

**REPORT ON THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
PREPARED FOR THE ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA (OCA) – DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY
SS. PETER & PAUL CHURCH, ENDICOTT, NY
NOVEMBER 1, 2017**

The Metropolitan Council (MC) of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), consisting of elected and appointed clergy and lay delegates from across the United States, Canada and Mexico, met twice this year at the beautiful and serene *Seminary of the Immaculate Conception* in Huntington, NY: on February 21-23 and on September 19-22. Both meetings were chaired by Metropolitan TIKHON. In addition to His Beatitude, all the officers of the OCA—Archpriest John Jillions, Chancellor; Archpriest Eric Tosi, Secretary; and Melanie Ringa, Treasurer—were present, along with two members of the Standing Synod of Bishops: His Eminence, Archbishop MICHAEL, and His Grace, Bishop PAUL. (**NOTE:** *Unfortunately, the third member of the Standing Synod, His Eminence, Archbishop BENJAMIN, was unable to attend either gathering, due to a death in the family and illness.*)

At both sessions, His Beatitude solemnly reflected on his five years as Primate, describing them as enjoyable, challenging, frustrating and humbling, all at the same time. This “transition period,” adjusting from diocesan bishop to Metropolitan, not only affected him personally, but gave him a much clearer sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the OCA. He did not dwell too much on the negatives; rather, he focused on the good things that have happened since his election in 2012: financial accountability, Synodal unity, adoption of the new OCA statute and a more committed and engaging Metropolitan Council. Whatever difficulties and obstacles may face him in the future, Vladika TIKHON feels that none of them is so great that the Holy Church cannot overcome them, through open and honest discussions; well-executed plans and solutions; and, above all, prayer.

With regard to his continuing work on the four “pillars” of Church life—spirituality, stewardship, evangelism/outreach and external relations—which were developed by him and introduced at the MC meeting in September 2015, Metropolitan TIKHON completed an initial draft of a publication expanding on his vision. Entitled *Of What Life Do We Speak*, this reflective document was given to each MC member for his/her review and comments before it is shared with the members of the Holy Synod for their feedback, as well.

On the first day of the September gathering, the members of the MC participated in a retreat to discuss plans for the upcoming 50th anniversary of the granting of autocephaly to the OCA and the canonization of Blessed Father Herman of Alaska as her first saint. Alexis Liberovsky, Archivist of the OCA, presented a most informative history of the Church. Three representatives of the delegation that went to receive the *Tomos of Autocephaly* from our Mother Church of Russia in May 1970 were invited to speak and share their memories on this historic event: Protospesbyter Daniel Hubiak, Mitred Archpriest John Nehrebecki and Constantine Kallaur. Afterwards, a “brainstorming” session was held to discuss possible events and activities to mark this occasion in 2020, including pilgrimages to Alaska by each of the dioceses; commissioning an updated icon of All Saints of America; and reissuing an updated version of the “Red Book,” the publication that provided a history of the OCA from 1794-1976, in commemoration of the Bicentennial of the US. An anniversary commission, made up of representatives from each diocese, will be formed to better coordinate this special celebration.

In his reports to the MC, Chancellor Archpriest John Jillions highlighted projects in progress, including updating the *Guidelines for Clergy Handbook*, based on practices within each diocese and its parishes, and the *Clergy Compensation Guideline Handbook*. Father John hopes the former will be completed by next year’s *All-American Council (AAC)*. Clergy peer learning groups have expanded from four to 28 within six dioceses. Development of peer groups for celibate priests and clergy wives are in the beginning stages. Pastoral care for sexual issues, such as gender identity, has arisen and needs to be addressed. Finally, four dioceses, including our own, have signed on with *Protect My Ministry*, a background checking company for full-time parish rectors and employees.

The MC received reports from Secretary Archpriest Eric Tosi, in which he proposed the acceptance of a corporate gift policy; a resolution granting signing and authority to conduct business of the OCA to each and every officer; and the adoption of a new travel reimbursement policy for MC members; all passed unanimously. The main roof of the Chancery was replaced. The new computer server was installed at the end of February. The redesigned website should be up by the beginning of 2018. The 3rd *Annual Mission School* was successfully held in August. A project to reintroduce the “Chaplain’s Cross” is in progress; this cross will be given to Orthodox military chaplains upon their retirement or return from a combat zone. And finally, the publication of a new metric book has been postponed, due to the sudden death of its project leader, Protodeacon Gregory Hatrak, in July.

Updates on the 19th *All-American Council*, scheduled for July 23-27, 2018 in St. Louis, MO, were also provided by Fr. Eric. With the blessing of the Holy Synod, the theme will be *For the Life of the World*, based on the book with the same title written by Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann of blessed memory; it is one of the most influential modern books on Orthodox theology and covers so much of what His Beatitude's four pillars speak about. This AAC will be based more on a diocesan structure rather than as a large diocesan assembly. This will be accomplished in two ways: (1) No parish will be assessed directly from the OCA; the diocese will be assessed based on a percentage of the income it provides to the National Church and then the diocese will assess its parishes (or not), as it deems proper; and (2) Two sessions will be dedicated to diocesan initiatives on the "*Four Pillars*" to be taken up and voted by the AAC as a whole. Retired clergy and their wives will not have to pay to attend. Funding delegates from Alaska and Mexico needs to be discussed. Finally, a proposed agenda was passed by the MC for approval by the Holy Synod.

