

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL REPORT
NEW YORK/NEW JERSEY DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY
NOVEMBER 3, 2021

Since we last gathered virtually as a diocese on Nov 5, 2020, the Metropolitan Council (MC) of the OCA met four times, all via *Zoom* teleconference: twice in special session (Nov 19 & May 11), once in full session (a two-day meeting held Feb 24 & Mar 3) and once on the last day of September to prepare for a joint meeting of this body with the Holy Synod in Cleveland, OH on Oct 18-21. The agendas for each gathering were fairly dense, but we were able to review the issues and challenges facing the Church today and to try to find ways to successfully tackle them. Highlights are as follows:

Report of the Metropolitan

His Beatitude, Metropolitan TIKHON, though saddened by the inability to physically assemble as a group, felt that even under such circumstances, it was important for the Metropolitan Council to meet and he was grateful that communications technology made these gatherings possible. He emphasized that whether meeting face-to-face or over the Internet, the work of the Holy Church must continue and it is the responsibility of this deliberative body to serve God's will, first and foremost. He expressed his appreciation to all members for their efforts and loving devotion to the Church throughout the preceding difficult year. In spite of the pandemic, this body has accomplished much for the glory of the Lord and His Vineyard in America. In his humble opinion, His Beatitude believes this health crisis has provided a positive avenue for doing things differently with good results. He called on all members to continue to reorient their efforts and to recognize the great strength that resides in the OCA, when her faithful act together, as a common body with a common purpose.

His Beatitude received many letters from members of the Church asking him to take a stronger stance against the COVID-19 federal and local rules and regulations regarding limited church worship; the wearing of masks; and social distancing. He, as well as the Holy Synod, remains committed to protecting the Church and its faithful by following rational, scientific knowledge to provide guidelines and directives that will keep us all healthy and safe until this pandemic has passed.

Except for short trips to our seminaries in South Canaan, PA and Yonkers, NY, as well as visits to the Archdiocese of Washington, the Diocese of New England and the Albanian Archdiocese, His Beatitude has primarily remained in residence at the Chancery. There was no delegation for this year's *March for Life*; however, several virtual events were held marking this annual event, in which the Metropolitan took part.

Report of the Chancellor

Chancellor Archpriest Alexander Rentel reported that the offices at the Chancery remain closed to the public, except for *Saint Sergius Chapel*, where the full cycle of liturgical services continues to be held. A more dexterous office environment is being fostered—one in which the staff can easily work in person, remotely or on the road. To this end, a more efficient platform for internal dissemination was selected, as well as a network that provides better content management and files sharing. Communication with other Holy Orthodox churches has been done by telephone and E-mail and external relations with them have been “neutral” because of the pandemic.

Report of the Treasurer

Treasurer Andrew Smith delivered the financial and budget reports. Before going into numbers, he discussed how this past year proved to be a most unusual and uniquely challenging one, with the Coronavirus significantly altering the operations of the OCA and the central administration. Financial concerns were greatly relieved by the federal *Payroll Protection Program (PPP)*, the continued remittance of diocesan contributions and the outpouring of generosity and goodwill from people across the OCA, despite the restrictions on parishes because of the pandemic. Revenue collection in 2020 was \$2.124 million on an annual budget of \$1.815 million. Expenses incurred through December 31 were \$1.468 million on an annual budget of \$1.815 million. Many of the normal operating expenses, especially travel and lodging, were not incurred due to COVID-19. An unrestricted net income of \$656,000 was realized.

The internal audit for 2020 and the proposed budget for 2021 (\$1.898 million) were both approved unanimously by the MC.

Report of the Departments Program Manager

Archpriest Thomas Soroka, Departments Program Manager, offered a comprehensive report on the activities of the OCA:

- The *Department of Liturgical Music & Translations* continues to offer resources and texts for liturgical services. It's in the process of creating complete rubrical notes for upcoming divine services, as well as posting basic music for Vespers and Matins. Four webinars to prepare musicians for Pre-Lent, Lent, Holy Week and Pascha are archived on *YouTube*. A basic conducting course will be held online either in the summer or fall.
- The *Department of Evangelization* is revising and redesigning the late Fr. John Matusiak's *Tract Series*; around 50 attractive trifold and bifold pamphlets, professionally designed, will be made freely available for download and use in churches. A series of new videos on various topics important to Orthodox Christians will be produced. A new apologetics website will be designed featuring articles mainly by OCA priests and informed OCA laypersons. A compilation of currently available educational and liturgical resources will be translated into Spanish.
- The *Department of Continuing Education* is producing 12 one-hour online seminars and educational forums, entitled *Third Thursdays*, on a variety of topics relevant to clergy and church workers. Six 15-minute, high-quality production videos on a pastoral approach to those dealing with suicide, taught by experts in the field, are also being created.
- The *Department of Christian Service & Humanitarian Aid* produced links and tags to all current resources supporting His Beatitude's *Four Pillars* document. It's also authoring additional articles for parish ministry resources and creating four, one-hour webinars on the topics based on *Compassion in Action*.
- The *Department of Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministry* coordinated the *Annual Orthodox Youth Workers Conference*, held yearly at the end of January. It is also organizing the OCA's participation in the *Assembly of Bishops "Year of Youth" Initiative* and developing OCA specific youth programs, including a *Bible Bowl* type competition, leading up to the AAC in 2022.
- The *Department of Christian Education* provides weekly online Church School for middle and high school students. It is also coordinating efforts with the Greek and Antiochian churches to produce educational materials.

