

Orthodox Church in America
Diocese of Philadelphia & Eastern Pennsylvania
Diocesan Council Meeting
May 22nd, 2023

Attendance: Archbishop MARK, Fr. Martin Browne, Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, Fr. Mark Koczak, Fr. Innocent Neal, Fr. Nicholas Solak, Fr. Dn. John Shingara, John Buckeye, Russel Charowsky, Daria Cortése, Mark Linnehan, Danalisa Radu, Christopher Yanovich

Jennifer Bzik and Fr. Michael Shepherd guests

The meeting was called to order at 10 AM.

Minutes:

- The minutes from the previous meeting were distributed via email prior to this meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and seconded by John Buckeye. The motion passed unanimously.
- The draft minutes from the 2023 Diocesan Assembly were distributed via email prior to this meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and seconded by John Buckeye. The motion passed unanimously.

Archbishop's Remarks:

- **Clergy matters:**
 - Fr. John Kowalczyk has retired from St. Michael's in Jermyn after 38 years of service, and is now the Interim Chair of the Department Pastoral Theology at St. Tikhon's Seminary. Fr. John has been transferred to the omophorion of His Beatitude, Metropolitan TIKHON.
 - Fr. Nathan Clausson will be assigned to St. Nicholas in Olyphant (bivocational); Fr. John Black's assignment is yet to be determined.
 - Fr. Aleksey Paranyuk will be received in August from the Moscow Patriarchate, and will serve at St. Michael's in Mt. Carmel.
- **Budgetary adjustments:**
 - Seminarian support was increased due to financial need.
 - This coming fall, we will have only one seminarian, as the other two have graduated.
 - The diocese donated to St. Tikhon's Seminary in response to their recent septic system emergency.
- **The amendments to our bylaws** provide for smoother transitions within the Diocesan Council, and is memorializing what we have already been doing in

practice. The only change is in *staggered terms*, which will allow new members to be “shown the ropes” by those already serving on the Council.

- **Pension matters:**

- There is an annual national shortfall of over \$1 million (\$90,000/mo.).
- The list of non-participating parishes/clergy is inaccurate, as some clergy are ineligible for plan participation, but the Pension Board feels that all parishes should contribute, even if their clergy do not qualify for the pension plan.
 - There are currently 9 diocesan parishes without qualifying clergy.
 - The Pension Board wants a pension contribution of 12% of the \$350/weekend supply rate (amounting to \$42) from parishes without eligible clergy; this would only cover one (1) month of the national shortfall.
 - *Open questions:*
 1. *What if a parish doesn't have a supply priest every week?*
 2. *How would the parishes handle associated bookkeeping complications?*
 3. *What if a parish is underpaying their supply clergy? Will they still need to remit \$42, or will their payment be prorated down?*
- The Pension Board claims that diocesan hierarchs are not enforcing participation in the pension plan. **Response:** We are not getting the off-requested (accurate) numbers from the Pension Board to justify that statement.

- **McAdoo Cemetery:**

- The parish voted to close; they were not compelled to do so.
- There are no cemetery records (sales, open plots, etc.) and no remaining funds for perpetual care.
- The cemetery needs regular lawn care to avoid a \$300/day fine from the township. The diocese has been paying for lawn care to the township's satisfaction.
- Fr. Dn. Kirill Zawatski has offered to purchase the cemetery from the diocese, and to maintain it.
 - His Eminence suggested selling the property to Fr. Dn. Kirill for \$1.
 - Fr. Timothy Hojnicky made a motion to authorize His Eminence to sell the cemetery to Fr. Dn. Kirill Zawatski for \$1. The motion was seconded by Fr. Martin Browne, and passed unanimously.
 - His Eminence asked Daria Cortése to prepare a letter stating that the Diocesan Council voted to authorize him to sell the cemetery.

- Vladyka also suggested that the diocese pay for attorney expenses on both sides of the transaction.

