

May 1, 2025
Holy Prophet Jeremiah

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Diocese of the West

Dearly beloved in Christ,

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!

We write to you, the beloved faithful of this God-protected Diocese, to share important news and to seek your prayerful participation in a moment of great significance for its life.

Retirement of His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin

On this day in 2004, our Archbishop was consecrated to the holy episcopacy to serve as Bishop of Berkeley and Auxiliary for the Diocese of the West. In 2007, he became the ruling hierarch of San Francisco and the West. Since that time, we have been blessed with his guidance at the helm of our Diocese. In 2021, His Eminence announced to the Diocese that he had been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. He has since continued his active travel schedule to be present as much as possible with the more than sixty parishes and missions and eight monasteries entrusted to his archpastoral care. In the last few years, the adult census of the Diocese has grown by almost 20%.

In December, the Holy Synod of Bishops of our Orthodox Church in America announced the upcoming retirement of His Eminence, our Archbishop Benjamin, to take effect on July 15, 2025, the second day of the 21st All-American Council in Phoenix, AZ. We all have observed with loving concern the toll Parkinson's has taken on His Eminence and are grateful to God that he will have the opportunity to retire. The Diocese has worked closely with its Home of Mercy charity to ensure that an appropriate housing option is available for His Eminence. It is located next door to St. Seraphim Cathedral in Santa Rosa. We will continue to benefit from his wisdom, guidance, and prayer.

After his two decades of faithful service as a hierarch in our Diocese, we will have two formal opportunities to honor His Eminence: a dinner celebration in Santa Rosa, CA, on Sunday, June 29, 2025, and a luncheon banquet at the All-American Council on July 15, 2025. *Please purchase your ticket for both events at dowoca.org.*

Special Nominating Assembly to be Convened

The regular 2025 Diocesan Assembly will be held **Friday, July 18, from 1:00-4:00 pm**, directly following the conclusion of the All-American Council in Phoenix, AZ.

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon has blessed us to announce that a Special Nominating Assembly for the next Bishop of San Francisco and the West will be convened on **Wednesday, July 16, at 1:00 pm**, also in conjunction with the All-American Council.

As indicated in our bylaws, your lay delegate(s) are elected for *all* assemblies held in a calendar year, including this Special Nominating Assembly.

What happens at the Nominating Assembly?

The Special Nominating Assembly is chaired by His Beatitude or a Hierarch of the Holy Synod designated by His Beatitude as a “Locum Tenens” for our Diocese (See *Statute of the Orthodox Church in America*, Article VIII, Section 7). There is one agenda item: nominating a candidate as Diocesan Bishop. The practice in recent years established by the Holy Synod is that the Diocese is sent a letter outlining who is vetted and thus eligible to be nominated. The Locum Tenens submits the nominee to the Holy Synod which, if it accepts the nomination, would canonically elect the candidate.

What then?

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, has blessed us to prepare for the **Consecration or Installation of our next bishop on Saturday, August 16, 2025, in San Francisco**. Tickets to the Consecration Banquet and other logistical details will be made available on the Diocesan website, dowoca.org. We expect His Beatitude, hierarchs from our Holy Synod, and hierarchs from other sister Churches to attend to ordain our next bishop.

In the almost-month between the canonical election and the ordination of the new bishop (assuming he is not of episcopal rank) the Diocese would be led by the Locum Tenens and administered day-to-day by the Bishop-Elect along with the Chancellor and other officers of the Diocese.

Nominating Committee

For matters related to this transition and the pending Nominating Assembly, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon naturally provides the Chancellor and Diocesan Council with guidance and direction. His Beatitude’s office has notified the Diocese to formally begin the process of nominating a successor to His Eminence.

In light of that mandate, Fr. Vitaly (who has since been tonsured with the monastic name Fr. Vasily) Permiakov, Ph.D., was invited to speak with the Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Tuesday, December 10, 2024, and with the full Diocesan Council on Wednesday, December 11.

The Chancellor's Advisory Committee – which is made up of the district deans and diocesan officers – was designated by the Diocesan Council to serve as a Nominating Committee of the Diocesan Council.

This was not the first time, for many of us, to meet Fr. Vasily. We feel that it is important to say that Fr. Vasily was identified (unbeknownst to him) by His Beatitude and His Eminence as a potential episcopal candidate for the West several years ago. He was intentionally given opportunities to be with us in our Diocese on a number of occasions including speaking at our Missions Retreat, teaching at our Diaconal Practicum, and visiting parishes. Several of us studied with him in Seminary and a number of us have had him as professor in our own seminary studies.

Our long format conversations with him – first at the Advisory/Nominating Committee and then at the Diocesan Council – were helpful in this unique moment. During our conversations, he edified and inspired us with his thoughtful, candid, and spiritually grounded answers to our questions. He likewise encouraged us by asking profound and discerning questions of his own, demonstrating a heartfelt interest in the spiritual life, the pastoral challenges, and the growth of our Diocese.

