

Metropolitan Council Meeting

Spring 2022

February 9–10, 2022

Report of the Metropolitan

Session One (Wednesday)

1. *Welcome.* I welcome all of you to the Spring Meeting of the Metropolitan Council. We have a number of important matters to discuss, so I will try to limit my introductory remarks here.
2. *New Members.* We especially warmly welcome our new Metropolitan Council representatives from the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania, Fr. Nicholas Solak and Danilisa Radu, who are replacing Fr. Timothy Hojnicky and Sharon Shingara, whose terms have concluded. With gratitude to Fr. Tim and Sharon, we look forward to the contributions of Fr. Nicholas and Danilisa. We also welcome, as representative from the Diocese of Western Pennsylvania, Fr. John Parker, who was elected last Fall but is joining us for his first meeting this week. Fr. John, Fr. Nicholas, and Danilisa, we look forward to your contributions to this body.
3. *Our Cleveland Gathering.* Our last meeting in October was held in conjunction with a special gathering of the leadership of the Orthodox Church in America, including the Holy Synod, the Diocesan Chancellors, the leadership of all three of our seminaries, and superiors from several of our monastic communities. Even though COVID concerns forced the shortening of our gathering and the postponement of the Holy Synod meeting, I am pleased that we were able to accomplish what we hoped to accomplish at this joint meeting. Follow-up work has begun on the results of that meeting, and various entities will continue to carry on the work by trying to implement concrete solutions that were proposed or digging deeper into some of the areas of needed work. This is a Church-wide endeavor

which I hope will bear fruit, not only at the All-American Council in July, but beyond. I am grateful especially to Fr. Alessandro for his oversight of this process.

4. *October Events.* In the final weeks of October, following our gathering in Cleveland, I participated in the Annual Assembly for the Diocese of New England, in my role as locum tenens. I continue to have regular meetings with the Chancellor, Fr. John Kreta, and with Igumen Nikodhim Preston, the Chancellor of the Albanian Archdiocese, for which I also serve as locum tenens. The episcopal search process is underway in both dioceses, though at different speeds.
5. *November Events.* In November, I attended a concert of music by Arvo Pärt, co-conducted by Benedict Sheehan at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; met briefly with His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew at his hotel during his recent visit to the United States; and then participated in the “Opening of the Doors” ceremony at St. Nicholas Shrine at the 9/11 memorial. A planned visit of Fr. Alexander Rentel to the Phanar was postponed due to his bout with COVID, although he did present a paper virtually to the conference in which he was invited to participate. Later in November, I served with Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk at St. Tikhon’s Monastery, after he offered the keynote lecture at the Scripture Conference organized by St. Vladimir’s Seminary. His Eminence was very moved with his first visit to St. Tikhon’s Monastery, and was particularly impressed with the choir and with his conversations with Benedict Sheehan, the music director at the Seminary.

I had accepted to travel to Moscow at the end of November to participate in the celebrations surrounding the 10th anniversary of Patriarch Kirill’s enthronement as Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, but the event was postponed by the Moscow Patriarchate due to COVID concerns. Nevertheless, His Grace Bishop Alexis, who had been scheduled to travel with me to Moscow, did in fact travel to Russia for a week, where he ordained one of his Alaskan seminarians who is studying in Moscow. It was also planned for Fr. Alexander Rentel to travel there for the Feast of St. Catherine, the patronal feast of our representation Church, but he was unable to do so because of his health.

6. *December Events.* I took the last two weeks in November as personal time and travelled to France to spend time at my family home in the Alps and to visit with family. Upon my return, I presided at the Liturgy for the Feast of St. Nicholas on the Old Calendar at St. Nicholas Cathedral in New York City. His Grace Bishop Matthew of Sourozh was scheduled to concelebrate with me but was unable to secure the appropriate visa to travel to the United States from Canada, where he was at the time.
7. *January and Recent Events.* I spent most of the month of January in the Washington area, which allowed me to visit my parishes and also participate in the March for Life. I hosted the participating hierarchs of the Assembly of Bishops at my St. Nicholas Cathedral for the Divine Liturgy, which was served by a priest and a deacon. I also led the traditional Orthodox service before the actual March. Later in January, I served in Bridgeport for the retirement of the former Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America, Archpriest John Jillions, and also ordained a deacon for the Diocese of New England. At the end of the month, I served for the Feast of the Three Hierarchs at St. Vladimir's Seminary. Just today, I received a visit from two bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP), His Grace Bishop Viktor of Barshevskii and His Grace Bishop Dionysii of Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi, both vicars of His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry.
8. *Relocation.* First, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to Greg Honshul and Ray Steeb for their tremendous and professional leadership, not only of the Property Committee, but also of the Landing Committee and its various subcommittees. This has been a labor-intensive process and one, as they will report, which is not yet completed. In October, I reported that we were at a point where it was necessary to take a step back to more carefully reflect on the major undertaking that is the Chancery relocation project. Today, I am pleased to say that we are ready to take a step forward, or perhaps even several steps forward. I welcome the input and discussion to be held by the Metropolitan Council on this

particular subject, but I hope that we will positively consider the resolution that is being presented today.

