



The Diocese of the West

The Orthodox Church in America

THE RIGHT REVEREND VASILY
BISHOP OF SAN FRANCISCO AND THE WEST

Diocesan Council Minutes

Wednesday, May 6, 2026

Holy Trinity Cathedral, San Francisco, CA

His Grace, Bishop VASILY, convened a meeting of the Diocesan Council with an opening prayer at 10:33 am on Wednesday, May 6, 2026.

DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

Observers and committee members: Brittany Yeager

Minutes of Previous Meeting: Accepted as distributed.

Bishop's Remarks: It is a great honor and privilege to serve you all and I am grateful to all of you for the remarkable work that is happening in the parishes and communities of this Diocese. I have traveled extensively since last Council meeting, celebrated Holy Week and Pascha at this Cathedral, but most other Sundays of this year I was visiting other parishes. Remarkable to see the growth of this Church and the great opportunity to meet this moment God has placed it in our hands. With growth has come the possibility to focus on vocations and supporting our parishes in new ways. I have seen churches filled with people; one that stood out was a weeknight Presanctified Liturgy in Ashland. The Chancellor, the Deans, and I are preparing to meet the challenges ahead proactively. The Diocese is working as a team with support from all sides. It is especially good to see the work to support Seminarians to complete their full formation. I have seen the dedication and work of the seminarians firsthand, and it is admirable. By investing in our seminarians, we are investing in our future. I continue to be invited to teach courses remotely, and I am finding that the connection this keeps to St. Vladimir's Seminary is beneficial. Of course, I serve as a member of the Holy Synod of Bishops and have just returned from our regular Spring session. I have been appointed to two commissions on the Synod, one being the commission on External Affairs headed by His Beatitude and I have been appointed to chair the commission on canons and statutes. I was invited by His Beatitude to attend the memorial of Patriarch Ilya of Georgia, who was a towering figure. This was a good opportunity to meet many hierarchs of other Churches. The Orthodox Church of Georgia unquestionably recognizes our autocephaly and it is good to further our connection with that venerable Church. I also greeted His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople while



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there. The Holy Synod accepted the semi-retirement of His Eminence, Archbishop Alexander from his ministry in the Diocese of the South, with elections to be held later this year to fill that see. In closing, I look forward to continuing the good work we are doing and am grateful for your help.

Chancellor's Report: The Chancellor's report is attached.

In questions for His Grace and Fr. Kirill, David Lane noted that the OCA gives grants to missions, but there has not been an application from the DOW in recent memory. Fr. Kirill Sokolov noted that the upcoming adjustments in requirements will make it easier for us to qualify to apply. Priest Daniel Lattier asked if the council and leadership had any ideas or suggestions on things to do to avoid problems addressed by ORSMA as we grow. Fr. Kirill Sokolov offered some advice and reminders about our mandatory procedures and policies. David Lane spoke about recent legislative changes and reminded all of that all parishes and institutions must keep insurance paperwork available forever along with objective notes during any investigations (kept separately from confidential counseling notes).

Treasurer's Report: Remittances are at 48% of annual budget, as of end of April. Much of this is remittance reconciliation from 2025. Surplus of \$200,000 for 2026 as of now. Renewed the \$600,000 invested in OCCIF with an annual interest of \$21,000 (with two bi-annual payments of 10.5k). We have about 10 parishes who have not submitted, but they are in contact with their deans. Grants from the Lilly Endowment including the upcoming Faith & AI opportunity now require External Audit or Review. We can use part of the funded planning grant for the external review this year; this external review will need to be completed every year. This year cost is approximately \$15k (following years likely less, once established in process), and Matushka Theodora has engaged a firm in Colorado Springs to do this review. Once completed, our internal Audit Committee will go over the review for our annual internal audit. Important reminder to keep in mind the commitments that we already have in place as we move forward with enthusiasm to fund new ministry.

Finance Committee: The Finance Committee makes motion below. The parish in Chico asks for a "bridge loan" to get them over the line to purchase this church. Timeline and turnaround are expected to be fast.

MOTION: Finance Committee moves that for Saints Cyril and Methodist Church in Chico, California, the Diocese of the West will provide a loan of \$375,000.00 towards the purchase of property located at 355 Panama in Chico, California. The full amount will be repaid in 6 months at 0% interest accrued. The Finance Committee is delegated to reevaluate the terms after 6 months if their current property is not yet sold.

