

**Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania
Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes — November 15th, 2022**

Attendees: Archbishop MARK, Fr. Martin Browne, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Fr. Mark Koczak, Fr. Innocent Neal, Fr. Nicholas Solak, Fr. Gregory White, Dn. Peter Staller, Dn. John Shingara, Russel Cherwosky, Daria Cortése, Mark Linnehan, Danalisa Radu, Christopher Yanovich

The meeting was called to order at 10:15 AM with the singing of “O heavenly King”.

Minutes: The minutes from the previous meeting were distributed via email prior to this meeting. A motion to accept the minutes with amendments was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and seconded by Fr. Innocent Neal. The motion passed unanimously. See amended minutes.

Archbishop’s Report

• **Clergy Matters:**

- Fr. James Jadick retired as of October 31st.
- Fr. Vjekoslav Jovicic was transferred from St. Michael in Mt. Carmel to Holy Ascension in Frackville. He remains the administrator of St. Mary’s in St. Clair, and is also administering St. Michael’s in Mt. Carmel.
- We have been dropped as a party in the Coatesville lawsuit.
- At the previous meeting the Archbishop mentioned that there were misconduct allegations levied against an individual in our diocese. Investigators have concluded that the accusations do not have merit. However, the accused party may not resume their duties until they are in compliance with background check requirements.

• **St. Tikhon’s Summer Camp:**

- Fr. Michael Shepherd is now Executive Director of the camp. Fr. Silouan Burns is overseeing the camp’s finances.
- Fr. Michael is working quite hard to recreate necessary camp documents.
- Many thanks to Barbara Linnehan for typing camper and counselor applications. She will also type the new camp handbooks.
- We have a new camp logo, as the previous one was copyrighted by the prior administration.
- We now have the domain name for the camp website.
- The website should launch as soon as possible so we may begin accepting volunteer applications/registrations. We need to know how many volunteers we have to determine how many campers we can enroll.
- All volunteers need to apply/register, even if they have served in previous years. No one is simply assumed to be a participant.
- Fr. Michael Shepherd now has possession of the camp cell phone.
- There was discussion of background check and fingerprinting requirements. Fingerprints help ensure that an individual is who they claim to be.

- We need an electronic database for camp data. Ideally this will be a “live” database that is automatically populated with information submitted on registration forms. This is the most efficient way to make sure that information such as medical data and dietary restrictions remains linked to the associated campers and delivered to camp staff who need this information.
- Danalisa Radu volunteered to help digitize existing paper records, and will speak to the website administrators to assist with the creation of a camp database.

- **Diocesan Assembly Agenda:**

- The prospective agenda for the 2023 Annual Diocesan Assembly was distributed via email prior to this meeting.
- There was discussion of whether or not the pension plan will be discussed at the Assembly.
 - Mark Linnehan remarked that we may not yet have enough information for a fruitful discussion.
 - Fr. Martin Browne asked Danalisa Radu about the discussion of the pension plan during the most recent meeting of the Metropolitan Council, particularly with regard to the potential impact of the planned 4% contribution increase (split over two years) on parish finances.
 - Discussion was limited to “Get the word out now so parishes may budget for this increase.” There were no 5-, 10- or 20-year projections presented to the Metropolitan Council.
 - Fr. Martin expressed concern that the Pension Board is not mindful of the situation “in the trenches”, that the Board’s actuarial data is based on inaccurate/incomplete information, and that the Board doesn’t know what it doesn’t know.
 - Fr. Martin also stated that an attitude of “We are the experts; just trust us” is unacceptable.
 - His Eminence concurred and emphasized that the Pension Board ultimately works *for* the Church, and should be willing to provide information upon request.
 - Dn. John Shingara cautioned that any communications regarding the pension plan and criticisms of it must be carefully constructed to minimize panic. Failure to do so may result in younger participants withdrawing from the plan out of fear, which would further jeopardize the pension program’s disbursement ability.
- There are several typos on the agenda that should be fixed before publication.
- By general acclamation, the Council approved the agenda.

- **Term Limits:**

- Vladyka recently sent out a letter to parishes outlining term limits for parish council members.

- The letter includes a 20-year participation limit, which means that an individual may serve on their parish council for no more than 20 total years. However, parishes may request an exemption from this on a case-by-case basis.
- His Eminence will amend the diocesan bylaws to reflect the contents of the letter. This change does not require approval by the Diocesan Assembly or the Diocesan Council.

- **Holy Synod:**

- In addition to his duties as primate, Metropolitan TIKHON has been administering three dioceses, and has been feeling overwhelmed. His Beatitude reached out to his brother bishops for assistance, and Archbishop MARK is now locum tenens of the Albanian Archdiocese.
- The Albanian Archdiocese is administered by Archimandrite Nikodhim (Preston); Fr. Mark Doku is the chancellor.

