

59<sup>th</sup> Annual Diocesan Assembly

Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania

## **Metropolitan Council (MC) Activity Report, 2022**

### **Metropolitan Council Leadership**

Under the leadership of His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon Archbishop of Washington and Metropolitan of All America and Canada, Archpriest Alexander Rentel (Chancellor), Priest Alessandro Margheritino (Secretary) and Andrew Smith (Treasurer), the Metropolitan Council is comprised of two representatives from each diocese (*one priest and one layman elected by the Diocesan Assemblies*), as well as three priests and three laymen elected by the All-American Council (*the most recent AAC was held July 18<sup>th</sup> through July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, in Baltimore, MD.*)

It was also during this past year, on November 13, 2022, that His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon celebrated the tenth anniversary of his election as our Metropolitan. At the Fall session, it was suggested that a gift be offered from members of the Metropolitan Council in honor of this milestone. His beatitude appreciatively and very humbly insisted that whatever the total received, it should be divided evenly and donated fully to the two initiatives presented at the AAC this summer, namely, the Dioceses of Alaska and Mexico.

### **Cadence of Metropolitan Council meetings and other communications**

The year was a busy one for the Council, which focused heavily on several critical issues, namely, the relocation of the Chancery offices, (re)location of the Archives, how to proceed with the sale of the Westwood property in Syosset, and the Pension Plan. This was in addition to other regular duties and ad hoc topics that arose throughout the year. To this end, the Metropolitan Council met for the regular Spring and Fall sessions, as well as multiple special sessions throughout the year to discuss these and other topics. The meetings were held via

zoom, with the exception of the Fall session. Numerous other meetings and working sessions held by those working on key initiatives were also held throughout the year as needed.

On a monthly basis, the Metropolitan Council is also updated on the activities of His Beatitude and the Chancery Staff that are independent of the activities of the MC. These digests reflect and summarize the main activities of the Central Administration for information sharing and transparency. These and other Metropolitan Council documents are shared through Box for online collaboration and archiving.

One of the reminders always stressed is if any Diocese, Monastery, or Seminary is planning a public event, to please share the information so that it can be celebrated and reflected on the OCA calendar on the OCA website ([oca.org](http://oca.org)). To do this, you may send an email with the information or any questions to Father Alessandro Marqheritino at: [amarqheritino@oca.org](mailto:amarqheritino@oca.org)

### **Temporary Relocation of the Chancery offices**

It was decided (*via Metropolitan Council resolution with unanimous confirmation and approval by the Holy Synod of Bishops*) that the relocation of the Metropolitan and Chancery offices should and would focus on the greater Washington, DC, area. Critical for the new temporary location would be proximity to hotels, airports, rail stations, parishes, as well as the space, pricing and lease terms. After the research and analyses were completed, a location in Springfield, VA, was selected. This office building, located at 6506 Loisdale Road, Ste 325, Springfield, VA 22150, is approximately a 20-minute drive south of Washington DC, and a very short drive to All Saints of America Orthodox Mission in Alexandria, VA.

The office in Springfield was fully operational by mid-October, and the Metropolitan Council was fortunate to have been able to meet there in person for the first time at our Fall session which took place October 19-20<sup>th</sup>. This location is indeed very accessible with a hotel just next door, further ensuring the convenience for meetings requiring overnight stay. The office offers

enough room and conference space to conduct business in a quiet, professional, and convenient setting.

### **Archives of the Orthodox Church in America**

As part of the relocation of the administrative offices from Syosset, the archives also needed to be addressed in terms of where they would be located going forward. After a lengthy process evaluating several locations for storage and stewardship, it was approved in late June (*via Metropolitan Council resolution with unanimous confirmation and approval by the Holy Synod of Bishops*) that the Archives be relocated to St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. Visits were also made by the administration to see first-hand the facilities prepared to house the collection and this was shared with Metropolitan Council at our meetings throughout the process.

### **The Westwood property in Syosset, NY**

The work continues in progressing the sale of the property of Syosset, where the Chancery was previously. This is a very large property towards the northern shores of Long Island. The Property Committee of the Metropolitan Council, as well as the Legal Committee, have been working on a plan detailing options for how to sell this property. However, over the course of this past year, no sale was made, and so during the Fall Session it was decided the Property Committee will revisit the following: selection of a new real estate agent, new broker, property pricing, and marketing efforts.

Chancery operations: While the administration moved to the new temporary location in Springfield in October, the Finance office remained operational in Syosset. The goal is to fully close all operations in Syosset in the early part of 2023.

### **Pension Plan**

Throughout 2022, the Pension Plan was the most critical focal point. Understanding and objectively being able to pinpoint the weaknesses of the Plan was the first step in being able to

create an approach to improving performance. That said, there were several things happening in parallel which contributed to frustration, confusion, and lack of clarity.

