

Holy Ghost-St George
Monday March 1, 2021
Via Zoom

Participants:

Fr John Kreta, facilitator, (Chancellor, Diocese of New England [DNE]); Igumen Nikodhim (Preston) Chancellor, Albanian Archdiocese [AlbA]); *From St George Church*: Bill Kovachi, Gregory Buzi, Laura Chadwick, Laura Coughlin, Peter Dacey, Bob Lazar. *From Holy Ghost Church*: Fr John Jillions, LoveAnn Curran, Mark Curran, Richard Jankura, George Kasper, David Lepesko, Ruth Sencio.

Notes

1. Fr JK opened the meeting at 6:30 pm with prayer and welcomed Fr NP as newly appointed Chancellor of the AlbA.
2. Fr JK reported on the DNE Diocesan Council meeting (2/23/21) which considered the HG-SG report of 1/28/21 and the request for blessing continued steps toward unifying the parishes. The council was enthusiastic about the need for the diocese to consider consolidating parishes given the decline in parishioners and shortage of clergy across the DNE (and the OCA generally). In the DNE no new mission has been started in 26 years. The diocese is developing a strategic plan that will include consolidations and putting resources toward missions. Although the HG-SG initiative is to be encouraged, there was some reluctance to approve anything concrete, given uncertainties about the ultimate direction of the two parishes and the hurdle of dealing with two dioceses, neither of which wants to “lose” a parish. And neither diocese has authority to make decisions involving the other diocese. While creative thinking will be needed, it was agreed that the parishes should continue working together, making plans, and formally reporting on progress at every meeting of the Diocesan Council.
3. Fr NP reported on the AlbA Diocesan Council meeting (2/25/21) and its reaction to the HG-SG report. While they were curious and felt conversations should continue, for most this was all new. Some expressed concern about the potential “loss” of a parish, given that they are a very small diocese. Bottom line: there is interest in pursuing the project but in a non-binding way for the time being. This wasn’t negative or antagonistic, just expressing due concern. The more information is shared between the parishes and dioceses, the more everyone will be at ease. BK had attended the council meeting as well and agreed with Fr NP’s assessment. FrNP will add a report on HG-SG progress to the agenda of AlbA Council meetings. Fr JK and NP will consider bringing HG-SG reps to the respective diocesan council meetings, so that both dioceses may become more familiar with both parishes. It was generally agreed that there needs to be transparency between both dioceses.
4. Fr JK noted that HG and SG also need transparency with their parishioners, so that no one is uninformed about developments. The pandemic has made this more of a challenge but going forward we need to ensure that parishioners are aware and that all questions can be brought into the open.
5. Question arose about Fr Sergei Bouteneff’s involvement, since he has been serving de facto as SG’s pastor while technically being a retired supply priest. Fr NP will review the situation at SG, speak with Fr Sergei and consider next steps.
6. DL noted the need for in-person meetings, perhaps in small groups, to gauge parishioners’ views and share information. RS also noted that HG would be embarking on an assessment of parish health as part of strategic planning. Fr NP agreed that meetings will help put fears to rest. PD said that we were going in the right direction but the pandemic interfered. Fr JK agreed and said we now need to start reintroducing ourselves.

7. There was discussion of the potential timeline, some wanting union as soon as possible given the urgency, and others willing to take more time. Fr NP said he understands the pressure of finances and demographics, but speed is not the way to bring about the right decision. Fr JK emphasized that the decision is ultimately up to the hierarchs, whose discernment we need to trust. BK wondered if there could be a “phasing in” process, allowing each parish to remain for a time in its own diocese while the two parishes continue growing together and having joint services.
8. Fr NP suggested that an independent assessment of the financial health of each parish and its projected prospects into the future would help focus the parishes very practically and then help in the joint planning process for taking next steps.
9. **Agreed actions:**
 - 1) **Fr NP will review the history of these conversations, the current situation at SG and Fr Sergei Bouteneff’s position and consider next steps from perspective of the AlbA.**
 - 2) **FrNP will add a report on HG-SG progress to agenda of AlbA Council meetings.**
 - 3) **Fr JK and NP will consider bringing HG-SG reps to the respective diocesan council meetings, so that both dioceses may become more familiar with both parishes.**
 - 4) **Bill Kovachi will work with Dave Lepesko to find an independent financial consultant to assess the projected financial health of both parishes over the next decade (appointment of the consultant to be approved by both parish councils).**
 - 5) **Fr JJ will arrange with Fr Sergei possible joint services (Presanctified, Sundays) and study group.**
 - 6) **Parishes will continue to share their calendars, bulletins and Facebook postings.**
10. Next meeting: Monday, May 24, 2021, 6:30 pm.
11. Fr JK asked Fr NP to end the meeting with a prayer, around 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Fr John A. Jillions