

Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania
55th Annual Diocesan Assembly
January 25-26 2019
St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Thursday – January 25, 2019

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 PM with the singing of *O Heavenly King*.

Presentation of the Agenda.

Archbishop Mark added additional items to the agenda after it had been posted online. Copies of the revised agenda were available at the registration desk. The agenda was approved by general acclamation.

Election of Assembly Officials

- Clergy chair: Fr. Raymond Martin Browne
- Lay Chair: Mark Linnehan
- Clergy Secretary: Deacon Silouan Burns
- Lay Secretary: Matushka Sandra Kopestonsky

The officials were approved by general acclamation.

Credentials Committee Report was given by Fr. John Onofrey

1	Hierarch
22	Clergy Delegates
22	Lay Delegates
4	Diocesan Council Members
49	Total voting members
6	Observers/Alternates
6	Guests

Hierarchical Message

- In place of a speaker, this year we will be honoring three retiring clergy families: Father Daniel and Matushka Myra Kovalak, Father David and Matushka Sharon Shewczyk, and Father Stephen and Matushka Sandra Kopestonsky.
- The sale of our Diocesan Center to St. Tikhon's Seminary took place on February 5, 2018. Seminary allowed Diocese to remain in property for six months' rent free and then \$500 per month rent until we could move.
- The purchase of our new Diocesan Center was complicated, took much time, paperwork and travel. It required a variance. On August 16, 2018 we closed on the property in Bath. Special thanks to Sandra Tosca for all her help in assisting in the acquisition of the property as well as acquiring a permit.
- Thanks to the contractor, John McGarrity, who inspected every property and what would need to be done to transition it to a useable facility. A great help, all at no cost.
- Atty. John Coles, Jr., spent numerous hours assisting in this purchase and sale. He is currently working to get our tax exemption status.

- Lots of help from parishioners around the diocese in cleaning up the new center. Moved in within a month. Again, thanks to all. There was a good showing from across the diocese. Much work still needs to be done in the Diocesan Center.
- Finally there is an asset that belongs to the Diocese. Travel to and from the Center is more centralized, perhaps an hour to an hour and a-half for most parishes.
- Summer camp was cancelled by the directors as they did not feel they had sufficient time to get proper vetting for staff in place before camp. All three submitted their resignations in the fall. **(Note: To be a camp counselor requires a clergy reference stating he/she is a member of an Orthodox Church in good standing along with background checks.)** The Diocese is grateful to Kimberly Metz, Nicholas Macura and Tatiana Bohush for their many years of dedicated service, care and concern for our summer campers and the winter youth retreat. They are helping with the transition, including the website accounts. There is no acrimony here.
- On December 9th I met with Dimitri Ressetar. Katya Hubiak, David Drobish and Rebecca Oliver who have submitted comprehensive applications, work and clergy references. They are working closely with Fr. Timothy Hojnicky on proper vetting procedures and seeking his direction in preparation for this summer. St. Tikhon's Monastery and Seminary have always been cooperative in allowing the use of their facilities to conduct the camp.
- His Eminence received guidelines for summer camp from the directors at the Antiochian Village, which have been passed along to the new directors and which have been helpful in updating the guidelines for our summer camp program, including proper attire while on monastic grounds.
- Fr. Nicholas continues to work with the Clergy Peer Learning and has done much travelling to present our program to other Orthodox jurisdictions and Dioceses within the OCA.
- Fr. Solak also has spearheaded our Seminarian Internship Program, which allows students to serve more frequently and in a different capacity than at the seminary allowing them to get practical experience of serving in a parish, meeting the various officers of the parish, preaching, teaching and getting to know the people of our Diocese. Four Diocesan seminarians are participating in the Internship/Mentoring Program. They have supervision of clergy in the diocese and are gaining practical experience. Having monastery training is not enough; it is not the same as in parish life.
- Father Innocent Neal has been released from SS Peter and Paul Church , Uniondale, and assigned to Holy Trinity Church in Wilkes-Barre. Father Seraphim Reynolds has been released from Holy Ascension Church in Lykens and is assigned to Holy cross Church in Williamsport. Father Gregory White has been received from the Diocese of NY and NJ and is assigned to Holy Resurrection Cathedral in Wilkes-Barre.
- Special thanks to Protodeacon Kapral who drove me to and from Syosset for meetings.
- I continue to be active in the Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry
- I continue speaking with other bishops regarding receiving stable, healthy clergy to fill our empty parishes.
- Aric Gingo is cleaning up our website and working to providing additional links
- The last issue of our Alive in Christ magazine is being distributed today. Due to the high cost of this publication, the Diocese will instead be preparing a quarterly newsletter which will be distributed to our clergy and posted on our website.
- I have enjoyed working with the current Diocesan Council members; they have been open-minded, honest, have given me good advice and have helped me to see things in a different light. Very positive
- Joe Tosca, who would not accept any stipend for his position, did a tremendous job keeping impeccable, meticulous records. He has asked to resign as treasurer and will be missed. Mark Linnehan will be taking over the position. Joe will help with the transition.

