

DIOCESAN COUNCIL MINUTES

Diocese of the West

Thursday, Oct. 23, 2025

Holy Trinity Cathedral, San Francisco, CA

His Grace, Bishop Vasily, convened a meeting of the Diocesan Council with an opening prayer at 10:33am on Thursday, October 23, 2025.

DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

His Grace Bishop Vasily, Archpriest Kirill Sokolov, Archpriest Lawrence Margitich, Archpriest Michael Anderson, Archpriest Andreas Blom, Priest Peter Runyon, Archpriest Stephen Soot, Archpriest David Morrison, Archpriest Timothy Wilkinson, Priest Alexander Vallens, Priest Daniel Lattier, Mr. David Lane, Ms. Dorothy Nowik, Ms. Catherine Mabus, Matushka Theodora Blom, Matushka Elizabeth Powell, Ms. Katie Huff

Committee Members and Observers: Archpriest John Dresko, Brittany Yeager, Matushka Sophia Runyon

Meeting commenced at 10:33am with the recitation of "O Heavenly King."

Minutes of Previous Meeting: Accepted as distributed.

Diocesan Hierarchy's Report: His Grace Bishop Vasily expressed gratitude for the welcome he received to the Diocese and especially all of those supporting him in his day-to-day work. He desires to travel and visit all the parishes in the Diocese and unfortunately will not be able to make it to every parish in one year due to the number of parishes. He is encouraged by the faithful in all the areas he visits and the hard work of the members of the church. His Grace shared his upcoming travel plans and his desire to visit parishes and missions on or near their patronal feasts. He applauds the people at the Cathedral and the Diocese for their liturgical work and maintaining high standards. His Grace shared that he has met with and concelebrated with many of the hierarchs of other Dioceses that share our region. His Grace expressed gratitude to the Deans and Officers of the Diocese for their productive and fruitful work in recent meetings. One important decision has been made regarding the Missionary District. Our missions will be under the supervision of the local geographical deanery. The intention is for the Mission parishes to receive support and closer cooperation of neighboring parishes. In addition, it has been decided to reconstitute the Missions Board and appoint Priest Peter Runyon lead the Board and assist the Deans with Missions. His Grace is also establishing a new Deanery of the Pacific Southwest, merging the Desert and Pacific Southwest Deaneries with Archpriest Michael Anderson as Dean. We now have four large Deaneries. His Grace encouraged and recommended greater cooperation and fellowship for clergy within the deaneries who are geographically close. The district dean acts in the name of the Bishop with the Bishop's support.

There is a legacy of conciliarity and consensus in cooperation in our Diocese. Bishops serve in a key role, but it is an illusion that they govern alone, as it requires the work of many. His prayer is that this is the beginning of the great work done together.

Chancellor's Report: Fr. Kirill Sokolov began by reporting that this summer we had a couple retirement celebrations for Archbishop Benjamin, and we are indebted to many people for their work and efforts. I believe we did an honorable job of honoring him. There was good order in all the transitions for our Diocese, and it is a testament to our OCA and Diocese. It has been a joy to have our new Hierarchy present, engaged, and decisive in all our meetings and preparations. Our Diocese is growing and our parishes are growing, with 22% growth from 2020-2025. Pew research studies, and others, are finding exceeding growth projections with one projection at 2.8 million in the USA by 2040. This might require 1,350 new parishes to serve. The numbers can be daunting, but it is important and good that we are prepared to work. This challenge of growth is a great problem to have! His Grace rejuvenating the Mission Board is an important way we will be working towards establishing new parishes. His Grace is minded to establish a mission in the greater Boise area (Kuna, ID) led by Archpriest Jerome Cwiklinksi. The greater Salt Lake City area will be researched as well. We are in the process of looking at placements of priests to areas in need of missions. His Eminence Archbishop Benjamin is attending many liturgies locally and we encourage people to visit him in Santa Rosa, as he enjoys the company. St Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow, and patron of our Diocese and Church fell asleep in the Lord 100 years ago, and the Synod asked every parish to hold a celebration in honor of that repose. There was one in Denver on October 9 and there will be one here at Holy Trinity Cathedral on Nov. 18th in honor of him. We are looking to reestablish a Diocesan Clergy Retreat. There is discussion of a Missions Retreat, but we also have an idea extending the Diocesan Assembly and including dedicated time for Missions in the Assembly this year. Two practica were held in Santa Rosa in July: Liturgical Music and Diaconate. Additionally, our Priesthood Formation Cohort met. There were more than 100 people present across these three groups. St. Seraphim Cathedral does an amazing job hosting these events. Many thanks to Fr Lawrence for hosting when asked, so often. (applause). Also, a round of applause and letter of thanks to Matushka Esther Carr who worked so hard for the Fort Ross Centennial. In addition to the events, there is a challenge for our parishes in the way of property insurance, especially in CA as non-renewals are becoming more common. Will need to look at how this is affecting our parishes. We have 12 seminarians right now, 6 at St. Vladimir's and 6 at St. Tikhon's.

