

**Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of Philadelphia & Eastern Pennsylvania
Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes
November 22nd, 2024**

Attendees: Archbishop Mark, Fr. Martin Browne, Fr. John Black, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Innocent Neal, Dn. Peter Staller, John Buckeye, Russell Charowsky, Daria Cortése, Mark Linnehan, Danalisa Radu

Absent: Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Fr. Mark Koczak, Fr. Nicholas Solak, Dn. John Shingara, Jennifer Bzik

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 AM with the singing of “O heavenly King”.

Minutes

A motion to accept the minutes was made by Dn. Peter Staller and seconded by John Buckeye. The motion passed unanimously.

Diocesan Assembly

- The Annual Diocesan Assembly will take place on January 23-24 in Wilmington, DE.
- *There was discussion of possible guest speakers.*
 - Vladyka suggested Fr. Nicholas Solak.
 - Fr. Victor agreed it would be helpful to have Fr. Nicholas speak on the needs of clergy (clergy peer groups and other types of support for clergy and their families), and how parishes can help.
 - His Eminence believes that most DOEPA parishes are giving clergy their annual COLA increases, but there are still many parishes who do not observe clergy appreciation month (October).
- *Agenda For the Diocesan Assembly*
 - There were no suggested changes to the proposed agenda.
 - A motion to approve the agenda was made by Fr. Martin Browne, seconded by Danalisa Radu, and passed unanimously.
- Vladyka mentioned the financial gifts the Council agreed to give to retired clergy and matushki, and how he has received many letters of thanks from the recipients, who were deeply moved that they were remembered in this way.

Archbishop’s Message

- We have one seminarian: Alexander Scott.
 - We will send him \$1,500 per semester, as we have done with other seminarians.
 - His parish (Frackville) will likely also send him some financial support.

- If we want to directly help seminarians, donations should be sent directly to them. Otherwise it will become a donation to St. Tikhon's Seminary, as tuition is already covered.
 - Sending the money to the seminarians enables them to use the money to provide for their daily needs such as housing and food.
 - Seminarians are not able to take out student loans, so many accumulate massive credit card debt.
- *Holy Resurrection Cathedral:*
 - The realtor believes the church is not sellable due to all the required repairs. Also, the building is so large it would be nearly impossible to repurpose it.
 - Fr. Innocent is looking for a way to separate the church and rectory electric, and to change the rectory electrical box (the current model has caused many fires in other locations). There was discussion of a second quote for this that will likely be received next month, after PPL inspects the property.
 - The realtor believes the rectory may be sold for roughly \$250,000 *if the church is demolished.*
 - We currently have a bid on demolition, not including topsoil and seeding, for \$75,000. This figure may change if asbestos is discovered.
 - Fr. Martin Browne remarked on the extent of water damage to the dome; the icons are rippling because of it.
 - There is a huge, very heavy safe in the basement.
 - There was discussion of what to do about the bells and kitchen appliances.
 - Vladyka will investigate possibly getting another, more proactive realtor.
 - Fr. Martin stated that the marble iconostasis has a solid concrete backing and may not be able to be removed and transplanted elsewhere.
 - It may be possible to separate the mosaic icons individually, but this may cause disintegration. Marble is also a very soft stone that will not survive attempts to remove it in a single piece.
 - There is also an iconostasis in the chapel; its removal potential has not yet been evaluated. Vladyka remarked that the Russian mission in Philadelphia may be interested, as they are currently using a portable iconostasis requiring teardown after every service.
 - There is a large stove and a corner dishwasher.
 - Fr. Innocent will inventory the kitchen and add it to the inventory spreadsheet.
 - There are real china plates. However, most parishes no longer use these, preferring disposable dishes.
 - Vladyka stated that any parishes who are interested in taking some available inventory items should plan to do their own packing.
 - Vladyka mentioned to Archbishop Daniel that there are multiple chandeliers that might be a good fit for the new church in Cleveland, but he did not seem interested.
 - Fr. Victor asked if the rectory will need to be rezoned.

