

# Orthodox Church in America

**Metropolitan Council**  
P.O. Box 675, Syosset, NY 11791 / USA  
Tel: 1-516-922-0550 / Fax: 1-516-922-0954  
[info@oca.org](mailto:info@oca.org) -- <http://www.oca.org>

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## **Address of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius to the Metropolitan Council meeting Spring 2000**

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### **My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:**

I greet you in the love of Christ and with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will inspire us in the task of building up the Holy Orthodox Church in America.

As we enter the Third Millennium of Christianity, we are inspired by the fact that for two thousand years the Church has remained faithful to the mission entrusted to it by our Lord and Master. Throughout the past two millennia, in favorable times and circumstances as well as in times of opposition and persecution, the Church has steadfastly proclaimed the saving truth of the Gospel and has lived in fidelity to its missionary vocation. Today, standing on the threshold of the Third Millennium, the Holy Orthodox Church, through its hierarchs and clergy, monastics, and faithful, continues to proclaim the same Truth. And we do so with renewed dedication and zeal, inspired by the lives and examples of those who have gone before us.

As we come together today, I give thanks to God for you and for the assistance and counsel you give to me, as Primate, in my task of overseeing the good and well-being of the Holy Orthodox Church in America.

The discussion and reports of our meetings of the Metropolitan Council, while addressing the current, and often routine, concerns of our life and mission, must always be placed within the context of the Church's living Tradition, which is both ancient and young. We approach the work of the Metropolitan Council with the understanding that we are called to serve and help implement the Church's living Tradition. Our responsibility as those called to serve Christ's Church is to be faithful and loyal to the past and yet oriented to the future.

The role of the Metropolitan Council is first described in the statute of our Church as "exist(ing) for the purpose of implementing the decisions of the All-American Council and continuing its work between sessions. The decisions of the Metropolitan Council shall become effective upon approval of the Metropolitan or Holy Synod, depending on the nature of the decision." Further definitions of the Metropolitan Council's role and responsibilities relate primarily to Church administration. The existence of this body is always to be viewed within the context of the canonical tradition of the Church. Thus, the Metropolitan Council, as well as other advisory bodies at the level of the Church's central administration, is to be understood and defined in light of its relationship to the Primate who is designated by canonical tradition as the primary overseer of the Church's life and mission.

You who are present here today as members of the Metropolitan Council, whether by virtue of election, appointment, or office, bring to this meeting your concern for the well-being of the Church, its mission and ministry. You come to this meeting from varied backgrounds, with a wealth of life experience, professional knowledge, and above all, faith. Your knowledge and insights, counsel and advice, and your commitment to the Church, are of valuable assistance to me in my role as chief overseer of the Church's life and mission.

It is within this context and with this understanding that the Metropolitan Council comes together today and tomorrow to discuss various matters affecting the life of the Church and to provide counsel and advice that will assist me in my role as Primate.

There are several concerns I would like to address today which affect the ongoing life of the Church: namely, the questions of finances, stewardship and how the Church administration and its ministries are supported. Related to these issues is also the topic of the changing demographics of the Church which were highlighted in a presentation made at the All-American Council held last July in Pittsburgh.

We have repeatedly discussed multi-faceted concerns about our financial status, financial capacities, and financial support. As much as we may not like it or want to admit it, our ability to minister and to serve is greatly influenced by our financial status. And, quite frankly, financial status is determined by and based upon the income received through assessments, those assessments that are mandated by the Statute of our Church as well as by resolutions of the All-American Council.

The resolution that has come to be known as the "Fair Share" resolution was passed at the 12th All-American Council and approved by the Holy Synod of Bishops to help clarify the role that assessments play in funding the life and mission of the Church. This resolution promised not only to stabilize the level of assessment income, but also to begin leading the Church to a more responsible, more mature manner of financing its mission, not only on a national level but also on the local and diocesan level. However, as a result of individual, subjective interpretations of that resolution, assessment income threatens to decrease rather than increase. The confusion that has arisen from the various interpretations applied to the resolution is something that must be discussed by us in a manner that provides an acceptable solution to this ongoing challenge.

