
58th Annual Diocesan Assembly Minutes

January 26th-27th, 2022

The agenda, budget proposal and reports were made available on the diocesan website prior to the meeting.

Opening

The Assembly was convened at 4:15 with the singing of “O heavenly King”.

Agenda and Appointments

Agenda: A motion to accept the agenda was made by Fr. Traian Stafiuc and seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky. The motion passed unanimously via voice vote.

Credentials:

- The credentials were compiled by Mat. Mary Reynolds and Sbdn. Sebastian Crews.
- 1 hierarch, 19 clergy, 23 lay delegates, 4 observers, 5 Diocesan Council members, 2 auditors.
- **Total votes: 48.**

Chairpersons: Dr. Paul Witek and Mark Linnehan.

Secretariat: Fr. Silouan Burns and Daria Cortése

Nominating Committee: Fr. Stephen Vernak and Fr. Michael Demko

Tellers: Fr. Mark Koczak and Fr. Gregory White

Hierarchal Address

- His Eminence began his address by quoting John 13:34-35: *“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*
- Vladyka expressed thanks to Holy Trinity and Fr. Innocent for hosting this meeting.
- The Archbishop acknowledged the many struggles parishes, clergy and the laity have faced during the pandemic, and reminded the assembly that true parish wealth is found in its faithful people.
- We must acknowledge our clergy shortage and parish growth problems.
 - Many priests are approaching retirement age; some are past it. We cannot count on all of them being able to serve as supply clergy, either.
 - We are the only OCA diocese that conducts our census by age group.
 - In some parishes, 70% of the members are age 65 or older.
 - 6 of our diocesan clergy are at or past retirement age. In the next five years, 4 or 5 more will also reach retirement age.
 - Attendees who had not already read Fr. Martin Browne’s report were encouraged to do so.
 - His Eminence urged all parishes to become familiar with their census data, do an honest assessment of their present condition, and formulate a five-year (or longer) plan. **Failure to plan is planning to fail.**
 - These are not easy conversations to have, but Vladyka shared an insightful Arabic saying: *“A friend is one who tells you the truth.”*
 - Parishes must ask themselves: what will happen to us in five years if we do nothing?
 - His Eminence exhorted the faithful to be kind to the clergy. They do far more than what is visible to the entire parish.
 - We must abandon parochialism, and each person must ask themselves: *“If my parishes closes, will I still go to church? Where are my priorities?”*
- Vladyka welcomed Fr. Nikolai Breckenridge to the diocese.
 - Fr. Nikolai is the new rector of St. Nicholas’ in Bethlehem.
 - Many thanks to Archbishop +MELCHIZEDEK (Diocese of Western Pennsylvania) for transferring Fr. Nikolai to us.
- Congratulations to Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk of St. Stephen’s Cathedral, who successfully defended his doctoral dissertation.
- Over this past year, Mitered Archpriest Fr. Daniel Rissetar, Mitered Archpriest Fr. Eugene Pianovich and Protopresbyter Michael Slovesko fell asleep in the Lord. May their memory be eternal!
- The Archbishop’s episcopal visit schedule is available on the diocesan website. Please note that this calendar does not include private meetings.
- Over the past year, the Holy Synod met via Zoom. Meetings were more frequent than in previous years.
- All 2021 Diocesan Council meetings were in person, which was refreshing.

- Many thanks to the Diocesan Council members for their generosity and service, and also for their willingness to voice opposing opinions.
- Diversity is often a powerful growth aid.
- His Eminence reminded the assembly that to truly accomplish our mission, we must not surround ourselves only with “yes people”. A dissenting opinion may very well be the correct one.
- The Council voted to cover the \$27,000 All-American Assembly fee rather than divide it among the parishes. They also voted to cover the registration fee and meal costs for this present assembly.
- Many thanks to Diocesan Chancellor Fr. Martin Browne, and to the Deans: Fr. Nicholas Solak (Wilkes-Barre), Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk (Philadelphia) and Fr. Timothy Hojnicky (Frackville).
- His Eminence acknowledged the tireless work of Carmen Hodson, our diocesan administrative assistant.
- The Archbishop concluded his address with an exhortation to be mindful of those who are lonely and isolated; let us continue our outreach efforts so that our Lord may be glorified.

Chancellor’s Address (Fr. Martin Browne)

- Fr. Martin issued a correction to his report: there are currently 25 active clergy in the diocese, and roughly half are at or above retirement age.
- Fr. Martin urged attendees to read his report if they have not already done so.
- Although our diocese faces some serious problems requiring focused attention, there are also many good things happening. We must pass them on and use them to grow, not preserve them in amber.
- Our Lord will judge us on one criterion: did each of us do everything in our power to fulfill our God-given mission?

Approval of 2021 Minutes

- Before the vote to approve the minutes, Fr. Nicholas Solak made a motion that observers be allowed to speak during the meeting. The motion was seconded by Michael Galeff and passed unanimously via voice vote.
- A motion to approve the minutes of the 2021 Diocesan Assembly was made by Fr. James Jadick and seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky. The motion passed unanimously via voice vote.

