

REPORT OF THE DIOCESAN HIERARCH

DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEETING
ST. TIKHON'S SEMINARY, SOUTH CANAAN, PA
JUNE 27, 2006

I. INTRODUCTION

I would like to welcome all of you to our Diocesan Council Meeting and thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to gather here for the important work of the Council. May the prayers of All Saints of North America, whose memory we celebrated this past Sunday, and the intercessions of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, whose feast is coming up, guide us as we work together for the spiritual health and growth of our beloved Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania and of The Orthodox Church in America.

II. THE CURRENT CRISIS IN THE OCA

Our Diocesan Council has not met since last November, and during that time, much has transpired in our Church, both on the national level and within our Diocese. All of us are well aware of the current financial problems that are facing the OCA and many of us have seen first-hand the distressing effect these problems have had in our parishes, among our clergy and on many of the faithful.

It is not my intention to address all of those problems at this meeting today. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, the Holy Synod of Bishops, the Metropolitan Council and others have been discussing and are addressing these matters and have implemented the process of investigation that will lead to a resolution of the current crisis. Many statements have already been issued concerning the on-going investigation and these documents are available for all to read in various places. Later, we will also hear a report from Fr. John Onofrey and Mr. John Zoranski, our diocesan representatives on the Metropolitan Council.

As your Diocesan Hierarchy, I would like to state that I am in full support of the efforts that have been undertaken by His Beatitude, by the Holy Synod and by the Metropolitan Council to resolve the present crisis. For some, these efforts are not proceeding quickly enough, for others, they are not adequate. Whatever our personal opinion in these matters, we must remember that we are dealing with serious issues that affect the Church, not only on a financial level, but more importantly, on a spiritual level. We must all have patience and allow those who are doing this important work to proceed with care and with diligence so that all things might proceed according to God's will and not according to our human agendas.

III. THE STATE OF OUR DIOCESE

As we pray for a good resolution to the problems that confront us on the national level, we know that the work of the Church must continue on the level of our Diocese, of our Deaneries and of our parishes. Although only six months have elapsed since my enthronement as Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania, I have been able to continue the process (begun at the time of my consecration in 2004) of observing and evaluating the spiritual, physical and financial health of our Diocese. I have visited our parishes, spoken with our clergy and with our faithful, worked with the members of our various diocesan departments and members of the diocesan administration. On all levels, I am pleased with the work that continues to be done in our diocese by our clergy and our faithful.

Nevertheless, our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to *be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect* and we know that, whether it is in our own personal life, in our family or in our parish, we can never be satisfied with what we have achieved but must continue to strive for divine perfection in all things. This is true on the diocesan level as well: although the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania is in good health, there is always more that can be done to nurture that health, to improve ourselves and to grow in Christ. Today, I would like to review some examples of the good health of our diocese and propose the implementation some necessary changes within the life of our diocese.

A. Administrative Changes

As you know, one of the first decisions I made when elected as Bishop of Philadelphia was the creation of the office of Chancellor and the appointment of the Archpriest John Kowalczyk to that office. At that time, the office of Secretary/Treasurer (also being filled by Fr. John) was merged with that of the newly created position of Chancellor. For the past year, Father John has faithfully served in both positions, with the able assistance of Matushka Katherine Kowalczyk in the office of treasurer. As is well known to all, Matushka Katherine has fulfilled her work with integrity and with diligence for the past 17 years.

Over the past several months, I have personally been involved in overseeing the work of the office of the treasurer and have recently conducted an on-site evaluation of the record-books of the treasurer's office. I would like to state that Matushka Katherine has fulfilled her responsibilities admirably and with humility. Her attentive and accurate work is revealed in the precise reports that have been presented both to this council as well as to the Diocesan Assembly. She is to be commended for the integrity of her work, which has helped our Diocese to remain on a good foundation of accountability and transparency.

In order that the diocese might better reflect outwardly the good order that is already present inwardly, I will continue the process of evaluating the office of treasurer. Over the next few months I will be consulting with our accountant and with others with expertise in financial matters, in order to find concrete ways to insure accountability and

transparency. This will include the review of our auditing process, research into the computerization of our financial records and the search for, and appointment of, a new treasurer.

B. Accountability and “Best Practices”

As a result of the current financial problems, much has been said about the need for accountability and transparency in the Church. In this age of distrust and suspicion, it is indeed important to make sure that our good inner health is reflected outwardly and to confirm that, on all levels, we are living and operating with integrity and honesty. As I said in our recent diocesan clergy retreat, “while it is good for us to make every effort to align ourselves, as persons and as the Church, with the principles that govern our social and political environment, we must always place that alignment in the light of repentance and salvation, and never turn the principles of the world into idols to which we blindly bow.” In other words, if we are to be accountable, if we are to make our finances transparent, if we are to employ Best Practices, let us do these things, not because the world demands it of us, but because the Gospel demands it of us.

