

**Orthodox Church in America**  
**Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania**  
**Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes**  
**September 17th, 2024**

**Present:** Archbishop Mark, Fr. Martin Browne, Fr. John Black, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Fr. Mark Koczak, Fr. Innocent Neal, Fr. Nicholas Solak, Dn. Peter Staller, Russell Charowsky, Daria Cortése, Mark Linnehan, Christopher Yanovich, John Buckeye

**Absent:** Danalisa Radu, Dn. John Shingara

**Guest:** Pdn. Sergei Kapral

**The meeting was called to order at 10:08 AM with the singing of “O heavenly King.”**

**Archbishop’s Message**

- At the 2025 Annual Diocesan Assembly, we need to elect a several members; some have already agreed to be re-elected.
- Gregory Polk will be ordained to the diaconate on November 9th.
- The diaconal formation program has resumed at St. Stephen’s Cathedral, with 8 students.
- Pension plan modifications:
  - Bi-vocational clergy required to participate; their parishes are required to contribute.
  - Clergy who have aged out may not contribute, but their parishes are required to contribute.
  - Letters have been sent to all concerned.
- Fr. Kirill Zawatski is well received in Frackville.
- Fr. Vjekoslav (St. Herman’s in Shillington) is addressing stewardship, website, and social media to make the parish more visible. His Eminence expressed gratitude to Fr. Vjekoslav for his willingness to take on this challenge, and to Fr. Martin Browne and Fr. Timothy Hojnicky for assisting with the transition.
- The St. Tikhon’s Summer Camp went exceptionally well, and the Fall Teen Retreat looks to be another wonderful event.
  - There was discussion of how to register and bill campers from outside our diocese, and how to set a cutoff threshold for these campers.
  - Vladyka emphasized the importance of maintaining proper records for all campers and staff, and retaining those records so they are readily available in

the event of insurance claims or misconduct allegations lodged 20-30 years post-event.

- The Brotherhood of St. Alexis Toth men's group had its first meeting in Bethlehem.
  - Fr. Martin Browne stated that the diocese should form a similar group for young women (approximate age range 18-24).
  - There is room to improve communication and advertising of the men's group and its activities. One person remarked that the first meeting was a positive experience, but at its conclusion, the date of the next meeting was not discussed.
- The Clergy Pre-Nativity Fast Retreat will take place on November 12th-13th at Daylesford Abbey. The guest speaker, Bp. Benedict, will speak on the Rule of St. Benedict.
- Many thanks to Rdr. Nicholas Hojnicky for his diligent and proactive work on the diocesan website and social media.
  - Fr. Martin Browne commented that parishes that submit photos for inclusion on the diocesan website should include photos of laity attending services, especially on feast days.
  - Fr. John Black commented that parishes should include photographs of coffee/fellowship hour.
- His Eminence stated that parish website domains should be in the name of the *parish*, not an individual member, to ensure continuous access.
- Vladyka appointed Fr. Timothy Hojnicky as Diocesan Vice-Chancellor.
  - Fr. Timothy will receive the same stipend as the Chancellor, and will also continue to receive his dean's stipend.
- We will continue to support our current seminarian, Alexander Scott, with \$1,500 per semester.
- *There was discussion of clergy peer support groups and grants to fund them.*
  - The diocese obtained an original matching grant which is the source of the monies currently in the peer group account.
  - The Thriving in Ministry (TIM) program is funded by a Lilly grant to the OCA.
  - Fr. Nicholas Solak will investigate the parameters of the original grant obtained by DOEPA, which will aid in guidance of future disbursements from the peer group account; however, it was possible for DOEPA to contribute to the TIM program on behalf of diocesan groups which have aged out of TIM.
  - Groups are inter-jurisdictional.
  - Clergy should be made aware that there are funds available for special/extraordinary sessions and events such as museum trips.
- The Metropolitan Council needs lawyers and accountants on it.

## **Chancellor's Report**

- On October 2nd there will be a Zoom meeting of the diocesan chancellors to discuss assessments for the 2025 All-American Council.
- Kudos to the Office of Pastoral Life on the Lilly Grant.
  - Fr. Nicholas Solak remarked that the OCA was invited to apply for the grant.
  - Clergy must attend a minimum of two financial training classes; they are then eligible to apply for financial assistance through the Office of Pastoral Life.
  - Fr. Martin Browne stated that DOEPA leads the OCA in opportunities for clergy financial support and education.