SECOND: N/A

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY



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Deans and Deanery Updates: (assignments, changes, and good news)

- *Rocky Mountain Deanery, Archpriest Andreas Blom:* St. John mission in Colorado Springs is looking like it will be able to take over its own mortgage this year, which is years ahead of what we had expected. The new temple for St. Anthony's in Bozeman will be consecrated Aug 22nd. SLC Mission moving ahead. Working towards new plans for Holy Protection Monastery (CO) as Mother Cassiana is aging and looking to move to assisted living. An upcoming graduate from St Tikhon's is slated to be assigned to Holy Dormition Church, Calhan, CO. Our camp in RMD is running out of space; perhaps we will need to add a second week.
- *Pacific Southwest Deanery, Archpriest Michael Anderson:* Fr. Michael Anderson spoke about transitions and noted that a Deanery Retreat is being scheduled for July 6-8, 2026. He noted challenges in two parishes.
- *Pacific Central Deanery, Archpriest Lawrence Margitich:* Eureka is growing and thriving, and the temple has had many critical repairs. Leadership in the parish is excellent and supportive. Archpriest Andrew Jacobs, at St Silouan mission Marysville, has expressed interest in retiring. Chico is in process of acquiring new church; they have many catechumens. Many updates and baptisms in Concord. Archpriest Peter Fermeglia is working on fundraising and a new capital campaign. Many priests and clergy are serving with me in Santa Rosa; next door is Home of Mercy.
- *Pacific Northwest Deanery, Archpriest Stephen Soot:* Updates on Bend, a new priest has been placed, Priest Mark Solomon. Fr. Mark coming to Bend from Alaska is a real gift. They had more than 25 baptisms this Pascha season, someone has donated land for building a church. Indebted to Archpriest Damian Kuolt and Archpriest Irenaeus Williams for their labors during this transition. Gig Harbor camp going ahead this summer for our Deanery.

Youth and Camps: St. Eugene's Camp is full! Bozeman work week is happening this summer, as well.

Legal: Have received intermittent communications from an individual threatening to sue, insurance company is on alert.

Compliance/Background Checks: Brittany Yeager reported that everyone is doing well responding to requests and asked that we please make sure the retired clergy know background checks are still required in retirement status.

Retired Clergy Fellowship: No report.



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Clergy Wives Fellowship: Matushka Elizabeth Powell has shared the two events coming up: lunch at Diocesan Assembly and November Clergy Wives Retreat in Manton, and asked for a blessing. His Grace noted that he has extended his blessing.

Metropolitan Council and Pension Plan: A written report was previously submitted.

Charities: No report.

Thriving Parishes Project Update: Monthly Zoom modules with guest speakers happening, for instance Fr Evan Armatas, Jonathan Pageau, etc. In person gathering in October at Diocesan Assembly. All positive feedback from the young adult events connected with the TPP. Interestingly, our young adults have shared that they have no interest in “virtual” or Zoom meetings but great appreciation for in person events. Last week we hosted a young adult event for people to connect, 40 people attended.

Home of Mercy: Fr. Lawrence Margitich shared that Fr. Damian Kuolt is living in a manufactured home and taking care of the property where Abp Benjamin also resides with his father. Large expenses recently; Holy Thursday the well pump stopped working. Also purchased an electric sit-down mower and worked on tree trimming. Many maintenance fixes. I would suggest current board be considered as a transition board until settles and a new board appointed could be helpful as the board’s work has stagnated. There will be a fundraising need in the future. Fr. Lawrence suggested that he share names and work on this with the Bishop. His Grace noted that he would like the Diocesan Council to discuss how to best provide for Abp Benjamin as time moves forward; he would like to see preparation for that conversation. Matushka Theodora noted the Diocese still has a life insurance policy for His Eminence.

Other Old Business: Fr. Michael Anderson preparing to reserve a space for the Diocesan Priest Retreat late May 2027 (17-20 or the week after), San Luis Rey Mission San Diego.

New Business:

- Nominating Committee for the Diocesan Assembly. His Grace Bishop Vasily appoints Fr. Kirill Sokolov, Archpriest David Morrison, and Katie Huff to this year’s nominating committee.
- Salt Lake City Mission: Fr Peter Runyon expresses his gratitude for the Diocesan Council supporting. They were able to visit SLC together and experienced many positive interactions within the community. The Working Group for the SLC Mission includes Fr. Kirill Sokolov, Fr. Andreas Blom, and Fr. Peter Runyon. Met with representatives from other denominations and churches. The Antiochian Diocese, beginning with His Grace, Bishop Anthony and continuing with the local pastor have been supportive and the local pastor agreed with current thinking that Utah County be the location of our upcoming mission.



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Working on the financial and growth expectations, capital expenditures, facility and location, Diocesan support and expectations. If parishes have any extra liturgical items (robes, books etc.) in good shape, can be way to support the mission. The decision was made in October and the work commenced and now we have something happening. St. Peter the Aleut property sale has been slated to support the mission financially. The SLC mission will have its first year of budget managed by the DOW (Matushka Theodora). The Council noted its approbation for this work and the continuing measures around implementation with a round of applause.