Chancellor's Report

- The report was distributed via email prior to the meeting. See report.
- Fr. Martin stated that he and the deans will do everything possible to ease Vladyka's task load while he is locum tenens of the Albanian Archdiocese. To that end, please request archiepiscopal visits as soon as possible, because His Eminence's calendar is, and will continue to be, very full.
- Father stated his intention to hold monthly Zoom meetings with the deans.
- Fr. Martin suggested a pre-Lenten clergy retreat with no other agenda than fellowship and prayer.
- Father is very interested in input from female members of the Diocesan Council and various parish councils with regard to potential topics, venues and guest speakers for women's retreats. Feedback from female non-council members is also welcome.
- In addition to the St. Tikhon's camp, we should prioritize programs for college students and young adults.

Financial Reports

- The reports were distributed via email prior to the meeting. See reports.
- We have eliminated the car fund. It was established when our diocesan financial position was very weak, which made it prudent to officially allocate money in a vehicle fund. As our financial position has greatly improved, such a fund is no longer necessary.
 - The archbishop's vehicle, a late-2015 Honda CRV LS, currently has about 90,000 miles on it and needs to be replaced.
- The archbishop has assigned a stipend to Fr. Michael Shepherd for his work on the camp records.
- A motion to approve the financial reports was made by Dn. Peter Staller and seconded by Fr. Martin Browne. The motion passed unanimously.

2023 Budget

- The proposed 2023 budget was distributed via email prior to the meeting. See report.
- There was discussion about whether or not stipends for deans, chancellors and administrators count as pensionable income, or if they are simply reimbursement for travel and mileage. This is currently unclear.
 - Mark Linnehan expressed the opinion that these payments should be pensionable.
 - Fr. Martin Browne stated that if the aforementioned monies are pensionable, the same should go for payments to substitute clergy.
 - Mark Linnehan said that such payments to active clergy should be pensionable, but payments to retired clergy should not. He also expressed the opinion that parishes should pay both pension contribution percentages (that normally paid by the parish, and that normally contributed by the priest) for the active clergy.

The Council adjourned for lunch at 12:15 PM and reconvened at approximately 1:10 PM.

2023 Budget, cont.

- Overestimating budgeted income is not helpful, as 38% of that figure automatically goes to the OCA.
- Danalisa Radu pointed out that last year, clergy received a \$1,000 appreciation bonus, and suggested adding that to the 2023 budget, and to future budgets.
 - Fr. Nicholas Solak suggested giving the money to clergy wives (where applicable). Mark Linnehan remarked that if we do this, we need to collect tax information from the wives and issue 1099's.
 - Fr. Martin suggested that some or all of the bonus funds could go to paying for clergy to attend the national clergy retreat scheduled for October 17-21 in the Chicago area. The cost of registration/lodging will be \$500, with additional costs for travel.
- Mark Linnehan suggested amending the proposed budget to include a line item for the clergy retreat.
- Danalisa Radu moved to allocate \$1,000 to the clergy wives. The motion was seconded by Russel Cherwosky, and passed.¹
- Fr. Nicholas Solak moved to have the diocese cover the registration/lodging costs for the national clergy retreat, and to ask parishes to cover the costs of travel and food. The motion was seconded by Danalisa Radu, and passed unanimously.
- Mark Linnehan stated that he will add \$17,500 to the 2023 budget proposal to cover the costs of the clergy retreat.
- A motion to approve the amended budget proposal was made by Fr. Gregory White and seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky. The motion passed unanimously.

Deanery Reports

- **Philadelphia:**

¹ The laypeople present voted to pass this motion unanimously. The clergy abstained due to a potential conflict of interest.

- Fr. Victor reported that the Russian Mission recently had a food festival.
- It is unclear how the war in Ukraine is affecting attendance.
- Vladyka remarked that it may be prudent to refer to the Mission as “Slavic” rather than “Russian”.
- **Frackville:**
 - The Gettysburg Mission now offers weekly services. Vladyka remarked that we need to promote the Mission on the diocesan website.
 - Fr. Joseph Ramishvili was recently awarded the dignity of the gold Cross.
 - Dn. Peter Staller is now attached to Holy Apostles in Mechanicsburg.
 - Sbdn. Sebastian Crews has resigned from the Diocesan Council due to the scheduling demands of his new job.
- **Wilkes-Barre:**
 - The retreat with Bill Marianes was a great success. Holy Annunciation Church in Berwick is now working with him on a strategic plan for the parish.
 - The clergy picnic was wonderful. The deanery picnic is upcoming.
 - The deanery is down to 2 supply priests.
 - Fr. Michael Shepherd is now running the OCF chapter at Scranton University, and serving Great Vespers there on Thursday nights.
 - The deanery is working on reestablishing the NEPA youth group.