- I offer a heartfelt thank you to our Chancellor and our three Deans, who have taken much work off my shoulders and workload, allowing more time in prayer, reading of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers.
- On behalf of His Eminence, Fr. Martin Browne asked if there were any comments or feedback on the hierarchical message.

Approval of Previous Minutes of the 54th Annual Diocesan Assembly.

There were no questions or changes made to the printed Minutes. Fr. Traian Stafiuc made a motion to accept the Minutes of the 54th Annual Diocesan Assembly. Seconded by Sandra Tosca. **The motion passed unanimously.**

The Assembly broke at 5:00 pm for Great Vespers followed by a delicious dinner prepared by the faithful of St. Nicholas Church.

Thursday Evening Program.

A special tribute was given to Fr. David and Matushka Sharon Shewczyk who retired this past year and are now living in South Carolina for their dedicated service to the Diocese. May God grant them Many Blessed Years!

A special tribute was also given to Fr. Dan and Matushka Myra Kovalak, who also retired this past year and are now living in Harrisburg. Comments were offered by son-in-law Fr. Barnabas Fravel, Fr. Ignatius Hunter, a native son from Holy Cross Church in Williamsport, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and Fr. John Kowalczyk who expressed their love and thankfulness to both Father and Matushka for all their guidance. Father Dan serves at various parishes when asked. May God Grant Them Many Years!

Archbishop Mark thanked priest Father Stephen Kopestonsky for his continued service in our parishes when needed, He presented an Icon of the Mother of God and a check to Matushka Sandra Kopestonsky for her ten years of service as Administrative Assistant to the Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania. May God Grant Them Many Years!

A wine and cheese social followed, prepared, served and sponsored by the Young Adult Group from St. Nicholas Church.

Friday, January 25, 2019

The morning began with Divine Liturgy at 8:30 AM, followed by brunch. The meeting was called to order at 11:02 am with the singing of *O Heavenly King*.

Credentials

- 1 hierarch
- 25 clergy delegates
- 23 lay delegates
- 5 Diocesan Council Members
- 54 Total Voting Members
- 7 alternates/observers
- 6 Guests

Treasurer's Report

- The report was presented by Mark Linnehan (See complete report online).
- Father John Perich made a motion to accept the report; seconded by Protodeacon Sergei Kapral.
Motion was approved unanimously.

Auditors' Report

- The report was presented by Mark Linnehan (see report online.)
- Auditors found the Treasurer's records to be in meticulous order.
- A motion to accept the report was made by Fr. Stephen Vernak and seconded by Jim O'Brien.
The motion passed unanimously.

A special presentation entitled *Opportunities for Small Parishes* was given by Sandra Tosca.

