

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

Diocese of New York & New Jersey – Annual Diocesan Assembly – November 5, 2020

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Under the chairmanship of His Beatitude, Metropolitan TIKHON, the Metropolitan Council (MC) met three times this year: once in person, on Feb 5-6, at the *Seminary of the Immaculate Conception* in Huntington, NY; once via teleconference, on Mar 31; and once, via *Zoom*, on Aug 27 & Sept 16-17. (**NOTE:** *The three-day meeting via Zoom constituted the Fall Session of the MC. As of the submission of this report, this session is not yet completed, as a fourth and final day is scheduled for Nov 4.*)

Participating in the work of the Council were elected and appointed clergy and lay delegates from across the United States, Canada and Mexico. Confronted with the challenge of the Coronavirus, this group, responsibly and analytically, dealt with those questions and matters that are under its purview, regarding the life, organization and mission of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA).

Below are some of the highlights of the three gatherings:

## **Metropolitan's Report**

His Beatitude continues to serve as *Locum Tenens* of the *Albanian Diocese* and the *Diocese of New England*, following the repose of His Eminence, Archbishop NIKON, last September. It is the desire of the Holy Synod to have two ruling bishops—one for each diocese—instead of one, but many financial considerations are involved.

The Metropolitan presided over the consecrations of two new bishops: His Grace ALEXIS of Bethesda on January 25 and His Grace ANDREI of Cleveland on February 1.

His Beatitude has started working on a follow-up to his book, *Of What Life Do We Speak: Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the Apostolic Work of the Church*. While the first writing was more ecclesiastical and theological in nature, the second will have a more personal slant, dealing with such topics as loneliness and friendship. It is His Beatitude's hope to have this work completed in time for distribution at the next *All-American Council (AAC)*.

Following the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown in March, His Beatitude secluded himself at *St. Tikhon's Monastery* in South Canaan, PA and remained there, celebrating the divine services and conducting Church business via telephone and *Zoom*, until late June, at which time he returned to the Chancery. Other than visits to the *Holy Transfiguration Monastery* in Ellwood City, PA in August to ordain John Thetford to the diaconate and to *St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church* in Jamaica Estates, NY and *Three Saints Pavilion* in Bethany, CT to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the falling-asleep of Archbishop NIKON, the Metropolitan has made no further parish visitations or international trips.

Effective mid-August, Father Deacon John Thetford was named Personal Secretary to the Metropolitan, following the resignation, for personal reasons, of Father Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak. The transition was seamless. Archdeacon Joseph faithfully served as His Beatitude's secretary for eight years; he, along with his wife and family, has temporarily relocated to Poland and will continue to do work for the Church.

## **20<sup>th</sup> All-American Council (AAC)**

In February, AAC Manager, Fr. Deacon Peter Ilchuk, provided the MC with an update on preparations for next year's gathering in Baltimore. The theme proposed and blessed by the Holy Synod was *Hope in an Age of Despair*. More so than in past years, the Synod decided to take an active role in planning for this Council, providing input for such areas as youth involvement, workshops and liturgical services. The Pre-Conciliar Commission (PCC) also worked on an agenda that included more time for fellowship and socializing.

However, since the pandemic, things have changed dramatically. As of late August, 14,000 cases of the virus have been confirmed in Baltimore. Face coverings are mandated. Church worship and retreats are limited to 25% and 50% capacity, respectively. The location chosen for the Council, the *Hilton Baltimore Inner Harbor Hotel*, has not yet opened and its convention center is being used as a field hospital. Based on this info, several options moving forward were discussed by the MC, including postponing the AAC until July 2022 or relocating it to another city. Deacon Peter agreed to continue monitoring the situation and keep discussions open with the hotel until December, at which time the MC will meet in Special Session to revisit this matter and make a final decision.

## **Youth Work Report**

In February, Steven Christoforou, Director of Youth & Young Adult Ministries of the *Greek Archdiocese* and Dimitrios Rentel, the youth coordinator hired in Summer 2019 by the Chancery, presented a detailed report on an online survey that was disseminated to youth, youth workers, parents, priests and young adults across the country, asking the question: *What Should the OCA's National Youth Program Look Like?*

Based on the 1,375 responses received, kids like to be part of a community, whether it be camp or church. However, there is a definite generation gap when it comes to their ability to serve their parishes; 75% of those surveyed feel they are discriminated against because of their age. The lack of Orthodox Christian education was also a common response. Most children do not like Church School. There is also a strong desire among them to know not only what is the Church's stance on social topics, such as homosexuality, same-sex marriages and abortion, but why does it take these positions.