- Fr George Khristich has been with Calhan CO and done a great job supporting the parish. As his assignment comes to an end, there, there is a suggestion that the Diocese employ him as a Diocesan Missionary – not parish specific – with regards to his R-1 Visa. Fr. Andreas Blom suggests the DOW supports him moving to another mission, Helena MT. Fr. Andreas believes could be very good fit for Helena and jumpstart that mission’s growth.

MOTION: Fr. Andreas Blom makes a motion to direct the Finance committee to work with the District Dean and St. Moses Mission in Helena, MT to develop a compensation package for Diocesan Missionary Fr George Khristich.

SECOND: CATHERINE MABUS **PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

- A next mission that may be ready for similar support is Sequim, WA. The Diocese continues to work to support growing and struggling parishes. Fr. Kirill Sokolov noted that we are limited by the availability of vocations.
- Open Discussion on Diocesan Assembly preparation and decisions, Seminarian support, Priest Cohort Formation & “Chicago” Midwest/St Tikhon’s model. The robust discussion resulted in a consensus that we should prepare a comprehensive and bold initiative to “meet the moment” for the consideration of the 2026 Diocesan Assembly with elements to include more complete seminarian support, intentional support for missions, support for currently serving pastors and their families.
- Financial Health Initiative with coordination of other Diocese has been very successful, with Office of Pastoral Life.

MOTION: Fr Stephen Soot makes a motion for a one-time payment of \$24,000 to the Office of Pastoral Life in the year of 2026.

SECOND: DOROTHY NOWIK **PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

- Closing remarks by Bp Vasily: Gratitude to the Chancellor and everyone for their good works. I can sense that we all have a common goal and vision for the future of the Church.



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Next Meeting: Wednesday, Aug. 13, 10:30am via Zoom. The last meeting of this year's Diocesan Council is scheduled for Oct. 20th, 4pm in Colorado Springs immediately prior to the Diocesan Assembly.

Closing Prayer: "Shine shine..." Meeting adjourned at 2:45pm

Submitted by: Katie Huff, Diocesan Council Secretary

**Report of the Chancellor of the Diocese of the West
to the Diocesan Council
May 6, 2026**

Your Grace, Bishop Vasily,
Dear Fathers, Brothers, and Sisters:

Christ is risen!

Since our last meeting on January 21, the Lord has blessed us to reach the annual celebration of His Pascha. The big news is that the Lord is risen and has appeared to Simon (Luke 24:34) and He continues to be the great high priest and archpastor of the Holy Orthodox Church (*Reception of Converts*). Mercifully and powerfully, humans keep finding the Orthodox Church and our parishes. We baptized and received hundreds of believers into our parishes at the end of Lent. Glory to God for all things.

Our Diocese is certainly in a moment. We Christians strive to be sober, attentive, and humble. And we try to live and work in the *now* of God. But humbly, *now* is a moment in which the Church is in fact growing. I don't want to be in a position of idolizing numbers or statistics but if humility is seeing things as they really are, a lot of our parishes really are bigger than they have ever been. When what is now our Diocese was the American Missionary Diocese, parishes were required to report attendance for every service to the equivalent of the Diocesan Council. With some touchpoints like the Cathedral we're meeting under today, it seems humble to note with gratitude to God that our parishes are truly serving more individuals than ever before.

And so, I do believe that the humble, sacrificial, and trusting thing to do is to try to meet this moment. Perhaps some of the meetings of past years and decades that were dominated more by worry or caution or prudence or even over threat were preparatory for this moment. God knows, but the reality is that our relative financial health and a providential coming together of various factors lead me to begin my report by stressing my own personal conviction that we could choose as a Diocese, as a locality of the Body of Christ, to be bold. We could choose to embody our calling as the Orthodox Church in the American West by opening up bottlenecks to the Gospel being even more effectively proclaimed.

To this end, I would like to suggest that all of us – as our meeting today progresses – lift up in prayer and thought the needs of the Church now and in the near future. Our Diocese runs on a calendar from Diocesan Assembly to Diocesan Assembly. My request for this Council is to look forward to the October Diocesan Assembly in Colorado Springs and to consider how we might boldly meet the moment. Can we unite even more people to the Holy Church? What stands in our way of more people experiencing the love of Christ in healthy, strong parishes?

There are a lot of answers to this question but, to me, the analysis always comes back to people. To vocations. To leadership and talent. To seminarians and pastors to be more specific. A parish with a competent leader-pastor in *this* moment seems to thrive, thanks to God. When our district deans and officers “retreated” on this question over the last two days, we discussed the possibility of this Diocesan Council boldly drafting a plan to meet the moment that could be presented for prayerful consideration at the Diocesan Assembly.