Metropolitan Council Report

- The most recent Metropolitan Council meeting took place on October 19-20 in Virginia.
- The main topics of discussion were the pension plan and the sale of the property in Syosset.
- The Syosset property was listed for sale at the wrong price. It will be reassessed and assigned a new sale valuation.
- The Metropolitan Council expressed support for the translation of various educational materials into other languages, with a particular emphasis on Spanish.
- There was discussion of who pays for Metropolitan Council members to attend meetings. Currently the OCA covers costs for at-large members; costs for other members are covered by their individual dioceses.
- Going forward, the Metropolitan Council plans to meet twice a year: once in the spring (via Zoom) and once in the autumn (in person).
- Fr. Gregory White moved to increase our diocesan allocation for Metropolitan Council meeting attendance to \$2,000. The motion was seconded by Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, and passed unanimously.

Pastoral Life

- In June, Fr. Nicholas Solak was named Chair of the OCA Office of Pastoral Life.
- Four current focal points:

1. Thriving in Ministry, a clergy peer learning group that also offers support to clergy wives. There are currently 117 participants; 22% are from DOEPA. A sustainability grant is in progress.
 2. Synaxis, another support program that meets 4 times per year on Zoom. A newsletter and website are probably coming in the near future.
 3. Retreats for active and retired clergy, to which the Holy Synod is also invited.
 4. Support for clergy wives (akin to a sister group of Synaxis). Efforts in this area include building relationships with clergy widows, applying for grants for parent/child faith formation initiatives, and applying for grants to work with clergy families and clergy children.
- The Office needs to call up various parishes to solicit new group members and retreat participants.
 - Hierarchs from other dioceses need to be urged to contribute financially.

Seminarian Support

- Mark Linnehan stated that he needs a list of which seminarians are receiving financial support from DOEPA, and in what amounts, on a per-semester basis.
- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky stated that we need to get to know our seminarians more thoroughly, and that they should be invited to the clergy retreats.
- Fr. Gregory White moved to donate \$500 to each of our seminarians for Christmas. The motion was seconded by Fr. Martin Browne, and passed unanimously.

Charitable Giving

- As decided at the September meeting, we have sent a \$2,000 donation to Bp. ALEXIS of Alaska to help cover his travel expenses. Many parishes in that diocese are only accessible via plane.
- We have encountered difficulty sending the \$2,000 donation to Mexico (which was also decided at the last meeting). The best way to proceed appears to be a wire transfer. Mark Linnehan will orchestrate the transfer after receiving the relevant details from Vladyka.
- There was discussion of some local food banks as possible donation recipients.
- Fr. Innocent Neal moved to give a \$1,000 donation to the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen in the Scranton area. The motion was seconded by Fr. Martin Browne, and passed unanimously.

Other New Business

- Fr. Nicholas Solak suggested including 1 clergy wife as a member of each Diocesan Council.
- After some discussion, Vladyka stated that we should begin by inviting 1 clergy wife to each Council meeting as a guest, to allow us to gauge interest.
- If there is substantial interest, we may, in the future, consider adding a “clergy wife at large” to the Diocesan Council slate. However, this would require an amendment to our bylaws.
- We need to provide babysitting/childcare support to encourage younger clergy wives to participate.

ACTION ITEMS

- Create a digital database of records for the St. Tikhon's Camp, preferably automatically updated with data from registration forms.
- Digitize paper records (Danalisa).
- Collaborate with website administrators on database (Danalisa).
- Fix spelling errors on Diocesan Assembly agenda.
- Provide Fr. Martin Browne with ideas for women's retreat topics, locations and guest speakers (female Council members and other women from the diocese).
- Amend 2023 budget proposal (Mark L.).
- Increase focus on programs for college students and young adults.
- Contact parishes to recruit new participants in programs run by the Office of Pastoral Life, and encourage other hierarchs to have their dioceses contribute to these programs financially.
- Provide Mark Linnehan with a list of which seminarians are receiving aid, and the amount of aid, on a per-semester basis.
- Send our seminarians \$500 each for Christmas.
- Send \$1,000 to the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen.
- Provide Mark Linnehan with information necessary to wire \$2,000 to Mexico (Vladyka).
- Wire \$2,000 to Mexico (Mark L.).
- Invite a clergy wife to the next Council meeting.
- Fr. Martin Browne will compose a letter authorizing His Eminence to sell or trade the existing diocesan car, and to purchase a new vehicle. As per Vladyka's instructions, the letter should not contain the maximum authorized purchase amount. (See addendum to these minutes.)

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM via general acclamation, with the singing of "It is truly meet".

**Respectfully submitted,
Daria Cortése, Recording Secretary**

ADDENDUM

On January 19th, 2023, the archbishop emailed the Council to ask for a motion and a second to sell or trade the diocesan vehicle and purchase a new car, spending up to \$37,000. Fr. Mark Kozak made the motion to purchase a new car as presented, up to \$37,000; the motion was seconded by Dn. Peter Staller. On January 19th-20th, the Council approved the motion via email vote.

Respectfully submitted,
Daria Cortese, Recording Secretary.