The Holy Synod of Bishops has provided for an implementation of the "Fair Share" resolution that will not allow for subjective interpretations by individual dioceses, priests, or parish councils. We want to assure that this resolution is implemented throughout the whole Church, for the good of the whole Church. Included among the reports which will be presented during this meeting of the Metropolitan Council is a report which will help us better understand how this resolution is to be implemented.

The question of Church finances and responsible support of the Church's life and ministry is clearly connected to that of demographics. This is a topic which has been discussed before. The reports submitted by our parish and mission communities confirm that there is a definite change taking place within our Church; there is a clear shift in its demographics.

We are grateful to God for the many years of vibrant Church life which once was experienced in the geographic areas of this country that were settled by large groups of Orthodox immigrants. However, we must admit that the large, ethnically-based parish around which the rest of community life revolves is an increasingly-rare phenomenon. This is most particularly true for parishes that now find themselves located in those inner-city areas that have fallen victim to what is often referred to as "urban decline." Thus, we are seeing that a significant number of the large parishes, which were once the backbone of church activity in America, are experiencing a decline in membership and in viability.

We must also note that, as many older, larger parishes decline in membership, we are also witnessing the birth and growth of new parish and mission communities. These newer communities tend to be smaller in terms of membership and more widely dispersed geographically, often quite isolated from other Orthodox parishes or missions. As we are grateful for the contributions made to the Church and its life by older, more-established parishes, we are equally grateful for the life and vitality which these younger and smaller communities of faithful bring to the Church as she continues her Mission of proclaiming the

fullness of the Gospel of Christ to North America.

The reality of the Church's changing demographics cannot be ignored as we plan and strategize for the future in a way that assures the greatest effectiveness in our mission of proclaiming the Gospel.

At its recent meeting, the Holy Synod of Bishops discussed the question of vocations to the episcopal ministry and how candidates are chosen and prepared for service as bishops in the Church. The need to nurture vocations to the episcopal ministry cannot be discussed without also speaking of the need to nurture vocations to all ministries within the Church, most notably vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and monastic life. All of us, bishops, priests, deacons, monastics, and laity, must encourage our priests to inspire and foster worthy candidates for the sacred ministry and the monastic life. We must encourage parents to instill within their children a love for the Church that opens them to the possibility of being called to the ordained ministry or monastic life. We must encourage parish communities to serve as the "first schools" of ministry and to be supportive of those who are in the process of discerning the vocation to which God is calling them.

I am now going to update you regarding the matter of the Primate's Discretionary Fund and bring this issue to closure.

On February 6, 2000, Archbishop HERMAN and I, along with a number of trusted professionals, met with the accounting firm of Lambrides, Lamos, Moulthrop & Company. At that time, we made it perfectly clear that the discretionary funds of the Primate of the Church, along with the discretionary funds of all hierarchs and the funds and accounts of each individual diocese, parish, mission, monastery, and seminary, are not included among the accounts under the control of the Treasurer of the Church. This matter has been clarified and reaffirmed by the Holy Synod of Bishops.

It is with a profound sense of responsibility and with the awareness that Church assets and funds are given to the Church to enable it to fulfill its holy mission and ministry that I approach my role of stewardship. I take this role seriously and use prudence in carrying out these purposes. I am not so naïve as to believe that everyone will always agree or be satisfied with my decisions or the decisions of the Holy Synod of Bishops, but we, as the Church's hierarchs, have been called by the Holy Spirit to lead the Church, to nourish the spiritual well-being of God's people, and to be custodians of the temporal affairs and assets of the Church.

At the recent meeting of the Holy Synod, Archbishop HERMAN, *Acting Treasurer of the Orthodox Church in America*, reported that the Audit Committee had met and had concluded the audits for fiscal years 1997 and 1998. It was also reported that an independent CPA firm had completed its summary review of the Metropolitan's Discretionary Account for 1997 and 1998 and has already begun the review for 1999. The Holy Synod approved the actions taken concerning the financial audits for 1997 and 1998 and the summary review of the Discretionary Account of the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America for the same years. Thus, all of the discretionary funds of which I am Chief Steward have been reviewed and properly accounted for by an independent certified public accounting firm.