Chancellor's Report:

- The report was presented by Fr. Martin Browne.
- **Reflections and observations on the nature of the office of chancellor during the time when a diocese has no ruling hierarch:**
 - Thanks to His Beatitude for entrusting these particulars to the discretion and decision of each diocese, as no two dioceses or hierarchs are identical.
 - Fr. Martin suggests to His Beatitude, through Archbishop MARK, that as vacancies occur in diocesan sees, the Diocesan Councils of those sees be provided with a list of candidates for the episcopacy vetted by the Holy Synod. This will prevent dioceses from spending time examining potential candidates who the Holy Synod ultimately rejects.
 - Existing diocesan bylaws leave plenty of discretionary room for bishops to tailor the office of chancellor as they see fit. Fr. Martin strongly opposes any significant limitation of that in the bylaws. The chancellor is the bishop's chancellor, first and foremost, and his presence in office depends on the bishop alone.
 - **Necessary traits:**
 - A chancellor must have good judgment.
 - His interest should be the same as the bishop's: the welfare of the holy churches of God entrusted to his care as the bishop's chancellor.
 - He must be able to express his opinions freely to the bishop, as needed. He should not be a "yes man".
 - He must have and sustain a healthful working relationship with the other members of the Diocesan Administration, and the diocesan clergy.
 - He must recognize that the deans are as important to the life of the diocese as the chancellor is, and must treat the deans as such.
 - The chancellor must be an advocate for the bishop to the clergy, and for the clergy to the bishop, even in the most difficult circumstances.
 - Above all, the chancellor must be able to carry out episcopal policy faithfully, and should seek release from office if unable to do this.
 - Our current hierarch is an exceptional administrator, but we should not expect that future hierarchs will necessarily have the same strength in this area. Thus, preservation of records during an interregnum is critical;

ideally, the Administrative Assistant who has had the most sustained, direct involvement with the previous hierarch will also continue service during this time.

○ **During an interregnum:**

- The chancellor should expect to have greater involvement in the administration of the diocese, as the *locum tenens* has his own diocese and is not a resident of the diocese in interregnum.
- The scope of authority of the *locum tenens* and his preferred methods/level of the involvement in diocesan affairs must be established at the outset, in alignment with the OCA Statute and directives of the Holy Synod.
- The chancellor must provide the *locum tenens* with helpful information.
- The chancellor must carry out the directives of the *locum tenens*.

○ **In a new administration:**

- Fr. Martin believes that the new hierarch should choose his own chancellor, although perhaps not immediately for the sake of a smooth transition.
- The change should not be mandatory, but should be made from among clergy who suit the new hierarch's style and temperament, and who are not approaching retirement age.

○ **Future administrations:**

- Fr. Martin expressed hope that if a chancellor is to be more involved in diocesan administrative tasks, he should be given some consideration as to assistance with his parish ministry in order to keep the balance between the two commitments as healthful as possible.
- *Consideration means practical help, not money:*
 - Ready coverage for absences from the parish due to diocesan responsibilities on Sundays
 - Assistance with pastoral visits
 - Seminarian clergy would be an excellent resource here; this would also provide them the opportunity to develop mentoring relationships with the deans and chancellor, no matter the seminarian's home diocese.
 - Retired clergy may also be of service here, with priority given to dean/chancellor parishes for coverage as necessary.
- Fr. Martin stated that he believes diocesan deans should be given the same aforementioned consideration.

- After Father gave his report, there was a brief discussion of locum tenancy versus having an appointed diocesan administrator.
 - There is the presumption that the diocesan administration, as it exists, will continue during an episcopal interregnum.
 - A diocese must have an enthroned hierarch before any changes, such as merging dioceses or changing boundaries, may occur.

Treasurer's Report:

- The report was distributed via email prior to this meeting.
- The financial state of the diocese is very good.
 - Net income is greater than expected, due to low expenses and early contributions to the St. Tikhon's Summer Camp.
 - Note that due to the way Quickbooks calculates, our net income is displayed as a negative number (dividing a positive by a negative gives a negative result). We had expected to be down by \$5,898, but *are in fact ahead by \$22,537*.
 - As of April 30th, 2023, there are no aging concerns.
- His Eminence emphasized that it is extremely important to get parishes in the mindset of budgeting for education.
- A motion to approve the report was made by Fr. Martin Browne and seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky. The motion passed unanimously.

Deanery Reports:

- **Philadelphia (Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk):**
 - The deanery is stable.
 - This past Lent, Mission Vespers were held in Gradyville and Wilmington.
 - Many thanks to Fr. Silouan Burns for his work in Wilmington, both with the parishioners of St. Michael's and on the physical plant.
 - His Eminence visited the Russian Mission on Bright Friday (the day of the Mission's patronal feast). Attendance was very good.
 - There are no current clergy vacancies.
 - There is one (1) upcoming clergy retirement, but not in the immediate future.
- **Frackville (Fr. Timothy Hojnicky):**
 - The deanery hosted two Mission Vespers services during Lent.
 - The Gettysburg Mission has its first upcoming archepiscopal visit scheduled for Father's Day (June 18th, 2023). The Mission now has a steering committee that is meeting monthly. Attendance on Pascha was about 50.

