



MINUTES

DIOCESE OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
2021 ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY
FRIDAY, 29 JANUARY 2021
10AM TELECONFERENCE VIA ZOOM

FORMAL OPENING OF ASSEMBLY. The Diocesan Assembly (referred to hereafter as “the Assembly”) was called to order and formally opened at 10:02AM by His Eminence, Archbishop Mark, Diocesan Hierarchy, with the chanting of “O Heavenly King...”

ROLL CALL. As the Assembly was convened digitally due to the situation presented by the COVID pandemic, a roll call of all participants was taken by His Eminence, Archbishop Mark. The roll call identified 61 voting members and 3 assembly guests.

APPOINTMENT OF ASSEMBLY CHAIRS AND SECRETARIAT. By unanimous consent, His Eminence made the following appointments for the running of the Assembly:

Clergy Chair: Archpriest Martin Browne, Diocesan Chancellor, St. Mark’s, Wrightstown, PA;

Lay Chair: Mark Linnehan, Diocesan Treasurer, Holy Apostles, Mechanicsburg, PA;

Clergy Secretary: Priest Innocent Neal, Holy Trinity, Wilkes-Barre, PA; and

Lay Secretary: Dr. Paul Witek, All Saints, Olyphant, PA.

APPROVAL OF THE ASSEMBLY AGENDA. Following the approval of the Assembly Chairs and the Secretariat, the Assembly reviewed the proposed agenda for the 2021 Assembly. A motion was made to approve the Agenda with minor edits and

passed by the Assembly (**MOTION:** Archpriest Stephen Vernak, Christ the Saviour, Harrisburg, PA; **SECOND:** Deacon Peter Staller, Member, Diocesan Council; **VOTE:** Yea, 55; Nay, 0; Abstentions, 2).

APPROVAL MINUTES OF THE 2020 DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY. Following the approval of the agenda, the reading of the minutes of the 2020 Annual Diocesan Assembly held on 23 January 2020 was dispensed with. A motion was made to approve the minutes with revisions provided by Matushka Sharon Hubiak, Diocesan Auditor (**MOTION:** Claire Remington, St. Mary's, Coaldale, PA; **SECOND:** Michael Geleff, St. Stephen's Cathedral, Philadelphia, PA). The motion was passed by the Assembly (**VOTE:** Yea, 50; Nay, 0; Abstentions, 3).

CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE REPORT. Following the approval of the minutes, a credentials report was made by Archpriest Victor Gorodenchuk (St. Stephen's Cathedral, Philadelphia, PA), Chair, Credentials Committee. Fr. Victor reported the following participants for the Assembly:

Hierarchs: 1

Clergy Delegates: 26

Lay Delegates: 27

Diocesan Council Members: 7

Total Voting Members: 61

Observers: 0

Upon an inquiry made by Dr. Paul Witek on the issue, His Eminence noted that the Assembly had no observers due to the nature of digital gathering.

ADDRESS OF THE DIOCESAN HIERARCH. Following the approval of the minutes, the Assembly heard the address of the Diocesan Hierarch, His Eminence, Archbishop Mark. The text of His Eminence's address was presented to Assembly delegates in an email of 28 January 2021, and is reproduced below in Supplement 1 below (see p. 8). There were no questions in follow-up to His Eminence's address.

REPORT OF DIOCESAN TREASURER. Following the Hierarch's Address , the Assembly heard a report of the Diocesan Treasurer, Mark Linnehan (Copy of the report is available online at <https://doepa.org/files/Diocesan%20Assembly/2021/2021-DOEPA-Assembly-Treasurer-Report-1-25-21.pdf>). In addition to the review of his written report, Mark Linnehan reviewed how investments have been made from monies that came from the closing of three parishes of the Diocese. Following this presentation, a motion was made to accept the Report of the Diocesan Treasurer (**MOTION:** Deacon Sergei Kapral, Member, Diocesan Council; **SECOND:** Manny Lopez, Christ the Saviour, Harrisburg, PA).

Assembly delegate discussion of the report included:

1. An inquiry concerning a plan for the future use of monies gathered from the closing of parishes;
2. An inquiry concerning the allocation of diocesan monies through departments and programs;
3. An inquiry concerning maintenance and upkeep of the diocesan center; and
4. The suggestion of providing for a capital reserve account for maintenance needs and other possible unforeseen expenses that may arise.