As you know, the reorganization of the Chancery operations is well under way as a result of our two and one-half year study that was guided by a professional consulting firm. Detailed job descriptions and more effective use of personnel were two of the major areas addressed in the reorganization plan that resulted from this study. The decision to out-source the work of the accounting department is now being implemented and the services of a Certified Public Accountant have been retained. Their professional assistance and service will streamline our financial operations and will simplify the day-to-day on-site bookkeeping. I have also decided that, beginning with the 1999 financial records of the Church, the annual audit will be conducted by the Audit Committee elected by the All-American Council, as stipulated in the Statute. I have directed the chairman of the Audit Committee that, should he need additional professional accounting advice beyond that of the CPA engaged by the Church, he may do so.

These procedures will fulfill the reorganization goals of the Chancery by making its work more time and cost effective and will also serve to eliminate much of the misinformation that has been disseminated over the past few months. Our resources, time, and energies can thus be better utilized in serving Christ

and the needs of the Church.

At this time, I would also like to inform you of recent changes in Chancery personnel. Theresa Egan, part of the Chancery secretarial staff, recently retired after twenty years of dedicated service. Protodeacon John Hopko, after eight years of service in the Office of the Metropolitan, the last four as my secretary, has petitioned for ordination to the Holy Priesthood. I have responded favorably and have given my blessing to this request. The date for his ordination has been set for June 29, 2000, the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. After priestly ordination, he will be assigned for service as a parish priest in one of the dioceses of the Church. I have begun the process of appointing a priest to succeed Protodeacon John as my secretary. Paul Hunchak, a member of the Chancery staff for ten years, recently resigned his position as Church Secretary, which he held for four years, and as Assistant to the Chancellor, in order to pursue a career consistent with his life plans. Father Robert Kondratich, OCA Chancellor, is presently seeking a replacement for his assistant. We thank Paul for his commitment, untiring labor, and dedication to the work of the Chancery.

Next month, May 10-16, I will travel to Japan to participate in the enthronement of Bishop PETER as the new Primate of the Autonomous Church of Japan. His Eminence, Archbishop HERMAN, will join me in representing the Orthodox Church in America on this occasion.

Lastly, in the past months while the world has celebrated the beginning of a new century and a new millennium, we, as Christ's faithful people living in North America, have been given the opportunity to reflect upon the place of our Church in the overall history of the one Church of Christ throughout these past two thousand years.

The Orthodox Church in America, sharing in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel "to the nations," has been specially blessed in the many holy men and women who have shared in the planting of the Gospel on the North American Continent. Many, indeed, are the saints who have "shone forth" in North America. Among these stands a Servant of God and Hierarch of the Church whose life was notable for his dedication to preserving the unity of the Church in North America even when ethnic differences threatened to divide it. I speak, of course, of the ever-memorable Servant of God, Bishop RAPHAEL (Hawaweeny).

In 1996, while meeting with His Eminence, Metropolitan PHILIP of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, I first suggested that a joint Canonization Commission be established to investigate the possibility of Bishop RAPHAEL's glorification. For several years prior to that, the Antiochian Archdiocese had already been posing the question of this glorification to the Patriarch and Holy Synod of Antioch. These overtures, however, received no response. The joint Canonization Commission was subsequently formed and began its work in 1997. Its work has continued since then.

Last month, during its spring session, the Holy Synod of Bishops issued a formal decree proclaiming the sanctity and numbering among the Saints this Servant of God and Hierarch who faithfully labored to proclaim the Gospel to the peoples of North America. Final preparations are now being made for the ceremonies in which Bishop RAPHAEL will be glorified as a saint of the Church.

I invite all of you to be present for our Church's official Millennium Celebration, which will take place during the annual Memorial Day Pilgrimage to Saint Tikhon's Monastery, May 26-29. Together, as Bishops, Clergy, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, we will celebrate the beginning of the Third Millennium of Christianity. This year we will have the joy of welcoming His Beatitude, Metropolitan SAWA, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland. And we will be blessed to celebrate the glorification of our Father among the Saints, Bishop RAPHAEL. I encourage all of you to make plans and arrangements now in order to participate in this important and historic event.

As we continue on our Lenten journey toward the celebration of the Lord's bright and joyous Pascha, I ask you, my dear brothers and sisters, for your prayers and your forgiveness. Let us now entrust our efforts for the well-being of Christ's Holy Orthodox Church in America to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth.

*Submitted this seventeenth day of April 2000.*

**+ THEODOSIUS**

*Archbishop of Washington*

*Metropolitan of All America and Canada*