

**Interview with Bishop Melchisedek of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania,
Interim OCA Chancellor**

**Svetlana Vais
June 15, 2011**

1. Your Grace, do you have any particular concerns about the current state of affairs in the OCA?

My principal concern is that of effective communication at every level. There has, for a variety of reasons, been misunderstanding on some basic issues in the Orthodox Church in America, and hopefully these misunderstandings will be satisfactorily resolved.

2. What are the administrative issues in the Church that have concerned you since your appointment as Interim Chancellor of the OCA?

The main administrative issue, for me, is that the Central Church offices function smoothly during this time of transition, and, at the same time, maintain our commitment to the principles outlined in our Best Practices. We have to see that they are fully implemented.

It should be understood that Church life – particularly as pertains to its ministry – is now much more complicated in several ways. For example, in 1985 - only twenty-six years ago – I was at a conference at Princeton Seminary. The conference, which concerned the WCC document on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, was attended by a fairly large number of people (both men and women) from various Protestant Denominations, as well as the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. At one point, the topic of clergy sexual misconduct came up and it was pointed out that according to traditional canonical standards, any clergyman who was caught in such a situation was to be deposed.

The response to that statement of historical fact was a virtual explosion – how unchristian, how unloving, how unpastoral, etc. The vast majority of those present were of the opinion that any clergy caught in such a situation should simply be relocated to another parish in order to work out his repentance, and to continue his ministry. And, indeed, that is exactly what was done in most cases.

Today such an attitude is considered criminally negligent. Clergy in the U.S. are set on the same level as other professionals and are subject to the same standards, legally, morally, and ethically. So, a case of clergy misconduct is regarded as a kind of malpractice, and it is no longer the case that it is sufficient to simply remove or replace an offending priest, but the Church is held liable for the treatment and well-being of the victims. Failure to implement our policies properly, subjects the Church to the possibility of crippling legal action. This is merely one instance of a variety of areas in which the clergy, and through them the Church, are being held responsible for the well-being of its membership.

3. At present, to what extent are the actions of the OCA Holy Synod and Metropolitan Jonah in accord?

In theory, we would seem to be mostly in accord. According to the OCA Statute, the Holy Synod is the highest canonical authority of the local Church. The Primate, as the chairman of the Holy Synod, has the task of perceiving and building consensus in the whole. In this way, there is mutual accountability and mutual obedience, of the Primate and the other members to each other and to the decisions of the Holy Synod as a whole. One essential concern of the Holy Synod is that agreements, which reflect the consensus of the entire Synod and have been ratified by the entire Holy Synod, following our Best Practices, should be carried out by the Holy Synod as a whole.

4. What is your assessment of the significance of the concelebration of Metropolitan Hilarion of ROCOR with Metropolitan Jonah on May 24?

It is always a source of joy when the “Brethren dwell together in unity”, especially when that unity is concretely expressed in the Eucharistic offering. Having said that, it is difficult to assess the exact impact of this particular concelebration. To be sure, this is the first time that the chief hierarchs of the OCA and the ROCOR have concelebrated since autocephaly. But this is not the first time in which bishops and priests of the ROCOR and the OCA have concelebrated. For example, there was a ROCOR bishop among those concelebrating the Divine Liturgy at the enthronement of Metropolitan Jonah, and there was a ROCOR priest representing his bishop (who had another commitment) at my own consecration.

5. In your opinion, was this historic event largely the result of the joint work of the Commissions of the OCA and ROCOR or simply the hospitable invitation of Archbishop Justinian, Administrator of the Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USA?

It should also be noted that there was another prior date set for all the bishops of both Synods to meet and concelebrate. Unfortunately, that date could not be met. In that circumstance, much credit is due to Archbishop Justinian for arranging and providing the hospitality for this particular concelebration.

6. Your Grace, can you speak about any upcoming joint events or liturgical concelebrations among these three Orthodox jurisdictions (Russian Patriarchate, OCA, & ROCOR)?

There are, as yet, no such events planned for the immediate future for the exclusive participation of the OCA, ROCOR, and Russian Patriarchal hierarchies. However, the Episcopal Assembly for North America, to which all of the canonical Orthodox Bishops in North America belong (which includes Greek, Arab, Bulgarian, Serbian and other hierarchs from sixteen national groups) and in which the hierarchs of these three jurisdictions are full participants, is proceeding to meet in its various committees and commissions. It is in this larger venue that all three bodies

have important roles to play in furthering the unity of Orthodox Christians in North America.