- Overview of the Challenges
 - Of the 35 parishes, 11 have less than 50 adult members with 0 to 11 children.
 - 9 parishes have between 50-75 adult members with 2-25 children.
 - Economic conditions impacted opportunities and population, including a decline of the coal and textile industries.
- Review of Mission
 - Be faithful in fulfilling the commandments of Christ to "Go therefore...(John 13:4-5)
- What is Servanthood?
 - Serving our surrounding communities
 - Serving our existing Orthodox communities
 - Higher rates of poverty – should help the established charitable organizations
 - Outreach to elderly population and to the forgotten generation
 - Make an Orthodox presence in community; serve as a role model in the community
 - Engage people in conversation
 - Be a role model for youth in the community
 - Make visits to the elderly.
 - Provide transportation for people to get to Church services and fellowship
 - Provide education and activities for our youth; fun activities
 - Helping each other sustain and grow (Proverbs 22:6)
- Reflections
 - Do we want to serve each other? Why? What are our reasons?
 - Fulfill Orthodox mission.
 - Fellowship and networking with each other.
 - How can we help each other?
 - Forge friendships
 - Share talents and resources.
 - Jointly work on community projects and fundraisers
 - Educate our youth jointly
 - Provide meals once a month; invite others to share
 - Be transformed by renewing your mind (Romans 12:2).
 - By coming together and praying hard, we can be successful
 - We need to get started on this
- Next Step?
 - How do we start?
 - Who will take the first step?

His Eminence emphasized that teamwork is needed; that our parishes should band together to accomplish projects together.

Budget Proposal for 2019

- The proposed budget is online in full detail, including reports on major expenditures this past year.
- Fr. Martin Browne thanked Joe Tosca for his dedicated and exemplary work. He will be missed greatly at the Council meetings.
- Need to add back into the budget a stipend for the Treasurer – an additional \$3,600 per year -- since Joe would not accept any stipend for his services.
- A motion to accept the report was made by Deacon John Shingara and seconded by Fr. John Perich.
- **The motion was approved unanimously.**
- Mark Linnehan stated that there will be training classes for parish finances before the next Assembly. Please let him know of your interest for such training.

Clergy Peer Group/Lilly Endowment/Mentorship Program

- Presented by Fr. Nicholas Solak
- \$470,700 applied for by the OCA Pastoral Department, ours being one of 68 proposals to receive approval from over 600 applications. This proposal will expand the clergy peer group system across the country. When applying for this grant, they were able to point to and provide evidence from the success of the peer groups here in the diocese. This is the fourth year of our five-year Lilly Grant. It is a Clergy Peer Program and is designed to build community among priests and provide opportunities for parish priests to share their learning. In order to continue the stability of this program. It is being recommended that participating parishes consider an annual donation of \$300. The five groups in the diocese are meeting quarterly for a full day, which helps the priest balance his time for family and parish.
- Our proposal was to build upon the Clergy Peer Groups successful pilot program
- The basic formula is a healthy priest (physical, psychological and spiritual health,) leads to a healthy parish, a vitalized parish, as well as strong family relationships.
- Just recently 125+ clergy wives were surveyed. One of the questions was about the most challenging aspect of parish life. The top answers (tied) were finances, especially caring for a family on a small income, and isolation. The Clergy Peer Learning Program is meant to fight off isolation and to provide accountability. It provides the opportunity for seasoned parish priests to share their wisdom with others.
- Thriving Orthodoxy.org is coming soon
- Floor question. What about parish funding for this program? Answer: There are two issues: evaluation of the program and financial sustainability beyond the grant program when that funding runs out.
 - The first year will be set up for free – for priests and their wives.
 - The second year will be \$300/year, ideally from the parish
 - This is something growing across all jurisdictions
- Floor Question: Will \$300 be enough? Answer: It will be if enough participate, which is hoped. Also looking for the Diocese to help.
- Floor Question: How often, where? Answer: Four years now, about nineteen people in five groups participating, which is a mix of priests, wives, and seminarians. The new model will be quarterly rather than monthly because of travel feasibility. Pan-Orthodox participants are welcome.

