

**2009 DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY
DIOCESE OF THE WEST**

**October 15-16, 2009
Saint Seraphim of Sarov Church
Santa Rosa, California**

MINUTES

PLENARY SESSION I

On Thursday, October 15, 2009, at 1:00 p.m., following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and the Service of Prayer for the Opening of a Church Assembly, His Grace, the Right Reverend BENJAMIN, Bishop of San Francisco and the West, convened the 2009 Diocesan Assembly of the Diocese of the West in Saint Seraphim of Sarov Church, Santa Rosa, California, with the singing of "O Heavenly King."

Welcome and Introduction of Guests

On behalf of His Grace, Bishop BENJAMIN, Archpriest Ian MacKinnon, Chancellor welcomed the delegates, observers, and guests to the annual diocesan assembly and noted the presence of special guest, The Right Reverend ALEJO, Bishop of Mexico City and the Exarchate of Mexico. Father Ian also expressed his gratitude to Archpriest Lawrence Margitich and the clergy and faithful of Saint Seraphim Church for their kind hospitality as hosts of the annual assembly. He further noted the presence of three vendors who had set up their displays in the Protection of the Theotokos chapel.

Appointment of Assembly Officers and Secretariat

Archpriest Ian MacKinnon, Chancellor, announced that Bishop BENJAMIN appointed Archpriest David Lowell to serve as clergy vice-chair and Dorothy Nowik to serve as lay vice-chair. Archpriest David Brum and Priest Andrew Jacobs were appointed to serve as the assembly secretariat.

Report of the Credentials Committee

The Credential Committee reported the following attendance at the first Plenary Session:

Hierarchs:	2
Clergy delegates:	46
Lay delegates:	48
Observers:	13

Review and Acceptance of Minutes of the 2008 Diocesan Assembly

His Grace announced that the Diocesan Assembly had reviewed and accepted the minutes of the 2008 Diocesan Assembly. (see www.dowoca.org for 2008 Assembly minutes and all following addresses/reports)

Address of His Grace, Bishop BENJAMIN

In his report, Bishop BENJAMIN expressed his gratitude to God that our diocese is blessed with peace and oneness of mind, with a “palpable sense of unity.” He also expressed his gratitude to everyone for their generous contribution to the work of the Diocese. His Grace further expressed his gratitude to the Chancellor, Deans, and Diocesan Council, to Mary Caetta, Diocesan Treasurer, and to his assistants at the diocesan center, Barry Migyanko and Elias Mukasa.

Noting the recent repose of Archpriest Joseph Hirsch and Archimandrite Gabriel (Cooke), His Grace led the assembly in the singing of “Memory Eternal.”

The Bishop’s Address further highlighted the existence of five monastic communities within the Diocese of the West and that life within the parishes and missions continues to grow, noting the election and installation as Abbot of St. John’s Monastery in Manton, CA, of Archimandrite Meletios Webber, as well as new parish clergy in the diocese, including Fr. David Burgess, at St. Nicholas of Japan Mission in Redding, CA; Fr. James McKee in Bend, OR; Fr. Michael Spainhoward at St. Cyril & Methodius Mission in Chico, CA; and Rev. Deacon Gary McFarland in Bozeman, MT. His Grace also noted physical plant improvements at St. Barbara Monastery in Santa Paula; CA, St. John’s Monastery, in Manton, CA; Ss. Cyril and Methodius Mission in Chico, CA; and Ss. Constantine and Helen Orthodox Church in Colorado Springs, CO.

His Grace reported that the 2011 All American Council will likely be held in the Diocese of the West, with Seattle and Denver being discussed as possible locations, Seattle being the favored site at present. His Grace also commented on the OCA strategic plan and the need to change the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America in order for it to reflect Orthodox ecclesiology. Citing a need for “mindfulness and prudence,” Bishop Benjamin also noted that not all parishes or clergy are in compliance with the requirement for background checks on both clergy and other church workers.

