

MEETING OF THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL

Chicago, Illinois • Tuesday, 7 June 2011

I. OPENING.

The regular meeting of the Diocesan Council of the Diocese of the Midwest was opened with prayer by His Grace. Bishop Matthias of Chicago and the Midwest at 10:10 a.m.

II. ATTENDANCE.

Members present: His Grace, Bishop Matthias; Archpriests John Adamcio, Andrew Clements, Alexander Kuchta, John Matusiak, Secretary, Thomas Mueller, Timothy Sawchak, Basil Stoyka, Paul Wesche, Christopher Wojcik, Andrew Yavornitzky, and John Zdinak, Chancellor; Priests Stephen Hrycyniak and Nathan Kroll; Mr. Sam D'Fantis, Mr. Michael Dorosh, Mrs. Ann Marie Gidus-Mecera, Mr. Michael Herzak, Jr., Mr. Robert Koncel, Treasurer, Ms. Kitty Mabus, and Mr. Mark Stokoe.

Guests present: Mr. Joseph Kormos and Philip Sokolov.

III. SCRIPTURE READINGS.

Fathers Wojcik and Hrycyniak read the day's appointed selections from the Epistles and the Gospels.

IV. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted with corrections upon motion by Father Hrycyniak, seconded by Father Adamcio.

V. REPORT OF THE DIOCESAN BISHOP.

Bishop Matthias reported on a variety of aspects of his ministry since the beginning of the year.

- Life has been intense since his consecration, with meetings of the Holy Synod and Metropolitan Council the following week, the Episcopal Assembly, and a variety of events and activities within the diocese. "I have no personal agenda," he stated, adding that he is "old and wise enough to know that I don't have to please anyone except Christ and the Church, and these must be placed above our own desires. That is my focus, and I feel that this is the best way I can serve the flock entrusted to my care."
- The Project Mexico pilgrimage in honor of the late Archbishop Job has upward of 150 participants.
- He is making every attempt to visit every parish before the end of the year.
- At the end of July and beginning of August he will be in Guatemala. He noted that three nuns from the monastery/orphanage were present at his consecration.
- With regard to seminarians and diocesan assignments, he stated his feeling that those contemplating seminary study, especially recent converts, should spend at least three years in a parish in a lay capacity. While we are blessed to have many diocesan seminarians, we are not always sure who they are, or whether they are even from the Midwest Diocese. He plans to visit the seminarians at least once each year. He visited both seminaries in November to form a bond with our diocesan seminarians, and plans to keep in touch with them. With many clergy from outside the diocese and/or outside the OCA wishing to enter or return to the Midwest Diocese, and graduating seminarians wishing to return to the Midwest Diocese, he stated that priorities in terms of assignment is crucial.
- He spoke about diaconate programs, he stated that in addition to studies of a more academic nature, prospective deacons need to learn how to serve properly, which involves "more than just reading the book."
- He would like to use videos on YouTube, the diocesan web site, and elsewhere, as it is crucial to show that the bishop is in touch with parishes and the faithful, youth, and everyone else. "One of my greatest challenges is being with the people, given the large size of the diocese," he said. "I have the desire to be with them, but there is only so much time in day, with over 70 parishes, cathedrals, special celebrations, etc."
- The recent Episcopal Assembly was positive and relaxed. "While we won't achieve unity by next month, a great deal of discussion on areas in which we should cooperate, such as how are converts received, was held with the aim of finding common approaches," he said. "The most important thing is that we got to know each other – personal relationships will go a long way toward working together and cooperating in the future."

VI. CHANCELLOR'S REPORT.

Father Zdinak

- welcomed Mr. Michael Herzak, Jr. to his first meeting. He replaces Mrs. Alexa Geeza, who recently resigned due to personal reasons. [Everyone signed a card for Alexa, expressing their thanks for all she contributed to the diocese during her tenure.]
- announced that, effective 1 July 2011, the Columbus Deanery will be known as the Indianapolis Deanery. Both Columbus parishes will be transferred to the Cleveland Deanery, while the other western Ohio parishes will remain in the Indianapolis Deanery. Archpriest Joseph Gibson, who is on a leave of absence, will return in July and continue as dean.
- reported on the retirement of Priest Luke Nelson and provisions for a smooth transition with regard to bookkeeping. He, together with Mr. Koncel, Mrs. Polly Walker, and Mr. Sokolov, are overseeing this.
- stated his feeling that when a dean is appointed administrator of a vacant parish, said dean should receive a stipend.

