemption status for the Chancery.

Great Lent is drawing near, and the faithful were encouraged to participate in the traditional services and to increase their pray life. They were also encouraged to participate in one or two Lenten services that they may have not ever attended before.

There were no questions at the conclusion of the message. (Complete message available online.)

Minutes of the 55th Annual Diocesan Assembly

There were no questions or corrections made to the printed Minutes. Motion to accept was made by Delegate Michael Geleff. Seconded by V. Rev. Fr. James Weremedic. Unanimously approved.

The Assembly broke at 5:00 pm for a delicious dinner prepared by the faithful of Christ The Saviour Church. It was followed by Great Vespers at 6:30 pm.

Orthodox Church Capital Improvement Fund (OCCIF): 7pm

V. Rev. Fr. John Dresko, Director and Interim Treasurer provided an overview about the purpose and work of the OCCIF. The OCCIF was created to assist parishes in the Orthodox Church (USA) to acquire, build, remodel, and refinance church-related properties as a mortgage bank and was established by volunteer Orthodox lay persons. The company offers financial resources for parish capital projects that is available through a step qualification process. They also seek interested Orthodox institutions and individuals for investment. The investments will earn interest during the required 5-year term. Investment money is put into a loan pool where it is

used to make new loans to Orthodox organizations throughout the United States. For further information see <https://occif.org/>

Parish Growth Presentation: 7:30 pm to 9:30 pm

The V. Rev. Thomas Soroka detailed the importance of parish growth and ongoing revitalization of our churches by posing questions that included: What is the church for? Where are we going? What are we doing? What is your mission? What is your message?

Church attendance is down. Current societal trends indicate that people are not just changing denominations, but they may not know anything about God as did prior generations. It is important to know how to respond to people in this current day and age. In addition, Fr. Thomas urged us to not make assumptions about what people do or do not know in the church. Teach them so they will know.

Parishes go through life cycles and they need leadership and vision to move forward. Resources are available to initiate the process. Fr. Thomas advised parishes to do 4 things: 1) have a frank discussion with parishioners about long-range planning 2) align with parishioners who want growth and are willing to move forward. The rest will eventually come along, 3) readily encourage clergy to preach on themes of opportunities within the parish such as: Love one another (if hate is a problem), accept visitors or new families (if acceptance is a problem), 4) be communication and technology focused. Improve the church website, utilize Face Book or podcasts on Ancient Faith Radio.

Fr. Thomas counsels all to seriously adopt a cooperative approach with God, not as a “committee” but by using our individual gifts and talents to unify around the mission and vision in the church.

The session concluded with *It Is Truly Meet*

Evening Social Time: 9:30 pm- Attendees enjoyed an evening social in the church hall.

Friday, January 25, 2020

The reading of the Hours began at 8:00 am, followed by Divine Liturgy at 8:30 AM, and a 10:00 am brunch. The meeting was called to order at 11:37 am with the singing of *O Heavenly King*.

Credentials Committee Report - Fr. John Onofrey

- 1 Hierarch
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Motion to accept Fr. Onofrey's Report by Russ Torosky, Seconded by Nina Petro. Unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report

Report presented by Mark Linnehan (Complete report available online). Overall, obligations are up to date and there is a positive cash flow.

Question: John Malinchok - about accuracy of income reporting?

Response: Income reporting is accurate. Profitability up about \$37,000.

Question: Delegate asked - What is the Lily Fund?

Response: Lily is a non-profit charitable foundation for the Clergy Peer Program.

Comment: Matushka Sharon Hubiak noted that auditors had advised for Director of the Youth Ministry to use QuickBooks?

Question: Delegate asked - What were the 2018 net assets?

Response: Some items were mis-classified, and numbers weren't exact. Assets: \$738.00.

Motion to accept Treasurer's Report by Fr. Traian Stafiuc. Seconded by Fr. Seraphim Reynolds. Unanimously approved.

