

Report of Diocesan Metropolitan Council Representatives

The September 2019 Metropolitan Council (MC) meetings took place from September 18-19 at the Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington (Long Island) NY. The meeting was chaired by His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, with the other members of the Standing Synod, His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, His Eminence Archbishop Benjamin and His Eminence, Archbishop Irénée also in attendance.

On Wednesday, Sept. 18, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon was unable to attend the opening day of the meeting due to his participation in a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Assembly of Bishops. His Beatitude designated Archbishop Benjamin, the senior member of the Standing Synod to preside at this portion of the Metropolitan Council in his absence. His Beatitude, however, confirmed the decisions of the Metropolitan Council that were made in his absence as the first order of business once he joined the meeting.

In his **Chancellor's Report**, Fr. Alexander Rentel began with remembrance of His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon, Archpriest John Matusiak, and Archpriest Steven Belonick. Fr. Alexander has been traveling domestically and also to Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Finland and Jerusalem, and he wishes to continue to visit dioceses and assemblies. Fr. Alexander met with His Beatitude, Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem, where he conveyed the greetings of Metropolitan Tikhon, and also expressed the gratitude of Metropolitan Tikhon to Patriarch Theophilos III for receiving so many pilgrims from the Orthodox Church of America over the years. Patriarch Theophilos III and Father Alexander also discussed the status of relations between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the OCA, and the state of affairs in world Orthodoxy, including possible concelebration by OCA clergy and clergy of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

An ad hoc location committee has been formed by His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon to consider the possibilities of relocating the OCA Chancery. Fr. Alexander commented that this will be the major issue in the immediate future. At this time all options are on the table but at present questions regarding maintenance and continuation at Syosset require serious attention.

Fr. Alexander outlined the work of the Sexual Misconduct Policy Advisory Committee (SMPAC) and outlined the work under his purview on the Chancery restructuring. Andrew D. Smith was confirmed by the Holy Synod as Treasurer last May, and the job has been split, with Susan Wisnewski as Accounting Manager. A secretary is needed per statute, but this job has not yet been filled. In other personnel moves, IT manager Ryan Platt and Subdeacon Roman Ostash have resigned. Fr. John Schroedel is the new Technical Manager. Matushka Jessica Fuhrman is now the Web Content Manager; she and Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak have taken on the communications role that Fr. John Matusiak of blessed memory had done so well.

The MC reviews the work of selected departments, and at this meeting, Archimandrite Alexis [Trader] presented his report on the revitalization of the **Department of Pastoral Life**. Archimandrite Alexis reported that the most significant work to date has been the successful HOPE Program, now known as the Thriving in Ministry Program, that opens up the opportunity for peer learning and fellowship among our clergy and now including clergy wives. The department's proposed, revised mandate includes the following departmental goals, inspired by His Beatitude's Four Pillars (1) the healthy spiritual life of our clergy and their families, (2) their sufficient financial support through good stewardship, (3). their relationships with others, and (4) their ability to engage in outreach.

During the **Internal Governance** report, motions approved were: (1) the Ethics Committee and Human Resources Committee be merged and reconstituted as the "Human Resources & Ethics Committee", (2) the Financial Development Committee be dissolved and the Finance and Investment Committee's Charter/Job Description be revised to also include that they "Receive reports from the Stewards of the OCA (SOCA) and present appropriate recommendations for action concerning the Church's fund-raising policies and activities to the Metropolitan Council.", (3) the Charity Committee be dissolved as a standing committee and that in its place a discretionary fund (in the amount budgeted for the previously existing Charity Committee) be established for the use of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon subject to yearly audit and guidelines to be drafted and reviewed by the MC (4) create a "Technology Committee" of the MC, and (5) create a "Properties Committee" of the MC, which will be empowered to invite subject experts to serve as advising members of the Committee.

