

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY-NINTH ASSEMBLY OF
THE DIOCESE OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

The 29th Annual Assembly of the Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania of the Orthodox Church in America was convened on Saturday, June 20, 1992 at St. Tikhon's Seminary/Monastery, South Canaan, Pennsylvania.

His Grace, Bishop HERMAN, Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania, concelebrated the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy and Mollieben with clergy representing the three deaneries.

Following the Divine Liturgy, the Assembly gathered in the Seminary Dining Hall for a continental breakfast. Clergy, delegates and observers then proceeded to the Seminary Auditorium, the site of the Assembly sessions, for registration.

ASSEMBLY SESSION

The session was begun with the prayer "The Grace of the Holy Spirit..." and the blessing of Bishop HERMAN at 11:30 a.m. His Grace welcomed the delegates and declared the 29th Assembly to be open. The agenda was reviewed and no changes were made. Fr. Michael Evans moved to accept the Agenda as presented, seconded by Edward Hojnicky.

Credentials committee:

Fr. John Onofrey reported the following:

Hierarchy	1
Clergy	33
Laity	27
Alternates	3
Diocesan Council	3
Observers	2

for a total of 64 votes present at the Assembly.

Election of Assembly Officers:

Fr. John Kowalczyk submitted the following clergy and laity for Assembly Officers:

Clergy Vice-Chairman -- Fr. John Mason

Fr. Ressetar moved to close nominations, seconded by Fr. Michael Hatrak.

Lay Vice-Chairman -- Mr. Edward Hojnicky

Paul Malinchak moved to close nominations, seconded by Harrison Hubiak.

Clergy Secretary -- Fr. David Shewczyk

Fr. Claude Vinyard moved to close nominations, seconded by Theodore Sovyrda.

Lay Secretary -- Mrs. Marie Proch

Fr. Neal Carrigan moved to close nominations, seconded by Bill Talpash.

Fr. Daniel Kovalak moved to cast a unanimous ballot for the nominated officers, seconded by Fr. Dimitri Voytilla. Motion carried.

MINUTES OF THE 1991 ASSEMBLY.

The minutes of the 1991 Assembly were part of the packet of materials sent to delegates prior to the Assembly. Fr. John Udics moved to accept the minutes as presented, seconded by Nina Petro. Motion carried.

DIOCESAN BISHOP'S REPORT

His Grace, Bishop HERMAN welcomed the delegates to the 29th Diocesan Assembly. He said that it was fortunate for us to meet for one day due to the relatively close location of our parishes. There is good communication within the Diocese through the Deans and the Diocesan magazine.

His Grace reported that Diocesan membership is currently at 6,592 souls; 5,400 adult members support the Diocese through the assessment. He noted a decrease in membership attributed to the aging of members and the lack of bringing in new people. There are many small parishes. His Grace called for the need to bring about growth and cited some of the areas where some difficulty was being experienced in achieving growth. One example is the Philadelphia area. The parish in Wrightstown is currently without a priest. The Departments of Religious Education and Youth are working toward Church growth by educating the youth. Many times the interested child will motivate the parent to also become more active in Church life. The work of the departments receives much support from the Diocese and their efforts are much publicized in the Diocesan magazine. The delegates were asked by the Bishop to support the Senior citizens.

Bishop HERMAN stated that the Diocesan Budget has increased due to the \$5.00 increase in the assessment and to the success of the United Appeal. The purpose of the United Appeal is to allow for more work to be accomplished such as continuing education for the clergy, scholarships for Seminary students and to help with the work of the other Departments.

The Church and Diocese received much in the way of public relations during the visit of Patriarch ALEXY. His Grace expressed his gratitude to all in the Diocese in making the Patriarch's visit a success. During Bishop HERMAN'S recent visit to Russia, the Patriarch publicly acknowledged to his faithful his visit here and the warm manner in which he was received. Bishop HERMAN met with Patriarch ALEXY and members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and their Youth Department during the visit from which he just returned last week. The faithful in Russia are looking for aid for their programs. Bishop HERMAN reported that \$10,000 was given from the Diocese for Russian humanitarian aid, \$6,000 being earmarked for orphans.

His Grace also expressed his thanks to the clergy and faithful for the success of Metropolitan THEODOSIUS' Jubilee.

The itinerary for the Bicentennial Celebration will be confirmed at the All-American Council. One or two of the major events will take place within the Diocese and the St. Tikhon's Monastery.

