

Diocesan Assembly Report
from
The Diocesan Representatives to the Metropolitan Council
July 19, 2011
Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Endicott, NY

Submitted by the Very Reverend John Shimchick and Dr. Paul Witek

As your diocesan representatives to the Metropolitan Council, we would like to present to the faithful clergy and laity of the diocese a full reporting of the work and deliberations of the Council over the past six months. The work of the Metropolitan Council over the past several months has primarily focused on preparations for the upcoming All-American Council that is to convene in Seattle, Washington in November 2011. In addition the standing committees of the Metropolitan council have worked in addressing other pressing concerns of the Church, which will be discussed as well in the proceeding pages of this report.

The Development of a Strategic Plan for the Orthodox Church in America

Beginning in the Fall of 2010 and continuing through the early months of 2011, much of the attention of the Metropolitan Council was focused on the development of the strategic plan for the Orthodox Church in America. A charge of the All American Council held in Pittsburgh in 2009, the development of the strategic plan was primarily accomplished through the auspices of the Council's Strategic Planning Committee. In the Fall of 2010 the Strategic Planning Committee developed 10 working groups which were charged with developing core objectives and strategic planning steps in various aspects of Church life. Throughout January and February of 2011 these working group met primarily through teleconference and developed the various sections of the overall plan. The work of the ten groups was collectively compiled by Strategic Planning Committee Chair, Fr. John Vitko, and brought together into a working draft by the end of April 2011. The working draft was presented to the Metropolitan Council at its Spring session in early May 2011, where a resolution was adopted to distribute the draft to the broader Church through the website of the Orthodox Church in America (online at <http://www.oca.org/PDF/NEWS/2011/2011-0519-studypaperstratplan.pdf>) as well as the summer issue of *The Orthodox Church* (issue forth coming). During this development process, Dr. Witek served on the working group focused on developing objectives for theological education as well as served on the broader Strategic Planning Committee.

Delay of the Spring Session of the Metropolitan Council

The spring session of the Metropolitan Council was originally scheduled to take place in Syosset, NY on the week of March 13th, 2011, but was postponed by His Beatitude Metropolitan JONAH following the announcement of his 60 leave of absence during the Great Fast. The meeting was rescheduled for the first week of May, and the venue was moved to Chicago to

facilitate a joint meeting of the Holy Synod of Bishops and Metropolitan Council on the week following the consecration of His grace Bishop MATTHIAS.

Spring Session of the Metropolitan Council

The Metropolitan Council held its spring session in Chicago at the Chancery of the Diocese of the Midwest on May 4th & 5th. The meetings held over the course of two days in Chicago covered a broad range of issues in an atmosphere that could be characterized as candid with particular moments of critical intensity. The Council took up a very full agenda which was discussed in a press release on the Orthodox Church in America's website (<http://www.oca.org/news/2533>). As the press release mentions, the Council heard reports given by His Beatitude, the officers of the church, as well as the reports of the various standing committees of the Metropolitan Council. In executive session the council also heard a report of the Sexual Misconduct Policy Advisory Committee. From the various sessions several major issues could be highlighted.

Policies and Procedures of Holy Synod Clarified

During his opening remarks, His Beatitude made the council aware of four resolutions (presented in minutes of Holy Synod's spring session <http://www.oca.org/PDF/NEWS/2011/2011-0506-mayhssynodminutes.pdf>) adopted by the Holy Synod of Bishops at their Spring session that help clarify several issues of internal governance of the Synod itself. The resolutions adopted by the Synod make the following affirmations: that the Primate of the Church is not to appoint himself to the Locum Tenancy of vacant diocesan sees; that officers of the Church be confirmed by the Synod of Bishops upon recommendation of the Metropolitan Council and dismissed from service by the Synod upon recommendation of the Metropolitan; that the Lesser Synod of Bishops meet on a bi-monthly basis to address pressing concerns of the Church, approve all programs and initiatives taken up by the Church in between sessions of the Holy Synod, and exercise oversight over the officers of the Church on behalf of the whole Synod; and that the Chancellor will act as the chief operating officer of a "Synodal Chancery" and is accountable to the Synod as a whole. Following His Beatitude's remarks there was active discussion of these resolutions adopted by the Synod. Members of the Synod noted that the resolutions were meant to give clarity to issues of governance within the Synod which were quite vague within the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America. It was made clear to Council members that these resolutions were not amendments to the Statute, but rather procedural resolutions that would shape how the Synod would do its work as it moves into the future.