Therefore, I am calling for us as a diocese to continue this work of the Gospel on a personal, on a parish and on a diocesan level. As a means of confirming this, I am beginning the process of implementation of “Best Practices for Non-profit Organizations.” As is well-known, “Best Practices” is a relative term and it is important that we adopt those specific practices that will be appropriate and useful to this diocese. In this process, I will be consulting with our accountant and with others with expertise in these matters in order to present some concrete proposals at the next Diocesan Assembly.

C. The Unity of the Diocese

There are many ways in which the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania can be seen to be united: our small geographic area, the proximity of many of our parishes and the many ways in which the parishes work together for the building up of the Church. Two recent examples can be cited:

1. Olyphant Fire Appeal. On Sunday, June 18th, the feast of All Saints, I served the Divine Liturgy at the parish of All Saints in Olyphant and presented them with the proceeds from the Diocesan Appeal which I called for after the tragic fire which seriously damaged their Church. I was very pleased with the support which was offered by nearly all the parishes in our Diocese. On that Sunday, I was able to present the parish with funds in the amount of \$27,500.

2. Vacation Bible School. Recently I attended one session of the DCE-sponsored Vacation Bible School held at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Wilkes-Barre. I was very pleased with the work of those who organized and ran this event, as well as with the enthusiasm and interest of the many children. I was particularly impressed with the fact that this event was the joint effort of four area parishes working together. I would like to encourage such examples of parishes working in unity.

It is my conviction that there are many more ways in which we, as a diocese, can give examples of our unity in Christ. As I will mention briefly, unity will be the theme of the next year, in which we will be able to discuss and implement ways to continue and deepen the unity of our Diocese. One way to do this is the concept of sister parishes. Currently, two of our parishes have established relationships with parishes abroad: St. Michael's in Jermyn with a parish in Dubranich in Western Ukraine and St. Nicholas in Bethlehem with a parish in Klimm, Russia. I would like to encourage such sister parish relations, not only on the international level, but also within our own diocese. Many of our parishes that are on sound financial and spiritual foundations should be able to offer of themselves to those parishes within our diocese that are struggling financially and perhaps even spiritually. This can be one way of working towards a deeper unity.

IV. LOOKING AHEAD: THE NEXT THREE YEARS

At our Lenten Clergy Retreat, I announced the implementation of a three-year program in our diocese, with each year devoted to a particular theme to be developed and studied over the course of the year. The theme of the first year will be "Unity," that of the second year will be "Liturgy," and the final year will be devoted to "Mission." These are certainly very broad themes but I believe that they are central to our life in the Church today and in particular to the life of our Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania.

Each of these themes is also intimately related to the other, and I realize that it is somewhat artificial to separate them. Mission cannot be done without unity, unity is realized in its deepest sense through our liturgical and prayer life, and it is our unity in liturgy that gives birth to mission. And so, although each year will focus on only one theme, the other two themes will not be neglected. Our life in the Church is all-encompassing and we must always be striving for perfection in all aspects of our life.

A. Pastoral Letter.

I have planned to have the thematic years begin on September 1, the Ecclesiastical New Year. At that time, I will be sending a pastoral letter to all the clergy and faithful of the Diocese in which I will address some issues concerning the theme. This year, I hope to present some thoughts on unity, particularly as it is reflected in the ecclesiology of the Church: what is Orthodox ecclesiology and how is that lived out in our diocese?

B. Diocesan Assembly

I am also planning for the next three Diocesan Assemblies to reflect the theme for their respective year. In light of this, I am considering expanding our current one-day assembly to a two-day event to be held in one of our parishes. Although nothing has been finalized, and I am open to suggestions from the council on this subject, I would like the Diocesan Assembly to provide an opportunity for us to move beyond a simple plenary session in which the business of the Diocese is discussed, to an occasion for spiritual

growth, for learning and for fellowship. This will provide us with the opportunity to share and discuss issues that are important to the diocese.

C. Communication

Another important means for striving for unity is communication. Personal means of communication are, of course, the most important: our prayers for one another, our communion in prayer and at the Divine Liturgy, our gathering in fellowship, our love for one another in our homes, in our parishes and in our Diocese. As we consider the theme of unity over the next year, it is important for us to be willing to communicate with each other on all of these levels.

Communion and unity can also be encouraged in many other ways, such as the many electronic means of communication that are available to us today. Although these means of communication can be used in a very negative way, they also may be use in very positive and fruitful ways. As such, they are no different that the more traditional means of communication that are available to us: it is possible to use our mouths, our pens and pencils either for good or for evil.

Our Diocesan website (doepa.org) has been up and running since my enthronement in November of last year. In the past few weeks, I have begun the process of ensuring that our website is updated on a regular basis. With the technical help of several individuals, including Dn. John Parsells and my Aide, Gregory Hatrak, I believe that the good work that has gone on will continue. I would also like to expand the website to include a listing of events that take place on a deanery level and on a parish level. I am therefore instructing the Deans to be responsible for 1) the collecting of such information from each of the parishes in their respective deaneries on a monthly basis and 2) the forwarding of this information to the person responsible for the website.

