

54TH ASSEMBLY OF THE DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

Atlanta, Georgia
Monday, 20 July 2015

I. OPENING

The Assembly opened with the Invocation of the Holy Spirit and prayer at 9:15 a.m., after which His Grace, Bishop Paul, called the Assembly to order.

II. CREDENTIALS.

One Bishop, 42 clergy delegates, 41 lay delegates, and 9 observers, for a total of 93 participants.

III. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS, APPOINTMENTS.

Archpriest John Zdinak, Chancellor moved, on behalf of the Diocesan Council, that Archpriest Mark Hodges and Mr. Philip Sokolov serve as the Secretariat and that Archpriest Andrew Clements serve as Nominations Committee Chair. Deacons will serve as tellers.

Father Zdinak noted that Diocesan Council member Mr. Samuel D’Fantis has stepped down as Metropolitan Council lay representative, thereby necessitating the election of a new representative at this Assembly.

IV. REPORT OF BISHOP PAUL.

Bishop Paul highlighted key elements of his written report, noting that his archpastoral parish visits have been most fruitful and that he hopes to visit all parishes by March 2016, after which a “rotation” schedule will be developed. He provided updates the status of four areas of concern he identified at the January 2015 Diocesan Council meeting.

- A. **OCA Sexual Misconduct Guidelines.** In Phase 1, level 3 background checks for all priests and deacons will be conducted. Those who have not complied will be contacted by their respective deans. In Phase 2, background checks will be conducted for all subdeacons and readers, who are considered clergy and perceived as such. The expense for this phase will probably be the responsibility of the parishes. Phase 3 involves development of a screening program for youth workers.
- B. **Stewardship and Finances: Moving to a Proportional Giving Model.** Simeon Morbey has been appointed to chair a committee that will be responsible for reviewing possibilities in this regard.
- C. **Mission Committee.** Priest Joel Weir and Mr. Gator Greenwill attended the OCA Mission School in Detroit in April 2015. It is projected that the Mission Committee will be fully functional by 2016.
- D. **The Relationship between the Diocese and Chicago’s Christ the Savior Church.** Under the two previous diocesan hierarchs, Christ the Savior Church was considered to be the Bishop’s Chapel – a diocesan entity. The question today is how to move forward with separating the two entities. Two considerations are in play here.
 1. Since the LaSalle Street property was acquired during the tenure of His Eminence, the late Archbishop Job, the diocese has expended over 1.8 million dollars in expenses involving the church and residence. Projected ongoing repairs and renovations are likely to be quite costly, begging the question of whether the diocese can continue to bear such mounting expenses.
 2. In the past several years, the parish has grown, maintaining an active and energetic life of its own. In addition, at the direction of Archbishop Job, the parish undertook the interior iconography project, for which parishioners raised \$300,000.00, indicating that the parishioners are capable of being wise stewards of the property. Bishop Paul added that the parish was approached with regard to its purchasing the property from the diocese, but the parish was not in a position to accept the offer. The parish is forming a committee to explore options, as is the diocese. The committees will enter into dialogue with regard to future possibilities with regard to the property. In any instance, Bishop Paul firmly noted that he will not bless anything that would affect Christ the Savior Church in an adverse manner.

Bishop Paul went on to report on a number of other concerns.

- A. **Liturgical Matters.** He reported that he does not intend to issue any “global liturgical directives” at this time, as he feels that he needs another year or so to observe the liturgical life of diocesan parishes. Should issues arise, he should be consulted. With regard to Vespers and Baptismal Liturgies, he explained that these may be effective in some parishes, but he hopes that a single “version” of each could be developed for the sake of consistency. With regard to the attire of readers and subdeacons, he noted that in light of the sexual misconduct guidelines, we must not be “overly clerical” with minor orders. Readers may wear cassocks only when they are discharging their duties; if they are not reading at a given service, they should not wear them. Readers and subdeacons are not to wear cassocks when they visit other parishes. In the future, altar servers may be blessed to wear oraria in the Byzantine style – that is, not crossed as customary for ordained subdeacons – and henceforth will be referred to as “senior altar servers” rather than “blessed subdeacons.” Only those who are capable of serving Hierarchical services will be ordained to the Subdiaconate proper.

In response to a question with regard to occasions on which seminarians are permitted to wear cassocks, Bishop Paul responded that they are blessed to do so at their respective seminaries.
- B. **Diocesan Archives.** Sharing his concern for the proper and safe storage on the archives, he noted the need to

digitize them. This also would reduce the volume of hard copy files. Nicholas Groves has submitted a proposed plan to initiate this process.

- C. Concerning Marriage.** Bishop Paul noted that we live in a world that is increasingly secular and tremendously polarized, especially with regard to matters that have been highly politicized. This can lead to equating Orthodoxy with political viewpoints. But, he added, “Christ’s Kingdom is not of this world.” While we acknowledge that same-sex marriage and abortion are indeed wrong, the real issue is how to deal with those who walk through the doors of our churches who may have had an abortion or gender reassignment surgery. While emphasizing that he in no way is attempting to minimize the clear position of the Church in such instances, he stated that how we live in and minister to this world is central. “Christ ate with sinners, brought them to repentance, and invited them into His Kingdom,” he said.

Bishop Paul concluded by sharing insights into the revision of the OCA *Statute*, slated to be presented and voted upon at the All-American Council’s second plenary session on Tuesday morning, July 21.