Bishop HERMAN addressed the delegates about the 10th All-American Council with its theme, "Discerning God's Will." Everyone had an opportunity to participate in the preparation for the Council by completing the Workbook. Unfortunately, not everyone took advantage of the opportunity. Every area of Church life was addressed in the materials. Some of the problems have been with us for many years. Many good suggestions were made. But, nothing will take place unless we put the good suggestions into action. Everyone must assume responsibility of doing what they must do within the Church. We are quick to point out disappointments in others but not in ourselves. We must start with ourselves. It is not enough to merely review the Resolutions; we need a change within ourselves or, we will go through the same process again. We must look to ourselves to see what we are not doing. His Grace pointed out that at times good laity and priests go astray in frustration. He also noted the lack of candidates for the Priesthood. Bishop HERMAN stated that this All-American Council will probably be the smallest we have had as indicated by reservations to this point. Even some parishes of our Diocese have ignored the Council. There are three years to prepare financially for the Council. It is up to the priest and parish council to set aside funds to be sure to have participation in the Council. His Grace concluded his remarks about the Council by saying that many good Resolutions and suggestions were sent in. They all reflected a love and concern for the Church. Each one was read, studied and then recorded in a book even if it was not accepted.

Bishop HERMAN concluded his report by saying that this Diocese is one of the strongholds of the Orthodox Church in America. But, we must look to this because the situation could change very quickly. Our Lord sent us out to preach and teach. His Grace offered his prayer that the thoughts and concerns of the delegates are for the Church and the building up of the Diocese and the Orthodox Church in America. If our concerns are only for His Glory and the building up of His Church, then all problems will be overcome.

Bishop HERMAN then responded to questions about the declining membership. He again stated that the decline was largely due to the aging membership and the faithful moving to other areas of the country in job-related moves. But, even these areas to which people are moving are not showing a large membership increase. His Grace noted that this is a problem in every jurisdiction. If we could unite our forces and talents much could be accomplished

but, the usual politics enter the picture because of the connection with the Mother Churches. The last SCOBA meeting was one of the best yet. There has been a move for more cooperation especially between the OCA, the Greek Archdiocese and the Antiochian Church. We cannot just say that we have a problem; we need to do something about it.

One of the delegates asked if it was possible to study why the decline was happening. Perhaps this information could help to solve the problem. From 1987 - 1991 there was an 8% decrease in OCA membership. From 1987 - 1992 there was a decrease of some 400 members. Our Diocese reflects the National Church. His Grace reminded the delegates that the Resolutions to be considered at the All-American Council will address this problem.

Fr. Eugene Vansuch thanked His Grace for his insights and asked if His Grace would like to challenge the delegates today with further insights. His Grace answered that this would be done in the afternoon session.

The reports of the Diocesan Council Secretary, Diocesan Treasurer and Diocesan Auditors were included in the report packet. A clarification was made by Fr. Kowalczyk in his Treasurer's report. Expenses of the Department of Religious Education should have been listed as \$637.59. These expenses were included in the Miscellaneous column by the accountant. Mary Diffenderfer gave the Auditor's report and thanked Fr. Kowalczyk for his efforts of investing the money.

A motion was made by John Zoranski, seconded by Paul Husak to accept all reports as given. the motion was carried.

BUDGET FOR 1993

After a brief discussion, Theodore Sovyrda moved to accept the Budget for 1993 as presented, seconded by Fr. Dimitri Voytilla. The motion was carried.

SECOND SESSION - 2:00 p.m.

Fr. John Onofrey reported that the credentials report for the afternoon session was identical with that of the morning session.

REPORTS

The Diocesan Deanery, Department and Metropolitan Council reports were all included in the packet sent to all delegates prior to the Assembly or distributed at the Assembly.

Concerning the Department of Religious Education, Matushka Isabel Anderson was commended for her fine efforts within the Department.

Marie Hudock commented on her report of the Department of Insurance. A new phone system has been installed to handle the 1200 calls per month on average. The system

needs some adjustments. Newsletters are being sent out and the response to the Newsletter is improving as more people seem to be reading them. The prescription program is continually being adjusted because of usage. She noted that premiums do go up because of the cost of health insurance and the usage. The plan is still the best for the money as demonstrated by the fact that some people have left the plan only to return. The Life Insurance program continues to remain the same ie., same benefits and same premium.

Nina Petro moved to accept all reports as submitted, seconded by Jeffrey Lovell. The motion was carried.

10th All-American Council

It was noted that not all Diocesan parishes would be represented at the All-American Council.

Bishop HERMAN introduced the discussion about the All-American Council by challenging the delegates about parish life. He asked that Parish Councils meet not only for the purpose of paying bills but, to look into the spiritual life of the parish. The relationship of the pastor to the faithful and his relationship to the Parish Council needs to be examined and vice versa. Does everyone understand his role? Are we fulfilling our task as members of the Church? There is room for disagreement and argument but, we must meet in a family manner. We need to ask these questions not only at Parish Council meetings but at the Annual Meeting as well. We do not always have full participation in these meetings but, we need to keep inviting the people to attend; attendance will grow. We cannot ignore going out and bringing back our own. The faithful are strengthened when they see that the pastor does not accept the situation and attempts to do something out of his love.

Moving on from the parish to the deanery or closer parishes level, His Grace suggested the exchange of thoughts and ideas. He encouraged the faithful to be present at deanery parish celebrations and perhaps even exchange choirs and pastors. Parishes can work together to see what can be done to bring people back to the Church. Perhaps there can be clergy and laity gatherings on a Deanery level to see what can be done. Even a small amount of success will be good for us; we must try. A similar line is being followed in the National Church for better communication among bishops and laity.

His Grace then opened the floor for discussion. Some of the thoughts of the Assembly were as follows:

- The Deanery-wide Parish Council meetings are a good idea.
- Diocesan Church School Workshops were very successful but, not all parishes were represented and the function was provided free of charge.
- We seem to suffer from "lack of participation problems." Perhaps we can have an "in house survey" to assess the needs of the people. Why do people go away?

Why don't we bring in more people?

- We need to be more friendly to visitors. Carpools can be provided for people who need rides.

- Fr. Vansuch volunteered his services to do a demographic study and called upon delegates to help in this process.

- Work cannot be confined to the Parish Council. Other groups of parishioners are a tremendous resource.

- We need to welcome people into the Church. People are becoming more interested in Orthodoxy as a result of the publicity for our humanitarian aid to Russia and the fall of communism in general.

- A great pastoral frustration is felt when even seemingly simple things cannot be accomplished such as instituting a parish coffee hour. The dynamic of parish life often does not allow for the ability for the pastor to follow up on trying new things. It would be helpful if the follow up process was shared by the parish council and parishioners rather than the whole burden resting on the pastor's shoulders.

- Gathering the parish as a family is a good idea, eg. coffee hour. There is no need for a great program or goal. Just getting the people together as a family is positive. Parish trips for youth and adults are also good examples of getting people together.

- One thing necessary for community life is a sense of family. We may not fully understand the concept but, we live it every day. We cannot presume that a community exists. An effort is needed to live the life of the Church. A pastor's sense of being loved and being cared about is important. A conscious choice and effort to do things together as a family is important. How do we behave as an Orthodox Christian family? Nobody wants to be victimized by dysfunction. We recognize that we make mistakes. We need to learn how to say, 'I've made a mistake; I'm sorry.' If we live in this manner, those people who walk in the door will see that we truly love one another.

Bishop HERMAN concluded this segment of the Assembly by stating that every issue on the Agenda of the All-American Council is an important issue. It is hoped that these issues will receive attention after the All-American Council as well. When asked about current parish fulfillment of responsibilities, His Grace noted that the situation is better than it has been in the past.

RESOLUTIONS

Fr. Emilian Kutnyan offered a resolution on behalf of the Wilkes Barre Deanery:

"After a considerable amount of discussion at the recent Wilkes Barre Deanery meeting which was held on June 18, 1992, the clergy of the Wilkes Barre Deanery do hereby propose the following resolution to the body of the 29th Diocesan Assembly: That the Financial Calendar coincide with the timing of the yearly Diocesan Assembly.

The resolution was seconded by Fr. Kovalak. After discussion the resolution was defeated by a vote of 15 For and 22 Against.

OTHER MATTERS

Jeffrey Lovell suggested that in the future the Accountant use categories in his report that would be similar to the Diocesan wording of the budget or use footnotes to aid in the delegates' understanding the proposed budget.

Fr. John Udics moved to adjourn, seconded by Nina Petro. Motion carried.

Bishop HERMAN thanked all who worked with him in the past year and those who helped at the Assembly. He encouraged the delegates to take their enthusiasm with them to the All-American Council. He reminded the delegates to the All-American Council to discuss the minutes of the Council with their people upon returning home.

The Diocesan Assembly was closed with prayer and the blessing of Bishop HERMAN at 3:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Priest David Shewczyk

Priest David Shewczyk

Marie Proch

Mrs. Marie Proch

Approved by

His Grace, Bishop HERMAN