Treasurer Melanie Ringa gave an in-depth financial disclosure elucidating the fiscal status of the Church. Despite being \$63,000 over in expenses, due to (1) the hiring of Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak as His Beatitude's full-time secretary; (2) increased travel expenses for the Metropolitan and; (3) psychological testing of candidates for the priesthood, the year 2016 budget ended with a \$26,000 surplus. Diocesan support was higher than expected, under the new proportional giving initiative. Also, the ethnic dioceses of the OCA—Albanian, Bulgarian & Romanian—all increased their contributions, even though there is nothing directed in the Statute for them to do so.

The projected balanced 2017 budget resulted in the Church being "in the black" by \$281,000; this was attributed to a \$13,000 surplus from diocesan support through proportional giving and expenses being \$41,000 under budget. A balanced budget of \$1.8 million for 2018 was presented and passed. (**NOTE:** *This does not include the AAC, which will have its own budget.*)

Internal and external audits were conducted for the year 2016; overall, there was no fraudulent activity. The independent auditors suggested changing reviews of the books from twice a year to just once; this recommendation will be given to the Statute Committee for approval at the AAC.

Reports were presented from the numerous MC committees, with each chairman reviewing the work that had been completed. Written and/or oral statements came from the following: Legal, Charity, Ethics, Human Resources, Internal Governance and Finance. The Charity Committee voted to give a \$1,000 donation to *International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC)* for its hurricane relief efforts. The Human Resources Chairman reiterated that the reorganization of the Chancery is progressing and detailed job descriptions of all employees were completed and waiting approval of His Beatitude. Under Internal Governance, a motion to accept the letter of engagement from *D'Arcangelo & Co. LLP* to be this year's auditors was unanimously passed. The Finance Chairman informed the MC that an investment policy for the OCA is in development and a move to change "assessment" to "diocesan support" is beginning. Particularly heartwarming was the motion that passed, with four obvious abstentions, to increase the salaries and benefits of the Metropolitan, Chancellor, Secretary and Treasurer by 2%, retroactive to January 1 of this year. Finally, a proposal is being examined to fund the Department of Missions with an innovative investment plan; more details are needed before taking action.

Although detailed reports of all the OCA departments were provided beforehand, the following sectors were invited to speak to the MC: Stewards of the Orthodox Church in America (SOCA), External Affairs, Christian Education, Christian Service & Humanitarian Aid, Pension Board and Evangelism. In his statement, SOCA Chairman Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak reported that since 2004, the OCA has given more than \$1 million to mission parishes and an SOCA Appeal Sunday has been scheduled for October. With regard to External Affairs, Protopresbyter Leonid Kishkovsky presented pointed summations on the OCA's ongoing efforts to be more visible worldwide, including a recent visit to India by our own Vladika MICHAEL; the involvement of Archpriest Peter Baktis, Rector of *Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow Mission* in Princeton, in US-Muslim relations; and our continued membership in the *World Council of Churches*, *Church World Services* and the *Assembly of Orthodox Canonical Bishops in the USA*, in which Archbishop MICHAEL was elected Treasurer. Matushka Valerie Zahirsky, Chair of the Department of Christian Education, gave a detailed presentation on the supplemental materials being developed for Church School and adult education. In her capacity as Chair of the Department of Christian Service & Humanitarian Aid, Donna Karabin focused on incorporating Orthodox living will documents into estate planning. In February, our Diocesan Treasurer, Matushka Mary Bulezta-Breton, as a representative of the Pension Board, discussed the latest developments within the plan and addressed any questions of those MC members in attendance. Finally, Fr. John Parker, Chair of the Department of Evangelism, proposed using a \$1 million unrestricted bequest to further his work.

In February, particular attention and concern were given to the report of the OCA Archives Advisory Committee, a group formed to study the housing needs of the Archives and to develop solutions mandated by decision of the Metropolitan Council at its Spring 2013 Session. Committee Secretary Alexis Liberovsky stated that Matushka Tamara Skvir was chosen to be the new chairman of the Committee, following the repose of Alexis Troubetzkoy. He also informed the MC that two college students were interested in interning at the Archives this summer. (*This did not come to fruition.*) The most pressing issue, however, continues to be the physical state of the Archives within the basement of the Chancery. Some improvements have been made, including sealing windows and installing monitors and activated carbon filtered units; unfortunately, more substantial work needs to be done (waterproofing and refinishing the walls and installing new lighting, an HVAC system and moveable shelving), considering that the Church will not be in any position to put the Archives into its own space for the foreseeable future. After a lengthy discussion, a motion was made by Treasurer Melanie Ringa to use money from a family's charitable remainder trust to preserve and restore the current Archives. The motion passed unanimously and the Metropolitan Council gave the Committee the authority to approve whatever work proposal was chosen.

After some legal complications, the proceeds from the trust were received and contracts were signed with structural engineering and architectural firms. The Archives are now closed to the public until the extensive remodeling and repairs are completed; in the interim, all documents and materials are being stored in pods located on the Chancery parking lot.

One last highlight of the September meeting was the unanimous approval by the MC to donate \$5,000 from the OCA operating budget to the Diocese of Mexico to be used for disaster relief in the aftermath of the recent earthquake. According to His Eminence, Archbishop ALEJO, our churches were not terribly affected, but many parishioners were left homeless.

Both sessions of the MC were conducted efficiently and effectively in an atmosphere of unity and friendliness. We thank all of you for your confidence and trust to serve as your delegates for the glory of Christ and His Church here in America.

Respectfully submitted,

Igumen Joseph Hoffman
Clergy Representative

James P. Kornafel
Lay Representative