To the question of allocation of monies from the closing of parishes, both His Eminence and Fr. Martin Browne noted that the Diocesan Council was actively discussing possibilities for use of the monies, but wanted to put together a cohesive and well thought out plan for doing so. In reference to the work of ministries and programs, Mark Linnehan noted that support had gone from the Diocese to such things as contributions to missions in the Diocese, seminarian support, a contribution to the Monastery in Ellwood City, as well as providing for Continuing Clergy Education and Clergy Health. His Eminence also noted that Diocesan Council makes regular decisions regarding regular contributions to local charitable organizations that provide for those in need. Regarding the Diocesan Center, Archbishop Mark noted the improvements made to the various systems of the house that will minimize the need for continued one-time maintenance costs. And finally, to the issue of a capital reserve account, Mark Linnehan noted that the savings account of the Diocese essentially served that purpose already, with a goal of maintaining \$40,000-\$50,000 in the account at any given time.

Following the discussion, the motion to accept the Treasurer's Report was accepted by the Assembly (**VOTE:** Yea, 58; Nay, 0; Abstentions, 2).

REPORT OF DIOCESAN AUDITORS. Following the Treasurer's Report, a report was made by Matushka Sharon Hubiak on behalf of the diocesan auditors (Report available online at <https://doepa.org/files/Diocesan%20Assembly/2021/Auditors-Report-Diocesan-Assembly-January-2021.pdf>). In addition written report findings, Matushka Sharon extended her thanks to various diocesan staff members and departments for their cooperation in providing for auditing of diocesan finances. Following her report, a motion was made to accept the Report of the Diocesan Auditors with a minor date revision to be made at the conclusion of the Report (**MOTION:** Claire Remington, St. Mary's Coaldale, PA; **SECOND:** Priest Michael Shepherd, Sts. Peter and Paul, Uniondale, PA). The report was subsequently accepted by the Assembly (**VOTE:** Yea, 58; Nay, 0; Abstentions, 2).

PROPOSAL AND APPROVAL OF THE 2021 BUDGET. At the conclusion of the Auditor's Report, the presentation of the 2021 Annual Budget was made by Diocesan Treasurer Mark Linnehan (the proposed Budget accessible online at <https://doepa.org/files/Diocesan%20Assembly/2021/2021-Proposed-Budget-DOEPA-1-25-21.pdf>). Following Mark's presentation, a motion was made for the Assembly to approve the proposed budget for FY2021 (**MOTION:** Michael Geleff, St. Stephen's Cathedral, Philadelphia, PA; **SECOND:** John Buckeye, Holy Annunciation, Berwick, PA).

Discussion of the Budget included a question regarding the increase in pension for the Diocesan Hierarchy, as well as a question concerning the compensation of Archbishop Mark in comparison to OCA Guidelines for compensation of clergy. To the question of the pension increase, Mark Linnehan noted that the increase reflected the change related to contributions implemented as of 1 January 2021 by the OCA Pension Office. To the question of compensation, His Eminence noted there is no standard guidance for the compensation of diocesan bishops. Mark Linnehan noted that His Eminence's compensation is a little low for the area in which he resides.

Following the discussion of the budget, the motion to adopt the 2021 budget was approved by the Assembly (**VOTE:** Yea: 59; Nay, 0; Abstentions, 2).

APPROVAL OF ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS. Following the adoption of the budget, a motion was made to accept the previously distributed administrative reports of the Chancellor, Deans, Metropolitan Council Representatives, and Diocesan Council Secretary (**MOTION:** Archpriest John Kowalczyk, St. Michael's, Jermyn, PA; **SECOND:** Deacon Peter Staller, Member, Diocesan Council) (Reports available online at <https://doepa.org/diocesanassembly2021>). The motion was subsequently accepted by the Assembly (**VOTE:** Yea: 57; Nay, 0; Abstentions, 3).

It can be noted that as an addendum to his report, Fr. Martin Browne drew delegate's attention to the OCA's report on vocations distributed in 15 October 2020 (OCA press release can be accessed online at <https://www.oca.org/news/headline-news/vocation-as-a-church-wide-endeavor>). Father Martin noted that the report indicated that over half of OCA clergy are age 55 or over. Fr. Martin suggested that the findings of the presentation should give collective pause and help delegates understand why the Diocese should give greater attention to fostering seminary vocations. As an aside, Fr. Martin also notified the Assembly that the next All-American Council was postponed until 18-22 July 2022 (OCA press release can be accessed at <https://www.oca.org/news/headline-news/20th-all-american-council-postponed-to-july-2022>).