Q. Fr David -Is there a list of updated deanery names and parishes, etc.? Is there an updated map of Deaneries?

A This will be included in the decree from His Grace.

Q. Fr Daniel – Will Deans be taking on more parishes? Will there be an increased Stipend?

A The Diocesan Council to determine alongside the finance committee.

In closing, the conversation about missions and doing them with some forward support and intentions is very exciting. Creating more outposts of the Kingdom is a wonderful privilege. Fr Peter Runyon noted that we are all evangelists and it's exciting to see us moving in this direction.

His Grace has asked Katie Huff to take the position of Diocesan Secretary.

MOTION: Fr Kirill Sokolov nominates Katie Huff for position of Secretary, with His Grace's blessing.

SECOND: N/A **PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Treasurer's Report: Stewards of West, is tracking well, right at 75%. Even with extra money sent to seminarians, our finances are still healthy. All invoices have not been paid from Ft Ross event, but we grossed over \$16k in lunch and registrations. A couple of our banquets garnered a net overage and at AAC we had to cover some additional expenses. It has been a big year for financial expenses, but amazingly we are still very sound (Fr. Kirill reminded the meeting that the Diocese shares the Ft Ross event expenses 50/50 with ROCOR Western America Diocese.). We await final cost. Last year (2025) finance committee decided to collapse a lot of business travel to one (Business travel). It is the first year, once we assess, we will need to increase the amount going forward. Budgeted \$12k, already at \$13k+ (this is not including DOW Council travel). Additional travel need expenses have included internal audits, metropolitan council, and seminary travel. Matushka Theodora is a minimalist on categories for budget with a desire to keep it simple. Financial statements will be reviewed.

Finance Committee: Ms. Dorothy Nowik; Finance committee being asked to consider rollover of \$600k in OCCIF with 4% for 5 additional years. The Finance Committee supports this and recommends the Council also approve. Options are to take money back, donate, or rollback into investment that equates to \$24k a year income on the amount.

MOTION: Finance Committee moves that we rollover our current money of \$600k with OCCIF for an additional term of 5 years at 4%.

SECOND: N/A **PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

An audit and review were conducted for Holy Virgin Cathedral. The committee examined outstanding unpaid amounts during a one-day visit. It was suggested that the parish does not have a tithing culture and pays bills by immediate priority (e.g., salaries, utilities). There is concern that salary expenses were treated as restricted funds, though such mandatory expenses should not be restricted. Bringing accounts current now would allow stronger enforcement after years of non-compliance. After some discussion of suggestions on how to move forward presented by the visiting team and the Finance Committee, His Grace noted that that the fresh start recommended by the Finance Committee will allow a new

dynamic to emerge with God's help and hard work by the clergy and parishioners of Holy Virgin Cathedral.

MOTION: Finance Committee moves that the Diocese forgive Holy Virgin Mary Cathedral of Los Angeles their 2024 assessment of \$48,877.68. They also recommend that the Diocese reduce their 2025 assessment to 6.25%.

SECOND: N/A **PASSED 1 NO, REMAINDER AYE**

A conversation ensued about supporting our seminarians in a time of particular financial uncertainty. It was noted that it would be helpful to benchmark how other dioceses support their seminaries so we can consider in our budgeting for next year.

MOTION: Fr Michael Anderson moves that to send a gift of \$1000 to each of our seminarians.