V. REPORT OF THE CHANCELLOR.

Father Zdinak highlighted the following.

- A. Clergy Background Checks.** All active, as well as retired, clergy are expected to submit a background check authorization form. This is especially important inasmuch as many retired clergy “fill in” at various parishes and/or otherwise serve on a regular basis.
- B. Appointment of Clergy.** The appointment of clergy is a canonical process, one that recently needed to be addressed inasmuch as some parishes had sought out potential clergy independently of the diocesan Bishop. He noted that it is the Bishop who appoints parish rectors; as such, parishes do not “hire” priests. Rather, they remunerate assigned clergy accordingly with the approval of the Bishop.
- C. Parishes in Arrears with Regard to Assessments.** At present there is approximately \$500,000.00 in accounts receivable. Some parishes may have had arrangements with previous diocesan Bishops with regard to assessment payments. Most recently, a process was developed by Bishop Paul, Father Zdinak and the members of the Diocesan Council whereby parishes that are in arrears in submitting assessments for six or more months will receive letters, to which they are expected to respond by accounting for their delinquencies and suggesting ways to move forward.

Father Zdinak concluded by noting that Bishop Paul is the third diocesan hierarch he has served. He shared that Bishop Paul consistently follows through on matters before him, has a method and a plan, and considers things from a pastoral perspective. Bishop Paul meets with Father Zdinak and Mr. Philip Sokolov weekly through Cisco WebEx, which has proven to be very effective.

VI. MISSION DIRECTOR’S REPORT.

Archpriest Thomas Mueller reported on three areas of activity in the immediate future.

- A. Mission Guidelines.** With the assistance of Mr. Joseph Kormos, guidelines for the establishment of missions will be revived, reviewed and promulgated. He emphasized the importance of viability – that is, discerning whether a mission plant can in time develop into a self-supporting parish. He also stressed the importance of following the guidelines, which has not always been the case in years past and resulted in the closing of some missions that did not prove to be viable or sustainable.
- B. Parish Development Grants.** It is projected that a call for grant applications will be solicited in August 2015. Parishes wishing to pursue ministries of a missionary/outreach nature are encouraged to apply, as in years past.
- C. Mission Grants.** Bishop Paul, Father Mueller, and perhaps others will identify missions and mission priests who could benefit from funding and ensure that they receive same.

VII. CATECHETICAL, DIACONAL VOCATIONS DIRECTOR’S REPORT.

Priest Elijah Mueller opened by explaining that the program, now known as the “Saint Macrina Orthodox Institute,” makes use of the talents of faculty members with excellent academic qualifications. The number of enrolled students averages 50, with some pursuing the catechist certificate and others preparing to petition for ordination to the diaconate. He stated that his function is to solicit qualified instructors in each area to provide in-person instruction. He announced that the 2015 diocesan-wide conference will be held at Saint Andrew’s House, Detroit, MI August 7-8. In addition to academic classes, Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak will conduct a practicum on liturgics as in conjunction with the diaconal “track.” Priest Bogdan Bucur and other speakers will facilitate classes and lectures. Detailed information is available on the diocesan web site.

VIII. METROPOLITAN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES’ REPORT.

Archpriest Alexander Kuchta had nothing to add to the written report.

IX. STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT.

Priest Nicholas Finley offered a Powerpoint presentation prepared by Atty. Simeon Morbey, Minneapolis, MN, who chairs the committee. Father Nicholas stated that the committee has been charged with developing a new diocesan funding model based on proportional giving for presentation at the 2017 Diocesan Assembly. The committee has met three times via Cisco Webex since May 2015. In response to questions, he stated that the matter of tithing will be

reviewed by the committee's members.

X. TREASURER'S REPORT.

A written report was submitted by Mr. Rob Koncel, Treasurer, who was unable to be present. Questions may be sent to Mr. Sokolov at the Diocesan Chancery, who will forward them to Mr. Koncel.

XI. AUDITORS' REPORT.

In a report prepared by Mr. Samuel Jacob, it was noted that the books for three-quarters of the year had been audited in June 2015 and that all previous recommendations had been followed. All credit card documentation has been accounted for. The auditors recommend that the diocese needs to maintain a record retention policy so that old records might be accessed. The report was unanimously accepted as presented upon motion by Father Kuchta, seconded by Archpriest Andrew Yavornitzky.

XII. NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT.

Archpriest Andrew Clements reported that there was only one nominee for the open position of lay Metropolitan Council Representative, adding that said nominee was ineligible for nomination. Upon motion by Father Clements, seconded by Father Kuchta, it was unanimously decided that Bishop Paul would appoint a lay representative.

XIII. NEW BUSINESS.

In a discussion on the Finance Resolution to be considered at the 18th All-American Council, the question was raised as to whether replacing the current "head tax assessment" with a "tiered assessment" would negatively impact the diocese. Bishop Paul and Father Zdinak concurred that our percentage will remain "more or less the same."

XV. ADJOURNMENT.

There being no further business, and upon motion by Mr. Dennis Garlick, seconded by Archpriest John Adamcio, the Assembly adjourned at 11:45 a.m. with the singing of the Hymn to the Mother of God.

Respectfully submitted by the Secretariat,

Archpriest Mark Hodges

Mr. Philip Sokolov

Edited by Archpriest John Matusiak, Secretary