Report of the Chancellor

Archpriest Ian MacKinnon presented his annual report to the Diocesan Assembly, noting that much has transpired in the Orthodox Church in America since our last assembly: “Father” Jonah was consecrated auxiliary bishop for the Diocese of the South and shortly thereafter, “Bishop” Jonah was elected Metropolitan of All America and Canada, which Father Ian cited as “unexpected and joyful.” The recent repose of Archpriest Joseph Hirsch has been hard to accept for all who knew and loved him. He was a wise and valued counselor for many years and his presence among us will be felt. Memory eternal!

Archpriest Ian stated that the Orthodox parish often lives “outside of itself,” as part of the hierarchal Church and as part of the community in which it is located. While he cited the encouraging evidence of our missions’, parishes’ and monasteries’ “works of worship and charity,” he added that these works on the part of clergy and faithful are often “hidden.” He then made mention of the diocesan loan program, by which contributions to funds can be made, and those funds could be made available to parishes for building programs.

Review and Acceptance of Treasurer’s Report

Mary Caetta, Diocesan Treasurer presented her annual report. She noted that everything has been well documented and that all loans are recorded and accounted for (Life-Giving Spring Retreat Center, Boulder City, NV; Saint Mary Magdalene Mission, Merced, CA; and Holy Assumption Monastery, Calistoga, CA, as well as the funds provided to Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco Monastery, Manton, CA, and Saint Barbara Monastery, Santa Paula, CA.)

She then said that there were several specific areas of financial matters that she would cover in some detail. Of these, Mary first noted that two yearly reviews had taken place, conducted by internal and external “auditors.” She also reviewed the “numbers” presented in the report, highlighting various areas of diocesan life and growth. Mary also commented on her availability to assist parish treasurers, on the “essentials” of parish bookkeeping, and on the resources provided in the diocesan Policies and Procedures Handbook.

Addressing the issue of emergency planning, Mary said she felt that the Diocesan Treasurer’s procedures handbook should be made more transparent, especially as, if something would incapacitate her as the existing Treasurer, any backup plan would have to include a means for passing along vital information on how diocesan financial procedures are done. She added that anyone acting as an emergency backup would also have to be proficient with the latest version of the bookkeeping program, “QuickBooks.”

Mary also cited the increasingly complex legal reporting required of parish treasurers, and suggested redefining the parish treasurer role. This would entail separating the bookkeeping and the financial oversight duties that parish treasurers now have. This would result in the parish having a bookkeeper who is not a parish council member, and whose activities would be restricted to those of a bookkeeper. Such bookkeeper would be provided with a strict budget and the latest Parish Council minutes, and would keep up-to-the minute books and logs of receipts, etc. On the other hand, the parish Treasurer would oversee the Bookkeeper, and would be a member of and report to the Parish Council. Mary included aspects of her previous discussion on the exchange of important information—between treasurers and bookkeepers, and between incumbents and those who would replace them in these positions. This would necessitate having a thorough, transparently clear Procedures Manual and expertise in the financial software (preferably QuickBooks) used by the outgoing Treasurer or Bookkeeper.

Report on Diocesan Loan Program

John Della Monica provided an informational report on the Diocesan Loan Program. The name given this program is *Orthodox Church Capital Improvement Fund* (OCCIF). He began by reviewing the members of the Board of Trustees, who were appointed by His Grace, Bishop BENJAMIN: John Della Monica, president; Eric Worth, secretary; Peter Schwalbenburg, treasurer; Archpriest Stephen Soot, Attorney Scott Adams; Dmitri Solodow, and Andrew Evans, trustees. John noted that the purpose of OCCIF is to provide funds to construct church buildings, acquire property, and refurbish church

buildings and that it is meant to serve missions, parishes, and other diocesan institutions of the Diocese of the West. OCCIF has been legally established as a not-for-profit organization within the State of California. It seeks to be a source of revenue for the Church, from the Church. He noted that there are three initial stages of fund raising in order to get the Fund “up and running.” Legal counsel has been retained, as well as the services of a Certified Public Accountant. Questions and answers ensued. It was noted that the relationship of the Fund to the diocese is based upon good will and the fact that board members are appointed by the Diocesan Bishop. More information will be forthcoming, especially on how parishes and individuals may contribute toward, and/or invest, in the Fund.