- Vladyka stated that the county will take care of that if it is required.
- His Eminence thanked Fr. Innocent for all his hard work on this project.
- The fall teen retreat at Camp Hebron went exceptionally well.
 - We received the bill for the retreat, the amount was \$10,000-\$13,000.
- Registration for the winter teen retreat is now open.
- Proposed website dedicated to promoting various youth events:
 - Proposed by Dan Peck and Patrick O'Leary
 - This will include photos of past and present events, as well as additional information that will help in recruiting staff.
- There was discussion of expenses associated with the 2025 All-American Council, and if DOEPA should cover these costs for the parishes.
 - There is already an expense line item in the budget for this. No motion is required.
- The Metropolitan Council has created a new position for the national Office of Pastoral Life, and they want Fr. Nicholas Solak to be released to the central Church for this purpose. This will leave us with a vacancy in Stroudsburg; we have a deacon there that is going to be ordained.
- There was discussion of DOEPA Council elections at the 2025 Annual Diocesan Assembly.
 - We need a clergy delegate at large (perhaps Fr. Kyrill Zawatski?).
 - We need a Metropolitan Council clergy delegate. Fr. Martin Browne may be interested in fulfilling his term, depending on the length of the commitment required.
 - We need a Frackville lay delegate.

Chancellor's Report

- Fr. Martin attended the 50th Anniversary celebration at St. Stephen's Cathedral, including a Primatial Divine Liturgy with Metropolitan Tikhon and Archbishop Mark.
- Fr. Martin's parish, St. Mark's in Wrightstown, also had its 50th Anniversary, which was celebrated with a Hierarchal Divine Liturgy served by Archbishop Mark.
 - Other clergy in attendance included Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Fr. John Kowalczyk and Fr. Emmanuel Pratsinakis.
 - Students in the Diaconal Formation Program also attended the Liturgy.
- Fr. Martin attended the Akathist to the Hawaiian Iveron Icon at Holy Apostles in Mechanicsburg.
- *Other events attended:*
 - Ordination of Dn. Gregory Polk (Holy Trinity in Wilkes-Barre)
 - Thanks to Fr. Innocent Neal and the parishioners of Holy Trinity for their great care and hospitality
 - Funeral of Fr. Vladimir Petorak
 - Funeral of Fr. Nicodemus (St. Tikhon's Monastery)

- Funeral of Fr. Michael Evans (St. Johns in Edwardsville)
- Fr. Martin and Fr. Timothy Hojnicky revisited St. Herman's in Shillington to follow up with the parishioners on what progress has been made since the arrival of Fr. Vjekoslav Jovicic and his family.
 - The parish has stabilized. Weekly attendance is 25-30. Pledge letters have been sent out for 2025; as of this recent meeting, 11 pledge cards had come back, for a total of around \$59,000 annually. For the clergy to be compensated at his present rate, St. Herman's needs twice this amount.
 - Everyone is very happy with Fr. Vjekoslav and his family.
 - The current financial issues in this parish reflect its trajectory over the past 3-4 years. They have not just cropped up since Fr. John was removed.
 - Fr. Martin advised parishioners that this is a unique situation and there is concern about establishing a precedent where other parishes may ask, "Why won't you do that for us?". He also informed them that the Diocesan Council was not unanimously in favor of this level of support, and that the parishioners' perspective is not the only one that matters here.
 - Fr. Martin encouraged parishioners to call those who had left, especially with the upcoming holidays, and invite those who do not already have plans to attend services elsewhere to return to St. Herman's.
 - Fr. Martin also suggested that parishioners examine their most recent 1040s, and perhaps double their contributions (which in most cases means an increase from 1% to 2%).
 - Many parishioners are now beginning to realize that DOEPA is not their adversary and is not antagonistic towards clergy.
 - Vladyka reflected that the future of Stroudsburg, which is flourishing and needs to keep flourishing, is also a crucial factor in the decision of where to place Fr. Vjekoslav.
 - His Eminence has expressed to Met. Tikhon that we cannot have parish priests alienating their parishes from their hierarchs. This is a canonical offense that can result in deposition. His Beatitude agrees.
 - Fr. Victor asked if DOEPA is willing to financially support a part-time priest for St. Herman's if His Eminence transfers Fr. Vjekoslav to Stroudsburg.
 - Such a situation may also give additional income to the parish because they could then rent out the rectory.
 - Fr. Martin remarked that the situation in Shillington is still very murky, and the outcome uncertain.
 - *Options:*
 - If we want Fr. Vjekoslav to stay at this parish (and he is probably the best choice), the diocese will need to continue subsidizing his salary at least until June 30th, 2025.
 - Take Fr. Vjekoslav out and transfer him to a parish that can pay him adequately (such as Stroudsburg). Popadiya Dragana says the people are

lovely, but they want stability and not to continually move from place to place, especially because they have young children.