APPROVAL OF DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS. Following the acceptance of administrative reports, a motion was made to accept the previously distributed departmental reports from Youth and Young Adults, Education, Communications, and Clergy Peer Learning (**MOTION:** Claire Remington, St. Mary's Coaldale, PA; **SECOND:** Manny Lopez, Christ the Saviour, Harrisburg, PA)(Reports can be accessed online at <https://doepa.org/diocesanassembly2021>). The reports were subsequently accepted by the Assembly (**VOTE:** Yea: 57; Nay, 0; Abstentions, 3).

OLD BUSINESS

DISCUSSION OF COVID SITUATION. Following the acceptance of various reports, the Assembly moved into Old Business with a brief discussion of the continued impact of the COVID pandemic on parish and diocesan life. In this area, an inquiry was made by Archpriest John Onofrey (St. Herman of Alaska, Shillington, PA) as to

the possibility of the OCA and/or the Diocese revisiting their stated COVID protocols in light of the recent rise in COVID cases in certain areas and jurisdictions.

In response, His Eminence and Fr. Martin both indicated that at present the OCA is not presenting any modifications to present policy due to the vast variety of situations in various parts of the country. Regarding diocesan policy, His Eminence noted that the Diocese was going to maintain the guidelines it had already put in place, and commented on the great response of parishes in meeting the particular challenges of local situations. Fr. Martin noted that no diocesan clergy were being compelled to serve, and that individual situations of concern could be raised to the Diocese for a particular course of action to be taken that aligns to the circumstances presented.

NEW BUSINESS.

POINTS OF REFLECTION. Moving toward its conclusion, the Assembly moved into New Business, with several points of reflection provided by the delegates of the Assembly.

Fr. Nicholas Solak (Holy Trinity, Stroudsburg, PA) extended thanks to the Diocesan Administration and Deans for all their work in meeting the challenges of the difficult times brought about by COVID. Fr. Nicholas noted that the support of the Diocese and its cooperation with local communities has comforted many parishes during these challenging times.

Archbishop Mark noted the need to keep clergy together through Zoom meetings, and hoped to have individual meeting with deaneries to keep connected and share experiences from various communities.

Fr. Stephen Vernak (Christ the Saviour Harrisburg, PA) noted the recent falling asleep of Mitered Archpriest Daniel Resselar, and asked for the prayers of the faithful for his repose. Memory Eternal. Fr. Stephen commented on the major impact that Father Daniel had, not only on the community of Christ the Saviour in Harrisburg, but throughout the Diocese and the broader Church. Fr. Stephen noted that Fr. Daniel's work as Dean and Rector loom large in institutional memory and should not be forgotten.

In response, Fr. Martin Browne noted the difficulty of not being able to properly come together to sing away faithful priests and laity at funerals during this time of COVID. Among those ranks, Fr. Martin noted the repose of Archbishop David (Mahaffey), Fr. Eugene Pianovich, and Fr. Daniel Ressetar. As such, Fr. Martin urged that the next assembly provide for a memorial service to remember all those that have fallen asleep in the Lord during this time of COVID. The suggestion met with widespread agreement and approval.

Fr. Nicholas Solak extended words of welcome to new priests of the Diocese that began services to parishes in the midst of the COVID pandemic. These clergy included: Priest Michael Shepherd, Priest Silouan Burns, and Priest Vjekoslav Jovicic.

In addition to these items, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk (Dean of St. Stephen's Cathedral) gave a brief update on the progress of the Most Holy Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring Mission and asked for the prayers of the Diocese for its continued growth.

DISCUSSION OF DATE AND LOCATION OF 2022 ASSEMBLY. As a final matter of New Business, the Council took up discussion of the date and location of the 2022 Diocesan Assembly. Following the discussion, by consensus it was determined that the 2022 Diocesan Assembly would convene on 27-28 January 2022 at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Wilkes-Barre, PA.

ADJOURNMENT. Following all Assembly business, a motion was made to close the 2021 Annual Diocesan Assembly (**MOTION:** Archpriest James Weremedic, St. Mary's, Coaldale, PA; **SECOND:** Archpriest James Jadick, Holy Ascension, Frackville, PA). The motion passed unanimously. The Assembly concluded at 11:51AM with the chanting of "It is Truly Meet..."

