

# MEETING OF THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL OF THE DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

Chicago, Illinois • 11 June 2014

## I. OPENING.

The meeting opened with prayer led by His Grace, Bishop Alexander, at 9:30 a.m.

## II. ATTENDANCE.

Present were Bishop Alexander; Archpriest Paul Gassios; Archpriest John Zdinak, Chancellor; Mr. Robert Koncel, Treasurer; Archpriest John Matusiak, Secretary; Archpriests Theodore Bobosh, Andrew Clements, Alexander Garklavs, Alexander Kuchta, Thomas Mueller, Timothy Sawchak, Basil Stoyka, Paul Wesche; Priests Nicholas Finley, Nathan Kroll, and Elijah Mueller; Mr. Samuel D’Fantis, Mr. Dennis Garlick, Mr. Michael Herzak, Jr., Ms. Kitty Mabus; and Ms. Ann Marie Mecera; and Mr. Philip Sokolov, Diocesan Chancery. Absent were Archpriest Andrew Yavornitzky and Mr. Barry Gluntz.

The day’s Epistle and Gospel readings were read by Fathers Zdinak and Gassios respectively, after which Bishop Alexander offered insights.

## III. ACCEPTANCE OF JANUARY 2014 MINUTES.

The minutes of the last Diocesan Council meeting were accepted with corrections, which are reflected in the final approved set of minutes.

## III. BISHOP ALEXANDER’S REPORT.

- A. Bishop Alexander reviewed the situation between the Holy Synod of Bishops and Father Gassios’ appointment as Diocesan Administrator, which becomes effective 1 August 2014. He shared his hope that the nomination for a new diocesan bishop would be conducted at the forthcoming special Diocesan Assembly, to be held in conjunction with the regular Assembly to be held in Cleveland in October 2014.
- B. He noted that Father Gassios had been a candidate in the last nomination, having been one of three candidates put forward by the search committee, and that he had been vetted twice, by two different dioceses.
- C. He reported on pastoral visitations to Wheaton, IL [25th Anniversary], Broadview Heights, OH [Archpriest John Memorich’s 25th anniversary of ordination]; Bloomington-Normal, IL; and Green Bay, WI.

## IV. CHANCELLOR’S REPORT.

- A. Father Zdinak announced that the Diocesan Assembly will be held in Cleveland October 6-7, 2014. The Diocesan Council tentatively will meet at noon on October 6. Sessions will be held at Archangel Michael Church, Broadview Heights, OH. It is uncertain as to whether the electoral Assembly will be held before or after the regular Assembly.
- B. This year’s clergy convocation was cancelled due to low registration, but will continue in the future as it provides an excellent forum for our clergy to gether.
- C. With several retirements pending between now and the end of the year, there will be openings in several parishes.
- D. He reported on the Finance Committee meeting, held on the preceding evening. Among the items considered by the committee was a compensation package for the Diocesan Administrator. On behalf of the Committee, Father moved that the compensation package be set at \$24,000.00 per year cash salary, with the set value of the apartment set at \$18,000.00; \$5,880.00 pension; and 15.3% FICA, or \$6,426.00. The target cost for health insurance is \$12,000.00. [The OCA plan is \$13,500.00.] The package total stands at \$48,306.00. In instituting this, Father Zdinak’s salary will be decreased by one-third. The motion passed unanimously.
- E. Father Zdinak led Council members in an executive session.

