

Report on Fall 2014 Metropolitan Council Meeting

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Overall this council meeting had more action and forward movement than usual. Many items of old business are being taken care of, and new initiatives are being set in motion. This report will not follow a chronological sequence, but give some highlights of the meeting.

Metropolitan's Report: Metropolitan Tikhon, through his interactions with various clergy and faithful this past year, has seen a need to focus on three main areas in the Church: clergy health, evangelization and missions, and seminaries and monasteries. He has called a meeting of all the monastery leaders (attended by about 2/3 of them) and met with the deans and chancellors of all the seminaries to see where these institutions can be better supported and integrated into the Church.

Also, of course, he has done a lot of traveling and interacting to represent our Church on the national scene. He is clearly serious about Orthodox unity and autocephaly in America.

Additionally, **Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky**, as **our external affairs director**, gave an **informal report** which made clear that he is very active in a variety of venues and organizations on behalf of the church. He said something I feel is worth quoting. "We must carry the flag for Orthodox unity in this country."

However, there seems to be a need for a more concrete strategy in this area. There is no public list of the organizations we belong to as the OCA, there is no public breakdown of how our OCA resources are spent on international relations, and so on. On the positive side, Metropolitan Tikhon does have this as an objective for 2015.

Fr. John Jillions, during his **Chancellors' Report**, highlighted the need for better communication at all levels of the church. We all know this is an ongoing problem for everyone. How to let people know what is going on without overloading everyone all the time is the problem, and unfortunately no one at the council had a revelation on how to solve it. The Chancellor did ask to be included on emails so that he could better advise the Metropolitan.

The main part of the Chancellor's report concerned the seminaries, and Fr. John's proposal to merge the seminaries' boards into one system of theological education for the whole country. His Beatitude tabled this proposal summarily, so the council did not discuss it.

Fr. Eric Tosi's **Secretary's Report** covered several topics. First, there is an **archives preservation project** going forward, with budgeting for hiring of preservation experts, facility upgrades or new facilities to house archives, and so on. Next, the old **OCA database** is in the process of being cleaned up and modernized. This may not seem to exciting but is. Data is an important tool for church communication and for evangelization, and is one of those old pieces of business that is finally clearing after years of being on the back burner. Other than internal concerns, the rest of Fr Eric's report concerned the upcoming **All American Council** plans. This will be in Atlanta in July 2015, and will include some innovations like electronic registration.

The AAC deserves its own little report. It will be held in conjunction with the FOCA convention, will include a youth program, and will feature voting on both Statute Reform and Finance Reform. We should start encouraging our diocesan delegates to attend NOW. July 20 - 24 2015.

The **Statute Reform** is a big deal, and also not a big deal. Much of the reform is language update; some of the reform is adding pieces to the statute to cover areas that simply didn't get covered by the original statute (eg: what's the status of chapels?); but **some** of the reform is really critical, like the finance part. So the Statute Revision Commission is working carefully, and the revised statute will be circulated for comment and feedback in January, so that delegates will be ready to vote in July.

Finance Reform, obviously, is being held back a bit by aforementioned statute reform. The Diocese of the West presented their most recent resolution to move to proportional support of the OCA. This makes two dioceses that are supporting the OCA this way - the South and the West. As long as the support does not fall below the "mandated" amount according to the census and statute, this is okay. But revision will be better...

Other things going on at the council:

In line with His Beatitude's focus on **evangelization**, in the coming year the OCA will sponsor a one week long **Mission School**. This will be funded by the income from a bequest that was left to the church for evangelization. Details of location, curriculum, etc will be worked out in the next few months.

Clergy continuing education has started. Results and compliance has been mixed amongst the dioceses, and implementation is not yet smooth, but the general idea has been well received and improvements are in the works in many areas. Generally the sense seems to be that this is a welcome way for clergy to remain connected to each other and their mission.

Giving through the **Stewards of the OCA** exceeded initial expectations. The **Financial Development** committee (on which both Fr. John Shimchik and I serve) will continue to work to improve membership in the Stewards, and to sponsor other focused fundraising efforts.

A BALANCED BUDGET was adopted for 2015. The budget lowered assessments to \$90 per person, included additional parish planting grants (as well as retaining all existing ones) and also added a small amount to support seminaries. Council also adopted a resolution by the Finance Committee (on which I serve) to **implement an investment plan for the OCA's financial assets**. This will help fund the budget, the Mission School, and so on.

The **Office for the Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations** report was encouraging. There are fewer open cases, and the time cases are open is way down - from months to weeks. There is a place on the OCA website for parishes to access resources to help prevent problem, but standards for obtaining background checks on personnel and so on need to be maintained by parishes. This means the financial burden falls on them, which hampers good compliance with these standards.

Dr. Albert Rossi also spoke for the policy advisory committee. He mentioned an **workshop of Fr. John Parker's about having a porn-free parish!** What a great idea. He also talked about resources for clergy and faithful who had difficulties with sexual issues. We need this stuff.

With an estimated 20,000 **Orthodox Christians in the US military** (about 1.5% of the 1.3 million soldiers) our **chaplains** have a big job. They presented a proposal for funding for packets of material for soldiers (Bible, cross, icon card, etc), and portable communion items. These were not included in the budget for 2015. There was some discussion of how returning soldiers and chaplains were ministered to in the church.

Following the general air of "clean-up" and clearing of old business:

- the Legal Affairs committee has cleared several old cases, and seems not to have any new ones pending. Let's listen to the Lord and not sue each other!
- the Internal Governance committee of the MC is looking to restructure the committees of the council to make it more responsive and efficient.
- ORSMA reported that all "old" misconduct files which were under question because of new rules had been revisited and dealt with. Only two presented any possible problem.
- the Chancery will be hiring a temporary, part-time person to deal with data entry, to expedite the data base clean up. This is a good use of funds for a specific purpose.
- Fr. Eric has pro-actively started working on ideas for realigning Chancery functions more efficiently so that there are not departments, and committees, and offices, and so on. This dovetails with the work of the Reorganization Task Force, of which Fr. John Shimchik and I are both members.

There was also animated general discussion at several points in the meeting on the general direction of the Church. We need to have a clear, unified voice on the moral and spiritual issues of our world and our time to show to this country and our world. Many members of the Metropolitan Council expressed strong concern that our Church be a strong and active leader, rather than being seen as indecisive or divided in our message. While no "conclusion" can be reached on topics of this nature, the discussions were good ones to have with our bishops and fellow workers in the Church. All in all, this was a fruitful and highly encouraging Metropolitan Council meeting.

One final note.....the new venue, at the a former Catholic Seminary, was both less expensive, and far more pleasant and conducive to good work, than the previous venue. Kudos to Fr. Eric and Fr. Chad Hatfield on the change.

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