

Metropolitan Council Representative's Report – September 2013 Meeting

The first day of our time together was spent in a retreat given on the topic of "Conflict Resolution" on Monday, September 23rd by Dr. Al Rossi and Fr. Nicholas Solak . The presentations focused on the need to make everything that we do as members of the Council Christ-centered, and to make prayer the foundation of all deliberations: before, during, and after meetings. It was pointed out that often people suffer from the delusion of thinking that because they do "Church work" that by definition they are doing God's work, while this might be the farthest thing from the truth. We learned that conflict is inevitable and in a sense desirable as long as we deal with it in a non-destructive way. This non-destructive approach necessitates our making every effort to embody the healing presence of Christ in any given situation. This is a good message for us in all aspects of our life: both personal and ecclesial. We do well to take this message to heart whether we are serving on the Metropolitan Council, our parish council or even simply as members of the local parish.

With the near absence of controversy in the Church, in general the life of the OCA and in particular fall MC meetings were productive.

Good things reported at this fall meeting include:

- Implementation of many elements of the Strategic plan adopted at the 16th AAC, most notably that of continuing clergy education and work with youth and young adults, utilizing social media;
- Positive working relationships in the chancery and a high degree of productivity;
- Better disposition of misconduct cases with the new head of ORSMA (Office for the reporting of sexual misconduct allegations);
- Acceptance of Metropolitan Tikhon and the OCA by many world leaders of the Orthodox Church, and possibility of expanding our role and standing in the Assembly of Bishops in the U.S.;
- Documentation of "much good work" being done in a host of departments and committees by the Work study group'
- Enthusiastic head of Department of Evangelization, Fr. John Parker, working to implement a strategy for missionary work;

Growth areas:

- Dealing with current staff shortages in the chancery due to illness and other resignations due to do changes in people's lives;
- Deficit situation for 2013 due to shortfall in revenues and census figures;
- More work needed in Financial development (i.e. OCA Stewards);
- Changes with respect to the Orthodox Health Plan and health insurance issues in the U.S. generally speaking.

A deficit budget for 2014 was presented, but with some tweaking on the expense side and discussion regarding encouraging more activity with OCA Stewards, it was felt that we could anticipate the balance of that budget. OCA Stewards was rolled out at the February 2013 MC meeting and more than \$27k was raised from members of the council. It is hoped that this new stewardship effort of the Church with participation of clergy and laity of the OCA would help to secure some financial stability for our church. Please expect to hear more about this in the near future.

Things that presently or will affect us in the near future:

- Due to the drop in funding levels of the Pension plan to 83%, the Pension Board recommended that the MC ratify a restructure of the plan to include increase of contribution level of parishes for their clergy

from 6% to 8% of salary and housing, beginning in 2014. Clergy contributions will remain fixed at 6%. This infusion of cash will make the plan more stable and help us to achieve full funding within 15 years. This is a wonderful plan in that it continues to be a defined benefits (as opposed to defined contribution) plan. It is efficiently managed by professional managers—and by a very thoughtful pension board members, among whom are our own Fr. John Zdinak.

-The 18th AAC will take place in July of 2015, likely to be held in Atlanta, GA. An assessment for the council will come out in July of 2014, with levels commensurate with those of the 16th council. It will be good to anticipate this in your 2013 budgets.

-With the retirement of Archimandrite Alexander (Cutler) and Fr. Daniel to Ukraine, the future of St. John Monastery in Hiram is under discussion. According to the original conditions of the grantors of the Hiram property, in order for it to remain with the Diocese it must be used for church-related activities. If it does not, the grant has a “reversionary clause” that would see it returned to the family that donated it. I hope that it will be possible to do something that would see it continue in our diocese, or if not, at least with some Orthodox group.

Respectfully submitted,
Fr. Alexander Kuchta
MC Clergy representative