

Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania
Diocesan Council Meeting Minutes
November 2nd, 2023

Attendance: Archbishop MARK, Fr. Martin Browne, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicki, Fr. Mark Koczak, Fr. Innocent Neal, Fr. Nicholas Solak, Fr. Gregory White, Dn. John Shingara, John Buckeye, Russel Charowsky, Daria Cortése, Mark Linnehan, (Guest Jennifer Bzik, Auditor)

The meeting was called to order at 10:09 AM with the singing of “O heavenly King.”

Minutes:

- The minutes from the previous meeting were distributed via email prior to the meeting.
- Several amendments were requested.
- A motion to approve the amended minutes was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicki, seconded by John Buckeye, and passed unanimously.

Archbishop’s Message:

- The Annual Diocesan Assembly will take place on January 25th-26th in Harrisburg; hotel reservations are required by December 28th.
- Dn. Kirill (Tyler) Zawatski is our only diocesan seminarian this year; he will hopefully be ordained to the priesthood after he completes this semester.
- Bill Rusk (Stroudsburg) has submitted his diaconal ordination paperwork.
- Sbn. Gregory Polk will also be submitting his diaconal ordination paperwork, which will be reviewed at the Spring 2024 meeting of the Holy Synod.
- Other diaconal ordinations on the horizon include Tikhon Wallace from St. Stephen’s Cathedral, and another also from St. Michael’s, Wilmington.
- 27 clergy have signed up for the pre-Nativity retreat, which will take place on November 13th-14th.
- We have received a bequest from the estate of Joseph Danyo.
 - A motion to authorize Abp Mark to act on behalf of the Diocese in receiving the funds was made by Fr. Martin Browne and seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicki. The motion passed unanimously.
 - His Eminence asked Daria Cortése to write a letter stating that the Council authorized him to accept the funds on behalf of our diocese.

Chancellor's Report (Fr. Martin Browne):

- See report.
- Fr. Martin attended the anniversary celebrations of St. Herman's in Glen Mills and Christ the Savior in Harrisburg.
- Monthly Zoom meetings with His Eminence and the diocesan deans continue. Recent discussion topics include the agenda, keynote speaker, and possible liturgical order (which will be affected if there is/are ordinations(s)) for the Annual Diocesan Assembly.
- His Eminence, Fr. Martin, and the diocesan deans held a clergy education presentation on the new clergy guidelines.
 - The focus was on guidelines that directly apply to parish life and to other areas of governance and sacramental administration.
 - Attendance was good, but there will be a subsequent session for those who were unavailable, and another session specifically for deacons, subdeacons, and readers on Zoom.
- The clergy pre-Nativity retreat will take place on November 13th-14th at Daylesford Abbey. 27 clergy have signed up to attend.

Treasurer's Report and 2024 Budget Proposal (Mark Linnehan):

- See report.
- We are in a good financial position.
- There are no aging concerns.
- Parish support is 18% higher than anticipated. Mark Linnehan recommended giving an extra \$15,000 to the OCA in keeping with our percentage-based giving responsibility.
- The financial audit will take place on November 6th.
- A motion to approve the report was made by Fr. Innocent Neal and seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak; the motion passed unanimously.
- **2024 Budget:**
 - Expected income is increased 11%; expected expenses are increased 6% (mostly in personnel costs).
 - There is a 20% increase in youth programs.
 - A motion to approve the budget proposal for presentation at the 2024 Annual Diocesan Assembly was made by Mark Linnehan and seconded by Fr. Martin Browne; the motion passed unanimously.

Deanery Reports:

- **Philadelphia (Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk):**
 - The September clergy picnic and the charity golf tournament had good attendance.
 - Christ the Savior in Harrisburg recently celebrated their 60th anniversary.
 - St Herman of Alaska celebrated 50 years.
 - The recent IOCC banquet had record attendance.
 - The Russian ball will be held in January.
- **Frackville (Fr. Timothy Hojnicky):**
 - St. Herman's in Glen Mills recently celebrated its 50th anniversary.
 - St. Clair has clergy coverage, but not a full-time rector.
 - St. Michael's in Mt. Carmel has its patronal feast on November 8th. Fr. Timothy requests that other parishes in the deanery attend services at Mt. Carmel to support the parish and Fr. Aleksey Paranyuk.
- **Wilkes-Barre (Fr. Innocent Neal):**
 - The deanery retreat will take place on December 2nd.
 - Uniondale, Edwardsville and Lopez still do not have rectors.
 - Fr. Gregory White remarked that Uniondale recently had a major fundraiser; the parish needs repairs, including mold remediation.
 - Fr. Gregory asked for prayers for Fr. Michael Evans, who recently had brain surgery, and for Matushka Sonya. Fr. Gregory also asked for prayers for himself and for Matushka Kathleen, who is navigating a potential health crisis.
 - Fr. Innocent Neal stated that the Uniondale census remains unchanged.
 - Edwardsville continues to have maintenance expenses, including roof problems. The parish also has a declining census.

Metropolitan Council Report (Fr. Nicholas Solak):

- The Council had a hybrid meeting in early Fall, followed by an in-person meeting.
- Work continues on the sale of the Syosset property.
- **Pension Plan:**
 - At the most recent Metropolitan Council meeting, there was a presentation on defined-benefit plans. The Pension Board was in attendance.
 - The OCA allocates \$9,000/mo. to Plan administration.
 - Fr. Nicholas reported that the Council understands the urgent need to implement a strategy to get the Plan fully funded. He estimates that this will take 10 years.