- Communication: There were struggles in communication between the Pension Board and the Metropolitan Council. This became ever more apparent as things came to light in terms of understanding the funding of the plan, participation rates, actuarial data (available vs needed), and the future of the plan itself. As the Pension subcommittee of the Metropolitan Council, along with the Treasurer and Finance Committee, began to take an active role in trying to assess the situation, it became clear that communication and information gathering were a challenge.
- Documentation: Lack of visibility to data, information, performance indicators, to name a few, became the tipping point through this process.
- Expectations and accountability: What became very clear was that going forward, expectations needed to be defined and agreed upon by all parties involved. Also identified were areas of expertise that were needed going forward.

Given these challenges, an independent, third-party analysis was deemed the best approach and it was at the Fall 2021 Special Session of the Metropolitan Council that the Chancellor was authorized to engage an independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party consultant to review the pension plan, present findings, and share recommendations based on industry best practices.

In December 2021, several introductory meetings were held between the Orthodox Church in America and Cheiron, the 3<sup>rd</sup> party consultant, and an engagement letter was signed. The final report was ready in June 2022 with findings. This seemed to spark even more debate about how we got here, interpretation of the data, was all information even available for the actuarial models, investment decisions and financial management of the fund, responsibilities of each party, etc.

Over the next few weeks, the findings were continually reviewed, questioned, and clarified. There was the establishment of a joint committee with The Holy Synod to offer additional

insight into matters regarding compliance, plan status, and future of the plan. Following these numerous working sessions, recommendations and resolutions were passed by the Metropolitan Council, with further review by the Holy Synod of Bishops and then at the AAC to ensure everyone was aligned and we could build the approach to “right the ship”. It was also at the AAC that new Pension Board members were elected.

In summary, the outcome and next steps include, but are not limited to, the increase in employer contributions (*via Metropolitan Council resolution with confirmation and approval by the Holy Synod of Bishops*)), commitment to improved communication and information sharing between the Pension Board and Metropolitan council, finding a new actuarial firm, assessment of investment managers, and other steps as necessary while this progress continues.

### **MC Committees**

The committees of the Metropolitan Council of the Orthodox Church in America currently include:

- Ethics and Human Resource
- Finance and Investment
- Internal Governance
- Legal
- Technology
- Properties
- Pension

Each committee is comprised of a mix of clergy and lay people, with consideration of applicable skill sets. Additionally, there is an internal Auditing Committee, which is mandated by the OCA Statute, consisting of three persons with relevant professional experience appointed by and reporting to the Metropolitan Council.

At the Metropolitan Council’s Fall Session, the agenda included discussion of the committees themselves, and that we evaluate and ensure we are focusing on the right areas, in the right way, and change if necessary. Suggestions were requested for any new or modified

committees, along with the expectation that members of the Metropolitan Council serve on at least one committee during their service.

All current committee members are listed and visible on the OCA website. We are still examining if other, new committees would be of value to the service of the OCA and how to better serve the needs of the Church.

### **Special Sessions: Charity Efforts**

One of the Special Sessions early in the year was called to discuss and pass a resolution that the OCA immediately facilitate a collection to support those affected by the events in Ukraine. Any donations received, in their entirety, would be sent directly to ELEOS, the humanitarian agency of the Polish Orthodox Church. During this zoom meeting, it was a very swift and unanimous vote in favor, and immediately a website was made available from February 28<sup>th</sup> until March 7<sup>th</sup> with a \$10,000 goal. Not only was the goal immediately met, over \$400,000 was raised within the first week alone. The website remained active a little while longer due to overwhelming response, and it was announced at the All-American Council that the total collected approached \$750,000.

Another vote was taken in March by unanimous written consent to donate a contribution of \$10,000 to the Romanian Patriarchate for the benefit and relief of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.

### **Other Business**

Other projects and initiatives are underway such as:

- **Language translation**

While this is a pressing need, and widespread, translating materials into Spanish is an example of where to start. The council is always ready to welcome those with language and translation skills to participate in these efforts, or those who can offer guidance having worked with translation software, consultants, or vendors.

- **Sunday School Curriculum**

A more standardized curriculum for Sunday School programs is being developed. The goal is to offer guidelines to help align consistency according to age and grade, as well as the arrangement of content through the school year aligned with the liturgical calendar.

**Looking forward as we begin 2023**

Updates are expected on the following points of action:

- Steady improvement of collaboration and communication between all stewards and stakeholders of the Pension Plan
- Finalization of a new actuarial firm
- Assessment of investment management of the pension fund
- Access and visibility to pension fund performance indicators
- Updates from the Property Committee on progress to date regarding the sale of the Westwood property in Syosset
- Progress on other initiatives

As the Metropolitan Council continues to work on these and other items, we thank you and ask for your continued prayers as we enter 2023.

*Report prepared and respectfully submitted:*

*Danalisa Radu, Metropolitan Council member*