Respectfully Submitted 29 January 2021

Priest Innocent Neal, Clergy Secretary
Holy Trinity, Wilkes-Barre, PA

Paul J. Witek, Ph.D, Lay Secretary
All Saints, Olyphant, PA

SUPPLEMENT 1

ADDRESS OF THE DIOCESAN HIERARCH

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”(Matt. 5: 14ff)

Dear Rev. Frs., Rev. Proto-deacons, Deacons, Matushki and faithful, Glory be to Jesus Christ! Welcome to our virtual Diocesan Assembly. In the various reports presented, there are numerous references to the difficulties of the past year. Those difficulties were multifaceted and messy to say the least. This crisis did, however present us with an opportunity. Our excuses for not spending time in prayer or reading Holy Scripture were stripped away. We were provided the opportunity to draw closer to the Lord in the midst of the crisis. We had time to reflect on our priorities and choose to develop better habits.

As we ponder the past year and our ongoing situation, rather than ask, “Why is this happening to me?” we should ask, “Lord, what you want me to learn from this.” Three Scriptural references come to mind as we ponder the past year and our current situation. In Genesis 22, we are told the Lord tested Abraham when He instructed him to offer Isaac up as a whole burnt offering. As we know the Lord does not tempt anyone (James 1: 13), but He does test or allow us to be tested to show our commitment and character. The testing of Abraham’s faith revealed his character and unqualified obedience. The second reference is from the Epistle of James: “My brothers and sisters,[b] whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; 4 and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1: 2f).” The third Scriptural reference is from Psalm 66: “For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried (Ps. 66: 10).” The refiner of silver heats the silver and continues to remove the dross as it comes to the surface. He continues doing this until he can see his own image in the silver. We have the opportunity to become bitter or better by the way we respond to adversity.

As in the Scripture verse above, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5: 14ff), our faithful comforted one another and provided comfort to their local community. Parish councils and parishioners divided the list of members and made weekly phone calls to maintain contact, provide wellness checks and support allowed laity to become involved in ministry as well as cultivate new relationships. Relationships developed that likely would not have developed otherwise. Attendance of adult education increased through Zoom as parishioners did not have to travel to attend. In the midst of the storm, people sought consolation in the Church and Catechumens were enrolled and new members received. Thanks be to God our faithful continued to provide meals to the hungry and food for the pantries. In our parish reports parishioners made donations to help those in need. Given the Church was doing what the Church is supposed to do, there were parishes that saw an increase in stewardship. One of our faithful, together with Matushka Emily Shepherd of our Christian Education Department even started hosting Zoom meetings for mothers to show support and share ideas for children’s activities. Our department of Youth and Young Adults provided a virtual camp which allowed our youth to maintain relationships and learn about their faith. When we stop focusing on ourselves and reach out to others, we end the isolation we are experiencing and become a presence of ministry to others.

I would be remiss if I didn’t thank the clergy and their technically savvy parishioners who ministered through live streaming to their parishes, other parishioners of the Diocese, Orthodox Christians outside the Diocese and the OCA, as well as people all over the world. With little notice our clergy went outside their comfort zone and found ways to maintain contact with the faithful and provide words of consolation and encouragement. Thank you. Our clergy, together with their parish councils worked hard to implement protocols to provide for our parishes to safely reopen. We are grateful to Fr. Michael Shepherd who spearheaded the preopening survey to understand parishioners concerns associated with returning to church.

Parish visits were more limited this year and as in the past my visitation schedule is on line. Though it does not show private meetings with clergy, laity, parish councils or parish assemblies, and meetings with attorneys, etc. We also had more Holy Synod and

Diocesan Council meetings this year than in the past. Our new website was launched this past year, but still needs some cleanup.

I want to thank, Carmen Hodson our administrative assistant for the excellent job she is doing, our Diocesan Council for their commitment and labors on behalf of the Church and our Diocese. Finally, I must thank the V. Rev. Fr. Martin Browne, our Chancellor, who is doing an exceptional job and a wise advisor and our Deans, the V. Rev. Frs. Nicholas Solak, Victor Gorodenchuk and Timothy Hojnicky, whose tireless efforts take a heavy load off of my back.

Let us continue to reach out to our fellow parishioners and the surrounding community so that the Lord will be glorified! Let us be mindful of those who are suffering from loneliness, depression, isolation, anxiety and stress. As St. John the Theologian says in his First Epistle, “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+MARK

Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania