

Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania
Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes
August 17th, 2023

Present: Archbishop MARK, Fr. Raymond Martin Browne, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicki, Fr. Mark Koczak, Fr. Innocent Neal, Fr. Nicholas Solak, Fr. Gregory White, Dn. John Shingara, Dn. Peter Staller, Russell Charowsky, Daria Cortése, Mark Linnehan, Christopher Yannovich

Absent: Jennifer Bzik, John Buckeye, Danalisa Radu

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 AM with the singing of “O heavenly King.”

Minutes

- The minutes from the previous meeting were distributed via email prior to the meeting.
- A motion to approve the minutes was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicki and seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak. The motion passed unanimously,

Archbishop’s Message

- *Clergy matters:*
 - Fr. John Black has been assigned to St. Michael’s (Jermyn).
 - Fr. Aleksey Paranyuk’s transfer from the Moscow Patriarchate is taking longer than expected; he is currently on loan from the MP and serving at St. Michael’s (Mt. Carmel).
- *St. Tikhon’s Summer Camp:*
 - Donations from parishes and individuals may have covered the costs of all diocesan campers.
 - We had a wonderful camp this year, with 125 campers.
 - We need more staff.
 - Next steps: Zoom debriefings of staff, beginning with the kitchen and medical personnel, to identify what went well and what opportunities for improvement exist.
 - We anticipate website and application-process changes, including increased diocesan involvement in camper and staff applications.

- **Question:** What is our maximum camper capacity? **Answer:** About 125. This year we had 133 registrations, but for various reasons eight of those prospective campers did not attend.
- **Question:** What should we do to accommodate a substantial camper increase? **Answer:** We are exploring alternative site options, including an existing camp location being investigated by Fr. Silouan Burns.
- **Desired changes include:**
 - More canopies for outdoor activities
 - Increased ventilation/cooling for the pavilion
 - Increase ventilation/cooling for the dorm rooms
 - Permanent painting of a four square court for use by campers, children of seminarians, etc.
- *Pension:*
 - There was a discussion of some current issues with the pension plan, including how to calculate and handle contributions from parishes with ineligible clergy, mission parishes, and parishes without a permanent rector which are being served by supply priests.
 - Recent documentation from the Pension Board included suggested contributions for parishes in the aforementioned categories; these amounts are quite high — for some, perhaps prohibitively so.
 - These calculations must account for the cost of living in various states.
 - There was discussion of the merits and drawbacks of compelling priestless parishes to contribute to the pension plan.
 - Fr. Martin Browne stated that one major factor in these problems is that many parishes are not meeting the OCA clergy compensation guidelines. Diocesan hierarchs must enforce these guidelines.
 - Please pray for the Holy Synod and Metropolitan Council to have wisdom in this area.
- *Gettysburg Mission:*
 - Vladyka recently visited this mission and had a brainstorming session to develop ideas about what is needed to move forward:
 - Adult education
 - Accurate address information and directions

- Social media promotion

- *2024 Diocesan Assembly Agenda Proposal:*
 - The Assembly will take place on January 25-26 at Christ the Savior in Harrisburg.
 - The proposed agenda was distributed via email prior to the meeting.
 - There was a discussion of potential keynote speakers.
 - A motion to approve the agenda was made by Fr. Martin Browne and seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak. The motion passed unanimously.
- *Seminarians:*
 - Dn. Kirill Zawatski, our only diocesan seminarian, will hopefully be ordained to the priesthood early next year.
 - Fr. Martin Browne suggested inviting Dn. Kirill (a licensed funeral director and embalmer) to give a talk on the intersection between the funeral industry and the Orthodox Church, including topics such as natural burial.
- *Archpastoral Directives and Liturgical Notes:*
 - His Eminence is looking into re-issuing this document for the benefit of new clergy, who may be unfamiliar with these directives, and existing clergy, some of whom need reminders on certain topics.
 - Improper administration incurs legal liabilities for parish councils.
- *Other matters:*
 - We hope to resume clergy continuing education and plan to hold a pre-Nativity clergy retreat on November 13-14.
 - The house, ramp and garden shed were power-washed last month. The siding was reattached and the gutters were cleaned.

Chancellor's Report

- The report was distributed via email prior to the meeting.
- Fr. Martin stated the need to solicit feedback from clergy regarding archpastoral directives on which they would appreciate clarification.

- It would be helpful to have an annual review session for this purpose.
- Fr. Martin stressed the importance of keeping parish metrical books accurate and up-to-date.
 - Vladyka commented that deans should regularly inspect these books, and deanery meetings are an excellent opportunity for this.

Treasurer's Reports

- The reports were distributed via email prior to the meeting.
- There was a brief discussion on the interest rates of various diocesan investments.
- In preparation for preparing the 2024 diocesan budget proposal, Mark Linnehan solicited feedback in several areas:
 - Parish support:
 - Mark suggested an increase of between 5-10%.
 - This line item does impact the amount of money the diocese gives to the OCA.
 - Vladyka recommended conservatism, stating that in the event of a surplus the diocese may remit additional funds to the OCA at the end of the budget year.
 - Archbishop's salary and allowances:
 - Mark suggested a 10% increase.
 - His Eminence expressed displeasure at priests who refuse salary increases offered by their parishes; this is harmful to their eventual successor. Priests who accept such raises may, if they wish, increase their financial contribution to the parish accordingly.
 - There was discussion of healthcare coverage and costs. Mark Linnehan recommended covering all of Vladyka's medical expenses, including the \$500 deductible.
 - Stipends for camp directors, deans, mission priests and the diocesan chancellor:
 - Camp director stipends come out of camp expense monies.
 - Fr. Martin Browne suggested increasing the stipend of diocesan deans.

