

Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania
Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes
May 12, 2025

Attendance: Archbishop Mark, Fr. Martin Browne, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Fr. Innocent Neal, Fr. Michael Shepherd, Fr. Kyrill Zawatski, John Buckeye, Daria Cortése, Mark Linnehan John Malinchok, Danalisa Radu, Christopher Yanovich

Diocesan Communications Director: Rdr. Nicholas Hojnicky

Not Present: Fr. Mark Koczak, Dn. Peter Staller

The meeting was called to order with prayer at 10:12 AM.

Minutes:

- John Malinchok moved to accept the minutes of the April 21st Zoom call on the topic of the sale and/or demolition of Holy Resurrection Cathedral. The motion was seconded by Fr. Martin Browne, and passed unanimously.
- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky moved to accept, in lieu of official minutes, the email chain in which the Diocesan Council agreed to loan Fr. Vjekoslav Jovičić \$20,000 to assist with the purchase of a home, and with associated closing costs. The motion was seconded by Fr. Michael Shepherd, and passed unanimously.

Archbishop's Message:

- *Incoming seminarians:*
 - Jacob Kurtz (St. Tikhon's)
 - Alexander Korapsak (St. Vladimir's)
 - Nicholas Sheridan (St. Vladimir's; intends to become a military chaplain)
 - Alexander Scott has withdrawn from seminary.
- **Discussion:**
 - DOEPA customarily provides \$1,500/semester to our seminarians.
 - Mark Linnehan asked if these payments should be sent shortly before a new seminarian moves to campus, to help cover those expenses. His Eminence replied that he has no problem with this. Mark will send the funds to our seminarians in August 2025.
 - **Question:** should DOEPA provide this financial support to seminarians who plan to become military chaplains, rather than priests in our diocese? **Consensus:** Yes.

- Fr. Michael Shepherd stated that prospective military chaplains must have two years' experience before they may be enter active duty as a military chaplain. During this time, they may serve DOEPA directly. After their military service, these priests may also accept a parish assignment and/or serve as substitute clergy.
- Fr. Martin Browne asked, "Should seminarians who do not complete their course of studies be required to repay financial assistance received from DOEPA? If so, what stipulations should be put in place? Should length of time spent in seminary be a factor?"
- Fr. Martin expressed the opinion that a seminarian should know if seminary is/is not for him by the end of the first year.
- Fr. Kyrill Zawatski expressed similar views, and proposed a cutoff date of the end of the first semester of the second year in seminary.
- John Buckeye stated that this should be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account factors such as sudden health problems, regardless of the length of time spent in seminary.
- There was discussion of psychological evaluations and seminary transcripts.
 - Currently, seminarians who apply for ordination undergo psychological evaluations (paid for by the OCA) near the end of their studies. However, if seminarians do not request ordination until after graduation, DOEPA pays. The typical cost is \$750-\$1,000.
 - Archbishop Mark has begun to receive academic transcripts of our diocesan seminarians. However, he currently does not receive information collected from the psychological evaluations.
 - Fr. Michael Shepherd suggested that His Eminence be added to the psychological evaluation results release form. This may require approval from the Holy Synod.
 - Currently seminarians are not required to pass a psychological evaluation *before* beginning seminary studies. Various Council members expressed strong support for requiring evaluations both before seminary and before ordination.
 - Fr. Martin Browne stated that seminarians must be made to understand that they are under obedience to their diocesan hierarch. His Eminence agreed, stating that, "Those who cannot follow cannot lead."
- Mark Linnehan remarked that it may be difficult to collect any required repayments, and that we would need to draft a contract for seminarians to sign before they receive money from DOEPA.