## V. ADDITIONS TO DEANERY REPORTS.

- A. **Chicago Deanery.** Archpriests Peter Bodnar and Myron Manzuk are slated to retire. Priest Andrew Bartek was transferred from Joliet, IL to Summit, IL. Saint Matthew Church, Green Bay, WI purchased a new church building – a major step for the community. Priest Elijah Mueller received his doctorate from Marquette University. The annual summer camp went well.
- B. **Cleveland Deanery.** Father Stoyka has been given the blessing to retire 1 January 2015.
- C. **Indianapolis Deanery.** No additions.
- D. **Kansas City Deanery.** Father Sawchak visited Saint Raphael Mission, Quincy, IL, with Father Zdinak, from which Priest Thaddeus Nielsen retired in October 2013. The community is small and needs to come together in a cohesive manner.
- E. **Michigan Deanery.** A resident priest is being sought for Detroit’s Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral.
- F. **Minneapolis Deanery.** As an update on Saint Nicholas Church, Chisholm, MN, Father Wesche reported that the parties involved in Chisholm have been permitted to obtain 501c3 status. The services of Minneapolis attorney Simeon Morbey have been retained in this matter, and the Diocese will hand over the property to the parties in Chisholm under specific conditions and a reversionary clause for ecclesiastical purposes only, stipulating that if the parties are no longer able to maintain the property, it will revert to the Diocese for further action. The mission in Chisago City will close at the end of the summer. Father Wesche explained the financial situation of the mission, which has a bank account of approximately \$100,000.00 and land worth \$50,000.00 – \$100,000.00.

Holy Myrrhbearers', St. Cloud, MN remains a chapel attached to Minneapolis' Saint Herman Church, while Archpriest Vladimir Lecko will no longer serve in Minocqua due to health.

**VI. METROPOLITAN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES' REPORT.**

Father Kuchta stated that there was nothing to add to his written report.

**VII. MISSION REPORT.**

- A. Father Thomas Mueller noted that he would like to reinstate the Parish Development Grant program.
- B. A Small Parish Forum will be held in Byesville, OH. The Midwest Diocese, which is cosponsoring the event with the Diocese of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, committed \$5,000.00 to the project.

**VIII. LATE VOCATIONS PROGRAM REPORT.**

- A. Father Elijah Mueller spoke of the program in the Kansas City area, which has attracted 12 students.
- B. Several individuals who have completed the program have been ordained to the diaconate.
- C. Detroit's Saint Andrew House will be the site of a conference August 8-9 at which Bishop Alexander and Father Gassios will be present.

**IX. TREASURER'S REPORT.**

- A. Mr. Koncel reported that salary information on the Profit and Loss statements have been broken down.
- B. The Development Fund is up by \$10,000.00 thus far in 2014, while the Operating Reserve Fund is up by \$74,593.30 due to the deposit of the escrow. The Maintenance Reserve Fund will be reduced due to chimney and roof repairs for Christ the Savior Church.
- C. Father Zdinak added that the Finance Committee will be meeting well before the next Diocesan Council meeting to develop a plan with regard to escrow funds and expenses for the bishop.
- D. With regard to seminarian grants, they will be distributed only to those seminarians who submit applications and other requested documentation by the stated deadline, thereby eliminating the issue of unclaimed funds.

**X. NEW BUSINESS.**

- A. Father Zdinak announced that Bishop Alexander has called for the convening of a special Assembly at which a nominee for the position of diocesan bishop would be determined. After considerable discussion, Ms. Mabus, seconded by Father Matusiak, motioned that the Diocesan Council endorse Bishop Alexander's request to convene a Special Assembly in conjunction with the October 2014 regular Assembly. After brief discussion and clarification, the motion passed unanimously.
- B. Father Elijah Mueller moved, seconded by Father Kuchta, that the Diocesan Council endorse Father Gassios as its candidate for diocesan bishop. Motion passed with two absentions [Mr. Garlick and Ms. Mabus] and no opposition votes.

**XI. NEXT MEETING, ADJOURNMENT.**

- A. Upcoming meetings include those to be held 6 October 2014 in conjunction with the Diocesan Assembly and 16-17 December 2014 in Chicago.
- B. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned upon motion by Ms. Mabus, seconded by Mr. Garlick, at 1:50 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Archpriest John Matusiak, Secretary, with Philip Sokolov*

DIOCESAN MC REPRESENTATIVE REPORT  
on February 2014 Metropolitan Council meetings

Draft minutes of these meetings are available at:

<http://oca.org/cdn/PDFs/metropolitancouncil/2014/spring-metcouncil/spring14mcdraftminutes.pdf>

Sam D'Fantis and I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have about the content of these minutes.