SECOND: Fr Andreas Blom **PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

MOTION: Fr Andreas Blom moves to approve Parish Remissions Contribution percentages for 2026 as presented by the Treasurer.

SECOND: MS DOROTHY NOWIK **PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Youth and Camps: Fr Michael. Youth Deaneries had their camps with no fires or evacuations, though one did run out of water. Fr Kirill shared that the Diocese, through the Thriving Parishes Project, is hosting a summit for young adults, Feb. 13-15 in San Diego for young adults ages 18-30, to help establish and support a community amongst themselves. Price point is being kept incredibly low. Email sent out to rectors about it.

Legal: Mr. David Lane, re copyright issues for all images. This is something affecting parishes around the OCA and worth to request people to review.

Compliance/Background Checks: Reminder to please stay on top of all background checks and compliance, including retired priests.

Clergy Wives: Matushka Elizabeth shared that in recent news around Orthodox podcasts and conversations, there has been a notable absence of the fact that priests need wives. Formation of young women, intentional, is something I'd like to see in Diocese. Priestly formation cohort intensive is being hosted by St. Katherine in Kirkland and some of the wives will be coming as well. Registration for clergy wife retreat closes tomorrow - 14 signed up. Retreat is being held for the 3rd year at monastery of St John in Manton. Fr Innocent leads discussion. Office of Pastoral Life has established new position for clergy wives and Matushka Lela no longer in that volunteer role for OCA. That group of women were asked to retire. The women (15 wives, 1 for each Diocese) are devastated, as they met as a volunteer group every other week on Zoom for

6 years. Matushka Kari Foley was hired as a paid role. Our Diocese may need to keep stepping up to reach out to Clergy Wives. Mission Clergy Wives, how to minister to them? (Matushka Theodora). Deans to incorporate. Matushka Lela really encourages Deans to identify clergy wives in their deanery who may be interested in being point people.

Retired Clergy Fellowship: Have been invited to speak with the group, it is large and wonderful.

Metropolitan Council and Pension Plan: Metropolitan Council members reported on recent meetings related to the work of the Church at the Metropolitan Council and on the Pension Board.

Thriving Parishes Project Update: Going great overall. 4 initiatives: Initiatives 1 and 2 are focused on peer learning groups with parish priest and lay leader. Initiative 3 is vocations-related. Initiative 4 is focused on youth and young adult ministry. Financially, at the end of year 2 of 5 as of right now. Fr. Kirill reminded the Council that the Thriving Parishes Project is organically succeeding because it is work that we would want to do regardless of the amazing boost grant funding has brought.

Home of Mercy: Fr Lawrence Margitich. This 2.5 acres next to St Seraphim of Sarov in Santa Rosa is where Archbishop Benjamin and his father have lived for over a year now. Fr Damian Kuolt and Matushka Joanna live there, too, with Fr Damian serving as property manager. Rental agreements in place. A discussion was held on past financial agreements between the Diocese and its oldest charity, the Home of Mercy.

MOTION: Matushka Theodora Blom moves to forgive the \$300,000 advance that was originally given to the Home of Mercy.

SECOND: MR. DAVID LANE **PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

New Business:

- Lake Havasu: Status update given by Fr. Kirill; Message received by those working on project tabled for transition of Bishop. When the board meets again, will go back to previous plan that this council was in support of. First option given to Greek Metropolis, 2nd option given to current tenants, and 3rd option is put on market. Board designated restriction to missions has been the tentative plan of our meetings.
- Scheduling of Diocesan Assembly: Colorado Springs, Oct 20-23, 2026.
- Fr Andreas: Looking at map of Deaneries and parishes, Idaho and Utah are in need. To allocate funds to send missionary teams there to get started. Catechist, fully paid by diocese for a couple of years. We have funds for it, 2 full time salaries for 2 years. Ideally, they would establish parishes.

MOTION: Fr Timothy Wilkinson moves that the Diocesan Council enthusiastically supports the planting of a mission and the sending of a mission team to Salt Lake City with details to be proposed by a task force appointed by His Grace and to be decided at a subsequent meeting.

SECOND:

FR LAWRENCE

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 21, 10:30am via Zoom

The meeting is adjourned at 2:06pm with prayer.

Submitted by: Katie Huff

Diocesan Council Secretary