

**REPORT ON THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL  
PREPARED FOR THE ANNUAL DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY  
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA (OCA) – DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY  
HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, EAST MEADOW, NY  
OCTOBER 31, 2019**

The Metropolitan Council (MC) of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), consisting of elected and appointed clergy and lay delegates from across the US, Canada and Mexico, met twice this year: on February 13-15 and on September 18-19. As part of our duties as diocesan clergy and lay representatives to this executive body of the Church Administration, we've prepared the following written report; hopefully, it'll give you a well-rounded idea of what the MC has accomplished this year.

Except for Day One of the fall gathering, both meetings were chaired by Metropolitan TIKHON. *(His Eminence, Archbishop BENJAMIN, served as Interim Chairman, so that His Beatitude and His Eminence, Archbishop MICHAEL, could attend the Executive Committee Meeting of the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America.)* They were planned to be extremely compact and efficient and that goal was reached without the loss of any spiritual depth or purpose. Apart from the Liturgy, which was celebrated at the Chancery chapel, all working sessions, with reports and presentations, took place at the *Seminary of the Immaculate Conception* in Huntington, NY.

In both of his reports, Metropolitan TIKHON spoke on many issues regarding the life of the OCA and its future. Emphasis was placed on the ongoing restructuring of the Chancery. In February, His Beatitude formally welcomed Archpriest Alexander Rentel as the new Chancellor and just last month, he warmly introduced Andrew Smith as the new Treasurer. The other officer position—Chancery Administrator (new title replacing *Secretary*)—has yet to be filled. Replacements are also needed for a Director of Communications, Technology Manager and Assistant to the Metropolitan. A new job—Media Manager—was also proposed to generate OCA content to be disseminated within social forums, such as *Instagram* and *Facebook*.

At the February meeting, the Internal Governance Committee, under the direction of Archpriest Kirill Sokolov, was tasked with revising the structure of the current MC committees. A series of motions were presented and unanimously approved by the MC in September, including (1) Merging the Ethics and Human Resources Committee into one entity; (2) Removing the Financial Development Committee from the MC Handbook and revising its job description; (3) Dissolving the Charity Committee and, in its place, establishing a discretionary line item in the budget for use by the Metropolitan, with the guidelines for handling these funds being drafted and reviewed by the MC; (4) Creating a Technology Committee to address broad questions of infrastructure, software & hardware selection and strategic direction; and (5) Instituting a Properties Committee to look into matters related to the management of the real property of the Church. The Metropolitan also decided that members of the MC will no longer be required to serve on a committee.

In February, the Metropolitan called for the appointment of a small Relocation Committee that was tasked with looking at moving the Chancery from its current home in Syosset to another place, possibly Washington, DC. Of course, any new locale would have to take into consideration a review of current assets and the patrimony of the OCA, as well as the Archives, which is currently undergoing a costly renovation. As Chairman of this committee, Chancellor Archpriest Alexander Rentel reported in September that, based on its current configuration, the Chancery cannot continue to function efficiently and properly in its present location. Legally, the Church is incorporated as a non-for-profit in NY State and can remain so, if the decision of the MC and Holy Synod is to move the National Headquarters to another jurisdiction or become licensed to do business somewhere else, including the Metropolitan's Archdiocese of Washington. The current chancery sits on 14.56 acres and an appraisal of the property was to have been received by Fr. Alexander before the end of September. Currently, the houses around it are on two acres and each one is valued between \$1.1-2.6 million.

In his last report in February as OCA Secretary, Archpriest Eric Tosi presented a list of possible candidate cities for the 20<sup>th</sup> All-American Council (AAC). Baltimore, MD was unanimously approved by the MC as the favored site and the Holy Synod blessed this choice at its Spring session this past May. The AAC is slated to convene July 26-30, 2021. Once again, the *Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA)* will hold its annual convention in conjunction with the AAC. The Pre-Conciliar Commission (PCC), under the chairmanship of Metropolitan TIKHON, was to have met formally for the first time on September 23 at the *Hilton Baltimore Inner Harbor Hotel* to tour the future site of the Council. Based on feedback received from the last AAC, His Beatitude will be proposing a few changes, including making lunch two hours instead of one; limiting the length of reports; providing time for open dialogue during the plenary sessions; and leaving one afternoon free for sightseeing and fellowship.