Presentation of 2010 Proposed Budget

Dorothy Nowik reviewed the proposed 2010 Diocesan Budget which was prepared by the diocesan Finance and Investment Committee (Archpriest Matthew Tate, Dorothy Nowik, and Dmitri Solodow) and which had previously been approved for presentation by the Diocesan Council. Dorothy highlighted the changes reflected from the previous (2009) budget. Questions were answered and corrections made to the presented budget.

Moved by Archpriest Michael Regan; Seconded by Priest Michael Spainhoward: “That the 2010 budget, as presented, be accepted and approved.” The motion carried.

Diocesan Administration

Administrative Assistant Barry Migyanko gave a brief presentation on diocesan administration and administrative procedures. It was noted that the new domain for the diocesan website is: www.dowoca.org.

Presentation of Nominees and Election of Diocesan Council Members, Auditors, and Metropolitan Council Representatives

Archpriest Matthew Tate presented the report of the Nominations Committee and announced the following nominations for election to the Diocesan Council:

Diocesan Council – Clergy Representative – Nominees

Archpriest David Brum

Archpriest John Dresko

Diocese Council – Lay Representative – Nominees

Maha Estephan

Gary Hart

Ivan Pouschine

Priest Michael Spainhoward moved; Priest Christopher Swanson seconded: “That nominations be closed.” The motion carried.

Auditors

Archpriest Matthew Tate suggested that the Diocesan Assembly delegate the Diocesan Council to elect the remaining two auditors, and that Fr. Michael Regan be re-elected as an auditor.

Nadine Wood moved; Dmitri Solodow seconded: “That the Diocesan Assembly delegate the Diocesan Council to elect the remaining two auditors, for this year only.” The motion carried.

Archpriest David Brum moved; Dmitri Solodow seconded: “That Archpriest Michael Regan be continued as an Auditor.” The motion carried.

Archpriest David Lowell, clergy vice chair, explained the qualification necessary for someone to be elected as a lay delegate to the diocesan assembly, noting three requirements: 1) that the delegate be a member of the parish *in good standing*; 2) a member of the parish for a minimum of three years; and 3) that diocesan assessments must be paid in full in order for a parish lay delegate to have a vote.

Archpriest Matthew Tate moved; Archpriest Basil Rhodes seconded: “That the Diocesan Council appoint a committee to review, for possible update, the diocesan by-laws.” The motion carried.

PLENARY SESSION II

His Grace, Bishop BENJAMIN opened the second Plenary Session of the 2009 Diocesan Assembly on Friday, October 16, 2009, at 9:00 a.m., with the singing of “O Heavenly King.” Dorothy Nowik, lay vice chair of the assembly, made a few “housekeeping announcements,” e.g. regarding the bookstore, etc.

Report of the Credentials Committee

Archpriest Ian Mackinnon, Chancellor noted the Credentials Committee report relating the following attendance at the second Plenary Session:

Hierarchs:	2
Clergy delegates:	46
Lay delegates:	45
Observers:	16

Bishop Alejo’s Address

Bishop Alejo of Mexico City and the Exarchate of Mexico delivered his address, citing growth in his diocese, and stating that Orthodoxy faces unique challenges and continues to grow, as it has for 40 years.

Diocesan Council Election

Archpriest Matthew Tate oversaw the distribution of ballots.

Archpriest Matthew Tate moved; Igumen Sergious (Gerken) seconded: “That the clergy delegates be elected by acclamation.” The motion carried.

Ballots were collected and counted and Father Matthew announced the results: Maha Estephan and Gary Hart were elected as lay delegates to the Diocesan Council. Ivan Pouschine is the alternate.

Metropolitan Council Report and Update on Strategic Planning

Archpriest Matthew Tate and Dmitri Solodow presented their report on the current work of the Metropolitan Council of the Orthodox Church in America.

