

Report of Diocesan Metropolitan Council Representatives

Fall 2016 Metropolitan Council (MC) meetings took place from September 19-22 at the Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington (Long Island) NY.

Metropolitan Tikhon opened the meeting and stated that he wants to improve dialog between the Holy Synod and the Metropolitan Council, and strengthen the committees to improve communication. His Beatitude related there are two types of leadership (1) the shepherd who knows best leading his sheep, (i.e. obedience from the top down) which is flawed, and (2) the Mt. Athos model of obedience, in which the members of the monastery are obedient to the abbot, with the abbot being obedient to each of his charges. The goal of this model is to preserve the souls of the flock. His Beatitude asked for the help of the MC in implementing the Four Pillars, with priority on the process to communicate, led by the Internal Governance Committee.

The Pension Board reported a year-to-date return of -3.47%, but the 3-year net annualized return has been a positive 1.52%, versus a benchmark of 1.94%; the annualized return of the plan since the current strategy was deployed on 12/1/2012 has been a positive 2.44%, versus a benchmark of 2.06%. The market value of the plan was \$22,897,152 on 6/30/16. There are 333 active participants in the plan, and 177 receiving monthly benefits.

An amendment to the plan was approved to allow participants who are still working at age 75 to receive pension benefits along with their salary, as requested at the 18th All American Council. With this adjustment, participants would still pay in to the pension plan. If continuing to serve, at age 80+, participants would receive their pension, but would no longer have to pay into the plan.

At a previous meeting, a suggestion was made to allow priests to work at a declining parish and still receive their pension benefits, similar to the plan changes allowing them to work at a mission parish if they made less than a given amount and membership was below a specified figure. The actuaries need to know the definition of a declining parish so they can put costs to the proposal, and they will be provided with this information through the chancery staff.

The **Chancellor, Fr. John Jillions**, reported results from a Pew study about the unchurched – the “none’s”, who report their religious affiliation as none. They have grown from 16.1% of respondents in 2007 to 22.8% in 2014, and are the fastest growing segment. While there is some doubt expressed about the validity of the survey, there has been work to reach them, including a soon-to-be released film “Becoming Truly Human”, in which their concerns and views, specifically about Western Christianity are expressed, while looking at the Orthodox Church as a hospital for the soul. There was also discussion about re-catechumenizing those Orthodox who are no longer active in the church.

The **Secretary, Fr. Eric Tosi** reported that we are down to 50 in the Orthodox Health Plan, and considering rising health care costs, we are looking at alternatives, and in particular, are seeking input from insurance specialists from our parishes. There will be a new metrical book for clergy – the draft will be presented at the October meeting of the Holy Synod. Please send stories and ideas for the OCA Review communication to Fr. John Matusiak or Fr. Eric Tosi. The 19th All American Council will be held in St. Louis July 20-28, 2018, subject to approval by the Holy Synod, along with the FOCA conference and the youth program.

The **Finance Committee** reported that both the internal and external audits were without major issues. Cash flow is sometimes a problem, and dioceses are urged to get assessments in on a timely basis, so money doesn't have to be borrowed from restricted funds (discouraged by the auditors), or by external short-term loans (costly).

The **Treasurer** reported a balanced budget and coming in very close to the anticipated revenues from diocesan assessments, although timing presents a challenge. It is anticipated that the OCA will start making distributions from endowments, for purposes such as theological education, beginning in 2017.

The 2017 budget was presented by Fr. John Dresko for the finance committee. The balanced budget of \$1.77 million was unanimously approved.

The All American Council in 2018 is budgeted for about \$300,000. It is recommended that parishes set money aside in a “pocket account”. The money will be sent to Syosset by the dioceses, not the parishes. Each diocese will be billed a portion of the \$300k consistent with the percentage of total assessments they are paying. It was suggested that dioceses optionally set up an escrow account and send in the money in advance if possible.

Total **Planting Grants** for 2017 are budgeted at \$104,000 total, for 5 returning parishes, and for one new parish which will receive \$24,000 of the total. The choice for the new parish was between St. John of Chicago in Rogers AR (Fr. John Wehling) and Annunciation of the Virgin Mary in St. James MO (Fr. Joel Wilson). St. James MO (Diocese of the Midwest) was recommended, but they still need to be approved by the Holy Synod.

Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak presented a report on the **Stewards of the OCA** and the St. Herman appeal. SOCA has raised \$43,589 to date in 2016, with beneficiaries including new missions, seminarians, Christian service and humanitarian aid, liturgical music, youth ministries and others. MC members were challenged to fully participate and \$4,960 was raised from the floor, which will be doubled by a matching grant since 100% participation was attained.

In the discussion of the “**4 Pillars**” (The Apostolic Work of The Church), the MC prioritized the following initiatives under each pillar:

The Spiritual Life:

- Peer groups
- Montessori model for Orthodox education
- Training on how to lead a spiritual life

Stewardship:

- Stewards of the OCA (SOCA)
- Teaching what stewardship is

Evangelism / outreach:

- Teaching parishioners how to evangelize
- Re-energize former Orthodox

External Relations:

- Prepare for 50th anniversary
- Cross attendance with other jurisdictions

The next steps for the 4 pillars is for each MC member to look at and offer prayerful support for one or more of the initiatives. A prayer was written by His Beatitude for the first pillar (attachment 1), with plans to write a prayer for each of the other three.

Respectfully submitted,
Archpriest Alexander Kuchta
Bob Graban
September 27, 2016

[Attachment 1: Prayer for Pillar 1]

O Lord Jesus Christ,

We know that we are weak and frail human beings and are but poor vessels to contain the glory of Thine eternal Kingdom, the beauty of Thy mercy and the fullness of Thy love.

Nevertheless, we make bold to offer this prayer for the Church sojourning America, that we might in some small way *witness to the truth, and by Thy grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to reveal Thy way of sanctification and eternal salvation to all.*

Help us to encourage and support the men and women leading the angelic life in the monastic ranks and foster an appreciation for, and support of, monasteries and monastic vocations; to educate clergy, faithful and the non-Orthodox about the sacred value of life of prayer, purity, repentance and asceticism as lived in our monastic communities;

Strengthen us in renewing our efforts to foster clergy health so that our parishes and institutions may be guided by pastors and lay leaders who have a deep understanding of the therapeutic and pastoral aspects of the Patristic tradition so that the broken people of the world might find healing.

Illumine us strengthen the role of theological education in the broadest and deepest sense so that our seminaries, institutions and parishes might share the wealth of the theological, liturgical and spiritual treasures of the Orthodox Church with all people and at all levels;

And that by all these means, we might be blessed with healthy parishes that might serve as beacons for those who are lost, hungry and confused.