## **DEANERY REPORTS**

### **Philadelphia Deanery**

- The report was presented by Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk.
- The deanery is stable, with no immediate clergy vacancies.
- Upcoming 50th anniversaries: St. Stephen's Cathedral and St. Mark's in Wrightstown.
- The Orthodoxy On Tap event series has been very active and is quite popular.
- The diaconal vocation program has resumed at St. Stephen's Cathedral.
  - There are 8 students (7 from the Philadelphia deanery and 1 from Holy Apostles in the Frackville deanery).
  - There are two instructors (both priests): Fr. Milorad Orlic (Serbian) and Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk.
  - Fr. Nicholas Solak remarked that the diaconal program can be an excellent venue for identifying viable candidates for the priesthood.
  - There was discussion of DOEPA covering the cost of lunch for the students and instructors. Fr. Victor has negotiated lunch catering with a local vendor for \$150/week (\$15/person); the program still needs a catering solution for breakfast.
  - Fr. Victor commented that in many areas those interested in the diaconate only have training via correspondence (perhaps augmented by in-person training with their parish priest).
  - Fr. John Black commented that he believes late vocations will prove essential in the future and that this should be emphasized in parishes. Many men who are at a crossroads in their lives do not realize they are called to the diaconate or priesthood because they (mistakenly) believe they are too old to pursue such a vocation.

### **Frackville Deanery**

- The report was presented by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky.
- Holy Apostles (Mechanicsburg) celebrates its 20th anniversary this year this year.
- The Gettysburg Mission is now renting a more suitable worship space that does not require complete tear-down of the iconostasis after every service. The Mission also recently enrolled its first catechumen.
- **St. Herman's (Shillington):**
  - His Eminence, Fr. Martin Browne and Fr. Timothy Hojnicky updated the Council on the status of the parish during its clergy transition, including the church's financial health and the effects of outspoken negativity from some parishioners.
  - St. Herman's is currently \$1,046 in arrears on its financial commitment to DOEPA.
  - **Motion** made by Mark Linnehan:
    - To forgive the \$1,046 and not bill the parish for further assessments for the rest of 2024.
    - In January 2025, DOEPA will bill St. Herman's for 25% of its assessments, with further 25% increases every six months until the parish is once again fulfilling their whole financial commitment.
    - St. Herman's will submit monthly financial reports to the diocese.
  - After discussion, Mark Linnehan **amended his motion:**
    - DOEPA will forgive the \$1,046 owed by St. Herman's.
    - DOEPA will relieve the parish's diocesan financial commitment until June 2025.
    - St. Herman's will submit monthly financial reports to the diocese.
    - The motion was seconded by Fr. Martin Browne, and passed unanimously.
  - There was discussion regarding St. Herman's financial obligations toward Fr. Vjekoslav and his family.
    - **Motion** made by Mark Linnehan: That His Eminence, Fr. Martin Browne, and Fr. Timothy Hojnicky review St. Herman's monthly financial data to determine how much of that commitment was met that month; DOEPA will cover the difference between what Fr. Vjekoslav was supposed to receive and what he actually received.
      - The motion was seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak and passed unanimously.
  - Fr. John Black asked if Fr. Vjekoslav and his family had incurred moving expenses and suggested that DOEPA cover those.
    - Vladyka will inquire about this with Fr. Vjekoslav.

## Wilkes-Barre Deanery

- The report was presented by Fr. Innocent Neal.
- On Sunday, September 15th, 2024, the parishioners of Holy Resurrection Cathedral in Wilkes-Barre unanimously voted to close the cathedral.
  - There was discussion of the building's structural problems, possible demolition and salvage opportunities, and property distribution.
  - The metrical books must be located and turned over to Fr. Innocent Neal.
  - The church and rectory electrical accounts need to be separated.
  - Fr. John Black suggested DOEPA explore selling the land to the local parks department.
  - Fr. Innocent Neal suggested that the Divine Liturgy be celebrated on the property at least once a month to avoid abandoned status and possible loss of tax exemption.
  - Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk suggested forming a committee to address these issues.
  - **Mark Linnehan moved** to accept the cathedral parishioners' request to close. The motion was seconded by Christopher Yanovich, and passed unanimously.

## Treasurer's Report

- The report was presented by Mark Linnehan.
- The financial state of the diocese is very good; net income is greater than expected. (including reduced expenses and a bequest of almost \$200K from the Danyo Estate.
- **Notes/recommendations:**
  - Our \$400,000 PNC CD matures on September 22nd. The current value is \$410,457.45.
  - Mark Linnehan recommended rolling \$200K into a CD (PNC Bank offers an 8-month CD with 4% interest).
  - Our \$50,000 OCCIF matured in September, and we have received the principal as of August 6th.
  - The Danyo bequest paid 80% of what was due. We expect the remaining amount (roughly \$40K) to be paid later this year.
  - There is still an outstanding bequest of \$30-40K from the Fedora Trust.
  - We should anticipate a large proportional giving payment (approximately \$70,000) to the OCA.
- There was discussion about other investment opportunities, such as the Athene Fund from Honesdale Bank (suggested by Fr. John Black because this bank has a history of cooperating well with Orthodox Churches).
- A **motion** to accept the report was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, seconded by Russell Charowsky, and passed unanimously.