In this survey, most parents stated they are raising their children as Orthodox, without any emphasis on ethnicity. They feel that clergy are not as involved as they should be in their parishes' youth ministries. There is also a sense that the Faith sometimes isolates their kids from the rest of society.

Responses from the clergy varied, although 70% of the respondents felt that our seminaries do not prepare them for youth ministry.

Following this presentation, the MC discussed, at length, ways to address the results of the survey; the following engagement strategy was proposed:

- 1) Have members of the MC speak to the seminaries about the need for youth education for clergy.
- 2) Present a report to the Holy Synod that highlights youth vocations and alerts the hierarchs to pastoral issues within their dioceses about the lack of proper youth ministry.
- 3) Offer continuing education to clergy in this area.
- 4) Develop programs at the AAC for college kids.
- 5) Survey all of the dioceses and find out what youth programs are working and if they can be adapted on a national level.

## **Internal Governance**

The following six committees were fully activated and empowered to do the work of the MC: Ethics & Human Resources, Finance & Investment, Internal Governance, Legal, Technology and Properties. Each committee has a mix of clergy and laity with pertinent skill sets. As decided at the September 2019 MC meeting, members are no longer required to serve on a committee.

## **Chancellor's Report**

Because of COVID, Chancellor Archpriest Alexander Rentel reported that half of the people who are employed at the Chancery are now offsite, making his job of overseeing the day-to-day operations more challenging. There are no in-person meetings and the Fall Meeting of the Holy Synod will take place via teleconference.

It was an honor for Fr. Alexander to speak about the work and reorganization of the Chancery at our Diocesan Assembly last October. In addition to hiring Deacon John Thetford as the Metropolitan's secretary, Priest Alessandro Margheritino was named as the new Chancery Administrator/Executive Assistant in September. A search continues for a Media Manager to oversee the OCA website and generate content to be disseminated among social forums, such as *Instagram* and *Facebook*.

Fr. Alexander continues his assignment of surveying the governing documents of all dioceses, parishes, monasteries, institutions, offices and organizations of the OCA in order to determine the level of compliance with the Statute.

## **Offices, Initiatives & Department Updates**

Archpriest Thomas Soroka has been named as the new Project Manager for the Departments of the OCA. There are no longer department chairs; Fr. Thomas will serve as the head of all, with project leaders working under him. Any new project proposals must be based on the four pillars outlined in His Beatitude's book and benefit both parishes and institutions of the Church.

The *Department of Liturgical Music* continues to have a huge impact on the life of the Church. Since the retirement of Professor David Drillock at the end of 2019, Philip Ritchie, a third-year seminarian student at *St. Vladimir's Seminary*, has taken on the job of running and keeping current the website. The online course on basic conducting will be revamped and a new online instruction on sight-singing and ear training is being offered in October.

The *Department of Evangelization* received an unsolicited donation of \$50,000 for its initiatives. New videos on various topics important to the Orthodox Church will be produced and the "Tract Series" created by Archpriest John Matusiak of blessed memory will be revised.

The *Department of Continuing Education* will be making six 15-minute videos on dealing with suicide.

The *Department of Christian Service & Humanitarian Aid* will be offering four one-hour webinars highlighting its "Compassion in Action" initiative.

The *Department of Christian Education* will be publishing a new six-volume set of activity books for children highlighting the Saints of the Church. Online Church School classes for middle and high school students are now available.

The *OCA Catechism Project* is creating adult educational materials for use in instructing candidates who are seeking to join the Orthodox Faith via baptism and/or chrismation, as well as presenting basic doctrine and practice to current Orthodox Christians who may lack a fundamental understanding of the Faith. The project is being overseen by Fr. Thomas and the Synod and brings together experienced clergy, theologians and Christian educators from across North America. The expected release date of the catechism is December 13, 2020.

The *Stewards of the OCA (SOCA)* met its 2019 goal; total donations were \$76,728. Most of the giving came from individuals, rather than parishes. The last Sunday of October has now been officially designated as *Steward Sunday*.