Both the Nominating Committee and the full Diocesan Council were extremely gratified by these conversations. Questions were raised – not about Fr. Vasily himself, but about proper process – about whether other candidates were available for similar discussions. Certain names were proposed and the Council directed the Chancellor to ask His Beatitude about these specific individuals.

In a detailed and thorough discussion with His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, His Beatitude indicated that the two names suggested by our Council would not be available for the office of Bishop of San Francisco. He encouraged the Diocese to continue in dialogue with Fr. Vasily and to very seriously consider nominating him at our Assembly.

Since then, we have continued to grow our relationship and communication with Fr. Vasily. Since those meetings, he has been tonsured a monk. We were impressed that – unprompted and without organization – Father's students and colleagues from St. Vladimir's travelled *en masse* to St. Tikhon's Monastery for his tonsuring by Archimandrite Sergius along with students and colleagues from his time at Holy Trinity Seminary in Jordanville, NY. At the Spring Session of the Holy Synod of Bishops, as a testament to their

support of Fr. Vasily's growth in servant leadership and responsibility in the Church, the hierarchs of the Holy Synod elevated Fr. Vasily to the distinction of Archimandrite, the highest rank amongst monastic priests. His Eminence, Archbishop Daniel liturgically raised him to this high office on Lazarus Saturday.

Recommendation of Your Diocesan Council

While it may seem counterintuitive to only have one vetted candidate available for our consideration, the Diocesan Council, meeting at its regular meeting on April 30 at Holy Trinity Cathedral in San Francisco, has decided to write this letter to the entire Diocese of the West to express our considered thoughts, as your representatives, on this momentous duty to nominate a bishop. Having witnessed his humility, pastoral sensitivity, theological depth, and love for Christ and His Holy Church, the Diocesan Council, in unity and with sincere conviction, **wholeheartedly endorses the nomination of Archimandrite Vasily.**

Accordingly, we warmly and respectfully **encourage the clergy and lay delegates of the Diocese** to prayerfully consider, and to **submit the name of Archimandrite Vasily for nomination** at the Special Assembly.

Our Hopes

Change can be difficult, and we realize that we as a Diocese are relatively unused to uncertainty — after all, even before his election, Archbishop Benjamin was received into Orthodoxy in this Diocese, served as a choir director, the archdeacon and administrative assistant, camp director, cathedral dean, and vicar bishop. Yet we do believe that Fr. Vasily's humble and unassuming nature is of utmost importance for a man who must "rightly divide the word of God's truth." Having a true theologian, one steeped in the knowledge and love of the Divine Services, will benefit this Diocese which has forged a reputation for liturgical excellence and vitality. We are impressed by how his students confide in and turn to Fr. Vasily for counsel, and more recently but remarkably, for the healing sacrament of Confession.

We believe that the love and pastoral care that Fr. Vasily has shown to his seminarians and the conciliarity and care he has demonstrated in his collaborations with his colleagues on two seminary faculties will grow into a leadership style in the Diocese of the West marked by archpastoral love and devotion to us, the clergy and faithful. We are confident that given his humility and openness that the "Holy Spirit will supply that which is lacking." He will take the time to understand the ethos of the Diocese of the West as he assumes the authority of this high office. In so doing he will be considerate and respectful of its past, while bringing new insight and vision to its future.

In this process, we are seeking not to have an “election” but to allow ourselves to be assembled by the grace of the Holy Spirit to take part in this work of the Holy Spirit – in the Church – as is our theological vision of cooperation between the hierarchs, clergy, and laity. Ultimately, the hierarchs of the Holy Synod of Bishops will choose our next archpastor. We are buoyed by the strong endorsement Archimandrite Vasily has received from His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin, who has been clear on a number of occasions that he hopes we nominate Fr. Vasily and has expressed his trust that he can pass the responsibility for this Diocese, which he loves, to him.

Let us commend this sacred process to the grace of the Holy Spirit, praying that the Lord Himself will raise up a faithful shepherd for His flock in the Diocese of the West – one who will guide us in truth, love, and steadfastness in the Orthodox Faith.

May the Risen Christ grant wisdom and unity to all of us in the days ahead.

With love in the Risen Lord,

(the members of the Diocesan Council and Nominating Committee meeting on April 30, 2025)

Archpriest Michael Anderson
Archpriest Andreas Blom
Matushka Theodora Blom
Archpriest Andrew Cuneo
Archpriest John Dresko
Priest Edward Henderson
Ms. Katie Huff
Mr. David Lane
Priest Daniel Lattier
Archpriest David Lowell
Ms. Catherine Mabus
Archpriest Lawrence Margitich
Archpriest David Morrison
Ms. Dorothy Nowik
Priest Peter Runyon
Archpriest Lawrence Russell
Priest Andrew Smith
Archpriest Kirill Sokolov
Archpriest Stephen Soot