

Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania
Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes — May 10th, 2022

Present: Archbishop MARK, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Fr. Mark Koczak, Fr. Nicholas Solak, Fr. Gregory White, Dn. John Shingara, Dn. Peter Staller, Sbdn. Sebastian Crews, Jennifer Bzik, Russel Charowsky, Daria Cortése, Mark Linnehan, Danalisa Radu, Christopher Yanovich

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 AM.

Archbishop's Remarks

- *All-American Council:* Vladyka has requested a room for our clergy and delegates to gather and discuss proposed resolutions. Please ensure your parish is represented.
- The parish bylaws of St. Mary's in St. Clair and St. Michael's in Old Forge have been set aside due to inability to populate their parish councils.
 - St. Mary's is now administered by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and served by Fr. Joseph Ramishvili.
 - St. Michael's is now served by Acting Rector Fr. Michael Shepherd.
- We anticipate the ordination of Dr. Paul Witek to pastor All Saints in Olyphant. His diaconal ordination will take place next weekend.
- St. John the Baptist in Edwardsville is now administered by Fr. Innocent Neal. This parish also has a \$35,000 financial discrepancy in their treasurer's records. Vladyka noted that most parish treasurers do not have professional credentials.
- Ss. Peter and Paul in Uniondale is now administered by Fr. Gregory White.
 - In mid-April, we received a phone call from a lawyer representing this parish regarding unmaintained cemeteries. The parish wants the return of the (spent) perpetual care funds, and for the cemeteries to be administered by a non-profit unaffiliated with the OCA.
 - They also want the diocese to give them possession of their parish land; they have offered to let the OCA keep the parish's liturgical items.
 - Members want to sell the property and divide the proceeds amongst themselves.
 - None of this is in accordance with DOEPA bylaws, nor with the parish bylaws (which were duly voted upon by parishioners and approved by His Eminence). Vladyka's legal counsel suggested sending a letter stating this, but advised not providing the parish attorney with copies of either set of bylaws, as the attorney can locate those documents if they so choose.
 - The parish may also be using church funds to pay their attorney.
- *Clergy aging:* We need to be mindful that we have several priests at or close to retirement age:
 - Fr. John Kowalczyk (70)
 - Fr. Vladimir Fetcho (77)
 - Fr. James Jadick (68)
 - Fr. John Perich (69)
 - Fr. Stephen Miller (66)

- Fr. Gregory White (66)
- Fr. John Onofrey (64)
- Fr. Martin Browne provided His Eminence with a copy of the letter sent to clergy by Met. TIKHON when he was our diocesan hierarch, in which he required clergy to submit retirement letters upon turning 70. Vladyka intends to send a similar letter to clergy beginning at age 60, inquiring about their plans and the transition plan of their parish.
- The Diocesan Assembly in January 2022 went very well.
- *Bylaws:* On May 9th, 2022, Vladyka emailed the diocesan council to advise that he was modifying the diocesan bylaws by inserting the following: **Parish Administration.** *In accordance with Article XII, Sections 1A, 2A, B and Article VIII, Section H of the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America, if at any time a parish fails to have its Annual Parish Assembly in accordance with its own bylaws as required of Non-profit Corporations, and/or is unable to elect or staff a parish council capable of fulfilling its legal administrative and fiduciary responsibilities as stipulated by its bylaws, or a parish council capable of understanding its own bylaws, the Statute of the OCA or the Diocesan Authority; does not have a resident priest; and/or has dwindling financial resources, the administration of that parish will be forfeited/relinquished to the Diocesan hierarch and administered according to his direction.*
 - It is the hierarch's prerogative to modify the bylaws without approval of the diocesan council.
 - Clergy must be encouraged to read their parish's bylaws. A clergy workshop on this issue might be helpful.
 - There is no punitive intent here. Rather, the goal is to give parishes a way to continue to function legally.
 - Parishes are also encouraged to put a note in their bylaws regarding what to do in the event they find themselves unable to populate their parish councils.

St. Tikhon's Summer Camp:

- The camp and diocese are not separate entities. The camp uses the diocesan tax ID and does not have a separate corporate ID.
- We have regained control of the bank account. However, this was accomplished after considerable pushback from camp administrators.
- Fr. Silouan Burns, who has auditing/finance experience, has agreed to be involved. The camp needs to have financial controls and best practices in place.
- The current cost per-child is \$375. Is this too high? Vladyka stated that we should not be trying to turn a financial profit from the camp program. Also, we need to know how the camp determines the attendance fee.
- After the most recent camp, organizers made \$3,000 donations to St. Tikhon's Monastery and to the seminary. This was done without diocesan approval.
- We need to define the scope of work/job responsibilities for each administrative position.
- Mark Linnehan wants access to the camp's itemized expenses and income. He also stated that currently there is no oversight of check processing for attendance fees.
- The diocese should consider subsidizing clergy children

Treasurer's Report

- The report was distributed via email prior to the meeting. See report.
- We are in a very good position now, especially compared to three years ago.
- Mark Linnehan reminded council members that he is happy to offer further clarification/explanations upon request.
- Many thanks to Jennifer Bzik for her help with QuickBooks.

