

Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of Philadelphia & Eastern Pennsylvania
Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes — May 8th, 2024

Present: Archbishop Mark, Fr. Martin Browne, Fr. John Black, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Fr. Mark Koczak, Russel Charowsky, Daria Cortése, Mark Linnehan, Danalisa Radu, Christopher Yanovich
Absent: Fr Nicholas Solak; Fr Innocent Neal, Dn. Peter Staller, Dn. John Shingara, John Buckeye
Guests: Pdn. Sergei Kapral, Jennifer Bzik (Two of our auditors)

The meeting was called to order at 10:08 AM with the singing of “Christ is Risen.”

Minutes:

- The minutes from the previous meeting were distributed via email prior to this meeting.
- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky requested an amendment to the minutes to clarify that the request for substitute clergy financial assistance at the Gettysburg Mission is to accommodate Fr. Leonid’s bi-vocational work schedule, which (on rare occasions) conflicts with the service schedule at the Mission¹.
- A motion to approve the amended minutes was made by Fr. Mark Koczak, seconded by Russel Charowsky, and passed unanimously.

Archbishop’s Message:

- The 2025 Annual Diocesan Assembly will be held in Wilmington, rather than in Wilkes-Barre.
- Fr. Kirill Zawatski, our only diocesan seminarian, will be graduating in May. We will hopefully have two new seminarians in the fall.

Upcoming ordinations:

- *Diaconate:* Sbn. Gregory Polk (Holy Trinity in Wilkes-Barre)
- *Diaconate:* Sbn. Nicholas DiDonato (St. Michael’s in Wilmington)

Council term limits:

- The Council reviewed term limits and member eligibility:
 - Each term is three years.
 - Members may serve two consecutive terms, and then must leave the Council for at least one year before serving again.

¹ *Secretary’s note: Upon investigation, this appears to be a requested amendment to the August 2023 Diocesan Council minutes originally mentioned at the November meeting. I made the change and submitted the amended minutes shortly after the November meeting. I will resubmit them with these minutes also.*

- In 2025, the Council needs a clergy delegate-at-large and a lay delegate from the Frackville deanery. Will also need to elect a clergy delegate for the Wilkes Barre Deanery.
- Fr. Gregory White is retiring in May; Vladyka has asked Fr. John Black to fill Fr. Gregory's spot for the remainder of 2024.
- His Eminence noted that it makes sense to sync three-year Diocesan Council terms with the 3-year Metropolitan Council terms. (two concurrent terms is the maximum consecutive terms)

St. Herman's (Shillington) support reduction request:

- St. Herman's (Shillington) has requested a reduction in the amount of funds it remits to DOEPA.

Discussion on the concept as it relates to St Herman and other parishes:

- His Eminence stated that he is inclined to stick by the established guidelines, noting that we all need to be accountable to one another as a Church family.
- Vladyka noted that while we must be willing to help struggling parishes, they must also do what they can to help themselves.
- Personal conversations, rather than letters and emails, are the most effective approach when asking parishioners to increase their donations.
- A presentation/seminar/meeting with Bill Marianes might help the parish establish a strategic plan.
- Given our previous assistance to struggling parishes without any accountability on their part, we must be mindful we are not in the museum business; we cannot and should not prop up parishes because of their historical value or emotional attachments.
- Fr. John Black noted that in many cases parishes still using the old "dues" system are now being kept financially afloat by parishes who have transitioned to proportional giving.
- Fr. Martin Browne said that many parishes don't confront their financial problems because they are in denial. New(er) clergy need training on how to handle this. Furthermore, many priests are reluctant to emphasize this because it may seem self-serving. Fr. Martin recommended that clergy cultivate a group of faithful parishioners who will advocate for good stewardship "from the ground up".
- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky remarked that many parish councils don't act on this issue out of fear, and a lack of understanding on how to fix the problem(s).
- Russel Charowsky agreed that the education aspect is critical here, for both clergy and laity.
- Fr. John Black expressed that it would be helpful for clergy in struggling parishes to learn from the rectors of parishes who have already made good progress in this area.
- Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk suggested different presentations for clergy and parish councils, based on the information and tools needed by each. Furthermore, the

people who attend presentations on this topic are often not those who really need to hear and absorb the message.

- Mark Linnehan stated it would be very helpful to teach clergy how to read financial reports. He also remarked that training is a violent process; it involves taking what people are currently doing and thinking and crushing those things to establish better practices and attitudes.
- Vladyka commented that a number of parishes seem to lack the understanding that each individual parish is part of a larger Church family.
- Fr. John Black recommended the book Reclaiming the Great Commission by Fr. Evan Armatas; Fr. Martin Browne recommended Money and Salvation by Andrew Galeris.

