

Diocesan Council Meeting of 1 June 2021

Attendees:

Archbishop Mark	Fr. Timothy Hojnicky	Sebastian Crews
Fr. Martin Brown	Fr. Seraphim Reynolds	Danalisa Radu
Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk	Deacon John Shingara	Mark Linnehan
Fr. Nicholas Solak	Protodeacon Sergei Kapral	Russel Charowsky Herman Almasy

The meeting was called to order by Archbishop Mark and opened with the prayer “O Heavenly King...”

Comments from Archbishop Mark

- The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll our nation, our state, our cities and our parishes. We, as people of God, need to continue to pray for the health of our communities. We need to give thanks:
 - For being spared significant numbers of deaths during the pandemic.
 - Being blessed to be able to meet as a body.
 - That our parishes are moving in the right direction.
- Being present at St. John the Baptist Church (Nanticoke) for St. Thomas Sunday 2021 – this worship community has been meeting every Sunday since Pentecost 2020. While it’s an older parish (by age of attendees) the faithful have drawn strength from God and from one another. Their fellowship is stimulation for them and is also encouragement for their endurance. As a Church we need to learn from their example.
- **Outstanding Items** – Because we meet by Zoom throughout 202, we didn’t approve all Diocesan Council minutes. A motion to approve all 2020 meeting minutes was made by Fr. Seraphim Reynolds and seconded by Danalisa Radu. The motion passed unanimously.
- **Minutes from the 2021 Diocesan Assembly** – Minutes from the earlier Diocesan Assembly needed to be approved. Fr. Nicholas Solak made a motion to approve the minutes; seconded by Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk. All approved.

Chancellor’s Report / Comments – Fr. Martin Brown

Fr. Martin had no formal report but instead challenged all those gathered with the question, “What comes after the pandemic?” Fr. Martin continued by sharing the following facts:

- We have a clergy shortage – the diocese has 1 retiring priest and 4 active priests that are beyond retirement age.
- The Diocese of Eastern PA currently has only 1 seminarian.
- We have an “overabundance” of parishes. In looking critically at the parishes in the Diocese of Eastern PA, there 16 parishes whose futures need to be evaluated based on existing internal culture.
- Critical needs for each parish are:
 - Strong lay leadership
 - A stable or growing parish census
 - Willingness by the local lay church members to change and adapt to current local demographics and church demands.
- Parishes that are not willing to adapt and change need to be evaluated for viability.

Discussion ensued based on Fr. Martin’s observations / comments. First and foremost we need a reset to our individual spiritual life and the church’s vision of evangelization. A first step should be assessing the current state of our parishes – both clergy and people with a focus on clergy motivation / post COVID-19 state of mind as well as benchmarking lay involvement / outlook. Some key indicators might be Adult education, church school and active parish council involvement (and potential need for changes to the parish council). An important first step is clergy assessment. Archbishop Mark will handle clergy assessment. Members of the Diocesan Council were asked to review the Parish Health Inventory Manual presentation and offer comments / suggestions.

Treasurer’s Report – Mark Linnehan

As of this meeting the diocesan council of the Diocese of Eastern PA the diocese has \$312,923 invested with the Diocese of the South (OCA). The diocese is currently running at 95% of budget through the end of May 2021. A report was issued via e-mail for review. Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk made a motion that we accept the Treasurer’s report. The motion was seconded by Russell Charowsky and passed by those present.

Deanery Reports

Philadelphia Deanery – Fr. Victor

The deanery faces various challenges following the COVID-19 lockdown. Clergy burnout and having the faithful return to church are the 2 biggest hurdles. As a deanery in an urban setting reopening will be slow but indicators point to building momentum. The hope is that all of the faithful will return to church as quickly as possible following an extended period of “remote worship”.

Frackville Deanery – Fr. Timothy

- Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church (St. Clair) seem to be moving in a positive direction. Attendance is up and the parish has a positive attitude.
- Christ the Savior Church (Harrisburg) has completed the construction of a handicapped accessible bathroom in the church vestibule. This will aid those with disabilities as well as older worshippers.
- A clergy meeting is scheduled for August 2021.
- Fr. Timothy asked whether or not a deanery with only 8 functioning churches is really a deanery. With declining attendance in parishes located in central Pennsylvania and the potential closing of churches, is a new solution necessary? The answer may come out of the upcoming clergy / parish assessments.

Wilkes Barre Deanery – Fr. Nicholas

- St. Vladimir's Church (Lopez) is currently vacant and the census has dropped by 13 souls.
- The Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (Union Dale) is vacant
- St. Michael's Church (Old Forge) is soon to be vacant
- Re-opening has been progressing steadily. The deanery is facing a clergy shortage

Metropolitan Council – Fr. Timothy

- There are ongoing discussion regarding the selling of the OCA headquarters property in Syosset, NY. The headquarters would be relocated to the Washington, DC area as the Metropolitan is the Archbishop of Washington. No timetable was given.
- The OCA pension plan faces challenges / issues. It was formed in 1976 and, as of this writing, is not fully funded. There are legal ramifications to the underfunding of this plan. A committee has been formed to review the issues and find a remedy.
- The next All American Council is scheduled for July of 2022. Details to follow from the national church.

Summer Camp – Fr. Timothy

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, summer camp for 2021 is scheduled to be virtual. It will be spread over 2 weeks and be held via Zoom.

Parish Assistance

Following the earlier discussion on parish help, His Eminence voiced his desire to begin a parish review citing the need to assist struggling parishes that 1) want assistance and 2) are willing to accept assistance and direction from the diocese in growing the parish. In order to receive assistance, parishes must submit to a full review of:

- Current parish council (age, terms served, relations within the parish, etc.).
- Full time worship – what services are being offered, number of attendees at each service?
- Is there church school and adult education?
- Does the parish meet its own by-laws?
- What is the current level of stewardship? This includes a review of current financial resources, current individual giving, growth plans, etc.

In order to receive assistance, a parish will be **required** to submit to diocesan direction in all areas.

Charities

Cross Roads Program - \$500 – Motion: Fr. Tim; 2nd Fr. Martin

Old Forge Food Bank (Fr. Peter Henry) - \$250 – Motion: Fr. Nicholas; 2nd Fr. Tim

OCF Golf Outing - \$100

Seminarian Scholarship (Deacon John Black) - \$1,400 – Motion: Fr. Victor; 2nd Deacon John

Clergy Assistance (Fr. Joseph) - \$1,000 – Motion: Fr. Martin; 2nd Fr. Seraphim

Action Items

- **Archbishop Mark** – To meet with the clergy in each deanery to determine individual needs as well as potential parish needs and changes (internal and external).
- **Archbishop Mark** – Meet with parish leadership and determine that their challenges are when looking at spiritual renewal, spiritual growth and parish growth. The use of focus groups was mentioned.
- **Diocesan Council Members** – Review Parish Health Assessment presentation and submit comments focusing on revitalization.

Respectively Submitted,



Protodeacon Peter N. Skoog