The atmosphere of this and other recent Metropolitan Council (MC) meetings have been marked by their open and constructive atmosphere. This is in large part the result of the leadership of His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon working collaboratively with the officers of the OCA and the chancery staff. There is no question that we continue to face serious concerns and difficulties in our Church; however, they are not personnel or personality problems. They are issues with which we have struggled for a good long while, the most persistent problem being how to deal with funding the work of the Church. There is no question that the Central Church administration, ministries, and departments function well. (Some things may have to be adjusted to eliminate inefficiencies.) Yet, there is no consensus on how to pay for these things. The Seattle mandate to reduce the central annual assessment further complicates this. We in the OCA have been talking about tithing and first-portion giving for decades, but we have not been adequately able to put these things into place in our parishes, dioceses, and central Church. Each situation seems to be unique not lending itself to a one size fits all approach. We also continue to see shrinkage of OCA census figures which compounds problems. The question of our "ethnic dioceses" and their financial support is still at issue. MC members were told that the Holy Synod will continue to work on this.

While we struggle with basic things, we also see many positive things happening in the Church:

- Clergy misconduct issues are being dealt with proactively. We are working to prevent abuse and in cases where it does take place, we are reaching out to help victims and not just acting to "protect the Church. A proactive rather than reactive strategy is being put into place. Along with this there is a strong sense that clergy health (issues of continuing education, compensation, pension plan, etc.) must be addressed. The OCA is acting as a pioneer on many of these and other issues such as financial transparency and accountability with heads of other Orthodox Churches coming to us for information and guidance.
- We are receiving rather large bequests/gifts from laity. A recent \$1M bequest was given and a special focus group was formed to discuss its best use. These funds were placed in a restricted endowment fund and only moneys generated from its investment will be used. The Honesdale loan was paid off using money from another bequest.
- Continuing education for clergy: There is currently a 50% participation rate with clergy self-reporting their efforts. This is all better than expected being one year into this program.
- The OCA pension plan's ROI was reported to be 15.6% with participation in our diocese of 60% Anything that we can do to increase participation of eligible clergy or other full-time Church workers would only strengthen the plan.
- Good work is being done in the OCA Youth department. Activities include a plan to incorporate youth programs into the next All American Council in Atlanta, the Wonder Blog, OCF work, and fostering cooperation with and participation in youth gatherings/activities of other Orthodox Churches.
- Diocesan revitalization is taking place in eastern and western PA churches using the Parish Health Inventory developed by our own Joe Kormos. Archbishop Melchisedek, Bishop Mark, their clergy, and parishes are taking a good hard look at themselves and realizing that hard work has to be done.
- Parishes are working with Melanie Ringa on budgets, audits, and other financial issues.

Other concerns:

-The OCA Crisis management team (CMT) has been without a chair person since the resignation of Dmitri Solodow more than a year ago. Also, even though it has been on the "to do" list since its inception, training for the CMT has never taken place. Thankfully issues that the CMT has had to deal lately have been few and far between.

-Assessment payments of our diocese to the OCA have been remitted late. Last year's November and December payments were not received until January of this year. I was told that this year's January and February payments were not received until mid-March. I was further told that no payments have been received from our diocese since then.

To summarize, while we continue to face many challenges in our church we also have many things to be thankful for. In his report, Metropolitan Tikhon stated that while church life has been quite calm over the past year, we are still dealing with trust issues that exist because of instability and fracturing that has taken place over the past 10 years. He suggested that we need to examine what had happened over those years and move forward in a spirit of repentance, also asking for forgiveness. My hope is that Metropolitan Tikhon's willingness to be self-analytical and repentant will be an example to all of us at all levels of the life of the Church: first to confess our own weaknesses and sins, and then to enact necessary appropriate changes not only in the central Church, but also in our parishes and in our diocese.

Respectfully submitted,

Fr. Alexander Kuchta  
Sam D`Fantis