- If this option is chosen, the parish would get a part-time priest, and DOEPA should have someone lined up to assume that role before removing Fr. Vjekoslav. Fr. Vjekoslav has expressed that if DOEPA is going to move him, he would prefer not to wait until June.
- Russell Charowsky expressed support for moving Fr. Vjekoslav to Stroudsburg, for the benefit of the Jovicic family and Stroudsburg. Holy Trinity does not have a rectory; the Solaks own their house.
- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky has been appointed as Vice-Chancellor. Many thanks to His Eminence for appointing him and to Fr. Timothy for accepting the position.
- Condolences to His Eminence and the Maymon family on the repose of the Archbishop's sister Mona.
 - The Maymons have experienced several painful losses throughout the past year, but it has not diminished Vladyka's efforts and dedication in leading our diocese. May the Lord continue to strengthen and console him and his entire family as they mourn their departed sisters, mothers, aunts and wives.
- We look forward to another productive Diocesan Assembly in Wilmington. May our work today contribute to its success.
- We also look forward to the 2025 All-American Council in Phoenix, Arizona. Further details regarding travel arrangements, hotel accommodations and scheduling will be posted in January.

Treasurer's Report

- The financial state of the diocese is very good.
 - Net income is higher than expected, including a bequest of almost \$220,000 from the Danyo Estate.
 - There are no aging concerns.
 - The remaining ~\$40,000 due from the Danyo Estate should be received later this year.
 - We recently received the rest of the Fedora Trust money.
 - We should discuss asset allocations to determine the best places to put our money.
 - This report does not include any monies from the closure of Holy Resurrection Cathedral.
 - We should anticipate a large payout to the OCA as a proportional giving contribution (probably in the neighborhood of \$70,000).
 - Mark Linnehan would like to wait as late as possible to send this money (hopefully until we receive the funds from the Danyo Estate).
 - Fr. Martin recommended that if we are going to give the OCA these extra funds, that we give it as a donation specifically earmarked for Pastoral Life (which will then qualify for matching funds from the Lily Foundation grant that helps clergy families financially).

- Mark Linnehan will include a note with the donation asking that it be put toward the Lily Grant Economic Challenges grant. However, this does not obligate the OCA to grant this request.
- A motion to accept the report was made by John Buckeye, seconded by Fr. Martin Browne, and passed unanimously.

Budget Proposal

- Mark Linnehan reviewed the changes made since the September meeting.
- Further changes may be required based on costs associated with the closure of Holy Resurrection Cathedral and the possible reassignment of Fr. Vjekoslav from Shillington to Stroudsburg.
 - His Eminence remarked that he is inclined to move Fr. Vjekoslav to Stroudsburg, and that DOEPA should pay for the Jovicic's moving expenses.
- There was discussion of what to do with our OCCIF investment, which will mature in 2025. Pulling the entire amount out would likely cause significant problems for OCCIF.
 - Fr. Martin Browne shared the somewhat negative experience St. Mark's encountered when exploring OCCIF funding for the parish's building project.
 - His Eminence expressed that our primary responsibility is to our diocese, and that we need to seek out the best returns possible.
- Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk moved to approve presentation of the proposed budget to the 2025 Annual Diocesan Assembly. The motion was seconded by Dn. Peter Staller, and passed unanimously.

Deanery Reports

- *Philadelphia (Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk)*
 - St. Stephen's and St. Mark's celebrated their 50th anniversaries.
 - The charity golf tournament raised \$6,000.
 - The Diaconal Formation Program is going strong with 8 students; 7 are from the Philadelphia Deanery, and the other is from Holy Apostles in Mechanicsburg.
 - The Philadelphia Clergy Brotherhood is planning to have the Great Blessing of Waters on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River on January 12th.
 - Fr. Silouan Burns believes there is potential for a mission in Delaware, because St. Michael's is bursting at the seams.
 - Please pray for Fr. Mark Koczak, who has been diagnosed with cancer. Fortunately, his prognosis is very good and he expects to be able to continue serving on Sundays.
- *Wilkes-Barre (Fr. Innocent Neal)*
 - About 30 parishioners from the cathedral have joined Holy Trinity.
 - Edwardsville: Fr. Barnabas is serving at least twice a month, including hearing confessions. The parish now has an Instagram account and is promoting events with it.