The *Thriving in Ministry* program (peer learning for Orthodox priests and wives) continues to expand. Nationwide, 87% of clergy of all denominations are very satisfied with their parish ministry, even though it involves 21 tasks and 36 skill sets. However, thriving pastors within the Orthodox Church are not the norm; priests continue to feel isolated and social loneliness is a "great problem." They also complain about being underpaid and overworked and the lack of growth opportunities. Although family life is very rewarding, Orthodox clergy wives also feel isolated and lack friendships outside the parish. It is the hope of those involved in this initiative that more peer learning groups will be formed so that priests and wives can gather regularly, under the guidance of a trained facilitator, with the goal of exploring the joys, challenges and insights of pastoral ministry.

### **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**

Because of COVID-19, major events marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of autocephaly and the canonization of St. Herman of Alaska were postponed, specifically those involving the gathering of the Holy Synod on Memorial Day at *St. Tikhon Monastery's Annual Pilgrimage*; on August 9, on Spruce Island in Alaska; and on November 14, at the primatial cathedral in Washington, DC, at which clergy and guests from other Orthodox jurisdictions were to be invited. It is unclear when these occasions will be rescheduled.

The Fall 2019 Lecture Series at *Saint Tikhon's Seminary* focused on autocephaly. His Beatitude celebrated the Feast of the Repose of St. Herman on December 13 with an All-Night Vigil and Liturgy at the Chancery. His Eminence, Archbishop MICHAEL, delivered the keynote address on autocephaly at the Annual Father Alexander Schmemmann Lecture held in January on the campus of *Saint Vladimir's Seminary*.

A new OCA necrology was released on Friday, February 14 to be used on the first Soul Saturday of the year, February 22. (*A final publication, with corrections and suggestions, is expected by the end of the year.*) A newly revised and provisional service for the Feasts of St. Herman—his glorification on August 9 and his repose on December 13—was developed by the *Department of Liturgical Music*; the service has not been fully approved, but is still in a trial phase. Finally, Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak is working on an anniversary picture book.

### **Treasurer's Report**

OCA Treasurer Andrew Smith reported that overall, revenue collection for 2019 was good and expenses were controlled fairly well, resulting in net income of \$74,000.

As a reasonable practice to change auditing firms every three to five years, a proposal to leave *D'Archangelo & Associates* and engage *Satty, Levine & Ciacco, CPAs, PC*, at the same cost, was unanimously approved. A clean audit by *Satty & Partners* was completed, with no significant findings, difficulties or disagreements encountered. All proposed adjustments were agreed upon and recorded.

A \$1.815 million budget for 2020 was adopted. As of June 30, revenue collection was \$809K and expenses incurred were \$729K due, in large part, to a decrease in Chancery personnel and travel expenditures (because of the pandemic). Credit was given to the dioceses for continuing to submit their assessments during this unusual and difficult year.

The *Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act* was passed by Congress and signed into law in March, in response to the economic fallout from the virus. A significant component of this Act is the *Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)* which consists of loans convertible to "forgiven" grants to cover 2-1/2 months of payroll for qualifying employers. The OCA was approved for this funding and has received nearly \$195K which hopefully will be "forgiven;" Andrew is currently awaiting further guidance from the *Small Business Administration (SBA)*.

### **Financial Resolution Presentation & Adoption**

The MC met, via teleconference, in special session on March 31 to address financial shortfalls that might arise for dioceses and parishes due to the present COVID-19 crisis. A resolution was recommended by the Finance & Investment Committee to implement a program allowing each diocese to make an application to reduce monthly contributions to the Central Administration, with reductions payable by June 30, 2021, as follows: up to 50% reduction for Apr, May & June 2020; up to 25% reduction for July, Aug & Sept 2020; and no reduction for Oct, Nov & Dec 2020. The resolution became a motion and was carried with none opposed and two abstentions. Two dioceses have taken advantage of this deferred payment proposal.

### **External Affairs**

In his report, Chairman Protopresbyter Leonid Kishkovsky stated that the relationships of the OCA with other canonical churches are still tenuous, although Metropolitan TIKHON's visit with Patriarch KIRILL during the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in December 2019 of our representation church, *St. Catherine's*, in Moscow, was most cordial and meaningful.