Dmitri Solodow began with a presentation on the work of the Strategic Planning Committee of the Orthodox Church in America and noted that the process that had been designed by the Committee and blessed by the Holy Synod was having its debut at this assembly. He highlighted the fact that much has changed in the Church since our last assembly: new Metropolitan, new Officers, more frequent publication of financial reports and Metropolitan Council minutes. He also recognized that with this change there is also need for a new “culture” within the Church. Thus, the strategic planning process must be based on the Gospel, Tradition, and the Canons in order to build the Church in North America. He further noted that the Diocese of the West has been seen as a good model for conciliarity.

His Grace Bishop Benjamin spoke of the need for sound ecclesiology and of the “dance” that takes place between territorial Churches and their component dioceses. He noted that the Canons are descriptive but not dictatorial; they provide for some flexibility. He further commented on the need for conciliarity, with both clergy and lay participation. He emphasized that bishops elect bishops and gave examples of how this is done throughout the Orthodox Churches.

His Grace went on to say that, for example, conciliarity bespeaks the equality of bishops but also involves the chairman who presides. An example is that our Metropolitan is the Chairman of the Holy Synod, but not the bishops’ boss. We want consensus, but this does not always work. At the All-American Council, the dioceses are represented by their bishops, but decisions made at the AAC are approved by the Holy Synod.

Discussion ensued concerning the role of the All American Council and its current configuration as a representative body of parishes, not dioceses. In this, the AAC is an ecclesiastical anomaly; but the “new” AAC might have a different “face.” His Grace broached the question of an AAC that possibly could consist only of elected Diocesan Council members and members of the Metropolitan Council.

As the AAC has been a major symbol of OCA clergy and lay conciliarity, this sparked discussion that we would have to find a more effective format for satisfying what is perceived as the desire for church-wide unity in goals and focus. One idea coming from the floor included periodic non-AAC get-togethers of clergy and laity throughout the

diocese—or even the entire OCA—as a way to promote greater unity, bred through common interaction and familiarity. His Grace suggested that the Greek and Antiochian “family life” gatherings might provide models for such activities.

Archpriest Matthew Tate highlighted the recent work of the Metropolitan Council, noting that some of the matters currently being dealt with include the appointment of a new, part-time Treasurer. He described the new interrelationship and administrative structure that exists between the Church’s officers, with the Chancellor being redefined as the overall coordinator of the other officers. Another highlight of the work of the Metropolitan Council is that its committees are now authentic, functioning committees. These include the Best Practices and Ethics Committee, the Internal Audit Committee, and the Finance Committee. Father Matthew emphasized the good working relationship between the members of the Holy Synod and the Metropolitan Council.

Father Matthew also noted that legal concerns are very serious at the present and very draining, both emotionally and financially. He briefly reviewed the several lawsuits that are still active, noting that the legal costs of these lawsuits are a serious burden on the Church at present. He also reported on the recent revision of the OCA pension plan, resulting from current financial strains. All participants should have received an updated report of expected benefits. Questions and answers ensued and Father Matthew noted that any questions can be addressed to the Pension Plan Manager, Maureen Ahearn.

Dmitri Solodow continued the report on the strategic planning process (see report on diocesan website). He offered questions that are a part of this process, and should and will be asked throughout the Church: “What should the Orthodox Church in America be doing? How should it do it? How can it be funded? What is happening within the Church? Why is it happening? What can be done?” He then presented areas of consideration that are another part of the process that will be in place throughout the Church. Making such statements as “We must begin to visualize and conceptualize the OCA of the future,” he identified such components of this process as “Clarification of Goals and Values,” “Implementation,” “Creation of a Conciliar Culture,” and “Building Structure and Processes.” Subsequent to his presentation, the assembly was divided into small groups, and given lists of questions based on the above areas of concern for discussion. The questions and their answers were then returned and reviewed prior to adjournment of the Assembly.

Credentials Committee update

Dorothy Nowik announced an updated Credentials Committee report for the second Plenary Session:

Hierarchs:	2
Clergy delegates:	47
Lay delegates:	47
Observers:	16

Adjournment

His Grace Bishop Benjamin moved to adjourn the 2009 Diocesan Assembly of the Diocese of the West. The motion was unanimously seconded and passed by the acclamation of the assembly delegates. The Assembly was adjourned at 3:00 p.m. with the singing of “It Is Truly Meet.”