

Delegates Report on the Fall 2014 Session of the Metropolitan Council

Fr. John Vitko and Ms. Lisa Mikhalevsky

The Fall Session of the Metropolitan Council was held on Sep. 22-25, 2014 at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Huntington, N.Y. The meeting was chaired by His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon and included members of the Lesser Synod (Abp. Nikon, Abp. Benjamin, Bp. Michael), officers of the central church, and clergy and lay delegates from each of the dioceses (modulo a few absences) and from the church as a whole. Fr. John Vitko and Ms. Lisa Mikhalevsky represented the Archdiocese of Washington D.C. at this meeting.

Retreat on Orthodox Stewardship: The meeting was preceded by a one day “retreat” on Orthodox Stewardship by Fr. Robert Holet of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA. This wonderful retreat built on the Orthodox understanding that each of us – ordained and lay alike – are called to be part of a royal priesthood – and that as priests we are each called to make sacred offerings to God of our first and finest. Fr. Robert traced this theme through the Old and New Testament and then elucidated its practical implications for us today as we are called to give our lives back to Christ in love and gratitude for all that He has given us.

Some highlights of the rest of the meeting are given below.

Metropolitan’s Report: The actual Metropolitan Council meeting began on day 2, with opening prayers and then a report by His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon. He thanked the church officers and others for their support and remembered former Metropolitan Council members who had ‘fallen asleep in the Lord’ in the past year, Metropolitan Tikhon then went on to call the period between the 16th and 18th All American Councils (2011-2015) one of the most productive periods that he is aware of. During this time the church followed up on many of the key themes of the 16th AAC: implementation of the Strategic Plan, a reduction in central assessments and a move toward improved ways of funding the church; annual meetings with the diocesan chancellors and treasurers; and the drafting of needed revisions to the Statutes of the OCA to be presented and voted upon at the 18th AAC.

His Beatitude then laid out his top 3 priorities for the Church as we move forward:

1. Missions and Evangelism
2. Clergy Health
3. Strengthening of the Church’s institutions, particularly seminaries and monasteries

Significant steps have been taken in each of these during the past year and more will be forthcoming. In the area of evangelization, the church has received a \$1M bequest for evangelization and has decided to use the income off this bequest to establish an annual one week long “mission” school for further instructing clergy and laity working or intending to work in this area. In the area of clergy health, we have established an Office

of Continuing Education, addressed important issues to helping prevent sexual misconduct, and have a very good Personal Assistance Program to help clergy and other church workers with various counseling services should they need it. And, in terms of our institutions, there has been a gathering of most of the monastery superiors to share fellowship, experiences, and insights.

Metropolitan Tikhon also reported on the recent meeting of the Assembly of Bishops (AOB) – the gathering of all the canonical Orthodox bishops in the United States. He was most encouraged by the session in which the various pan-Orthodox outreach organizations spoke. These organizations manifested the unity of the Orthodox Church in the U.S. in a defacto way and included the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC), Orthodox Christian Network (OCN), Orthodox Christian Education Commission (OCEC), Orthodox Prison Ministries, and the Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting (EOCS). The Assembly of Bishops also heard two proposals on different paths toward administrative unity. There is no consensus yet around any of these and each Orthodox jurisdiction has 6 months to reply to these specific proposals. The OCA has issued a formal preliminary response stating that our ultimate goal is a local fully autocephalous Orthodox Church in the United States.

Treasurer’s Report: Melanie Ringa gave a detailed report on the independent audit of the OCA’s 2013 finances (no issues found), on the income and expenses for 2014 and the proposed balanced budget for 2015. The table summarizes the income, total operating expenses and total surplus for 2013-2015 – *all* the supporting details can be found shortly on oca.org once the full Minutes of this Metropolitan Council are published.

	2013 Actual	2014 Projected	2015 Proposed
Operating Income	\$2,190,631	\$1,964,274	\$1,912,570
Total Operating Expenses	\$2,178,544	\$1,889,537	\$1,912,570
Total Operating Surplus	\$ 12,087	\$ 74,437	\$ 0
Per Capita Assessment	\$ 95	\$ 92	\$ 90

Continuing to respond to the mandated of the 16th AAC to reduce costs, the total operating expenses are 12% lower in 2015 than in 2013. The \$90 per capita assessment is \$15 less than the assessment 5 years ago. The proposed 2015 budget was unanimously approved.

Financial Development Committee: The Financial Development Committee reported on investment strategies, which included moving assets to the Philadelphia Trust

Company. The Committee also reported on the Stewards of the OCA campaign, which netted \$27,000.00 through August 2014. A stewardship plan for 2015 is in the process of being developed.

18th All American Council: Planning for the 18th All American Council is progressing very well. The Council will be held at the Hilton Atlanta in Atlanta, GA on Jul. 20 – 24, 2015 immediately following the FOCA Convention. The theme draws on theme of the First Sobor, “Expanding the Mission”. Some of the highlights of the 18th AAC include:

- Revisions of the OCA Statutes (see below)
- Plans for future funding of the Church
- Multiple workshops on the theme of “Expanding the Mission”
- And parallel Youth Program on all days of the AAC, culminating in a presentation to the closing plenary session of the AAC on the youth perspective on “Expanding the Mission”

Revisions to the Statutes of the Orthodox Church in America: Since the start of the year, a task force headed by Archbishop Nathaniel and including a broad range of canonical scholars, lawyers, church historians and pastors have been working on proposed revisions to the Statutes of the OCA. These revisions are needed to:

- To allow for a broader range of funding mechanisms for supporting the church (the current Statutes have a per capita assessment built into them);
- To address areas not currently addressed in the Statutes: i.e. Theological Education, Monasticism, Stavropigeal Institutions, and the Office of the Metropolitan;
- To incorporate recent amendments from past AACs;
- To remove elements that need regular update, so that they don’t require continual amendments to update them

The plan/hope is to have these revisions completed in the January timeframe to allow sufficient time for the draft revisions to be presented to the Church at various levels, so as to get feedback before finalizing and sending out prior to the AAC. As soon as they are ready, the draft revisions will be presented to the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan Council, diocesan bodies, and on-line so as to be accessible to the Church as a whole.

Department Reports: In keeping with past practices, the Metropolitan Council heard reports from two of OCA’s Departments: the Department of Liturgical Music and the Office of Military Chaplains:

Department of Liturgical Music (Dave Drillock): This Department continues to produce downloadable sheet music on a weekly and seasonal basis. They have completed over 2400 settings of troparia and kontakia for all the days of the year and in 2015 will complete providing the required music for all the services of Vespers, Matins and Divine Liturgy for the major feasts of the year. Last year they began working on the texts and

music for the Canons of Matins and the stichera at the praises of Matins. They also have an on-line tutorial for learning the 8 tones and offer an online course on choral conducting for existing and aspiring choir directors.

Office of Military Chaplaincies (Fr. Ted Boback and Fr. Joe Gallick): The Office of Military Chaplaincies coordinates and ministers to OCA chaplains in the active duty military, the military reserves and Veterans Affairs and to their families. Currently 24 of the 50 Orthodox active duty chaplains are from the OCA and 8 of the 12 Orthodox military reserve chaplains are from the OCA. There are also nine OCA priests who serve our Veterans Affairs Medical Centers. Combined, these chaplains provide an important ministry and unique ministry to our service men and women, both on active duty and at home. Working through FOCA, this office has been able to provide those in the field with a packet containing a prayer book, icons, cross and pamphlets – but they are still in need of other church supplies for the field, most notably chalice replacement kits and vestments.