The Strategic Plan

Fr. John Vitko presented to the Council the latest draft of the Strategic Plan (Version 5.5), which was distributed to Diocesan Council Members via email on Tuesday May 10, 2011 (hard copies available at meeting). Upon the conclusion of Fr. Vitko's presentation, a decision was made by the Council to officially release the draft to the broader Church via the OCA website as well as

in the upcoming edition of *The Orthodox Church*. The draft of the strategic plan was the collective work of ten working groups that developed plan objectives and action steps over the course of January and February of 2011. During its formulation Dr. Witek submitted to Father Vitko and committee members (copied to His Grace Bishop MICHAEL) a detailed critique of the draft in which he shared some major concerns concerning the plan. Among these concerns were a lack of coherent structure and consistency within the plan, as well as some points regarding the language itself. Many of my concerns were addressed and many suggestions as well as those of other committee members were incorporated into the draft and are manifested in the version shared with the broader church. The draft does possess greater consistency and manifests clearer language than previous versions, however it is still in need of refinement and improvement.

The All American Council

Fr. Eric Tosi presented a report on the All American Council to be held in November of 2011 in Seattle. Fr. Eric reported that the planning of the Council continued to move forward with much progress, and that forthcoming materials concerning the council were to be soon released so that delegates would be able to make their plans for travelling to the Council. Fr. Eric shared something of the structure of the council noting that there would be general plenary sessions combined with two days of breakout sessions that would focus primarily on the areas covered in the new strategic plan. Discussion of the All American council also included a conversation concerning the participation and seating of council observers.

Chancellors Old and New

At the request of several members of the Metropolitan Council, Fr. Alexander Garklavs was present at the Spring session and addressed the council concerning the end of his time as Chancellor. The council affirmed Fr. Garklavs' dedicated service to the Church, and passed a resolution recommending that he "remain as consultant to the Interim Chancellor for his institutional knowledge and continuity of the work of the Chancery; that his compensation and benefits continue until he receives another appropriate appointment; and that his severance package of four months' salary be deferred compensation." Moving forward, the council directed its Human Resource Committee to begin the process of organizing a search for a new chancellor by the next meeting of the Metropolitan Council, and moved to provide funding for the search. Dr. Witek presently sits on this committee and will be actively involved in the search process as it moves forward throughout the summer leading up to the Fall session of the Metropolitan Council in September 2011.

Executive Sessions

The council took up several executive sessions to discuss confidential matters. Discussions included a report of the legal and ethic committees, as well as a presentation of the Sexual Misconduct Advisory Committee. Discussions within executive session could be characterized

as candid and at times intense. Among the significant decisions made after discussions in executive session, the Council resolved to recommend that any candidates to fill a position in the Office for Review of Sexual Misconduct must be vetted by the advisory committee.

Upcoming Events

Throughout the summer continued work will take place on the Strategic Plan as feedback is given from discussions of the Working Draft that will take place on both diocesan and parish levels of Church life. Before adjourning at its Spring Session the Metropolitan Council set its fall session for the last week of September in order to precede the upcoming All-American Council to be held in November.

Concluding Thoughts

It is our honor to serve diocesan representatives to Metropolitan Council, and we ask for your continued prayers in serving the Church in this capacity. Serving on Metropolitan Council is a very intense experience, and one that we take very seriously. We would welcome any insight you may have concerning the issues addressed in this report, would be glad to address any concerns you might have, and gladly answer any specific questions you may have concerning the work of the Council over the past several months.