Diocesan Auditors

Report presented by Matushka Sharon Hubiak (Complete report available online)

Question: Nina Petro - Was there a request from DOS for funds from us? Why did we give the loan?

Response: The DOS has had a program for a while. They had a good interest rate.

Question: V. Fr. James Weremedic asked about term limits for the funds.

Response: There are no term limits and no penalties for these funds.

Question: Archbishop Mark asked: How is the Interest computed?

Response: Compounded – 3.75 in a year.

Question: Where are these organizations based?

Response: DOS - Texas, RBO – PA OCCIF – CA

Comment: Deacon John Shingara (Diocesan Council Comment) Funds are backed by best banking practices and based on auditor's recommendations. He suggested a fidelity bond of malfeasance so there is an insurance policy to support the funds - like a traditional investment. Matushka Sharon Hubiak will draft an investment policy since these are not traditional investments.

Motion to accept: V. Rev. Fr. Tim Hojnicky. Seconded by Mark Yurky - Christ the Saviour Church Unanimously approved.

2020 Proposed Budget

Report presented by Mark Linnehan (Complete report available online.)

Question: Sharon Hubiak - How much money is budgeted for the 50th Anniversary celebration? (Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America). Will we need to charge additional fees for the event?

Response: \$3500 is budgeted.

Comment: Fr. John Perich - Gradyville It is unclear what exactly the Diocese wants for the celebration. With more clarity they can better prepare a budget for the event. We cannot minimize the importance of this anniversary. The canonization of St. Herman gave us the possibility to be autocephalous. We need participation and pledges from all parishes. PA was where autocephaly started. It was first incorporated here. Whatever the budget may be it is important for us in PA to be in the forefront of this celebration. Friday 7th-9th of August. There will be speakers, Liturgy, etc.

Comment: Debbie Taylor - Gradyville, PA., thanked Fr. John Perich for giving context to the celebration and suggested that the cost of the event may well be beyond \$3500 even if individual fees are requested for attendance. There will be tents, transportation... Please think in terms of the importance of the event and being able to do all that we want to do.

Comment: Archbishop Mark - Our Autocephaly means we are the only orthodox church in US that can vote in our own Hierarchs. All other Archdiocesan bishops are more or less auxiliaries. We are very unique in this way. As a bishop of the OCA one can speak his mind at synod meetings without fear of being removed. Auxiliaries cannot. We are free to preach the gospel without interference from another jurisdiction or mother church. We can celebrate the freedom we have as we become an indigenous church.

Motion to accept: Fr. John Onofrey - Since a proper decision cannot be made at this time, he moved to allow the budget to remain at \$3500 and give authority to the Diocesan Council for further consideration. Seconded by Michael Geleff. Unanimously approved.

Interjections after the Motions:

Diocesan Council member, Mark Linnehan mentioned that budgets are only guidelines and don't need motions to have the Diocesan Council to do what is proper.

Comment: Archbishop Mark - We should consider increasing the budget. It would be nice if we could do something and not charge people.

Comment: Fr. John Onofrey - Because it is a fluid decision we should not try to decide here - The council will vote.

Comment: Archbishop Mark - The diocesan council is there to make decision on changing the line item amount.

Comment: V. Rev. Fr. Martin Browne asked if anyone wanted to purpose a cap on the budget for the celebration?

General responses were to leave it up to the Diocesan Council and Archbishop Mark. Drawing inspiration from Fr. Thomas Soroka's presentation, Fr. Martin asked for parishes to support the celebration and opportunity to focus on the mission of the OCA. He urged that we can carry on the mission of the church and honor St. Herman of Alaska - as what we see our mission to be. Remember our first love. The Orthodox faith.

Comment: Fr. John P - Gradyville - Whatever Vladyka decides along with the council would be most appropriate.

The Assembly broke for a snack at noon and resumed the meeting at 12:30 pm with the Chancellors Report.