VII. DEANERY REPORTS.

- A. Chicago Deanery. Father Mueller added that four parish vacancies will be filled effective 1 July 2011: Priest Maximus Cade is assigned to Saint Matthew's, Green Bay, WI, while Priest Justin Foster is assigned to Holy Protection, Royalton, IL. Saint Nicholas Church, Joliet, IL, and Archangel Michael Church, Burbank, IL, remain vacant, although assignments are pending. The deanery summer camp anticipates a record attendance.
- B. Cleveland Deanery. Father Clements reported on positive feedback from parishes in response to Bishop Matthias' visits.
- C. Columbus [Indianapolis] Deanery. Archpriest Daniel Rentel, long-time rector of Saint Gregory of Nyssa Church, Columbus, OH, will retire 1 September 2011.
- D. Kansas City Deanery. Father Sawchak added that Priest Nicholas Finley is serving the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church, Madison, IL. Deacon Joshua Lawler, who will be ordained to the priesthood in two weeks, will be assigned to Saint Nicholas of Myra Mission, Lawrence, KS. He also spoke about recent floods, noting that to his knowledge no OCA members were directly affected.
- E. Michigan Deanery. Father Yavornitzky reported that, upon the retirement of Archpriest Michael Matsko, Livonia, MI, Priest John Wehling will assume the pastorate of Holy Transfiguration Church.
- F. Minneapolis Deanery. Father Wesche added that the newly ordained Priest Nicholas Hubbard has been attached to Saint Mary Cathedral, Minneapolis, MN as a supply priest; that FOCUS Minnesota is celebrating its first year of very successful ministry; that Archpriest Vladimir Lecko will be entering full retirement; and that Saint Nicholas Church, Chisholm, MN will most likely be closing, based on the vote of the few remaining parishioners.

VIII. METROPOLITAN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES' REPORT.

Mr. Stokoe and Father Kuchta shared a detailed written report, the full text appears as an addendum to these minutes and appears below, on recent Metropolitan Council meetings, together with Father Kuchta. While it was reported that many things have changed for the better, "not all is well," and serious questions concerning activities that could raise legal and/or financial difficulties continue to exist. He discussed the recent leave of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah; recurring issues that draw attention away from the Gospel; and related matters. It was also noted that Priest Gregory Jenson, who lives in Madison, WI, had been released to the Metropolitan's omophorion and is not a priest of the Diocese of the Midwest.

IX. TREASURER'S REPORT.

Highlights of Mr. Koncel's written report include

- a report on the consecration. While all bills have yet to be submitted, we did "very well" with the banquet and commemorative book.
- extension of Father Zdinak's stipend through 31 October 2011, at \$1,100.00 per month and a request for \$6,000.00 per year for a subdeacon to accompany Bishop Matthias on archpastoral visitations. The total for these items, in addition to the Bishop's additional salary, totals \$44,043.00.
- that, as of 31 March 2011, expenses are over budget by about \$25,000.00, primarily due to a variety of necessary repairs at the Diocesan Center.
- clarification with regard to monthly assessment statements, as well as ways to deal with parishes in arrears.
- the need to obtain new signature cards.
UPON MOTION by Mr. Dorosh, seconded by Ms. Mabus, it was decided that Bishop Matthias, Father Zdinak, Mr. Koncel, and Mr. Sokolov should be signators. Passed unanimously.
- announcement that the annual audit would be undertaken in August.

Mr. Koncel spoke of the need to appoint a late vocations coordinator with a stipend of \$6,000.00 per year, which will be administered by the diocesan chancery with the blessing of Bishop Matthias, and paid upon receipt of regular reports. It was also reported that a stipend of up to \$6,000.00 per year for bookkeeper will be administered in the same manner.

UPON MOTION by Mr. D'Fantis, seconded by Mr. Koncel, it was decided that if the overall year-end diocesan budget shows a deficit, the unused funds in the parish development budget may not be rolled over to the general fund. Discussion followed, after which the motion passed with one opposed.