- Fr. Martin Browne and Fr. Timothy Hojnicky will research options in consultation with Mark Linnehan, and report back to the Council.
- Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk raised the issue of providing full seminary scholarship to certain exceptional candidates. Fr. Martin and Fr. Timothy will consider this option as they research potential stipulations on seminarian support from our diocese.
- *St. Tikhon's Camp:*
 - Registration is full, barring cancellations. There are 31 incomplete applications.
 - Diocesan clergy are being informed of the names of their campers, and parishes asked to consider a donation equal to the \$375/camper registration fee.
- *Parish news:*
 - Fr. John Perich (St. Herman's in Gradyville) has requested retirement, effective August 1st, 2025.
 - The parish needs a replacement priest.
 - St. Herman's will have a special parish meeting to elect new councillors, as a significant number of the current council members have exceeded term limits by considerable margins.
 - Each month, His Eminence has a Zoom call with the deans and chancellor. Clergy compensation must be addressed in a number of parishes.
- *Holy Resurrection Cathedral:*
 - Archbishop Mark apologized for his frustration with this lengthy, complicated and expensive process, and thanked Fr. Innocent Neal for his tireless efforts on this project. His Eminence also thanked other clergy and Council members who have assisted during this time.
 - Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk reported that he contacted our diocesan representative at Church Mutual regarding temporary liability insurance. The agent is currently on vacation and will hopefully provide some concrete information in the coming days.
 - Fr. Timothy Hojnicky thanked Fr. Innocent for all of his efforts on this project, and remarked that the entire process has been very difficult for everyone emotionally and psychologically.
 - The icons will be removed by May 20th.
 - Fr. Martin Browne shared an email from Yadira Bove, our realtor, in which she encouraged the Council to accept the purchase offer from the Protestant church.
 - The Protestants have promised to demolish the cathedral building and have offered \$150,000 for all three components of the listing: the

cathedral building, the rectory and the parking lot. If this price is unacceptable, they have requested that DOEPA make a counter-offer with a dollar amount.

- Selling as-is would potentially save DOEPA from the lengthy, complicated and expensive process of obtaining permits and navigating zoning regulations applicable for demolition.
- Yadira can have the attorneys prepare a *hold harmless agreement*, outlining that DOEPA is not liable for any claims or damages that may arise post-sale related to structural issues on the property.
- **Discussion:**
 - His Eminence stated that if we accept the offer, we must provide the buyer with an updated list of any items we will be leaving on the cathedral premises.
 - Fr. Innocent stated that all necessary items can be removed by the end of June. However, a 90-day window would be preferable.
 - Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk suggested authorizing His Eminence to make decisions such as the sale closing date.
- John Malinchok moved to accept the purchase offer from the Protestant church with the following stipulations:
 - The purchase price will be raised to \$200,000.
 - The contract must include a promise to demolish the cathedral building.
 - The buyer must add DOEPA as an additional insured party (for liability purposes), effective from the date the contract is signed.
- The motion was seconded by Danalisa Radu, and passed unanimously.
- Question from Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk: Should we proceed with Church Mutual until the contract is signed? Answer: **Yes.**

Chancellor's Report

- Welcome to all new Diocesan Council members, and to our new Administrative Assistant, Jennifer Bzik.
- Top diocesan priorities for the next three years include:
 - *The sale of Holy Resurrection Cathedral*
 - Thanks to His Eminence, Fr. Innocent Neal, Fr. Paul Witek, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and the numerous faithful laity who have done the heavy lifting on this project.
 - *St. Tikhon's Summer Camp*
 - The camp benefits greatly from diocesan financial support.
 - Adult volunteers are still needed. Rectors and laity need to assist with recruitment, being mindful of the required background checks.

- *Young adult outreach and support*
 - This is not the sole responsibility of the clergy.
 - We need lay women and men, mature in the Faith, who can assist in mentoring the young adults in each parish.
 - We must remember that young men and women, even if not part of a small group within their own parishes, are often among the few Orthodox Christians in their schools and workplaces.
 - Support for this must occur not only on the diocesan level, but also on the deanery and parochial levels.
- *Continuing education for adults and clergy*
 - Fr. Kyrill Zawatski has been tasked with clergy continuing education.
 - Lay people should be tasked with investigating and recruiting speakers on topics of interest/concern to Orthodox laity.
 - We should attempt to draw talent from the large national inter-jurisdictional pool.
- *The July 2025 All-American Council*
 - All attendees should register ASAP and make travel arrangements accordingly. There are now Real ID requirements in place for air travel.
 - The 2028 All-American Council will take place in Dallas, Texas. Parishes should begin financial planning for this assembly now.
 - Diocesan attendees at the 2025 Council should caucus beforehand to reach consensus on issues on which we will be called to vote, including elections for the Metropolitan Council and the Pension Board.
- *Parish clergy assignments and strategic planning*
 - Fr. John Perich (Gradyville) will enter retirement effective August 1st, 2025.
 - We likely have a few years before the next expected clergy retirement(s).
 - Issues of clergy recruitment and compensation continue to consume a major portion of monthly discussions during diocesan administration meetings.
 - Strategic planning is essential for the future of DOEPA.
- Fr. Martin's activities since the 2025 Annual Diocesan Assembly have included:
 - Weekly conferences with Archbishop Mark
 - Monthly administration meetings with His Eminence, the vice-chancellor and the diocesan deans
 - Various forms of communication with deans, parish rectors and some lay leadership

- Communication, as needed, with our Director of Communications, Rdr. Nicholas Hojnicky
- Interactions with the national OCA administration and with other dioceses as needed
- Father also commenced his activities as a new member of the Metropolitan Council by attending the Spring meeting, held in February.

