

Diocese of the South
Diocesan Council Minutes
May 11, 2009 Meeting: Dallas, Texas

Agenda Passed Out

Present: His Beatitude Metropolitan Jonah (*Locum Tenens for the Diocese of the South*);
Archpriest Joseph Fester (Diocesan Chancellor and Dean of the Dallas Deanery);
Priest Marcus Burch (Carolina Deanery);
Priest Stephen Freeman (Appalachian Deanery);
Archpriest Philip Reese (Miami Deanery);
Archpriest Peter Smith (Atlanta Deanery);
Priest Theodore Pisarchuk (Mission Director for the Diocese of the South);
Mr. Milos Konjevich (Treasurer and Diocesan Administrator);
Mr. Milo Chilovitz (Orlando Deanery);
Matushka Jeanette Parker (Carolina Deanery);
Mr. Gary Popovich (Miami Deanery);
Dr. Bob Vranes (Dallas Deanery);
Mr. Bert Walthers (Appalachian Deanery);
Archpriest Basil Zebrun (Diocesan Secretary).

Opening: The meeting began at 10:05 am with the singing of “*Christ is Risen!*”

Report of Locum Tenens: His Beatitude began with comments concerning his recent trip to Russia, stressing that it was a humbling, sobering, encouraging and strengthening experience. He also mentioned that the Russian Patriarchate is 100% supportive of the Orthodox Church in America’s Autocephaly.

On a more local note: the Metropolitan explained that he sees his task as *locum tenens* being one of oversight and preparation for the next Bishop of the Diocese of the South. Because of His Eminence Archbishop Dmitri’s legacy the DOS is a difficult Diocese for which to find a Hierarch. His Beatitude stated that the Diocese of the South is a strong point in the life of the Orthodox Church in America. Unfortunately because of Archbishop Dmitri’s age the conciliar process in this Diocese has essentially stopped during the past few years but needs to be reinvigorated before the next Episcopal election.

The Deans have an important role, he stated, as the administrators who know the local parishes best. The Metropolitan expressed his desire to have monthly teleconferences with the Deans and face to face meetings on a quarterly basis.

The Diocesan Council also has an important role according to His Beatitude, as the venue through which the laity manifests its Diocesan leadership. He stressed that the laity in the

Church are the real missionaries and that the focus in the Orthodox Church in America must be for Diocesan Councils to become a viable point of conciliarity.

The new Chancery appointments were spelled out: Archpriest Joseph Fester as Chancellor and Mr. Milos Konjevich as Treasurer and Diocesan Administrator. As far as the Chancellor's role, His Beatitude stressed that he sees it as being more administrative in character rather than one involved with decision making.

To help facilitate the above His Beatitude stated that he plans to come to the South about once a month for the time being.

Chancellor's Report: Archpriest Joseph Fester stated that when he was informed of his new position as Chancellor he understood his responsibilities to include facilitating *communication* and *conciliarity*.

Items were then listed that need attention relative to the Chancery Building: tree trimming, concrete work and an upgrade to the phone system which could run around \$1,500. The general consensus of the Council was that these are routine matters of doing business; that the Chancery has had money budgeted for such purposes that were never spent over the years; and that such work should be accomplished.

Mr. Milo Chilovitz advised looking into a Uniden Phone System which could be had for about \$500.

Fr. Joseph asked what the Chancery staff can do better in serving members of the Diocese. Mr. Bert Walthers stated that the Diocese should look into POD casts and take more advantage of the electronic media. Fr. Stephen Freeman and Mr. Gary Popovich suggested rethinking the format and overall direction of *The Dawn* newspaper, while stressing that we should not stop printing it entirely.

Treasurer's Report: Mr. Milos Konjevich began by focusing on recent staff adjustments in the Chancery Office. He also explained the payroll reporting sheet.

In response His Beatitude mentioned the new Orthodox Church in America Health Plan and he recommended that Dioceses and local parishes look into local Health Plans for their clergy.

Milos explained the need to offset the expense for a Treasurer's salary on this and future reports to show a realistic appraisal of what it takes to run a Diocese. Discussions ensued concerning tithes, as well as what was termed an ideal "salary to tithe" ratio of about 40%. Currently the ratio is running just over 50%.