Chancellors Report

V. Rev. Martin Browne thanked the Dean's of the Diocese for making his job easy. (Complete report available online.)

Comment: Fr. Stephen Vernak would like to see more retreats for men, women and the youth and to increase pan orthodox opportunities. He advocated for improving communication for these types of events throughout the dioceses.

Comment: Nina Pietro reinforced the importance of having pan orthodox gatherings.

Comment: V. Rev. Martin Browne said there is no central clearing house for communicating about pan-orthodox events and that we need to better share this information among parishes. In addition, we can better participate in the events of other jurisdictions. We have a responsibility to nourish our spiritual lives in an ever-changing world.

Comment: Archbishop Mark said he will begin to forward emails about Antiochian Village events to our parishes.

Comment: Fr. Mark Kozak - Mentioned the clergy brotherhood meetings can also be a resource for retreats in the area.

Comment: suggested that churches hosting a retreat to send the invitation to other churches & jurisdictions.

Motion to accept - Fr. Stephen Vernak, seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak
Thank you for the report.

Diocesan Deans Reports

Fr. Solak - Not present - report included

Fr. Timothy - NO questions

Fr. Victor - NO questions

Motion to accept Reports - Fr. John Perich – Gradyville, Theodore Fedora - Holy Cross

Metropolitan Council Representative's Report - Fr. Timothy Hojnicky

Question: Fr. John Onofrey asked if next year's All American Council meeting will have a different format instead of using video's?

Response: V. Rev. Timothy Hojnicky - There is a meeting in two weeks to discuss the format changes as many people have made comments about the last All American Council.

Comment: Mark Linnehan noted there were also breakout sessions available to attend at the Council meeting.

Comment: V. Rev. Timothy Hojnicky echoed participation in the breakout sessions. He expressed that the videos are educational and provide a snapshot of a given diocese to balance various points of information.

Question: Fr. Barnabas Fravel from Delaware - Can you talk about the relocation committee for the chancery from Syosset, NY to Washington, D.C.? He commented that the church archives were part of the challenge and the documents were at risk as related to the integrity of the storage area. He asked if storage is available off-site?

Response: Yes. There is discussion around the possibility of moving the chancery to the Met See in DC? His Beatitude and the chancellor are open to considering the possibility. They assigned a committee to research these possibilities. The archives would be the most difficult part. There are questions about how to approach the archives if moved.

Question: Fr. John Onofrey - Stated there is a long history about relocation and noted that it is convenient to receive dignitaries in New York verses other locations.

Comment/Response to above relocation questions: Fr. John Perich reported that he is on the Archives Committee and most of the documents have been digitized in the last 6 months and are safe. He said, the best preservation practice would be to remove the documents from the Syosset, NY location.

Comment: Archbishop Mark said the Metropolitan Council is currently exploring the possibility of relocating from Syosset, NY to Washington, D.C. This topic is being addressed by the Metropolitan Council and then it will come to the All-American Council. The decision involves a 7-million-dollar project, which is currently outside the discussion of the dioceses. More information to follow in the next 2 weeks.

Comment: Delegate Nina Pietro noted it would be important to have an appropriate curator to oversee the archives.

Motion to accept Report - Fr. Mark Kozak, seconded Michael Geleff.
Thank you for the report.

Diocesan Council Secretary Report

No questions or comments.

Department of Education

Not present.

Office of Youth and Education

Katya Hubiak read the report. Dimitri Ressetar spoke briefly about camp finances.

Question: Fr. Stephen Vernak asked if we need more counselors?

Response: Yes, we need both, counselors and campers.

Question: Fr. Stephen Vernak asked when camp registration begins? The counselors were thanked for a job well done.

Response: February 3rd.

Question: Mark Linnehan asked if the Dioceses pay for clergy's children to attend camp?

Response: Yes.

Comment: Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk mentioned there are also donated funds for the children of seminary families.

Question: How are children sponsored that can not afford to attend?