- Olyphant's anniversary on 12/6. Vladyka will attend.
- Fr. John Black doing a great job at St. Michael's in Jermyn. He is also the administrator at Uniondale and get along very well with the people. They just had their annual meeting.
- Recent ordination of Dn. Gregory Polk.
- Vladyka says Fr. Traian Stafiuc is struggling with his brain tumor and has run out of sick days.
- *Frackville (Fr. Timothy Hojnicky)*
 - See emailed report.
 - The report was read into the record by Archbishop Mark.
 - Holy Apostles celebrated its 20th anniversary on 10/26-27.
 - Fr. Timothy's activities included:
 - Serving as Master of Ceremonies at the 50th Anniversary of St. Mark's (Wrightstown) on 10/12 and at the ordination of Dn. Gregory Polk at Holy Trinity (Wilkes-Barre) on 11/8-9.
 - Served as keynote speaker at the annual assembly of the Diocese of Chicago and the Midwest at St. Nicholas (Mogadore, OH) on 10/7-9.
 - Participated in a Zoom call with St. Tikhon's Seminary on forming vocations and recommending proper candidates for seminary enrollment.
 - Assisted Fr. Innocent Neal in inventorying holy items from Holy Resurrection Cathedral for distribution to our parishes.
 - Organized the vesting of +Mt. Archpriest Vladimir Petorak and +Archpriest Michael Evans, and offered the eulogy for Fr. Michael at his funeral on 11/20 at St. John the Baptist (Edwardsville).
 - Accompanied Chancellor Fr. Martin Browne to St. Herman's (Shillington) for a parish meeting on 11/9.
 - Archbishop Mark expressed the need for other clergy to assist Fr. Timothy in his many duties throughout the diocese.
 - St. Clare is stable and responding well to having Fr. Kirill as their administrator.
 - Christ the Saviour is going gangbusters; Fr. Steven is heavily involved in youth ministry, pastoral life and many other areas.

Metropolitan Council Report

- Danalisa Radu offered a summary of the most recent meeting:
 - The Metropolitan Council acknowledges that it has not been transparent with updates as promised at the last AAC (especially with regard to the activities of the Pension Board). The question now is, "What do we share?"
 - The Council discussed upcoming vacancies.
 - The Metropolitan Council was asked to increase its contribution to the SCOBA from 7k to 25k. The motion passed by 2 people (to allow this motion to go to the Holy Synod of Bishops for approval).

Heavenly Host Program

- Mark Linnehan updated the Council on recent synaxes and award presentations.
- Had a meeting with the chancellor of the Diocese of the South. They will discuss at the next Diocesan Assembly.

Old Business

- There was discussion about the transfer of Holy Trinity Cathedral's cemetery to Holy Trinity in Wilkes-Barre.
 - Fr. Martin Browne moved to have Daria write a letter stating that the Diocesan Council authorizes Fr. Innocent Neal and the cathedral's parish council to transfer the cemetery to Holy Trinity, and that DOEPA will pay the transfer fees from the cathedral's account(s). The motion was seconded by Dn. Peter Staller, and passed unanimously.

New Business

There was no New Business.

Charities

- Gifts for retired clergy and matushki fall in this category.
- There was discussion of the needs of the homeless at this time of year. Fr. Innocent stated that socks are particularly essential, as once they get wet they are often discarded.
- Mark Linnehan mentioned that we still have \$10,000 earmarked for a donation to the Diocese of Mexico.
- Fr. Martin Browne stated that if any Council member has ideas for any Christmastime charity needs, we can discuss it via email.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:38 PM via general acclamation, and ended with the singing of "It is truly meet".

Respectfully submitted,
Daria Cortése, Recording Secretary

ACTION ITEMS

1. Daria will draft a letter stating that Fr. Innocent Neal and the parish council of Holy Resurrection Cathedral are authorized to transfer the cathedral's cemetery to Holy Trinity (Wilkes-Barre).
2. Council members will discuss Christmastime charity suggestions via email.
3. Mark Linnehan will send the second half of the financial gifts to retired clergy and matushki.