- Christ the Savior (Harrisburg) has a combination anniversary event/icon blessing coming up on October 28th.
- Fr. Timothy relayed encouragement from Sbn. Gregory Polk to find interested men to enroll in the online diaconal formation program, and eventually to reignite the in-person diaconal formation program held at St. Stephen's Cathedral.
 - **Discussion:**
 - Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk stated that he is in conversations with Frs. John Parker and Paul Witek about restructuring the program, and potentially offering seminary credits to some students.
 - In the past, the Association of Theological Schools has denied such credits to MDiv. students because the diaconal formation instructors are not also seminary professors.
 - Fr. Victor is researching other potential avenues of accreditation.
 - An undergraduate degree is not required for non-credit seminary students, but *is* required for students in a degree program.
 - Fr. Nicholas Solak asked: *What about young men who want to serve the Church but are not interested in attending college?*
- **Wilkes-Barre (Fr. Innocent Neal):**
 - There are three (3) diocesan vacancies; seminarians are covering some services in these parishes.
 - On May 21st, 2023, St. Nicholas (Olyphant) accepted the bivocational clergy compensation package recommended for Fr. Nathan Clausson.
 - This year's Mission Vespers services were well attended.
 - His Eminence was at Holy Trinity Church on Pascha.
 - Certain parishes within the deanery are cooperating on services and educational opportunities.
 - Fr. Innocent hopes there will be a deanery event in the fall. Last year's event featured Bill Marianes as the keynote speaker.
 - His Eminence remarked that he hopes Mr. Marianes can give a similar presentation to the Frackville Deanery in the near future.

St. Tikhon's Summer Camp Update (Executive Director Fr. Michael Shepherd):

- The camp has transitioned to online registration; Diocesan Administrator Carmen Hodson is sending digital invoices.
- The camp now has control of its internet domain, and the site has been moved under the diocesan umbrella.
- There are currently 144 potential campers (including several day-only participants); 80 registrations are complete.

- The camp is working to resolve some problems with mail delivery.
- **Adult background checks/references:**
 - Adult background-check data is archived in the DOEPA office.
 - Carmen Hodson is keeping track of the data and the overall vetting process.
 - Adults require a letter from their priest, a professional reference (may be from a teacher/professor), and a personal reference.
 - Each adult camp participant requires His Eminence's blessing.
 - Vladyka stressed the importance of complying with Pennsylvania laws regarding background checks, regardless of the expense.
- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky is serving morning services and leading daily meditations.
 - Fr. Michael stated that more clergy should get involved with the camp.
- **Noise abatement:**
 - Activity changes will now be signaled by ringing a bell, rather than shouting over long distances.
 - Campers will be woken by a telanton (semantron) donated by St. Mark's in Wrightstown.
- Campers will not have access to their cell phones/tablets; Fr. Michael will try to have the dorm WiFi disabled.
- Campers will receive a guided tour of the monastery church building, led by one of the monks.
- Campers will receive some instruction in bell-ringing.
- Many thanks for Fr. Vjekoslav Jovicic for all of his diligent work, including preparing the pool for camp use.
- The camp has ordered insulated metal water bottles bearing the new camp logo; each camper will receive one.
- This year the camp will begin a pin program; campers will receive a new, unique pin every year they attend the camp.
- The pond has a brand new dock; see the monastery's Facebook page for more information.
- This year's theme is Word, Image & Song.
- **Food:**
 - Meals will be prepared in the seminary trapeza.
 - One diocesan parish is donating a meal to the camp by preparing pierogies.
 - Fr. Michael is preparing a continuity book for food service to assist with things like meal planning and preparation.
- **Many thanks to:**
 - Mat. Olivia Zawatski for the new camp logo
 - Carmen Hodson

- Fr. Silouan Burns
- Mark Linnehan, who came up with the idea for the pin program

Metropolitan Council Report:

- The report was given by Fr. Nicholas Solak and Danalisa Radu.
- **Pension plan:** Communications are now healthier, but much work remains to be done.
- **The Syosset property** remains unsold; the Council has engaged a new marketing company to help find a buyer.
 - Maintenance costs are roughly \$10,000/mo.
 - There is general confidence that the property *will* sell, but it is taking longer than expected.
 - **Question:** What is the sale price? **Answer:** Fr. Nicholas stated that he is unsure of the exact current price, but it is in the range of \$4.8-\$5.5 million.
 - The price takes into account the fact that the building has old, single-pane windows and window A/C units.
 - There are also water problems in the basement (the site of the archives).
 - **Transfer of the archives** to St. Vladimir's Seminary has just begun.
- **2025 All-American Council:**
 - The Council will take place at the Arizona Grand Resort in Phoenix on July 14th-18th, 2025.
 - The Council is trying to get the hotel to extend discounted room rates over the entire week, and perhaps also several days before, to accommodate families who may wish to combine Council attendance with a family vacation.
- The Church has received a \$50,000 bequest earmarked for youth activities.
- The Metropolitan Council is seeking new legal counsel.