Endorsement of New Secretary of the OCA

Following a most glowing recommendation, His Beatitude presented Priest Alessandro Margheritino as his choice to fill the position of Secretary of the OCA. Fr. Alessandro has served as Acting Secretary since Jan 1 of this year and has done well acclimating himself to the work of the Chancery and his new responsibilities. The MC unanimously endorsed Father Alessandro, who was presented and confirmed by the Holy Synod.

Chancery Relocation

The property is still on the market, since being listed in Sept 2020. Offers from several developers, as well as from an individual who wants to restore the mansion and add two additional homes in the back were recently reviewed, considered and eventually declined. The Location Committee remains focused on finding a single buyer who'll pay the asking price (\$6.5 million), move in and renovate/restore the home to its former grandeur. Subdividing the property is also under careful consideration, with the strategy being to offer surrounding neighbors the opportunity to expand their existing lot footprints. With reduced market activity, the Committee now anticipates that selling the Chancery will be a more extended process, reaching well into 2022 and longer; accordingly, a resolution authorizing the Committee to negotiate with any buyer, while reserving final judgment to the MC and confirmation by the Holy Synod, was presented and passed. His Beatitude initiated the creation of a new Planning Committee that will work in tandem with the Location Committee to address the relocation of the Chancery, the Metropolitan's home and the Archives. He is also putting the finishing touches on a 10-part podcast series on stewardship, focusing on this possible move. Overall, His Beatitude feels that, despite reservations from many clergy and laity throughout the OCA, we're moving in a good direction regarding this matter. He reiterated that there is no hurry to sell the Chancery and that this transaction must be done in a dignified manner so that it is for the betterment of the Church and shows her good stewardship.

Thriving in Ministry (TIM) Program & Clergy Health Synaxis

An update on the *Thriving in Ministry (TIM)* program was given by Father Nicholas Solak. This initiative, overseen by the *Office of Pastoral Life*, offers peer learning for priests and their wives. In six years, it has offered participants helpful and hopeful interactions and experiences that've made a difference in parish ministry. At the beginning of 2020, there were nine active groups across the country; at the end of the year, through *Zoom* and other virtual ways of meeting, there were 14 active groups. Two-thirds of participants were from the OCA, with the remaining third being comprised of members of the Greek, Patriarchal, Serbian, Romanian and Antiochian churches.

After his report, Father Nicholas and His Grace, Bishop ALEXIS of Baltimore, made a proposal for funding a series of *Clergy Health Synaxis*. This program of peer learning would be just for parish priests and deacons of the OCA. It was conceived as an urgent response to provide support and care to the emerging challenges of parish ministry during the current COVID-19 pandemic. While the *TIM* program is funded by a grant from the *Lilly Endowment*, the *Clergy Synaxis Program* has no financial backing. Three synaxis were held virtually this past year; 100+ priests and deacons from every diocese of the OCA participated. All were highly successful and beneficial. If these meetings are to continue, monetary support from the National Church is needed. A request of \$33,500 was made of the MC to hire and compensate facilitators and an administrative assistant, as well as to cover administrative costs and a stipend for IT support in 2021. A motion was made, seconded and unanimously passed by the MC to include this request in the budget.

20th All-American Council (AAC)

Because of the ongoing pandemic, the MC discussed, at length, the viability of holding the AAC in July 2021 in Baltimore, as scheduled, or postponing it until 2022. In case the hotel was unable to offer any new dates for consideration, AAC Manager, Father Deacon Peter Ilchuk, held discussions with two backup sites in Dallas. Based on this info, a motion was made and passed by majority to postpone the Council until 2022. Fortunately, after much negotiating, the hotel in Baltimore agreed to move it to July 2022 with “all the bells and whistles” offered in the existing contract and with no penalties or fees.

Investment Report

An Investment Report was given by Michael Crofton, our advisor from *The Philadelphia Trust Company*. Overall, our portfolio is performing well, despite the pandemic, the shutdown of the economy and the political unrest following last year’s presidential election. It is also well-diversified, with the top four equity categories being information technology, health care, communication services and industrials.

The Issuance of OCA Publications

The *Updated Diptychs of the Orthodox Church in America*, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the reception of the *Tomos of Autocephaly* from the *Russian Orthodox Church*, were published and distributed. *We Rejoice Even in Tribulation: An Encyclical of Hope*, written and offered by the Holy Synod out of love and gratitude to the faithful of the OCA for the struggles they endured in 2020 and as an encouragement of better things to come, by God’s grace, in 2021, was issued. After the Office of the Chancellor announced that the *Annual Desk Calendar* would cease being published, much feedback, both positive and negative, was received. Accordingly, it was decided to bring this matter to the MC for its consideration. Although nothing was decided, a lengthy and healthy discussion on this issue was held, including whether the Church should continue to publish it; ways it might be amended; and how to go about finding additional sponsors. **(NOTE: As of the writing of this report, the Office of the Secretary announced that the desk calendar will be printed and distributed in 2022.)**



There are many challenges to be faced by the Orthodox Church in America, but judging by the active participation and enthusiasm of all the appointees to this executive body, the Church remains strong and vibrant and her future is bright. As your clergy and lay delegates, we continue to be thankful for the confidence that you have placed in us to represent this God-protected diocese, for it is not made up of people who are better than the rest, but of people who are trying to become better than they are.

Respectfully submitted,

Archimandrite Joseph (Hoffman)
Metropolitan Council Clergy Delegate

James P. Kornafel
Metropolitan Council Lay Delegate