Treasurer's Report

- The financial state of the diocese is very good.
 - Net income is as expected, bolstered by additional offerings (extra tithing) and trust receivables.
 - Going forward, our budget-versus-actual totals will be confused due to an unbudgeted line item **69000 (Parish Closure Costs)**. The greater the expense on that line, the more we will exceed budget.
 - Cash flow will be confusing this year due to the loan to Fr. Vjekoslav, and the transfer of funds from CDs to be available for **69000 (Parish Closure Costs)**.
 - There are no aging concerns.
 - The Danyo and Fedora bequests have been fully disbursed.
 - Estimated demolition costs for Holy Resurrection Cathedral exceed \$100,000.
 - We should discuss asset allocations to determine where to best put our money.
- A motion to accept the report was made by Fr. Martin Browne, seconded by John Malinchok, and passed unanimously.

Philadelphia Deanery Report

- The report was presented by Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk.
- Fr. John Perich will retire on August 1st, 2025; the parish will need a new rector.
- There have been struggles in Coatesville; the parish bylaws have been suspended and a steering committee appointed.
- The Russian Mission celebrated its patronal feast day on Bright Friday.
 - The Mission's income and expenses are nearly identical. If they lose their current worship space, they may be unable to find another one.
 - His Eminence stated that strategic planning is crucial for both parishes and missions. Food sales are not a strategic plan.
 - Vladyka also said that missions cannot thrive without financial education and a 5-year plan.
- Fr. Mark Koczak is recovering from cancer. Please continue to pray for him.
- *Deaconal Vocations Program:*
 - There are currently 7 students.
 - This is a 2-year program.

- There are 2 potential new students for the Fall 2025 semester. 6 students are required to begin a new cohort.
- Fr. Victor thanked the Council for the grant previously issued to translate and publish an English translation of *From Unbelief to Faith* by Fr. Valentin Svetsitsky. The book has been published by Alexander Press and is now available for purchase.

Frackville Deanery Report

- The report was presented by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky.
- On St. Thomas Sunday, the new bells at Christ the Savior (Harrisburg) were blessed.
- St. Herman's (Shillington) is now administered by Fr. John Black.

Wilkes-Barre Deanery

- The report was presented by Fr. Innocent Neal.
- On May 7th, Holy Trinity Church (Wilkes-Barre) celebrated the Feast of the Repose of St. Alexis Toth, Confessor and Defender of Orthodoxy in America. The Divine Liturgy was concelebrated by Fr. Innocent, who is the rector of Holy Trinity, and Fr. Paul Witek.
- Fr. Traian Stafiuc (St. John the Baptist in Nanticoke) is still suffering from the after-effects of brain surgery.
- St. John the Baptist (Edwardsville) suffered extensive flooding due to a burst pipe, which has caused black mold growth. The rectory will probably need to be demolished.
- Stroudsburg has welcomed Fr. Vjekoslav and the situation is very positive.

Metropolitan Council Report

- The report was presented by Fr. Martin Browne.
- Various officers and departmental heads gave impressive presentations.
- The spirit of the meeting was very cooperative.
- Topics of discussion included the upcoming glorification of St. Olga of Alaska, and the location and dates of the 2028 All-American Council. Certain other topics remain confidential.
- The Council also had a virtual meeting on April 28th to address the lease renewal for the temporary chancery and the funding resolution for the next triennium.
- The Metropolitan Council will hold an in-person meeting on October 9-10, 2025, at the hotel across from the OCA chancery.

