

Report of Diocesan Metropolitan Council Representatives

Since the prior report submitted for the December 2021 Diocesan Council, the Metropolitan Council met by videoconference on February 9-10, and in a special meeting on April 11. Since agenda items were covered over multiple meetings, this report is presented by subject area.

Chancery and archives: No viable offers have been received on the Westwood property (Syosset Chancery). The Realtor contract has expired, and the Property Committee is considering what type of agent is needed and how it is to be marketed. A problem is that the property is assessed for tax purposes at \$11-12 Million, which leads to approximately \$250,000 annual property tax fee. The OCA does not pay this, but any purchaser would be stuck with it. The question of whether to seek to attempt to reduce the assessment was being considered.

The Property Committee presented a resolution to begin the relocation process of the Chancery by establishing an office in the greater Washington, D.C. as early as July 2022. Metropolitan Tikhon and Priest Alessandro Margheritino, Secretary of the Orthodox Church in America, would both relocate at the same time while the rest of the staff remains at Westwood until the beginning of 2023. The resolution carried, with one opposed and one abstention.

Archives: a resolution was approved (none opposed, 2 abstentions) by the Metropolitan Council to authorize the Chancellor and Secretary of the Orthodox Church in America to engage Saint Vladimir's Seminary in logistical and contractual discussions for the purpose of preparing a written agreement, for presentation and approval of the Metropolitan Council in summer 2022.

Pension Plan: An external review of the OCA Pension Plan is currently being conducted by Cheiron, Inc. This review was commissioned via a request for proposal, budgeted and approved by the Metropolitan Council. The results will be available soon, definitely before the AAC. A proposed Statute Amendment, to be presented for approval at the AAC was approved by the MC with 22 voting yes, nobody voting no, and 3 abstentions. As explained on the OCA website (<https://www.oca.org/files/aacs/20thAAC-proposed-statute-amendment-pension.pdf>) this would (1) Codify some of the basic expectations of the Pension Plan's regular reporting to the Metropolitan Council, and (2) Change the composition of the Pension Board to make for more direct representation of the key constituents, Plan participants and Employers. The proposed Statute Revision provides that the 3 members and 1 alternate appointed by the Metropolitan shall be subject to the endorsement of the Metropolitan Council and subsequent confirmation by the Holy Synod.

Other Proposed Statute Revisions: A proposed Statute Amendment "in the attempt to prevent possible conflicts of interest of Metropolitan Council members who are also employed by the Central Administration", stated "Elected members of the Metropolitan Council, whether Diocesan or at large, may not be employed, whether as full-time or part-time employees or as stipended volunteers, by the Central Administration of the Church or any of its Offices, Boards, or Departments." This proposed amendment was rejected by a vote of 3 yes, 22 no and 2 abstentions. The rationale was that it was not needed and could limit the availability of stipended volunteers and part-time employees in an organization of our size.

One additional proposed statute amendment provides for the statute to reflect the reorganization and reporting structure of the OCA Chancery that has been in effect since 2019. The MC approved this, for presentation at the AAC by a vote of 24 yes and 3 no.

Financial: Andrew Smith, Treasurer of the OCA, offered his report in which he reviewed current financials, proposed amendments to the 2022 budget, and introduced representatives from Satty & Partners who reported on the external audit. Ms. Maha Adranly, one of the three internal auditors, presented the auditing report noting the good health of the finances of the Orthodox Church in America, and thanking Mr. Andrew Smith and Ms. Susan Wisnewski for their hard and diligent work.

Work is progressing on the proposed Funding Resolution for presentation at the AAC. Those Dioceses not contributing at the 34% rate (including the DOM) continued to pay at the 40% rate in 2022, absent the authority of an AAC in 2021, which had been postponed. The current intent is that those Dioceses "shall remit 38% in 2023, 36% in 2024 and 34% in 2025, based on current year "budgeted net operating revenue." This would be defined similar to how we determine net income for our parishes, exempting pass-through accounts.