X. PARISH DEVELOPMENT, MISSION REPORT.

Mr. Kormos reported that he continues to offer presentations in parishes. Few involve day-long workshops; most constitute "coffee hour pe talks." He also reported that he maintains contact with four or five parishes with which he has been working closely. With regard to the Parish Health Inventory, he is developing an on-line survey, which had already been piloted in one parish, by which parishes can assess their strengths and weaknesses. The parish development committee will make a decision on grants to four or five mission communities.

Father Mueller reported on the forthcoming Urban Ministry conference with enthusiasm, with the gathering's stated purpose "to understand people struggling with inner city issues to think positively about them and the role of the parish within said context and to share ideas.

XI. COMMITTEE REPORTS.

- A. Strategic Planning. Father Adamcio offered no report.
- B. Facilities. Ms. Gidus-Mecera reported that the committee has yet to meet formally, although Father Zdinak and others have conversed with Bishop Matthias, who stated that he is comfortable with his present living arrangements, and that he would hope that in the future Christ the Savior parish will take on more responsibility for the residence, as well as the church building. "Our committee could help assess needs within this dynamic," Ms. Gidus-Mecera noted.
 She also reported that, in light of the fact that meetings of the Bishop's and Diocesan Councils run approximately \$12,000.00, but that money could be saved if future meetings were held at the residence, perhaps with members of Christ the Savior Church helping with meals. There are hotels within walking distance.
 She also proposed that the committee meet at the diocesan center to familiarize itself with the property, with the help of Priest John Baker, who has an excellent insight into the properties' problem areas. The committee will hold a telephone conference this summer to share ideas before said on-site meeting.
 Finally, she reported that committee members have begun to review the original vision for the LaSalle St. property and past expenses.
- C. Diocesan Funding. Mr. D'Fantis has been in contact with the members of this committee. They attempted to gather budget data from parishes and missions, requesting that all parishes send in copies of their 2010-2011 budgets. It was suggested that Ms. Mary Caetta and Milos Konjevic, both from other dioceses and both of whom will be at the All-American Council, be invited to address delegates to the Midwest Diocesan Assembly that will be held during the Council. It was felt that this would be an excellent idea.
- D. Seminarian Scholarship Committee. Father Kuchta highlighted his written report, emphasizing the need to establish, clear eligibility requirements for diocesan seminarians of MW diocese. Input from Bishop Matthias and others is welcome. Questions that need to be considered include whether funds should be given directly to seminarians, or to their respective seminaries. An application will be developed by the committee. In order to encourage accountability, seminarians should be required to submit brief periodic reports to Bishop Matthias, with copies to other appropriate persons.
UPON MOTION by Mr. Dorosh, second by Ms. Mabus, it was decided to establish a seminarian grant fund. Passed unanimously.
- E. Communications Committee. Mr. Dorosh noted that he had just learned of his appointment to this committee, so no contact with other members had been made. He then offered a lengthy series of ideas, spanning telecommunications to educational videos and presentations, that the diocese should pursue.
- F. Policy Review Committee. Father Yavornitzky reported that a number of plans are in process, especially with regard to the existing sexual misconduct policy. It is crucial to develop/appoint a crisis team, especially with the retirement of Father Matsko.
- G. Compliance Committee. Father Wojcik said that this committee should work closely with the Policy Review Committee. He and Father Kroll are developing a check list to send to all parishes, covering clergy compensation, by-laws, etc.

XII. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Monday, 31 October 2011, at 9:00 a.m., during the All-American Council in Seattle. The agenda will be basic, but hopefully will include a presentation by the mentioned Mr. Konjevic and Mrs. Caetta. The meeting of 1-2 December 2011 will be held at the diocesan chancery.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned with prayer at 3:18 p.m. upon motion by Father Kuchta, seconded by Father Hrycyniak.

Respectfully submitted, Archbishop John Matusiak, Diocesan Secretary

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES' REPORT

Tuesday, 7 June 2011

The Metropolitan Council (MC) is primarily charged with financial and legal responsibilities for the OCA.

The Minutes, the Reports of the Committees and all the Officers, including the latest Financials and ongoing Strategic Plan from our meeting in Chicago last month, are all posted on-line for review. This significant achievement of conciliarity, transparency and accountability, given our recent past, should not be overlooked. In this regard, the OCA is setting a high and positive standard for Orthodox Churches not only in America, but throughout the world.

This does not mean, however, that all is well. It is not.