- Russell Charowsky suggested stipends of \$600/mo for the chancellor, deans and mission priests.
 - Fr. Nicholas Solak stated that we need job descriptions for Fr. Michael Shepherd and Fr. Vjekoslav Jovičić.
 - Stipends for Fr. Silouan Burns and Fr. Vjekoslav Jovičić will be discussed at the next meeting.
 - Seminary scholarships:
 - We are currently providing \$1,500/semester; that amount could be increased to \$2000/semester.
 - Seminary scholarships are paid directly to the seminarian(s).
 - In the 2024 budget proposal, Mark Linnehan will increase this line item to \$10,000/year.
 - Camp expenses:
 - Mark Linnehan suggested an increase of at least 10%.
 - Fr. Martin Browne stated that we should consider a larger increase, as the cost of food alone is expected to continue to rise.
 - Diocesan administrator's compensation:
 - Carmen's current remuneration is \$25/hour; she is a contractor, so she is responsible for her own Social Security.
 - Fr. Martin Browne stated that this should be increased to at least \$25/hour plus the cost of her Social Security.
 - There was discussion of giving Carmen the amount remaining in her vacation pay budget line item as a year-end bonus.
- There was discussion of mission clergy stipends and funds sent to missions.
 - Missions receive funds on a case-by-case basis. For example, a decision to give a certain amount to the mission in Gettysburg does not automatically apply to other missions.
 - The Life-Giving Spring mission currently receives \$200/mo.
 - There was discussion of increasing the monthly amount to \$250.
 - Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk stated that this mission needs ideas for growth and more effective communication.
 - Fr. Timothy Hojnicky asked if the diocese is willing to assist in paying for substitute clergy at the Gettysburg Mission so Fr. Leonid can have days off.

- There was discussion of consolidating some line items in the budget. Mark Linnehan stated that some line items have to remain separate so 1099's can be properly issued. We cannot issue a 1099 for part of a line item; each 1099 requires its own line item in the budget.
- A motion to approve the financial reports was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and seconded by Russel Charowsky. The motion passed unanimously.

Deanery Reports

- **Philadelphia (Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk)**
 - There are no vacancies in the deanery.
 - St. Herman's (Gradyville) will soon celebrate its 50th anniversary, including a Primatial Divine Liturgy with Metropolitan TIKHON.
 - The annual charity golf tournament will be held in September.
- **Frackville (Fr. Timothy Hojnicky)**
 - There is a monthly Obiednitsa in St. Clare.
 - Fr. Aleksey Paranyuk is now serving at St. Michael's (Mt. Carmel).
 - The Gettysburg Mission is looking for a more permanent site.
 - Next step: Generating a list of members committed to the mission as their home parish. After this, His Eminence may bless the mission and give it a name.
- **Wilkes-Barre (Fr. Innocent Neal)**
 - Fr. John Black is now serving in Jermyn.
 - Two of four vacancies are now filled.
 - The deanery has five supply priests.
 - Upcoming events include a clergy picnic in the fall, and hopefully a retreat during that season.
 - The ORSMA investigation continues.
- **Metropolitan Council Report**
 - The Metropolitan Council held a special session in early May to confirm Phoenix, AZ as the location for the next All-American Council, and to establish the pre-conciliar committee.
 - The next meeting will be on September 28th via Zoom; the Metropolitan Council will meet in person in the second week of October.
- **Heavenly Host**

- The website is live: www.heavenly-host.com.
 - Bethlehem has begun the program.
 - Old Forge is also set to begin the program, with an introductory presentation scheduled for the end of August.
 - Holy Apostles (Mechanicsburg) has donated the existing stock of pins to the diocese.
- **Old Business**
 - Dn. Kirill Zawatski has declined to purchase the cemetery.
- **New Business**
 - There was a discussion of Mat. Priscilla Shipley's entrance into hospice care.
 - Fr. Martin Browne made a motion to donate \$2,000 to the Shipley family. The motion was seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak, and passed unanimously.
 - We are at 160% of budget for charitable donations, so no new charities were selected.

Action Items

- Debriefing Zoom calls will be conducted with St. Tikhon's camp staff, starting with the nursing and kitchen personnel.
- We need job descriptions for Fr. Michael Shepherd and Fr. Vjekoslav Jovičić.
- Fr. Nicholas Solak will speak with the prospective keynote speaker for the upcoming Annual Diocesan Assembly and see if he is available.
- Mark Linnehan will prepare a draft budget proposal for discussion at the next Council meeting.
- Mark Linnehan will send \$2,000 to the Shipley family.
- Next meeting: determine stipends for Fr. Silouan Burns and Fr. Vjekoslav Jovičić.

Next meeting: Thursday, November 2nd

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and seconded by general acclamation. The motion passed unanimously.

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