Metropolitan's Report: His Beatitude met briefly with His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew at his hotel during his recent visit to the United States; and then participated in the "Opening of the Doors" ceremony at St. Nicholas Shrine at the 9/11 memorial. His Beatitude received a visit from two bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP),

His Grace Bishop Viktor of Barshevskii and His Grace Bishop Dionysii of Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi, both vicars of His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry. He served at the March for Life with multiple other bishops at the liturgy. He has spent extended time in D.C. His plan is to continue with the steps to locate a residence in D.C., by July 1, 2022, with the chancery staff relocated by mid-2023. It has been determined that the Metropolitan should reside in and have his office in his diocese. At the present time, the D.C. office would be a branch office of the chancery (considering tax implications for the Syosset property). While he may not be able to prepare a second edition of the Four Pillars, he has completed a ten-part podcast series called “Our Apostolic Voyage”. He will communicate with the broader Church his thoughts on our mission, including the benefits of a relocation to the Washington, DC, area. He has also engaged two part-time remote staff members – Dn. Peter Ilchuk, who will be assisting with correspondence and calendar, and who will travel with His Beatitude on occasion. Fr. John Mikitish will help with drafting documents and with some aspects of external relations. His Beatitude asked treasurer Andrew Smith to engage the Finance and Investment Committee of the MC to formally review compensation structure for all chancery officers and staff, including the Metropolitan, and assure they are in compliance with the compensation guidelines of the OCA.

Chancellor’s Report: Fr. Alexander Rentel reported that he tested positive for COVID on December 1 and experienced relapses, and only felt good for one day between Thanksgiving and Nativity. The sickness forced him to cancel an overseas trip and events closer to home. Fr. Alexander was involved in nearly every aspect of the visitation of His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion November 10-16. He has completed evaluations of all Chancery personnel, including a self-evaluation of their work and collaborative work, a list of goals and projects they hope to accomplish during the coming year, a list of challenges and how these can be faced, and a list of areas they would personally like to develop.

Fr. Alexander announced that after his review, he changed Fr. Kyle Parrott’s title from Acting Director of Communications to Director of Communications. Emily Waters has been engaged as the acting ORSMA Coordinator. Judge Lanier is retiring as General Counsel and the formal process has begun to find his successor.

Secretary’s Report: Fr. Alessandro Margheritino reported on the status of the Westwood property, including boiler problems and the de-cluttering work that is ongoing, throwing away broken and unnecessary items collected for the past few decades. In preparation for the planned move of the archives to St. Vladimir’s Seminary, work is also proceeding to de-clutter non-archive items such as books and icon cards. With the help of Fr. John Schroedel and Barry Migyanko, he is considering Airtable as a possible replacement of the current Microsoft Access database. With the help of a seminarian intern, they have begun digitizing parish folders, and once done, will move on to digitizing clergy folders.

Office of Pastoral Life Report: Archpriest Nicholas Solak highlighted the attached report from the Office of Pastoral Life that included updates on the Thriving in Ministry and the Clergy Synaxis programs. Protodeacon Jacob Frimenko, a Professor of Management and Professional Leadership reported on the recently conducted Clergy Health Synaxis Survey, summarizing the methodology and results of a survey conducted within the Clergy Synaxis program to gauge personal spiritual, emotional, and physical health of clergy. In extensive discussion that followed, the importance and value of the program and survey were acknowledged.

Metropolitan Council Special Meeting June 28 and subsequent: The MC approved a 3-year lease on 2,765 square feet of office space in Springfield VA (DC area) for \$66,360 / year. The relocation of the archives to St. Vladimir’s Seminary, previously approved was reviewed for the details. The Cheiron Report, an independent audit of the pension fund by an actuarial firm was reviewed, and it can be found on the OCA website at (shortened link) <https://bit.ly/3IA5yLt>, along with a statement from Treasurer Andrew Smith. Cheiron found that communication by the Pension Board and their actuary Milliman of the risks to the Pension Fund was lacking. Adding to the risks is that the administrative expenses have been 2% instead of the 1.5% projected, and the 10-year historical average of investment returns is 4.75%, which is significantly lower than the 7% assumption that was the basis of Milliman’s projections. A Pension Plan FAQ and video by Andrew Smith is also available, at <https://bit.ly/3nUyAx0> Because of the discussion and length of the meeting, the agenda item of the funding resolution to support the OCA Central Administration for 2023-2025 was postponed to July 13.

Respectfully submitted,
Bob Graban
Fr. Elijah Mueller
July 12, 2022