V. OFFICIAL

A. New clergy assignments

1. Fr. Martin Browne was appointed Acting Rector of St. John the Baptist in Edwardsville

B. Clergy Releases

1. Fr. Andrew Diehl is being released to the Diocese of the South.

C. Clergy Retirement

1. Fr. Daniel Ressetar has petitioned for retirement from Christ the Savior parish in Harrisburg.

D. Parish Vacancies

1. Pottstown
2. Simpson
3. Coaldale

E. Missions

1. Mechanicsburg
2. Milford
3. Dover, DE

F. Department of Christian Education

1. Background Check
2. Request for Spiritual Advisor

VI. BISHOP'S ACTIVITIES

A. Since last Diocesan Council Meeting

November, 2005

- 11/13 – Feast of St. Michael, St. Michael's, Jermyn
- 11/19 – Diocesan Assembly, St. Nicholas, Bethlehem
- 11/20 – 40th Anniversary of Fr. Joseph Martin, Holy Resurrection Cathedral, Wilkes-Barre

December, 2005

- 12/18 – Divine Liturgy, Holy Trinity, Stroudsburg
- 12/27 – Patronal Feast, St. Stephen's Cathedral, Philadelphia.

January, 2006

- 1/3 – Wilkes-Barre Deanery, Farewell Dinner for Fr. Leo Poore
- 1/15 – Divine Liturgy, St. John the Baptist, Edwardsville
- 1/15 – Interview with Philadelphia Enquirer
- 1/15 – Novogodny Ball, Philadelphia
- 1/17 – Lunch with Bishop Martino (Roman Catholic) for week of Christian Unity
- 1/20 – Lesser Synod Meeting, Syosset, NY
- 1/22 – Divine Liturgy, Holy Trinity, MacAdoo
- 1/29 – Divine Liturgy and Parish Meeting, Holy Ascension, Frackville,
- 1/18-1/19 – Vespers and Liturgy, Holy Apostles Mission, Mechanicsburg
- 1/19 – Century Association Winter Festival, Wilkes-Barre

February, 2006

- 2/23 – Pre-lenten Clergy Retreat
- 2/25-26 – Vespers and Liturgy (Meatfare) – St. Stephen's Cathedral

March, 2006

3/1 – Extraordinary Session of the Holy Synod
3/3-5 – Two Divine Liturgies, Vigil and two Ordinations to the Diaconate, St. Vladimir’s Seminary, Crestwood
3/12 – Divine Liturgy (Sunday of Orthodoxy), St. Mary’s, Coaldale
3/12 – Mission Vespers, Holy Resurrection Cathedral, Wilkes-Barre
3/19 – Divine Liturgy, St. Nicholas, Bethlehem
3/19 – Mission Vespers – St. Michael’s, Old Forge
3/25-26 – Vespers and Divine Liturgy, Holy Cross, Williamsport
3/26 – Mission Vespers, SS. Peter and Paul, Minersville
3/29 – Presanctified Liturgy, Holy Trinity, Stroudsburg

April, 2006

4/2 – Divine Liturgy, Holy Ascension, Lykens
4/2 – Mission Vespers, St. John the Baptist, Edwardsville
4/8-9 – Vespers and Divine Liturgy, Holy Trinity, Pottstown. Awarding of Protodeacon to Peter Skoog
4/9 – Mission Vespers, St. Mark’s, Wrightstown
4/16 – Divine Liturgy (Palm Sunday), Holy Resurrection Cathedral, Wilkes-Barre
4/19 – Holy Wednesday Anointing Service, St. Michael’s, Jermyn
4/16-23 – Holy Week and Pascha, St. Tikhon’s Monastery, South Canaan
4/27 – Lesser Synod Meeting, Syosset, NY
4/29-30 – Vespers, Divine Liturgy and Parish Meeting, Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Philadelphia

May, 2006

5/6-7 – Vespers and Divine Liturgy, St. Michael’s, Wilmington, DE
5/14 – Divine Liturgy, St. John the Baptist, Dundaff. Award of Jeweled Cross to Fr. Dionysius Swencki
5/21 – Divine Liturgy, SS. Peter and Paul, Uniondale
5/23-25 – Spring Session of the Holy Synod, Syosset, NY
5/26-29 – Memorial Day Pilgrimage, St. Tikhon’s Monastery

June, 2006

6/13-15 – Continuing Education Symposium, St. Tikhon’s Monastery
6/18 – Divine Liturgy, All Saints, Olyphant. Presentation of \$27,500 as diocesan proceeds from Fire Appeal
6/24 – Visit of Basileos Mar Thoma Didymus I, Catholicos of the Malankara Indian Orthodox Church to Philadelphia

B. Upcoming Events

7/9-15 – St. Tikhon’s Summer Camp
7/9 – Ordination of John Soucek to the Holy Diaconate
7/21-8/1 – Trip to France
8/5-6 – Pilgrimage, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Ellwood City
8/12 – Women’s Retreat
8/26 – DCE Meeting (place to be announced)
10/3-6 – SCOBA Meeting, Chicago, IL
10/8 – Founder’s Day, St. Tikhon’s Monastery
10/15 – 90th Anniversary, St. Nicholas, Bethlehem
10/24-26 – Fall Session of the Holy Synod, Syosset, NY