Andrew Smith, **Treasurer**, presented a balanced budget totaling \$1.76M, which was approved by the MC. In the motion, for the endowments [*i.e., a donation which uses resulting investment income for a specific purpose*] totaling \$66,000, it was approved that the MC adopt a spending rate of 3% of the prior year-end value of endowments, not to override any purpose

restriction or earnings-type restriction that applies to any given endowed fund. In other words, 3% of the investment would be cashed out annually to provide support for the designated purposes. Also approved was a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the OCA and the Pension Board. Since these are two separate organizations, the MOU includes provisions that the Pension Board has access to OCA facilities and services, and the Chancery will continue to provide payroll services and employee benefit programs as if the Plan staff were employed by the Chancery. It is anticipated that the net financial impact will be \$0 for both organizations.

On Thursday, Sept. 19, Metropolitan Tikhon, in his report, first confirmed the decisions made the previous day in his absence. On the restructuring, His Beatitude commented that Fr. Alexander Rentel is a great benefit and has increased productivity, allowing him to concentrate on the broader oversight of the church. The Treasurer's office is working very well as reconfigured, and His Beatitude recognized Melanie Ringa for her strict vigilance over finances and investments over the past years of her tenure. His Beatitude also formally thanked Fr. Eric Tosi for his work as Secretary. The transition continues, and His Beatitude is evaluating the work of the chancellery as a whole. Preparation for the 2021 All American Council is going well, with the meeting of the Preconciliar Commission (PCC) scheduled the week of July 25 in Baltimore, at the site of the council. His Beatitude has read every survey comment from the previous AAC; he plans to make lunch two hours instead of one. His Beatitude talked about his trip to Cappadocia, where he served with His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople as they concelebrated the Divine Liturgy. His Beatitude recounted his meeting of the AOB Executive Committee from the previous day – there is no intention for the OCA to give up Autocephaly and it plans to remain in communion with all Canonical Orthodox Churches. Finally, there was a discussion about social media and how the OCA is perceived by some; a task force of the Holy Synod will help develop further communications to clergy and laity on transgender and other sexuality issues.

Further discussion of location considerations took place with Metropolitan Tikhon present. The OCA would need \$500k to make the needed upgrades to the Chancellery, including the archives, but does not have the money. Even considering the gift for the archives, we still fall \$20k short of basic needed repairs, which have been put on hold pending resolution. The property has been assessed at \$12M to \$13M fair market value and might sell for 30% more than that. The Romanian Chancellery at Grass Lake was presented as a good example of what our vision might be. The **Archives Department** received a \$49k grant to digitize the vast majority of our media and then start to digitize photos. In a relocation, it was felt the archives did not need to be co-located with the Chancellery.

In his report on **External Affairs**, Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky reaffirmed the OCA's desire to maintain communion with all Canonical Orthodox Churches; the Holy Synod confirmed that we recognize Metropolitan Onufriy and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate); recognition of the new Ukrainian church is being withheld. Attention was also brought to the demonstrations and protests in Moscow, where 118 clergy signed a letter appealing to authorities for justice, alleging human rights violations.

In **other areas**, Dimitrios Rentel presented the results of a survey with 1,500 responses taken while he traveled across the country and met with youth, youth workers, parents and clergy. One observation is that if you have friends at church, you will love being there. With regard to the need of a national youth director, Dimitrios felt that having a coordinator who could help answer questions and be a point person would be a good idea. Finally, it was emphasized that we absolutely cannot let the 50th anniversary in 2020 pass without celebration, and there is a need to experience it in Alaska in the presence of St. Herman.

Finally, this brings up the urgent need for Stewards of the Orthodox Church (SOCA) fundraising. The balanced budget passed is a bare bones budget, with 87% allocated toward the fixed costs of running the OCA: salaries, property, External Affairs and Archives. The remaining 13% funds departments, missions, seminaries and continuing education. A successful SOCA fundraising drive supported by all dioceses and parishes will be key to supporting this special celebration.

Respectfully submitted,
Bob Graban
Fr. Alexander Garklavs
October 2, 2019