Approval of Reports

- There were no questions regarding the administrative reports.
- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky made a statement regarding missions in which he asked those present to pray for the possible formation of a new mission in Gettysburg.

- A motion to approve the administrative reports was made by Dr. Paul Witek and seconded by Fr. James Weremedic. The motion passed unanimously via voice vote.
- There were no questions regarding the departmental reports.
- A motion to approve the departmental reports was made by Fr. John Kowalczyk and seconded by Fr. Stephen Vernak. The motion passed unanimously via voice vote.

The assembly broke for dinner at 4:58 PM and reconvened at 7:20 PM.

Treasury Report and Budget Presentation (Mark Linnehan)

- A motion to accept the treasury report was made by Fr. Seraphim Reynolds and seconded by Fr. John Kowalczyk. The motion passed unanimously via voice vote.
- The 2022 diocesan budget includes a 3% increase on income due to interest earned on investments.
- Line item 47205, *Income from Diocesan Assembly*, includes \$6,000 because the budget was already passed by the Diocesan Council before deciding to absorb the expense rather than charging parishes.
- The proposed budget includes increases to the bishop's salary, pension and for seminary scholarships.
- Some other expenses have been increased slightly due to inflation.
- A motion to accept the proposed 2022 budget was made by Mark Linnehan (on behalf of the Diocesan Council), and seconded by Michael Galeff. The motion passed unanimously via voice vote.

Elections (facilitated by Dr. Paul Witek)

The elections proceeded according to Article IX of the Diocesan Bylaws.

Introductions

- His Eminence asked present Diocesan Council members to introduce themselves and state if they would be willing to serve another term.
- **Sbdn. Sebastian Crews** is an at-large lay member. He shared some brief biographical information and has enjoyed serving on the Council for the past three years.
- **Danalisa Radu** stated that she has been honored to serve on the Council and that it has been a pleasant experience.
- **Russel Charowsky** echoed the sentiment that serving on the Diocesan Council has been an honor.
- **Fr. Seraphim Reynolds** expressed his willingness to serve another term.
- **Protodeacon Peter Skoog** has served on the council for the past six years, and said it has been a great experience.

- **Deacon Scott Staller** stated that he is willing to serve another term.
- **Deacon John Shingara** stated that he is willing to continue, but also willing to step aside if someone else would like to serve.

Metropolitan Council

- **Clergy:**
 - Fr. Timothy Hojnicky nominated Fr. Nicholas Solak.
 - Fr. Nicholas accepted the nomination and was elected via voice vote.
- **Laity:**
 - Fr. Timothy Hojnicky nominated Subdeacon Sebastian Crews.
 - Deacon John Shingara nominated Danalisa Radu.
 - Both candidates accepted nomination.
 - Delegates voted via show of hands and elected Danalisa Radu.

Diocesan Council

- **Clergy at large:**
 - Fr. Timothy Hojnicky nominated Fr. Mark Koczak, who declined.
 - Fr. Stephen Vernak nominated Deacon John Shingara, who accepted.
 - Fr. Gregory White nominated Deacon Sergei Kapral, who accepted.
 - Delegates voted via show of hands and elected Deacon John Shingara.
- **Layperson at large:** Mark Linnehan nominated Subdeacon Sebastian Crews, who accepted the nomination and was elected via voice vote.
- **Auditors:**
 - Fr. Timothy Hojnicky nominated Protodeacon Sergei Kapral, who accepted.
 - Mark Linnehan nominated Jennifer Bzik, who accepted.
 - Protodeacon Sergei Kapral nominated Gregory Polk, who declined.
 - Mark Linnehan nominated Fr. Silouan Burns, who accepted.
 - The three candidates who accepted nomination were elected via voice vote.
- **Philadelphia Deanery:** Fr. Mark Koczak and Daria Cortése
- **Frackville Deanery:** Dn. Peter Staller and Russel Charwosky
- **Wilkes-Barre Deanery:** Fr. Gregory White and Christopher Yanovich

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

- There was no new business brought up by delegates.
- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky suggested St. Nicholas' in Bethlehem as the location for the 2023 Diocesan Assembly. Fr. Nikolai Breckenridge accepted.
- Fr. Timothy asked, "Why do we do these meetings during the worst time of the year — in January, when the weather is poor?"
 - Fr. Martin Browne responded that it was due to our fiscal year and ease of reporting.
 - Mark Linnehan explained that the budget is also an issue, since moving the annual meeting would create a gap of time in which there is no approved budget. However, we do technically have the option to shift when our fiscal year begins and ends.
- His Eminence suggested January 26th-27th as the date for the 2023 Assembly.
- Fr. Traian Stafiuc made a motion that the 2023 Diocesan Assembly be held on January 26th-27th at St. Nicholas' in Bethlehem. The motion was seconded by Fr. Gregory White, and passed unanimously.

Closing

- Fr. Nikolai Breckenridge made a motion to adjourn the Assembly at 8:11 PM. The motion was seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, and passed unanimously.
- The meeting was adjourned at 8:12 PM with the singing of "It is truly meet".

Respectfully submitted,

Fr. Silouan Brown and Daria Cortése, Recording Secretaries