Edwardsville

- In late March 2022, in course of providing requested assistance to the parish treasurer, Mark Linnehan uncovered a \$125,000 financial discrepancy.
- Further investigation revealed:
 - The parish had one bank account of which the treasurer was unaware.
 - Some of the missing funds had been used to collateralize a bank loan.
 - Some transfers had been miscategorized as income.
 - In light of the aforementioned information, \$35,000 remains unaccounted for. Some of this is attributable to computer operator error and a lack of a clear financial recording process.
 - The parish president and council were unaware of the extent of this situation.
- The treasurer and parish president are amenable to a diocesan audit.
- Mark Linnehan and Jennifer Bzik will proceed with an audit. No vote was required.
- Vladyka emphasized that there is no evidence of malfeasance.

Deanery Reports

- *Wilkes-Barre:*
 - The deanery has a number of vacant parishes.
 - Two Mission Vespers services were held during Great Lent.
- *Frackville:*
 - Fr. John Onofrey has an injured knee.
 - In St. Claire, there will be a chrismation of a family of four on the Sunday before Pentecost.
 - Gettysburg mission: bi-weekly services are planned for the summer. Fr. Tim has notified the two closest Orthodox parishes, both of which are approximately 20-25 minutes away.
- *Philadelphia:*
 - There are two new priests in the deanery: Fr. Silouan Burns and Fr. Nicolai Breckenridge.

- There were two Mission Vespers services held during Great Lent; both were well attended.
- Fr. Victor stated he hopes to hold the annual clergy picnic this summer.
- Vladyka suggested increasing Fr. Nicolai's compensation due to his lengthy commute.

Coatesville Lawsuit

- This parish is the defendant in a \$75,000 personal injury lawsuit. The plaintiff alleges that she suffered a fall on the property after catching one of her pinky toes on a railing.
- The plaintiff is also suing DOEPA and the Orthodox Church in America. Archbishop MARK will offer his deposition on Monday, May 16th.
- The parish has also brought lawsuits against DOEPA and the Orthodox Church in America.

New Business:

- **Golf fundraiser:** Dn. Peter Staller made a motion to make a donation in the amount of \$100. The motion was seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak and passed unanimously.
- **Seminarian support:** Sbdn. Sebastian Crews made a motion to donate \$1,500 per semester to seminarians Dn. John Black and Bill Rusk. The motion was seconded by Dn. John Shingara and passed unanimously.
- **St. Tikhon's Summer Camp:** Mark Linnehan made a motion to fully subsidize camp attendance for diocesan children for a period of one year.
 - **Discussion:** If we do this, we should also approach other dioceses to suggest that they do the same for their children. Donations should also be encouraged.
 - Camp attendance increases the chance that young people will remain active in the Church after high school.
 - Vladyka stated that any subsidy program should give priority to children from within DOEPA, and that we should require a letter from each child's priest verifying that the family is in good standing at their parish.
 - Fr. Victor suggested involving the parishes; perhaps each parish could split the cost with the diocese. This would help the parishes truly understand the cost and share in the responsibility of training our youth. Christopher Yanovich suggested a partial subsidy for diocesan children, such as a \$200 credit, with parents responsible for the remaining balance. Mark Linnehan remarked that splitting each child's tuition in any proportion would make the accounting/recordkeeping substantially more complicated.
 - Dn. John Shingara suggested consulting with camp organizers.
 - Vladyka recommended sourcing volunteers from within our diocese whenever possible.
 - In the future, we may consider extending the length of the camp session, or running multiple one-week camps. This will require significant logistical work, as we do not have a dedicated campground. It would also likely require a second set of volunteers, as many take personal/vacation days off of work to be at the camp, and may not be able to take two consecutive weeks off.
 - Fr. Victor stated that if we simply state that diocesan children may attend the camp for free, families will assume the camp will be free forever. He recommended obviating this with clear messaging, perhaps using the angle that we are rebooting the camp after the two-year COVID-19 hiatus.

- Mark Linnehan's motion was seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak and passed unanimously.

Next meeting: Tuesday, September 6th at 10:00 AM.

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