The Orthodox Church in Ukraine continues to be in disarray. With the exception of the Moscow Patriarchate, no other church has broken communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate over the establishment of the new Church. While the Churches of Greece and Antioch are acknowledging the new Church in Ukraine, the OCA is continuing to withhold its recognition.

The OCA and the Greek Archdiocese remain the only Orthodox participants in the *National Council of Churches* and *Christian Churches Together*. Also, Archbishop ALEXANDER and Professor Paul Meyendorff continue to give presence and witness of the OCA within the *World Council of Churches*.

His Beatitude was chosen to help draft a mission statement of the *Assembly of Canonical Bishops*; he was also appointed Chair of the Monastic Committee, the first for an OCA bishop.

### **Chancery Relocation**

Christopher Lewis, Lay Delegate from the Diocese of the South, Ray Steeb, Lay Delegate from the Diocese of Western Pennsylvania, and Gregory Honshul, Lay Delegate from the Archdiocese of Washington, DC, facilitated discussions on this topic. In their presentations, they reiterated what was already stated by Chancellor Archpriest Alexander Rentel at the MC meeting in September 2019: based on its current configuration, the Chancery can't continue to function efficiently and properly in Syosset; changes and improvements will have to take place. There are neither legal obstacles to redomesticating the OCA corporation in another state nor any impediments to selling the Chancery estate. As of November 2019, the 14.59 acre-property was assessed at \$11.5 million and appraised at \$5.7 million for residential use. Deferred maintenance and upgrades are now between \$400-\$500,000 and the 2020 budget for upkeep is \$165,000. Even though some improvements have been made, the Chancery basement could never be made fully adequate to house the OCA Archives.

The Metropolitan shared his thoughts on this subject. Canonically, as Archbishop of Washington, he believes he should reside in his diocese. On a personal level, he feels that it would be more beneficial for him, both physically and spiritually, to live outside the Chancery.

A resolution was passed by the MC and blessed by the Synod to have the Property Committee begin the process of selling the Chancery in Syosset; looking for a new location for the Chancery; finding a new residence for His Beatitude; and pursuing a new home for the Archives. An agent, Fran Mazer, representing *Compass Realty*, has been engaged, for a term of nine months, to sell the Chancery for a list price of \$6.5 million. A sale to an individual, rather than a developer, would be quicker and more profitable.

As of the writing of this report, there have been two showings for the Chancery: one to a developer offering \$5 million to convert it into a community center and one to an individual looking to restore the mansion and add two additional homes on the property. A media campaign is being developed to interest other religious organizations looking to expand or move their headquarters.

### **Archives Relocation**

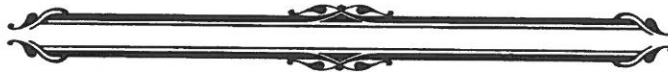
In light of the work being done to sell and relocate the Chancery property, His Beatitude convened a meeting of the Archives Advisory Committee to discuss what to do with the Archives. No full resolution was given to this question, but the unanimous desire of the Committee was to keep the Archives intact, whether that means having it accompany the relocation of the Chancery administrative offices; go to one of our seminaries; or establish itself at a completely different locale.

### **Pension Board**

A proposed change, based on the Pension Plan's actuary report from the December 2019 Pension Board Meeting, was presented by Fr. Matthew Tate and Matushka Mary Buletza-Breton. A motion was made to increase the church's contribution for its Plan members from 8% to 10%, effective January 1, 2021; it passed with three NO's and three abstentions. Furthermore, the MC approved a motion, with one abstention, to petition the Holy Synod to create a joint commission to enforce compliance with the OCA Pension Plan.

### **Human Resources**

A newly revised *OCA Handbook* was completed and submitted to the Human Resources Committee for further review and adoption.



Conscious of the OCA's responsibility for the life and salvation of its people and of the uncertainty of the time in which we are now living, the MC dedicated itself this year to addressing the vital questions and matters of the Church in a conciliary manner, based on unity in faith and bound in peace and love in the Holy Spirit. As your diocesan representatives, we appreciate your continued support and prayers.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Archimandrite Joseph".

Archimandrite Joseph (Hoffman)  
Metropolitan Council Clergy Delegate

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James P. Kornafel".

James P. Kornafel  
Metropolitan Council Lay Delegate