

Diocesan Council Meeting of 30 November 2021

Attendees:

Archbishop Mark	Fr. Timothy Hojnicky
Fr. Martin Brown	Deacon John Shingara (Zoom)
Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk (Zoom)	Danalisa Radu
Fr. Nicholas Solak	Mark Linnehan

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

Archbishop Mark opened the meeting by asking for a motion to approve the minutes from the 28 September 2021 meeting with the appropriate corrections. Corrected minutes had been circulated prior to the 30 November meeting. Fr. Martin made a motion to accept the amended minutes; Fr. Timothy seconded the motion. Accepting the amended minutes was passed unanimously.

Comments from Archbishop Mark

- Abp. Mark reiterated the clergy shortage in DOEPA –
 - Two priests are looking to transfer out of the diocese. This raised questions around parish health:
 - Is this a sign of dying parishes?
 - What does the end of a parish’s life look like?
 - Fr. Vladimir Fetcho is having mobility issues. He is not serving fulltime because of pain and infirmity.
- Fr. Nikolai Breckenridge has agreed to a posting at St. Nicholas Church in Bethlehem, PA. Fr. Nikolai will be transferred from the Diocese of Western Pennsylvania to the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania. An official start date for Fr. Nikolai’s pastorate in Bethlehem was not given.
- Diocesan Assembly (27 – 28 January 2022)
 - The Diocesan Assembly will be held at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Wilkes Barre, PA.
 - Clergy, delegates and department chairs must be present (this will be an in-person meeting).
 - The opening session will begin at 4:00 pm on 27 January 2022.

- The agenda for the Assembly was presented by His Eminence. A motion to accept the agenda was made by Fr. Timothy and seconded by Deacon Peter Skoog. The agenda was unanimously accepted.
- Accommodations will be at the Microtel Inn & Suites in Wilkes Barre, PA. A letter will be sent out by the diocesan administration with details.
- Based on the current financial position of the diocese, a motion was made by Mark Linnehan that the diocese cover the cost of meals during the assembly, registration costs, etc. (costs incurred by Holy Trinity and the diocese specifically) This excludes hotel and travel costs by attendees. The motion was seconded by Fr. Martin. After some discussion the motion was passed with no dissenting votes.

Chancellors' Report – Fr. Martin Browne

- Fr. Martin's report contained the following highlights:
 - **Chancellor's Meeting** – Cleveland, OH – Fr. Martin attended the chancellor's meeting held in Cleveland. He was the facilitator for the "Vocations Group" that discussed ways to cultivate and support vocations within the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). Some of the key takeaways / suggestions were:
 - Encouragement of vocations – the responsibility of hierarchs and priests
 - More in-depth vetting of candidates to be ordained to major orders, especially the priesthood.
 - Investigate ways of ordaining long standing deacons to the priesthood while minimizing the need to attend seminary.
 - Recruitment of retired clergy to support / mentor vocations and newly ordained priests.
 - Central clearing house for placement priests within the OCA.

These findings were presented to those in attendance including hierarchs.

- **Vacancy at St. Nicholas in Bethlehem, PA** – Fr. Martin and Fr. Victor attended several meetings with the parish and parish council in Bethlehem prior to Fr. Nikolai being assigned as the acting rector. Fr. Martin commented on the local parish dynamics and the confrontational undertones that seem to be present. The situation will be monitored by Archbishop Mark, Fr. Martin and Fr. Victor to make sure that Fr. Nikolai's transition is as smooth as possible.
- **All American Council in Baltimore** - There is a need for local clergy to talk up the upcoming AAC. With the AAC being in close proximity to DOEPA, attendance should be a high priority by our churches. It is important for local parishes to see the national church at work and participate where possible.

- **General Comment** – As a result of discussions, interactions and presentations at the Chancellor’s Meeting in Cleveland, Fr. Martin opined that the church is potentially approaching a crisis point. There seems to be growing polarization within the church – a more liberal wing that wants to have a “more inclusive” church and an ultraconservative group that would almost retreat from secular world interaction. Both viewpoints come with ideological and social downsides that can be considered outside Orthodox norms. As a church, we need to find a middle ground.

Treasurer’s Report – Mark Linnehan

- Following rebalancing of accounts (see Sept. meeting minutes) the DOEPA has \$375,000 in its operational accounts and \$600,000 in its investment accounts.
- Total income YTD is 86% of budget (including budgeted camp income). If budgeted camp income is removed (camp was not held due to COVID-19 precautions) DOEPA is at 97% of budgeted income.
- Total expenses are only 87% of budget.
- YTD net income is \$21,000.

A motion to accept the Treasurer’s report was made by Fr. Timothy with a second coming from Fr. Nicholas. Motion passed unanimously.

Deans’ Reports

- **Philadelphia Deanery** – Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk
 - Fr. Nikolai Breckenridge will be the incoming acting rector in Bethlehem. Following Matthew Joyner’s departure from Bethlehem, the parish had coverage every week and it did not miss a Sunday liturgy.
 - Philadelphia clergy brotherhood will begin meetings in November following a COVID hiatus.
- **Frackville Deanery** – Fr. Timothy Hojnicky
 - St. Clair is still has no fulltime priest.
 - Matushka Lisa Weremedic is still very ill and unable to travel outside her home. She is in need of our continued prayers.
- **Wilkes Barre Deanery** – Fr. Nicholas Solak
 - All is well; vacant parishes are being covered.
 - St. Michael’s Church in Old Forge, PA currently has no, chair, vice chair or treasurer on the parish council. No parishioners are capable / willing to assume the responsibility. The council has looked to outsource the responsibility of treasurer with no success. Help from within the diocese may be necessary.

- **New Business**

- There was some discussion concerning currently open parishes that appear to be near closing. They are:

- **Frackville Deanery**

- St. Clair – Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
 - Minersville – SS. Peter & Paul

- **Wilkes Barre Deanery**

- Lopez – St. Vladimir's
 - Nanticoke – St. John the Baptist
 - Union Dale – Sts. Peter & Paul

Some investigation / review is in order to determine future viability of these parishes and other parishes with aging and declining membership.

Charities

- Clergy gift of \$1,000 for all active priests in the diocese. Funding from diocesan coffers. Motion made by Mark Linnehan and seconded by Danalisa Radu
- Motion to take up to \$1,000 from clergy education budget to cover editing of the book **Dialogues** per Fr. Victor. Motion made by Deacon John Shingara and seconded by Fr. Timothy.
- Bethesda Mission - \$500. Motion made by Mark Linnehan and seconded by Fr. Martin.
- Project Mexico - \$500. Motion made by Mark Linnehan and seconded by Fr. Martin.

Respectively Submitted,



Protodeacon Peter N. Skoog