OCA Treasurer Andrew Smith, along with Accounting Manager Susan Wisnewski, presented financial results for the year ended December 31, 2018. Overall, the past year was a healthy one with respect to the general operations of the Church; a \$284,000 increase in overall net assets was realized, of which \$96,000 was an increase in unrestricted funds. Investment performance was down, based on normal market fluctuations. Andrew assured the MC that there was nothing to be worried about, as the first six months of 2019 have already shown an upswing. Interim results for fiscal year 2019 were substantially on target with respect to both overall revenue and expenses. The 2019 internal audit highlighted four areas for comment: (1) Credit card receipt documentation needs to be improved; (2) More frequent reporting of the Church's stavropegial institutions (*Saint Tikhon's Seminary, Saint Vladimir's Seminary, Saint Herman's Seminary and Saint Catherine's, our representative church in Moscow, Russia*) needs to be done; (3) The housing allowances of the Metropolitan and Chancellor need to be addressed, so that compensation is appropriately segregated between taxable and non-taxable income; and (4) Immaterial differences in investments need to be identified.

The MC was presented with the following proposals by the financial staff: (1) \$21,000 of the Chancellor's salary be designated as housing allowance; (2) A spending rate of 3% of the total endowment value at the prior year end be released for use in the current budget year; (3) In an effort to memorialize the relationship between the OCA Pension Board and the Chancery, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) be adopted; and (4) A plan to migrate from *Blackbaud*, the current financial software, to *QuickBooks*, be undertaken, as the former is being underutilized and becoming exceedingly expensive to maintain. All four recommendations were unanimously passed by the MC, along with the adoption of a \$1.76 million budget for fiscal year 2020, based on declining diocesan assessment rates and conservative estimates regarding other sources of income.

In addition to reports from the Metropolitan, Chancellor and Treasurer, the MC received updates from the Pension Board, the Information Technology (IT) Group, the Stewards of the OCA (SOCA), External Affairs, the Office of Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations (ORSMA) and the Sexual Misconduct Policy Advisory Committee (SMPAC). In February, Archpriest Nicholas Solak and Priest Theophan Whitfield presented an overview of *Thriving in Ministry*, a program being initiated throughout the Church as a result of a \$470,700 grant from the *Lilly Foundation*. Out of 700 applicants, the OCA was the only religious institution to be awarded this money, which will be used to develop national peer learning groups for clergy and their wives (following the good work being done in this area by the *Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania*), as well as programs on how a parish priest can better perform his day-to-day duties.

In response to the overwhelming support at the 19<sup>th</sup> AAC in St. Louis, the Chancery hired and directed Dimitrios Rentel (Archpriest Alexander's son) to travel across the country as a youth coordinator to speak with youth, youth workers, parents, priests and young adults about youth ministry in America. All discussions were focused on one single question: What should the OCA's National Youth Program look like? Because of limited travel time, Dimitrios also crafted an online survey addressing this issue; to date, he has received 1,337 replies. The raw data will be analyzed and a more detailed report will be presented to the MC at its Spring 2020 meeting.

Plans continue to develop for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Autocephaly and the Canonization of Saint Herman next year. As part of the Diocese of Pittsburgh & Western Pennsylvania and the Bulgarian Diocese, our diocese will be hosting a pilgrimage to Alaska next July. The response, so far, has been good, with approximately 15 "pilgrims" already signed up. *Saint Tikhon's Seminary* will be recognizing the Church's Golden Anniversary during its Memorial Day Pilgrimage and a Synodal Liturgy is scheduled for November 2020 at the primatial cathedral in Washington, DC, at which clergy and guests from other Orthodox jurisdictions will be invited. Finally, updating the "Red Book" (*Orthodox America 1794-1976*) that was published as part of the American bicentennial was suggested for, as Fr. Tosi stated: *"If we don't write our history, someone else will."*

All the discussions held and decisions made by the MC this year were good and members were united in working together for the advancement of the OCA. It was both a pleasure and a privilege to gather with our brothers and sisters to do that which our Lord Jesus has called us to do for His Vineyard in America. We thank you for allowing us to have been your diocesan representatives for the past three years; know that we have taken this responsibility very seriously. It has been a wonderful learning experience and we've appreciated the opportunity to serve the Church in this capacity.

Respectfully submitted,



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Metropolitan Council Clergy Delegate



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