There was no Old Business.

New Business:

- **Charitable donations:**
 - We have sent our regular donations to the golf tournament and to OCF.
 - Fr. Dn. John Shingara stated that Fr. Stephen Vernak would like the Council to make a \$5,000 donation to Orthodox Youth and Young Adult Ministries.
 - Vladyka asked, "What is this organization *doing*?" We need actionable results, and local efforts are often more successful than huge, Church-wide organizations.

- Fr. Dn. John suggested inviting Fr. Stephen to give a presentation on this organization at the next Diocesan Council meeting.
- There was discussion of the need for fellowship groups for younger converts who have come to the OCA from “internet Orthodoxy”.
 - Fr. Martin Browne stated that we need a list of reliable online Orthodox sources.
 - Fr. Nicholas Solak remarked that many clergy are unfamiliar with various online Orthodox personalities and may not understand why this information is so important.
- Fr. Nicholas Solak asked if we should focus on local groups, larger organizations, or both. Suggestion: at each meeting, the Council could donate \$1,000 to a national/international group such as OCPM, but we must not neglect smaller local groups.
- His Eminence stated that if we gave to charity the money we save by not paying property taxes, imagine what we could accomplish.
- Mark Linnehan noted that we have a serious problem with hemorrhaging youth, and this is evident in parishes that are closing; they often have no youth component.
- Fr. Martin Browne remarked that he is wary of pan-Orthodox organizations with a very large GOARCH component. *Where is the money going? Is it mostly to salaries and overhead?*
- **Off the Streets Ministries:**
 - This is an organization whose Lancaster chapter has, over the past 10 years, helped 4,000 people move into homes.
 - They have almost no administrative costs.
 - Orthodox churches in the Harrisburg area have been asked to start a chapter.
 - Fr. Dn. John Shingara made a motion to donate \$1,000 to the Lancaster chapter of Off the Streets Ministries. The motion was seconded by Russel Cherwosky, and passed unanimously.
- **Seminarian support:** We will have one (1) seminarian in the fall, and will make our usual \$1,500 donation.
- **Vladyka’s birthday is on June 22nd.**
 - Fr. Martin Browne stated that the Council should vote on a gift for His Eminence. One suggestion would be covering TMobile internet service for the archbishop’s Florida residence.
 - Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk suggested paying for an international trip to a destination of Vladyka’s choosing.

- Fr. Timothy Hojnicky suggested that His Eminence take some time to think it over; if a trip is the most desirable option, where would Vladyka like to travel?
- Mark Linnehan moved to authorize Fr. Martin Browne to spend up to \$5,000 on the birthday gift. The motion was seconded by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky, and passed unanimously.

Special Presentation on the Heavenly Host program (Mark Linnehan):

- This is a program similar to Boy/Girl Scouts, but it's Orthodox. The intended participant age range is 8-16 years.
- Mark Linnehan requested up to \$5,000 to fund diocesan participation (travel, printing, sashes/pins, misc. supplies).
 - Startup cost per parish: ~\$200
 - Annual cost per child: ~\$20
 - Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk made a motion to donate \$5,000 to the Heavenly Host program. The motion was seconded by Fr. Martin Browne, and passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 2 PM via general acclamation.

NEXT MEETING: August 17th.

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

Action Items

1. Daria Cortése will prepare a letter indicating that the Diocesan Council has authorized the archbishop to sell the McAdoo cemetery.
2. Invite Fr. Stephen Vernak to give a presentation to the Council on Orthodox Youth and Young Adult Ministries.
3. Send a \$1,000 donation to Off the Streets Ministries.
4. Donate \$5,000 to the Heavenly Host program.
5. In consultation with the rest of the Council and His Eminence, Fr. Martin Browne will proceed with selecting and purchasing a birthday gift for His Eminence.
6. Begin to develop a list of reliable internet Orthodox sources.