Communications Report

- The report was presented by Rdr. Nicholas Hojnicky.
- He remarked that he is truly enjoying this job.
- Instagram is a critical component of our social media presence. Short-form content such as Instagram Reels can have a powerful impact.
- YouTube is the weakest social media platform for our purposes because of the length of time it takes to create quality videos.
 - Many parishes stream services on YouTube.
 - Fr. Martin Browne mentioned that some of his parishioners have reported unsavory advertisements when viewing archived streams. One solution may be to continue streaming on YouTube while archiving the streams on another platform such as Vimeo. Several Council members pointed out that, to a large extent, the ads shown on these platforms depend on the browsing history on the user's computer. ¹
- There was discussion of post-visibility issues on Facebook, and the difference between Facebook accounts and Facebook groups.
 - Content from a Facebook group that is shared outside of the group is not visible to non-members, whereas content shared by Facebook accounts *is* visible.
 - Rdr. Nicholas recommends focusing on the diocesan Facebook account and encouraging members of the related Facebook group to friend the account instead.
- All diocesan social media content is also available on the diocesan website.
 - The website is close to its data capacity. We can purchase an additional 10 GB of space for \$100/year. Otherwise, we will have to regularly purge old material, including photos, videos and PDFs.
 - The Council agreed on the \$100 expense by general acclamation. A formal vote was not required because the funds will come from money already budgeted for communications.
- It's very important for parishes to display/provide/submit photos of fellowship, in addition to photos of the clergy and choir during liturgical services. Whenever possible, photos should have a pleasant background. Photos taken in front of dirty dishes or an open bathroom door are unappealing and unprofessional.
- His Eminence remarked that the quality of the diocesan website and the photos posted thereon have improved considerably.

Heavenly Host

- Mark Linnehan reported that almost 200 awards have been given to date.

¹ Individuals with Google accounts can disable personalized ads in account settings.

Old Business

There was no Old Business.

New Business

- John Malinchok moved to donate \$500 each to CrossRoad and Project Mexico, programs in which parishioners at Christ the Savior (Harrisburg) are participating. The motion was seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, and passed unanimously.
- Daria Cortése, Managing Director of Aorist Press, requested a grant of \$3,500 to help finance publication of the upcoming Liturgical Psalter. In addition to the Psalms, this volume contains the prayers and troparia read at the end of every kathisma, prayers before and after reading the Psalter, a large selection of Magnifications with selected Psalm verses, the Prayers at the Departure of the Soul from the Body, the Order of the 12 Psalms, kathisma tables and other didactic material.
 - Aorist Press is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization.
 - Future publications include the *Apostol*, a bilingual English/Slavonic Divine Liturgy book (in collaboration with Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk), and a *General Menaion*.²
 - Fr. Timothy Hojnicky moved to give \$3,500 to Aorist Press. The motion was seconded by John Buckeye. Fr. Martin Browne and Daria Cortése abstained from voting due to potential conflicts of interest.³ The rest of the present Council members approved the motion unanimously.
- Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk inquired about diocesan/deanery plans to commemorate St. Tikhon on October 9th.
 - His Eminence and Fr. Timothy Hojnicky mentioned that the full text of the service to St. Tikhon is available as a free PDF download from Aorist Press.⁴

Date of Next Meeting: September 11th, 2025 (10 AM)

A motion to adjourn was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and seconded by Fr. Martin Browne. The meeting concluded at 2:20 PM.

² The *Apostol* is the “big black book” used by readers, which contains the Epistle readings, Prokeimena, Alleluia verses, Magnifications and similar material. The *General Menaion* contains general hymnography for classes of saints (hierarchs, martyrs, confessors, etc.) that may be used when hymns specific to a commemorated saint are unavailable.

³ Sergei Arhipov and Daria Cortése, founders of Aorist Press, are parishioners at St. Mark’s in Wrightstown, where Fr. Martin is the rector.

⁴ www.aoristpress.com/menaion

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

ACTION ITEMS

- Mark Linnehan will send the seminarian support checks in August.
- Fr. Martin Browne & Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, in consultation with Mark Linnehan, will develop a list of potential contract stipulations for seminarian support.
- Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk will proceed with insurance inquiries with Church Mutual, regarding Holy Resurrection Cathedral.
- Archbishop Mark will contact Yadira Bove with the details of our counteroffer to the Protestant church interested in the Holy Resurrection Cathedral property.
- Fr. Innocent Neal will draw up a list of any and all items expected to remain in the cathedral building at the time of sale.
- Rdr. Nicholas Hojnicky will purchase 10 additional GB of website data from Orthodox Web Solutions at the cost of \$100 per year.
- Mark Linnehan will cut a check for \$3,500 for the Aorist Press publication grant.