Archbishop Mark mentioned that it is “hands off by him”. The groups and what happen in them is confidential. He has noticed how families have improved; time management is better by those involved;

the priest is able to re-evaluate his time spent with his family. The program can be challenging for priests who may have a difficult time with trust. This is an opportunity to overcome that issue.

Seminary Internship Program.

- Currently we have five second-year seminarians participating in this mentorship program: Deacon Silouan is being mentored by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky in Mechanicsburg; Fr. Vjekoslav Jovicic is being mentored by Fr. Nicholas Solak in Stroudsburg, Deacon Daniel Valentine is being mentored in Nanticoke by Fr. Traian Stafiuc, and Lawrence Conover is being mentored by Fr. Jason Franchak in Simpson and Dundaff. Fr. Michael Shepherd has the blessing of his bishop (Diocese of the South) and was being mentored by Fr. Michael Demko in Berwick until he was asked to serve at SS Peter and Paul Church in Uniondale when Fr. Innocent Neal was released. The students have the opportunity to preach, teach church school class, attend parish meetings, meet with choir members, council members, etc. giving them a good feel for parish life. They meet once a month with Fr. Solak to share their experiences and give feedback on what they have learned.
- Deacon Silouan Burns and his wife, Matushka Emilia, spoke on their expectations and positive experience with this program. It has helped them experience firsthand how parish life develops and grows. They feel their experiences will definitely help when they are assigned to a parish.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS - See all the reports on our website

- **Chancellor's Report.** There being no questions, Father John Kowalczyk made motion to accept the Chancellor's Report, which was seconded by Jim O'Brien. **The motion passed unanimously.**
- **Diocesan Deans Reports**
- Frackville:
 - Of the 10 parishes, four parishes have no assigned priest. Fr. Michael Evans has been serving in both the Frackville and Wilkes-Barre parishes when needed.
 - The Dean works on clergy compensation packages for new clergy.
- Philadelphia:
 - All parishes are filled.
 - The Dean tries to help provide a ground work for church unity in the Philadelphia area and participates as a witness of Orthodox unity.
 - Provides location as a bridge, to allow jurisdictions to come together to serve, thus acting as a witness of Orthodox unity..
- Wilkes-Barre
 - Only Lopez and All Saints, Olyphant, have no assigned priest. Serviced by deanery clergy.
- Fr. James Weremedic and Fr. Daniel Kovalak are here today and were recognized as former deans.
- There were no questions for the Deans; the Chair asked for a motion to accept the reports.
- At this point, His Eminence asked the three deans to come forward and speak on their experience as deans. He stated that over the last four or five years the deans have been empowered to go to parish council meetings at various parishes and to serve as administrator of parishes with no assigned clergy. They have been extremely valuable to the function of this diocese. In the past, the Chancellor had to handle a lot of the duties the deans now do. His Eminence believes that the budget for the Deans is too low and hopes to see that improve in the future. He also very much appreciates all that Fr. Martin has been doing in his position as Chancellor.
- Fr. Browne expressed thanks to the parishes of our Deans and his own parish for their understanding since the Deans and the Chancellor are often called upon to visit other parishes

when needed, taking them away from their own parishes. Reminder: The Diocese exists to serve with and for each other (Phil 2:4; 1 Cor 10:24)

- There being no further questions of the deans, a motion was made to accept their reports by Fr. James Weremedic and seconded by Fr. Seraphim Reynolds. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Metropolitan Council Representatives Report