Response: There are no current scholarships, but parishes do sponsor kids.

Question: A Sunday School teacher asked - What is the best channel to give feedback to kids and families about camp?

Response: St. Tikhon's camp org website.

Comment: Fr. Timothy Hojnicky noted he was proud of the new counselors for taking on the Youth Camp.

Thank you for the report.

Health Insurance

Matushka Kathy Kowalczyk reported that St. Tikhon's and the Dioceses are currently covered under a new United Health Care policy for this year. Archbishop Mark and Fr. Timothy Hasenecz have their own individual insurance policies.

Thank you for the report.

Communication

Not present.

Liturgical Life Report

Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk stated the purpose of the committee is to help parishes with liturgical celebrations. In particular, he suggested that clergy to hold vigil services occasionally even though you don't see really see them in parishes. He tried several ways to offer it at the Cathedral and came up with an abbreviated vigil that is done 1x per month (approx. length 1 hr. -10 min's). He has created a booklet with 8 Tones and will eventually place it on the Diocesan website.

Seminary Internship

Fr. Silouan Burns thanked Archbishop Mark for initiating the Internship/Mentoring program and expressed collective feedback that it is a valuable experience for all the seminarians. He is appreciative of the opportunity to learn and perform liturgical services. He shared that the internship has helped priests from other countries to become more comfortable and have a sense of home and family. It has also facilitated fellowship within the clergy peer group.

Matushka Emilia Burns expressed that this experience has lent itself to learning from seasoned Matushke. On behalf of the other wives in the program, she thanked the Matushke for their acceptance, love and encouragement.

Committee Reports - Completed.

Old Business - None

New Business

Archbishop Mark said, Matushka Jennifer Franchak did not incur surgery for her condition and she has been released from the hospital and is at home.

His Eminence thanked the auditors that work and travel throughout the year. This year, investments were a challenge and he would like the Diocese to develop an investment policy.

Archbishop Mark echoed an earlier discussion about communicating parish events in the Dioceses. He urged for flyers to be posted on the website in a timely manner and to encourage parishioners to "like it" so they will send it to others.

Archbishop Mark thanked Fr. Stephen Vernack and the faithful people of Christ The Saviour church for hosting the Assembly. He also thanked the delegates and observers for attending and for a peaceful meeting.

PA March for Life - Archbishop Mark reported that *March for Life* in Washington, D.C. will continue to be held during the month of February, however it will expand to the state of PA largely due to the work of the PA Family Council, a conservative group. The *PA March for Life* is Monday, May 18, 2020 and will be held at the PA State Capitol in Harrisburg. Prayer begin at 11 am. The March begins at 12 noon. Harrisburg anticipates approximately 1500 attendees. *March for Life* was held in the state of VA last year where they anticipated 1500 people. Ten thousand attended. Parishes are encouraged to participate.

Subdeacon Sebastian Crews indicated people who attend will assemble as a Diocese group, but plans are still fluid. If you plan to attend, consider coming by train because the station is across the street from the capitol and this will alleviate parking. A shuttle is pending. Please pass on this information to other jurisdictions. (More information at: <https://MarchForLife.org>)

Interjection – Delegate Joshua Potteiger from Holy Apostles Orthodox Mission shared his perspective of the OCA youth summer camp which he feels allows for important interaction with other Orthodox children. He also said the internship of Fr. Silouan Burns has benefitted his parish though hospitality and financial support and this brings the community together.

Fr. Martin - Next year's Diocesan Council

Location Holy Trinity in Wilkes-Barre
January 21, 22 or 28-29

Motion to accept January 28/29

Fr. Stephen Vernack

Fr. John Onofrey

Motion accepted

Motion to adjourn by V. Rev. Timothy Hojnicky, seconded by Joe Paprota

Unanimously approved.

Assembly adjourned with the singing of *It Is Truly Meet*.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise Distefano, Lay Secretary

Fr. Innocent Neal, Clergy Secretary