

Report of the Diocesan Representatives to the Metropolitan Council

The fall meetings of the Metropolitan Council (MC) took place September 23-25 at the Roman Catholic Seminary of the Immaculate Conception (a circa 1928 complex) in Huntington, NY, about 20 minutes east of the OCA Chancery. Holding meetings here afforded a cost savings to the Church.

About 28 members of the council attended a one-day retreat on the topic of Stewardship, given by Fr. Robert Holet, a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA. Fr. Robert's approach to this subject was holistic and pastoral, rooted in Orthodox patristic teachings and understanding of Holy Scripture. This was not a presentation on quick ways to "get money" out of parishioners, but an examination of the "stewardship cycle". The cycle has to do with recognizing God as the source of all gifts to us, offering them back to Him in thanksgiving and achieving communion with Him and others. Stewardship leads not to deprivation, but to the reception of even more gifts from God and spiritual growth for us. We were reminded that learning to practice stewardship is a long-term process.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon spoke about his efforts to focus on three essential areas of church life: missions and evangelism, clergy health, and the health of Church institutions: Seminaries and Monasteries. A focus group on missions and evangelism has led to the formulation of a plan for an annual Missions school. The school is designed to train seminarians, clergy, and laity in hands-on issues pertaining to missions work. It will be funded from an endowment created from a \$1M bequest that was recently received and designated for evangelization work.

Reports from Church officers and department heads were also received. We also received a report from Fr. Eric Tosi on behalf of the Pre-Conciliar Council for the 18th AAC to be held in July 2015 in Atlanta, GA. One important agenda item concerns the ratification of the OCA Statutes. The plan is for this revision to be completed so that a finished document can be posted in January 2015 on the OCA web site for review and comments by all members of the Church. We encourage you to examine the document when it is posted and offer your comments. We also hope that our new bishop, chancellor and deans will learn details about the revision and make themselves available to respond to questions.

The report of OCA treasurer Melanie Ringa included the following highlights:

The budget for 2014 lowered operating expenses by \$116K from 2013, but actual expenses are projected to come in almost \$200K under budget. This is due mainly to restructuring of Legal Counsel and saving \$92K in legal fees. The \$1.7M loan taken out to reconcile funds after the church scandal has been paid off. The computers at the Chancery have been up graded and all XP computers finally gone.

The overall operating budget for 2015 is a balanced budget. The assessments for 2015 are budgeted at \$90 per person, down from \$92 in 2014. In addition the overall census is expected to drop by 235 or 1%. The result is lower assessment revenue of about \$62K from the regional Diocese. The net result is a decrease of \$51.7K in projected operating income compared to 2014 projected operating income. The 2015 operating budget includes: \$102K for five planting grants in Annapolis MD (\$16K), Lansing, NY (\$16K), Cardiff, CA (\$22K), Tempe, AZ (\$24K), Beaufort, SC (\$24K), and \$39K for Seminary/Monastery grants.

On the whole these meetings of the MC were fruitful and positive. This is not to ignore or to minimize many issues in our Church that hinder our growth and effective witness. One issue has to do with the feeling of some in the OCA that the costs associated with functioning as an autocephalous church come

at too high a cost. But we should consider that our autocephaly is a great gift, given to us not only by the Russian Orthodox Church, but by the Lord Himself! He has entrusted us with this Church. We are the only Orthodox body in North America that is not dependent on authorities from halfway across the world, and no other Orthodox church in North America has the same vision or identity as we do. These words are not written in the spirit of proud triumphalism, but with the knowledge that we can and ought to rededicate ourselves to doing everything necessary to promote the health of our OCA. We also need to do this with the understanding that our mission is not self-preservation, but to act in cooperation with others to serve as a catalyst for the unity of all Orthodox Christians in North America. May we continue our efforts with this goal in mind and in the hope that the Lord will bless us as good and faithful stewards and servants, invited to enter into His joy.

Respectfully submitted,
Fr. Alexander Kuchta
Mr. Sam D'Fantis