



DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia • Orthodox Church in America

Metropolitan Council Report 61st Annual Diocesan Assembly

January 23 - 24, 2025

During the year, the Metropolitan Council continued to work on key focal points, including the sale of the Westwood Property as well as the Pension Plan. There were also other topics presented to the Metropolitan Council at the Annual Spring Session, the Annual Fall Session, other Special Sessions and various communications in between.

Special Session, January 24, 2024

The year began with a Special Session held on January 24 to discuss updates and progress made towards the sale of the Westwood property, as well as other legal matters concerning the Church. Regarding the sale of the property, the Metropolitan Council voted to authorize Archpriest Alexander Rentel to sign the contract on behalf of the OCA, subject to the approval of the Holy Synod.

On February 28, the Holy Synod unanimously confirmed the vote of the Metropolitan Council, and subsequently, the purchase agreement was reached, and the contract signed with the buyer. The agreement details a purchase price of \$4.25 million, with an anticipated timeline for closing within 24-36 months to allow for the New York state and local regulatory processes. Further updates will be shared on the OCA website when available.

Annual Spring Session, March 5, 7 and 28, 2024

The annual Spring Session was held via teleconference on March 5 and 7. In addition, His Beatitude, along with the OCA Administration and our General Counsel, Mark Hamilton, suggested we add a third session to ensure sufficient time to review findings and recommendations of the Pension Board. This additional meeting took place on March 28 via teleconference.

The presentation and recommendations focused on the health of the Fund, and how to fortify it. After the analysis was presented, it was clear that stabilizing the Plan by increased participation and funding are both of primary importance.

Following the discussion, an amendment was proposed by the Pension Board. It included, but was not limited to, requirements for employer contributions for inactive and non-compliant eligible members, as well as clergy contributions. It is now required that all age-eligible clergy participate regardless of whether they have secular employment (bi-vocational) and regardless of the amount of their stipend or salary. Further, parishes and institutions with aged-out employees and/or employees who refuse to participate are still required to contribute regardless of how little they are paid.

The amendment was approved by the Metropolitan Council and then presented by His Beatitude to the Holy Synod for its consideration. The Holy Synod also approved, and then a press release was shared and posted on the OCA website with complete details.

Annual Fall Session, October 9, 10, and 11, 2024

The annual Fall Session was held in person in Springfield Virginia on October 9, 10 and 11. Discussion on the Pension Fund continued, with updates from the Pension Board, the Pension Committee, and General Council. There was data presented that showed the Fund is moving in the right direction. There was also consensus in the room that communication and information sharing has greatly improved. That said, the Metropolitan Council agreed it would be beneficial to add two (2) representatives to work with the Pension Board and Pension Committee. This is with the specific purpose of continuing to build on this progress of collaboration and transparency, while providing additional review of data in a collaborative and thorough manner.

A presentation was given on the work and status of Mission Planting Grants. The program is somewhat stagnating, so the remaining second – and third-year grants will proceed, but the discussion centered around how to improve and grow the program. Thus, to help consider how the program can be reinvigorated, two members of the Metropolitan Council volunteered to partner with Archpriest Thomas Soroka.

The Metropolitan Council also approved a resolution to expand the Office of Pastoral Life. More information will be shared by Father Solak as updates become available.

His Beatitude made a presentation, a “Call for Reflections”, which is meant to help the Orthodox faithful in preparation for the 21st All-American Council in Phoenix, Arizona. This was introduced as a survey and study guide designed to promote thinking among not just the Metropolitan Council, but also parishes, missions, seminaries, monasteries and all institutions. Information is available on the OCA website, and the deadline for submitting feedback is February 18, 2025.

Additional Communications and Updates since the Fall Session

On Friday, December 6, The Rev. Dr. Alexander Rentel, Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America, sent an email to members of the Metropolitan Council informing Council that he had submitted his letter of resignation to His Beatitude, effective December 31, 2024. Father Rentel will be joining St. Vladimir’s Seminary as a Chief Operating

Officer and resume there a full-time faculty position as Assistant Professor of Canon Law. During this transition Archpriest Alessandro Margheritino, Secretary of the OCA, will step in as Interim Chancellor. Further updates will be shared when available.

Archpriest Alessandro also sent out an email that the OCA administration will resume the internal distribution of the Monthly Digests of Chancery activities. The purpose of these documents is to provide a compilation of the main activities of the Central Administration of the Orthodox Church in America. He also reminded us that if any Diocese is planning a public event, to please send him the information so that it can be published on the web calendar on the OCA website.

Respectfully submitted,

Danalisa J. Radu

Father Nicholas J. Solak