Meanwhile, finding priests for parishes and the related web of decision trees has taken a lot of our time. We welcome Priest Mark Solomon to the Diocese of the West who is taking up his ministry in Bend, Oregon, effective May 1. We have the potential assignment graduating seminarian Dn. Tikhon Krueger around July 1 in Calhan, Colorado. This frees up one of our missionary and flexible priests, Fr. George Khristich. In an environment where all of the Orthodox Churches and Dioceses face a clergy shortage, having a flexible priest available for placement in challenging situations is a great opportunity for this Diocese.

With two parish-level grants unrelated to diocesan work, graduating seminarian Alexei Listvinsky will be placed as a lay church growth director here at the Cathedral.

Regrettably, we have no other graduates from the seminaries this year.

As with Fr. Mark Solomon and Fr. George Khristich, we are buoyed by transfers in from other dioceses. Archpriest Alexander Cadman, an incredibly talented priest and administrator, is scheduled to come to the West this Summer.

It seems that God is blessing us in this moment with the opportunity to start missions anywhere we might be minded to if we had unlimited

resources. One of the most exciting efforts I've ever been involved with is the Salt Lake City area mission. Again, thanks to God, we've identified a priest to lead that effort from within our ranks [...]. In line with this Council's decisions, we have also posted for a part time choir director or, better yet, a full time Catechist-Choir Director for what will be a true adventure.

In addition to our seminarians, [Fr. Kirill spoke extemporaneously on the following]

- PFC...
- Young Adult Summit
- Last weekend Young Adult Gathering at HTC
- TPP
- Leading to "Growing in Faith in an Age of Artificial Intelligence" grant initiative
- Exploring Christian Practices grant initiative
- Support for existing priests

Certainly, our Diocese is benefiting from the breadth of the visitations and oversight and care of His Grace, our Bishop Vasily. He has been tireless in his travels and it has been remarkable to observe how carefully and conscientiously he is getting to know everyone and into the "nitty gritty" of diocesan life.

His Eminence, emeritus Archbishop Benjamin continues to reside at Home of Mercy. He seems weaker to me but is for sure still himself. I know he appreciates visitors and connection with the beautiful community of St. Seraphim Cathedral in Santa Rosa.

We currently have two open ORSMA investigations in the Diocese. While this will only occupy a sentence or two in this report since they are ongoing investigations with the support of the national office, it's important for me to share once in a while that these kinds of matters take an inordinate amount of time and energy.

My report in January included more comprehensive statistics and also statements of appreciation to all of my coworkers on every level of diocesan life. Those all stand and then some. I am grateful for the addition of PFC student Priest Gregory Hanson who is a wonderful

addition to our small team here at Holy Trinity Cathedral; his presence allows me to contemplate chancellor travel and to be more effective. In addition to his pastoral work at Holy Trinity, we brought him on board at the Diocese to do the church health survey work and followup with our TPP parishes that was a major part of Andrew Smith's ministry with TPP. We are also actively seeking temporary administrative support for the diocesan office so that Brittany can turn more of her talent to the TPP. Even with these additions, we are somewhat understaffed on TPP even before contemplating other grant work.

I'm confident that I have neglected to report on critical efforts and contributions that ought to have been in this report. I hope you will forgive some "Oh by the way..." interjections as we go along.

The Diocese of the West is an incredible place to serve. Behind a veneer of tiredness, I want to say again and again how much of a blessing it is to serve in a Church that is growing and clear-minded in its mission. We have a bit of an arc happening: 2025 was a year of big transitions; 2026 is a year of building capacity and of course "getting to know" our bishop. I believe that the Diocese can use 2026 to poise itself to really *meet the moment* that God is sending His Church in the American West. We have a lot to accomplish today but I would be thrilled to come out of our conversations today with a mandate for our Diocesan Assembly in October. We have almost half a year to prepare for this, still, but it seems clear to me that we are called to meet the moment by really investing in the people and capacity that God calls to serve His Church. The Lord is blessing us with growth in our parishes all over the place at the same time that he has blessed us with financial and other resources (with great gratitude to all worked to get us on this footing). Until 1917 this cathedral and its daughter parishes were part of the American Missionary Diocese. As we've grown, this missionary DNA is not just a "part" of us but who we are. I'm thrilled to keep have this conversation today and, in the months, to come, God helping us.

Christ is risen!

Respectfully Submitted, in Christ,

Archpriest Kirill Sokolov
Chancellor, Diocese of the West
Orthodox Church in America