Pension plan:

- There are roughly 29 non-participating *eligible* clergy. Previous figures were higher because they erroneously included ineligible clergy.
- Vladyka expressed the opinion that the roughly \$1 million held in reserve for pension plan payments should be invested (perhaps in a tiered system of 6-month CDs).

Chancellor's Report:

- Monthly diocesan administration Zoom meetings continue.
- All diocesan problems ultimately stem from not following the standards of good order described in the Holy Canons, OCA Statute, and a Diocesan/parish bylaws.
 - Later in the year there will be meetings/presentations that address issues of ignorance and/or self-will, enabling clergy to understand their responsibility and authority and are able to clearly, effectively communicate this to their parishes.
 - These issues exist in parishes with both recently-ordained and long-serving clergy.
- The OCA is applying for, and expects to receive a new Lily Foundation grant, focusing on meeting the financial challenges faced by clergy and their families.
- Fr. Martin attended a presentation for the Holy Synod immediately before its meeting regarding the pension plans. The substance of the meeting is confidential, but the atmosphere was collegial, honest, open and informative.
- Fr. Martin looks forward to the upcoming gathering in Bethlehem to celebrate Archbishop Mark's 10-year anniversary as our ruling diocesan hierarch.
- Many thanks to Fr. Gregory White, who is retiring at the end of this month, for his many years of service at Holy Resurrection Cathedral.
- Deep condolences to the Hojnicky family on the repose of Edward, Fr. Timothy's father. Many thanks to Fr. Silouan Burns and the faithful of St. Michael's in Wilmington for their generous and thoughtful hospitality.

Treasurer's Report:

- The financial state of the diocese is very good.
- Mark Linnehan reviewed the definitions of cash vs. accrual accounting.

- There are no aging concerns.
- A PNC CD matured in January. The \$400,000 principal was moved into an 8-month CD; the interest (approximately \$18,000) was moved into Operational Savings.
- A \$50,000 OCCIF investment matures in September. Mark Linnehan recommended withdrawing the money, leaving the diocese with \$200,000 still invested with that organization.
- Vladyka asked if we should assisting parishes with building projects or renovations like a bank as some other dioceses do with respect our reserve funds.
 - Lending to parishes would give DOEPA the same interest rate as a bank, while individual parishes would save money by paying interest rates lower than those offered by other lenders.
 - In the event of a loan default, this would ensure that parish assets would remain with the diocese, without partial claims from other lenders.
- A motion to approve the treasurer's report was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak, and passed unanimously.

Deanery Reports:

Philadelphia:

- Mission Vespers services were well-attended.
- The Sitka Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos visited St. Herman's (Shillington) on March 31st.
- Dn. Tikhon Wallace was ordained on the first Sunday of Great Lent at St. Stephen's Cathedral.
- Fr. Victor extended condolences to Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, and remarked that the attendance at services was truly wonderful.
- There is one pending priestly retirement in the Philadelphia Deanery.

Frackville:

- Two Lenten Mission Vespers were hosted in the Frackville Deanery.
- On March 28th, Holy Apostles in Mechanicsburg hosted His Grace, Bishop Alexei of Alaska, and the wonderworking Sitka Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. The faithful also raised \$3,000 for the Diocese of Alaska.
- Thanks to clergy who covered for Fr. Vjekoslav Jovičić during Holy Week and Pascha. Fr. Vjekoslav was quite ill, but is now recovering.
- Thank you to His Eminence, diocesan clergy and all the faithful for their prayers and support with regard to the repose of Fr. Timothy's father Edward.

Wilkes-Barre:

- The deanery hosted three Mission Vespers services during Great Lent.
- The three Liturgies of the Presanctified Gifts during Holy Week were celebrated collectively within the deanery. Fr. John Black remarked that this was a good

source of strength for clergy in advance of their efforts during the second half of Holy Week.

- Holy Resurrection Cathedral continues to have water leakage issues, and the moisture has caused a large chunk of plaster to fall from the dome.
 - His Eminence suggested contacting parishioners in person to raise funds for the repair.
 - Vladyka also emphasized the need to bring in new parishioners, especially younger people, as the current population is largely over age 65. Pdn. Sergei Kapral stated that the cathedral has about 20 active parishioners, and they are giving about 3% of their income to the parish.
 - There was discussion of how DOEPA might help specific parishes facing issues such as this, perhaps through diocesan matching grants or through bonds.
 - Fr. Martin Browne remarked that although ideas such as grants, bonds and pledges are good, in this case they are very premature. The cathedral also needs a new priest, as Fr. Gregory White is retiring at the end of May. The parish needs complete revitalization, including a plan and commitment *to* that plan. The new rector will need to be able to lead the faithful in courageously doing what needs to be done.