## Budget Proposal

- Mark Linnehan presented the first draft of the proposed 2025 budget.
- There was a discussion of insurance premiums and the cost of additional umbrella policies.
- **Modifications:**
  - Add the Vice-Chancellor stipend for Fr. Timotjhy Hojnicky.
  - Reduce tuition expenses for the diaconal vocations program at St. Stephen's Cathedral, due to the generosity of the students' parishes.
  - Cover the cost of lunch for the students and teachers in the diaconal vocations program. The cost is \$150/week for a total of 22 sessions (11 in fall, 11 in spring).

## Old Business

- There was discussion on our continuing efforts to send money to the Diocese of Mexico.

## New Business

- There was a discussion of what to do with the Holy Resurrection Cathedral cemetery. Fr. Innocent will transfer it immediately to Holy Trinity Church.
- There was discussion of potential insurance liability for the cathedral property and cemetery; some coverage must be maintained due to liability for injuries received by trespassers.

## Heavenly Host Program

- Mark Linnehan updated the council on the status of this program.
- His Beatitude has given permission for the program to be promoted in his diocese.
- Mark has contacted the Diocese of the South seeking permission to promote there; at least one parish in that diocese has expressed serious interest.

## Charitable Contributions

- **Fr. John Black moved** to donate \$1,000 to St. Theodosius Cathedral in Cleveland, Ohio. The motion was simultaneously seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and Fr. Mark Koczak, and passed unanimously.
- **Fr. Innocent Neal moved** to donate \$500 to Friends of the Poor. The motion was seconded by Christopher Yanovich, and passed unanimously.
- **Fr. Martin Browne moved** to donate \$500 to Focus, a charity based at St. George Greek Cathedral in Philadelphia. The motion was seconded by Christopher Yanovich, and passed unanimously.
- There was discussion of other potential future recipients.
  - Fr. Dn. Sergei Kapral suggested the Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration.

- His Eminence suggested an organization founded by Fr. Joseph Ciarciaglino (St. Philip the Apostle Orthodox Church in Tampa, Florida) which is very active in Zimbabwe, with a special focus on providing clean water sources.
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- **Clergy/matushki gifts:**
  - **Christopher Yanovich moved** give \$1,000 to each diocesan clergy member.
    - Fr. Martin Browne suggested that this year we give these gifts to *retired* clergy and matushki (including widows).
    - There was discussion of tax implications and required collection of recipients 'personal information, including Social Security numbers, for the purpose of issuing tax forms.
      - Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk expressed concern that giving a gift and immediately demanding this information would be in poor taste.
      - His Eminence suggested splitting the donations (\$500 now; \$500 on/after January 1st), to avoid having to issue tax forms.
    - **Question:** Are gifts per *person* or per *household*?
      - **Answer:** Per person. If the clergyman and matushka are both alive, the household will receive \$2,000. If one has already reposed, the household will receive \$1,000.
    - **Question:** How many donations do we expect to make in total?
      - **Answer:** About 30. Mark Linnehan will receive the list from Carmen Hodson.
    - Christopher Yanovich agreed to modify his motion based on the discussion. The modified motion is: that DOEPA will donate \$1,000 to each retired clergyman and matushka (\$500 per recipient to be paid now; \$500 per recipient to be paid on/after January 1st, 2025).
    - The modified motion was seconded by Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, and passed unanimously.

**NEXT MEETING: Friday, November 22nd**

**Fr. Timothy Hojnicky made a motion to adjourn at 3:52 PM.** The motion was seconded by Mark Linnehan, and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned with the singing of "It is truly meet."

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Daria Cortése, Recording Secretary**

### **ACTION ITEMS**

1. Following monthly review of the financial information submitted by St. Herman's (Shillington), Mark Linnehan will give Fr. Vjekoslav the difference between the parish's financial obligation to him and what Fr. Vjekoslav was actually paid.
2. His Eminence will ask Fr. Vjekoslav for information on unreimbursed moving expenses.
3. Mark Linnehan will modify the 2025 budget proposal to include the Vice-Chancellor's stipend, reduced tuition expenses for the diaconal formation program at St. Stephen's Cathedral, and the cost of lunch for 22 sessions of the same program (\$150/week).
4. Mark Linnehan will send \$1,000 to St. Theodosius Cathedral in Cleveland.
5. Mark Linnehan will send \$500 to Friends of the Poor.
6. Mark Linnehan will send \$500 to Focus.
7. Carmen Hodson will give Mark Linnehan a list of retired clergy and matushki in our diocese; Mark Linnehan will send \$500 to each person on the list before the end of 2024, and will send another \$500 to each person in January 2025.