We draw your attention to the Minutes again and their statements regarding the four committees whose reports dominated the recent MC meeting:

- a) The Crisis Management Committee reported "...on failures in the Church to respond adequately to specific critical situations."
- b) The Sexual Misconduct Panel Advisory Committee (SMPAC) reported "...major findings of serious concerns as to how sexual misconduct allegations were and are being handled."
- c) The Governance Committee discussed failures in "...compliance with OCA Best Practices and Whistleblower Policies."

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d) The Ethics Committee announced “...*various ethics complaints that had been received*”.

These failures, concerns and complaints are not primarily the result of the actions or inaction of the Synod, Officers, MC, or Committees of the Church – although we all bear responsibility for both denying and enabling the behaviors discussed in these reports. These failures have one thing in common: Metropolitan Jonah.

The Metropolitan sees his problem as “lack of leadership training”, which he has promised to address. But “lack of leadership training” is not the problem – as was made painfully clear to all who witnessed the events at the recent MC meeting held here in Chicago.

- The Metropolitan’s report states: “*Metropolitan Jonah also reported that at the Santa Fe meeting of the Holy Synod he was asked to take a leave of absence for rest and medical evaluation, and although he did not go to the institution requested by the Holy Synod, he did get solid evaluations.*” The Metropolitan did not go on a leave of absence, but rather, publicly denied the Synod’s “request”. He did not get the medical evaluation as requested by the Synod; instead he claims “a solid evaluation” was made, although he has, to date, offered no written evidence of any evaluation.
- In reference to the last 3 months of turmoil the summary of the Metropolitan’s report states: “*Metropolitan Jonah spoke of a trying Great Lent with many temptations, but the Resurrection has prevailed. Without temptations, he said, there is no salvation.*” In short, he expressed no remorse, shame, or guilt for any of his actions or inactions. Such behavior, as well as the failures, concerns and complaints mentioned above, has put, and continues to put the OCA at grave legal, and thus potentially disastrous, financial risk.

Two additional examples that have become known since the Metropolitan Council meeting one month ago only make the problem even more troubling:

1. The Minutes record a motion that “...*the Metropolitan Council strongly recommends to the Holy Synod (that) effective immediately, Fr. Gregory Jensen is removed from all activity related to the issue of sexual misconduct on behalf of the Metropolitan, the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan Council or any other entity of the Orthodox Church in America;*” and “*That all work product, files, electronic media created by or in possession of Fr. Gregory Jensen be returned to the Office of the Interim Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America. CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.*”
In light of this decision, the General Counsel and Interim Chancellor asked the Metropolitan to sign an official letter of dismissing Fr. Jensen from his post. To this date the Metropolitan has refused, on the grounds he never appointed Fr. Jensen to any position in the Office of Sexual Misconduct, nor hired him to undertake any investigations. He claims this — despite the fact Fr. Jensen has produced a letter signed by Metropolitan Jonah explicitly assigning him to the Office of Sexual Misconduct, and hiring him as the chief investigator. This is not just dissembling, prevarication, or simply being caught in a lie. Such denial in the face of clear, irrefutable evidence is evidence of a much deeper problem.
2. As is public knowledge, the Archbishop of Canada is currently awaiting trial in Winnipeg for inviting two ten year old boys to spend the night in his residence, where they claim he molested them, some thirty years ago. In the past three months the Metropolitan has repeatedly invited an unrelated 10 year old boy to stay in his DC residence with he and Brother Gregory, while the boys mother stayed with the Greek nuns next door. Nothing untoward has been alleged. Nevertheless, the Metropolitan has been repeatedly warned not to continue to do so for reasons that should be obvious to all. Yet the Metropolitan persists. Such recklessness, irresponsibility, and lack of concern about potentially litigious behavior is not “pastoral concern”; it is evidence of a much deeper problem.

The Metropolitan’s ongoing misrepresentation of the truth, irresponsibility, impulsive nature, unreliability, lack of shame, guilt, remorse or empathy, and his failure to admit any problem with such behaviors, has, is, and will continue to create potentially fatal risks for the OCA. It is evident to the MC that after almost three years that such actions are not a “blip on the screen”, but consistent, troubling behaviors.

The actions and behavior of the Metropolitan must be addressed by the Holy Synod of Bishops before the OCA is further damaged, financially, pastorally and administratively – perhaps irreparably.

*Mark Stokoe
Fr. Alexander Kuchta*