- Floor Question: Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk asked about the restructuring of Syosset. Answer: Fr. Alexander Rentel is the new Chancellor. He will also continue as a professor at St. Vladimir's Seminary through the end of the school year. Fr. Eric Tosi is continuing as Secretary until a new Secretary is appointed. Melanie Ringa has resigned but will continue to serve as Treasurer until a new Treasurer is identified.
- Floor Question: Fr. John Onofrey asked: What was actually accomplished at the recent All-American Council? It is expensive to attend and we should be doing some concrete planning and implementation in our communities. Answer: Fr. Martin spoke concerning the All American Council, bringing up that there was a plan put forth for this at the last AAC. Delegates were to have read Metropolitan Tikhon's publication: [Of What Life Do We Speak: Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the Apostolic Work of the Church. A Guiding Framework for the Orthodox Church in America.](#)
 - We are to bring forward things our Diocese can do to pursue this goal. and work on service projects that can be done in the city.
 - Workshops were offered at the AAC so that we could bring back to our diocese some concrete ideas to work on in our parishes. Attendance at some of the workshops was very small.
 - Archbishop Mark spoke concerning the All-American Council as well as reaching the youth of today. How is what you are currently doing working for you? If what you are doing is not working, then something has to change.
 - Many parishes are declining, yet there are people in the community that can be brought into the Church. We need to be visible. We need to drop the term "our people" because everyone is made in the image of God and all people are equally called to respond to His commandments.
 - Fr. Nicholas Solak suggested that the diocese set the example and start doing a community service project.
- Fr. Stephen Vernak made a motion to accept the Metropolitan Council Representatives Report, seconded by Fr. John Onofrey. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Diocesan Council Secretary

There being no questions, Fr. John Onofrey made a motion to accept the report, which was seconded by Fr. Ignatius Hunter. **Motion passed unanimously**

Communications.

- Floor Question. Are we using Facebook and for reaching our youth, the future of our Church? What is the future for reaching the youth? Answer: Fr. Browne responded that the youth are not the future of the Church; they are the present. They live in a different world, a digital world, that is not going away. The analog world will be replaced. Our youth are competent in the social media area. We should engage our young people and utilize their talents. We need to ask ourselves "What is it like to live in the world that we live in?" We do need to look at how we can reach the youth where they are at.
- Jim O'Brien made a motion to accept the Communications Report, seconded by John Buckeye. **Motion passed.**

NOTE: PUT SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE AGENDA FOR THE NEXT DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEETING.

Health Insurance.

- Archbishop Mark noted that there was about \$800 in bank fees. It is important that parishes and individuals in the health insurance plan pay invoices on time. If they are late, they should be responsible for paying the late fee, not the diocese.
- Fr. Stephen Vernak made a motion to accept the Health Insurance report, seconded by Fr. George Volkovinsky. **Motion passed.**

Liturgical Life.

No report. Archbishop Mark commented that he asked Fr. Gorodenchuk to work on an abridged Vigil Service. Every Sunday is a Pascha for us, and we need to be having the Gospel readings on Saturday evenings. He would like to have the full Psalm done at the beginning of the Vespers Services. Some instructions will be forthcoming.

Old Business

None

New Business

- Comments regarding parish delegates: Archbishop Mark stated that the new O.C.A. Statutes state that deacons assigned to a parish are no longer eligible to serve as a lay delegate at a Diocesan Assembly but they will have a vote at the Assemblies, , i.e., 1 assigned priest and 2 deacons at a parish would give them 3 clergy votes and 3 lay delegate votes at the Assembly.

A break was taken at 1:08 p.m. to enjoy the tasty snacks prepared by the faithful of St. Nicholas Church.

The meeting continued at 1:26 pm.

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS:

Chair Mark Linnehan proceeded with the Assembly Elections to the Diocesan Council. All those running for office were asked to stand.

Clergy Representative to the Metropolitan Council

Two nominations were presented: Protodeacon Sergei Kapral and Fr. Timothy Hojnicky. Protodeacon Sergei withdrew his nomination from the floor in support of Fr. Hojnicky. Fr. Timothy Hojnicky was approved by general acclamation.

Lay Representative to the Metropolitan Council

Since there were no further nominations, Matushka Sharon Shingara was approved by general acclamation.

Diocesan Auditors.