The topic of a salary for the new Bishop was brought up by Fr. Marcus Burch; should it equal that of the Archbishop as he formally ends his career, or should a start up salary be

considerably less? Fr. Basil Zebrun asked about the possibility of a full time Chancellor in the future given the growth of our Diocese, and brought up the subject of electing vs. appointing Diocesan Deans. The point was made that as the Deans become more and more responsible within their respective deaneries, that the ruling Hierarchy should have the option of appointing such individuals. Everyone recognized that for such action to become common in the Orthodox Church in America, the Statutes may have to be revised. Discussions also took place regarding the need for a second priest in those parishes that have Deans.

With regard to salaries for the Locum Tenens, Chancellor and Treasurer/Administrator, Fr. Stephen Freeman moved that they be accepted as presented. Fr. Philip Reese seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

At this point the Council took a 20 minute break, beginning at 12:30 pm.

After the break Milos explained that the budget that will be proposed in July will be a deficit budget. Such a thing is not unusual for the Diocese but presents a certain vulnerability when we approach banks who do not understand our approach to missions and finances.

It was mentioned that for the first three months of this year we find ourselves with totals almost identical to 2006. A challenge, of sorts, was issued for parishes having the designation of "Cathedral" in their future. Milos pointed out that the top parishes in terms of tithes, in the Dallas deanery, are spawns of St. Seraphim's. Emphasized was the notion that our larger Churches should be thinking in terms of starting local missions.

His Beatitude stated that it would be good for Milos to develop a form in the near future so that full parish financials could be sent to the Diocesan Chancery. As a parting thought Milos spoke about communities sending in their extra "money on hand" to deposit with the Diocese. A good rate of interest will be offered and the Diocese can use the funds, temporarily, to help other parishes with their development.

At 1:30 pm the Diocesan Council began a "working lunch."

Assembly Update: Fr. Joseph Fester asked Fr. Peter Smith to provide an update on Assembly 2009 to be convened in Atlanta, Georgia. Fr. Peter explained that registration will be run through the Diocese and that for late comers a registration table will be available at the Atlanta Greek Orthodox Cathedral where the Plenaries will be held. He described practical reasons for holding the Assembly at the local Cathedral, as well as youth and teen activities being planned, and a public lecture by His Beatitude Metropolitan Jonah.

Priest Lawrence Zalikowski and Retirement Assistance: The unique situation of Fr. Lawrence Zalikowski was discussed and the Diocese's ability or inability to offer him financial assistance now, during his retirement. The notion of running such aid in the future through parishes rather than directly to individuals was generally accepted. It was the consensus of those gathered that from *Parish Development Funds* money could be used to help aging clergy retire from their respective parishes if such a move was seen to be of great benefit to the growth and well being of those communities, as discerned by the local deans and other local leaders.

A motion was made by Fr. Peter Smith that Development Funds be available for use in parishes with aging clergy. Mr. Gary Popovich seconded the motion which passed unanimously. Discussions then continued concerning Parish, Deanery and/or Diocesan Assistance for aged clergy. His Beatitude did emphasize Diocesan Assistance.

Candidates for the Episcopacy and the Vetting Process: Fr. Marcus Burch stated that he would like to see candidates for the Southern Episcopacy visit Diocesan functions so that members of the Diocese could get to know these individuals. Fr. Joseph Fester stressed that such invitations should be one of the last actions taken in the search for a Bishop. A proper vetting process prior to anything else protects the reputation of both the candidate and the Diocese.


His Beatitude presented an overview of the vetting process and required criteria: the candidate must have no impediments; he must be well thought of by others and he needs to relate to people; he must be a good pastor and have a clean financial background; he will be required to write an autobiography which in reality is half confession and half biography (the entire Synod then reviews this document); he undergoes a background check as well as a psychological evaluation; and finally the entire Synod of Bishops has the opportunity to interview him.

Metropolitan Jonah stated that a search committee could be put together from members of the Diocesan Council if that is the desire of the group. Fr. Marcus Burch restated the Deans' consensus that the summer of 2010 was a more probable period for having a specific Episcopal candidate in mind given the expectations of this Diocese.

Fr. Joseph Fester suggested that a Resolution be put forth at this year's Assembly so that a search committee may be organized and begin its work. Fr. Peter Smith seconded the motion which was passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 2:55 pm with the singing of, "*Shine, Shine O New Jerusalem...*"

Respectively Submitted,


Archpriest Basil Zebrun
Diocesan Secretary

Approved Metropolitan Jonah