Metropolitan Council Report:

- Danalisa Radu stated that she did not attend the most recent in-person meeting, and commented that members of the Pension Board have been faithfully attending meetings.
- She remarked that several Metropolitan Council members had serious reservations about implementing changes to the pension plan without first seeking the approval of the Holy Synod.

Heavenly Host:

- Mark Linnehan has received Metropolitan Tikhon's blessing to promote the program in the Archdiocese of Washington.
- The updated Heavenly Host handbook now has four new electives.
- The program has received an inquiry from the school in Bethlehem.
- Mark Linnehan noted that the program has an elective that challenges students to attend at least one of each type of Lenten service, and that this likely contributed to increased attendance at services by both children and their parents.

Communications:

- Rdr. Nicholas Hojnicky has been appointed as Director of Communications for DOEPA.
- Projects include revitalizing the diocesan website (removing duplicate pages and broken links) and social media accounts.
- Future plans include creating an official diocesan YouTube channel and Facebook page. Rdr. Nicholas noted that content featuring hierarchal services is especially popular.

St. Tikhon's Camp:

- Additional donations continue to come in.
- Vladyka stated that hopefully parishes will include a line item not only for camp but for other youth ministries, such as church school/education expenses.

Young Men's Group:

- This initiative is being led by Fr. Mark Koczak and Pdn. Peter Skoog.
- Pdn. Peter is assembling some materials and plans to speak with diocesan rectors about the group to determine what kinds of presentations, activities and organizational structure would be most beneficial.

Charitable Donations:

- Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk made a motion to donate \$100 each to the golf tournaments in Philadelphia and Harrisburg (upon diocesan receipt of their annual mail requests). The motion was seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak, and passed unanimously.
- Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk moved to donate \$500 to each of the two Crossroads students and the one for Project Mexico from Harrisburg. The motion was seconded by Fr. Martin Browne, and passed unanimously.

Aorist Press Prayer Books:

- Fr. Martin Browne and Daria Cortése gave a brief presentation on the publications available from Aorist Press, an Orthodox liturgical publishing house founded by Sbn. Sergei Arhipov and Daria Cortése of St. Mark's in Wrightstown.
- Aorist has just released its first hardcover volume, Orthodox Daily Prayers, Hours and Typica, which is an updated reprinting that combines, in a much more durable format, the two softcover prayer books (Orthodox Daily Prayers and The Hours and Typica) previously published by St. Tikhon's. Books are \$40 each; Aorist Press is a registered 501(3)c non-profit organization; profits will benefit the building fund at St. Mark's.
- Future planned publications include a Liturgical Psalter, Parish Book of Needs (*Trebnik*), bilingual English/Slavonic Divine Liturgy book, and an Apostol.
- Other publications currently available include the following titles in the *New Kliros Library* series:
 - The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts
 - Forgiveness Vespers / Molieben to St. Theodore the Recruit
 - The services of the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete (Grand Compline and 5th Thursday Matins) for reader and choir
 - The complete text of the Great Canon, including the three-ode canons to the apostles used in the Fifth Thursday Matins
 - The Akathist Matins to the Theotokos
 - Pentecost (includes Vigil, the propers for the Divine Liturgy, the Kneeling Vespers, and rubrics for the Day of the Holy Spirit)

- For information on this and other Aorist publications, please visit www.aoristpress.com. The site also features a complimentary Menaion section; all services can be downloaded, free of charge, in PDF format.

NEXT MEETING: September 12th.

A motion to adjourn was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, seconded by Russel Charowsky, and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 1:57 PM with the singing of “Shine, shine.”

Respectfully submitted,

Daria Cortése, Recording Secretary

ACTION ITEMS

1. Fr. Mark Kozak and Pdn. Peter Skoog will continue their efforts to form the Young Men’s Group.
2. Upon receipt of the formal donation requests via US mail, Mark Linnehan will send \$100 each to the Philadelphia and Harrisburg charitable golf tournaments.
3. Mark Linnehan will send \$500 each to the three parishioners at Christ the Savior (Harrisburg) so they may participate in Crossroads and Project Mexico.