- There was discussion of the requirement that the Holy Synod approve changes to the Pension Plan recommended by the Metropolitan Council before the changes are implemented.
 - His Eminence expressed that it is inappropriate to blame the Holy Synod for not enforcing the mandate regarding participation, when the Pension Board has not provided any numbers to substantiate this claim after a year of requests to do so.
- Fr. Martin Browne stated that the sustainability of the Pension Plan depends on the sustainability of the OCA itself.
 - All dioceses should collect demographic census data, and compare the number of individuals aged 65+ with the number of those under age 35. The Pension Board must address this.
 - There will be a substantial shift in clergy demographics within the next 10 years, which will change the balance between contributions and withdrawals.
 - Fr. Martin remarked that there is a strong connection between clergy compensation and Pension Plan funding; if a priest only earns \$21,000 a year, 14% of that amount is quite a small figure.
 - Fr. Martin stated that mandated contribution increases discourage parishes from increasing clergy compensation. Clergy health coverage is another important factor.
 - There was discussion of the benefits of using weighted median income calculations when determining clergy compensation.
- Mark Linnehan stated that mandatory contributions, as they currently are, are problematic.
 - Ineligible clergy (bi-vocational, aged out, etc.) are not able to contribute.
 - Plan documentation mandates are unreasonable.
 - Fr. Nicholas Solak stated that the Pension Board does acknowledge this, and is having difficulty sorting it out.
- Mark Linnehan remarked that parishes currently without clergy benefit from the existence of the Pension Plan because it makes the priest's job more attractive.
- Fr. Martin Browne expressed that the OCA Statute mandates participation, but parishes in Mexico and Canada cannot legally do so. The Statute must be changed.
 - Fr. Martin also stated that at the next All-American Council, delegates from Mexico and Canada should be barred from voting on pension-related matters because they cannot participate in the Plan.

- There was discussion of topics related to Vladyka's healthcare coverage (premiums, prescription coverage, etc.).
 - Mark Linnehan recommended paying for *all* healthcare costs, eliminating the current \$500 deductible.
 - Fr. Dn. John Shingara works in this field and is available to offer advice and feedback as needed.
- Fr. Martin Browne stated that the diocese needs to have frank conversations with parishes that are no longer viable and are facing certain demise.
 - Some may merge with another parish; others may simply close outright, but remaining in denial ultimately benefits no one.
 - His Eminence reflected that such parishes are often sentimentally reluctant to close, and that certain parishioners may fall away if "their" parish closes its doors.
 - Fr. Martin expressed that monies from closed parishes should be given to growing ones; Fr. Nicholas Solak agreed, with the caveat that perhaps the monies should remain within the applicable deanery.

The Council broke for lunch at 11:50 AM and reconvened at 12:35 PM.

Heavenly Host Program (Mark Linnehan):

- New participants include Bethlehem, Old Forge and St. Mark's in Wrightstown.
- Mark is also in conversation with Fr. Silouan Burns and Fr. Michael Demko about joining the program; there is also growing interest from outside of our diocese.
- His Eminence stated that we should have a link to the program on the diocesan website.
- Fr. Nicholas Solak asked if program participants would have the opportunity to wear their sashes/pins at the All-American Council. Mark Linnehan replied that this probably will not occur — at least not yet.
- Jennifer Bzik shared a mnemonic device her children used to memorize the ranks of angels: **All** angels **practice** patience, **visiting** daily to comfort souls.

Charitable giving:

- **Seminarian support:** Mark Linnehan will send \$1,500 to Dn. Kirill (Tyler) Zawatski.

- **Elaina Silk:** Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk made a motion to donate \$3,000 to Elaina Silk; the motion was seconded by Fr. Mark Koczak, and passed unanimously.

Young Adults:

- There was discussion of issues surrounding Orthodoxy, the reliability/validity of social media sources about the Faith, and the recent influx of young people (especially men).
- **Winter Youth Camp/Retreat:**
 - There was discussion of possible sites, including a retreat center called Refreshing Mountain.
 - Mark Linnehan estimated a total cost of \$17,000 for roughly 60 participants; this figure includes certain optional amenities such as ziplining.
 - There was discussion about the benefits of having a separate website for this vs. incorporating it into the existing summer camp site.
 - There was discussion about nonrefundable deposits vs. cancellation fees.
 - There was discussion of registration and invoicing procedures, focusing on Quickbooks compatibility.
 - Mark Linnehan made a motion to add \$13,000 to the 2024 budget proposal; this amount would cover 60 attendees. The motion was seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and passed unanimously.
- **St. Tikhon's Women's Retreat:**
 - This will probably take place in the pre-Lenten period of 2024, and will be a one-day retreat.
 - Details will be forthcoming.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 1:41 PM by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and passed unanimously via general acclamation. The meeting was adjourned at 1:45 PM with the singing of "It is truly meet."

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

Action Items

1. Daria will write a letter stating that the Diocesan Council has approved His Eminence to accept the funds from the Danyo estate.
2. Mark Linnehan will send \$1,500 to Dn. Kirill (Tyler) Zawatski.
3. Mark Linnehan will send \$3,000 to Eleana Silk.

4. Mark Linnehan will add \$13,000 to the 2024 diocesan budget for the winter youth camp/retreat.

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