Four names were presented for the position of Auditor:

Gregory Polk – absent -currently an auditor, confirmed willingness to serve if elected
Matushka Sharon Hubiak – absent -currently an auditor, confirmed willingness to serve if elected

Protodeacon Sergei Kapral – present; currently an auditor
Mrs. Gloria Bench – present; introduced herself and presented her credentials
**It was approved by general acclamation to retain all four as Auditors on the Diocesan Council.
At least three auditors should be present for the audits.**

Diocesan Council Clergy Representative at Large

Since there were no further nominations, **Deacon John Shingara was approved by general acclamation.**

Diocesan Council Lay Representative at Large

Three people were nominated for this position:

Blake (Sebastian) Crews – Mechanicsburg (present)

Brian Di Stefano – Bethlehem (present)

Danalisa Radu – St. Stephen, Philadelphia (absent; Fr. Gorodenchuk presented her credentials) Candidates were asked to leave the room for a hand vote. The results are:

Blake Sebastian Crews won by 3 votes

Brian DiStefano and Danalisa Radu tied

Blake Sebastian Crews is our Diocesan Council Lay Representative at Large and was approved by general acclamation.

Congratulations to the newly-elected Members to the Diocesan Council.

At 1:39 pm a break was taken for the Deanery Caucus Elections. The meeting continued at 2:12 pm with the following Deanery Elections:

Deanery Caucus Elections

Frackville:

Dean: Fr. Timothy Hojnicky

Deanery Clergy Representative to the Diocesan Council: Fr. Ignatius Hunter

Lay Representative to the Diocesan Council: Russell Charowsky

Philadelphia

Dean: Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk

Deanery Clergy Representative to Diocesan Council: Protodeacon Peter Skoog

Deanery Lay Representative to Diocesan Council: Danalisa Radu

Wilkes-Barre:

Dean: Fr. Nicholas Solak (one year)

Deanery Clergy Representative: to Diocesan Council: Fr. Seraphim Reynolds

Deanery Lay Representative to Diocesan Council: Herman Almasy

Congratulations to the newly-elected Diocesan Council Members

Floor Question. Should we have a one-day Assembly or a two day Assembly? The Assembly voted overwhelmingly for a two-day Assembly.

A discussion then pursued on the possibility of having our Diocesan Assembly held on a Friday/Saturday timeframe or a Sunday/Monday (Martin Luther King Holiday) timeframe to include a youth workshop as well.

Fr. Ignatius Hunter made a motion to hold the next Assembly on Sunday/Monday, seconded by Jim O'Brien. A hand vote resulted in 22 in favor and 23 opposed. **Motion was defeated.**

Fr. John Kowalczyk made a motion to hold the next meeting on Thursday and Friday, January 29-30, which was then amended to January 23 and 24, 2020, seconded by Kathy Harmanos. **Motion was carried.**

Date and Location of the Next assembly: January 24-25, 2020

Father Stephen Vernak made a motion to host this Assembly at Christ the Saviour Church, Harrisburg. The motion was seconded by Russell Charowsky. **Motion carried.**

Father Stephen Vernak suggested the Diocesan Assembly discuss the idea of an alternate date for the next time a date is set (at the next Assembly), since the motion almost passed to move it to a Sunday/Monday.

Floor Question. Nina Petro (Lay Delegate from Coatesville) expressed concern about how to include more lay participation in the Diocesan Council. Answer. Mark Linnehan explained that the Diocesan Council meetings are open. She also asked about the possibility of meeting on a Saturday at some time in the future as a way to increase greater participation. The Diocesan Council will take this suggestion into consideration.

Announcement:

Registrations for the Winter Retreat to be held this year at Christ the Saviour Church on February 8-9 need to be made quickly. Registration forms are available at the registration desk. The cost is \$40 per family.

Archbishop Mark extended his appreciation to St. Nicholas Church for their gracious hospitality, to the Young Adult Group for their wine and cheese social, and to Fr. John Onofrey and Matushka Kathy Kowalczyk for working at the registration desk again this year.

A motion to adjourn the Assembly was made by Fr. Seraphim Reynolds, seconded by Jim O'Brien. **The motion passed unanimously.**

The Assembly was adjourned at 2:37 PM with the singing of *It Is Truly Meet*.

Respectfully submitted,

Deacon Silouan Burns, Clergy Secretary

Matushka Sandra Kopestonsky, Lay Secretary