I have remained committed to my intention of relocating to the Washington, DC, area and am prepared to initiate this process in a more concrete manner: by relocating my residence there by July 1 of this year, by securing a dignified temporary situation for the offices of the Chancery, and by beginning the process of gradually moving the appropriate Chancery staff, beginning this summer and continuing through next year. I do this for two main reasons, reasons which I have articulated before, but which nevertheless remain as the chief reasons for this relocation: 1) The Metropolitan should canonically and statutorily reside in his diocese, and the office which daily supports him should be with him; and 2) the greater Washington, DC, area provides one of the most effective locations for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and reaching out to the wider North American community.

9. *The Archives* are part of this consideration, and we will have a fuller presentation on that component as well, and a motion to consider.
10. *Our Apostolic Voyage*. Much of what I have stated very succinctly, I am intending to share with the broader Church in a fuller manner. Although I may not be able to prepare a second volume of my *Four Pillars* document, which I released at the time of the All-American Council in St. Louis, I am looking at ways to communicate my continued vision for the Apostolic work of the Orthodox Church in America. I have completed a 10-episode podcast series called “Our Apostolic Voyage,” which I plan on extending as an avenue of communicating with the broader Church about some of my own thoughts on our mission, including the benefits of a relocation to the Washington, DC, area.
11. *The Chancery*. In all of this activity, I am grateful for the support of the Chancery officers and staff, both those who are working here in person and those who are working remotely. Under the guidance of the Chancellor, Fr. Alexander Rentel, we

continue to see an increase in efficiency of my Office, even in these difficult COVID times. Fr. Alessandro Margheritino has shouldered many burdens, including the complex planning process that was involved in this week-long series of meetings in Cleveland and the ongoing work of the Archives relocation. I offer my thanks to Fr. Alessandro for his valiant efforts in work that often involves many frustrations and challenges, all of which he forges through valiantly and without complaint. In this, he is helped with great enthusiasm and energy by Barry Migyanko, who keeps a strong hand on all matters dealing with the logistics and functioning of the Central Administration. I am grateful to him for his persistence and for his perseverance.

You will hear more about the work of our other remote staff in the reports of Fr. Alexander and Fr. Alessandro, but I should also offer my gratitude to Andrew Smith, our Treasurer, and Susan Wisnewski, our Accounting Manager, with respect to all things financial; and to Fr. Thomas Soroka, who faithfully attends to the work of our Departments. Just recently added is Fr. Kyle Parrot, who has assumed the important role of Acting Communications Director. The rest of our communications team, including Fr. John Schroedel and Matushka Jessica Fuhrman, is to be commended, as is Alexis Liberovsky in the Archives. Alex recently represented the Orthodox Church in America at a conference in Serbia called to honor the centennial of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, for which he offered a talk.

12. *My Personal Staff.* For some time, I have not had the benefit of a personal secretary or a personal aide and subdeacon. Those responsibilities had been handled by the current staff as best as possible. Fr. Larry Soper has been serving as my driver and assistant for most of my pastoral visits, in addition to providing administrative support for the Diaconal Vocations Program and other aspects of the Chancery operation. More recently, we have also engaged two part-time and remote staff members who will share in the various needs of my personal secretary: Dn .Peter Ilchuk—who is well-known to us as Council Manager for the All-American Council, and who was instrumental in assisting Fr. Alessandro with this

gathering in Cleveland—will be helping me with overseeing my correspondence and setting my calendar, and will also travel with me on occasion. Fr. John Mikitish will help me with the drafting of documents and with some aspects of external relations.

13. *The Pension Plan.* I offer my sincere thanks to Andrew Smith and all those who assisted him, first in the preparation of the initial pension plan review, and then with the further assessment provided by members of this body. I think we all recognize the gravity of the situation, but, at the same time, we acknowledge the value and benefit of the pension plan of the Orthodox Church in America. It is important that this body thoroughly review this matter and that it discuss this as long as is necessary to reach the appropriate conclusions. It is not likely that we will arrive at such conclusions at this meeting, but it is nevertheless important and necessary that this body undertake its due diligence in this matter.

Thank you, and I ask for your prayers.

Session Two (Thursday)

14. *Finance and Investment Committee.* In light of the resolution adopted by the Metropolitan Council yesterday, and in anticipation of its confirmation by the Holy Synod in March, I would like to request that our Treasurer, Andrew Smith, engage the Finance and Investment Committee of the Metropolitan Council to do the following: a) formally review the compensation structure and the salary and stipend levels for all Chancery officers and staff, including the Metropolitan; b) ensure that they are in compliance with the compensation guidelines of the Orthodox Church in America; c) undertake this review with specific reference to the potential relocation of the Chancery offices and personnel to the greater Washington, DC, area; d) dialogue, at the appropriate time, with the Finance Committee of the Archdiocese of Washington to review and recalibrate, as necessary, the Archdiocesan financial contribution to the operation of the Central

Administration in its anticipated new geographical location; and e) report back on these matters to the Metropolitan Council by the Spring 2023 Meeting.

15. *Pension.* At the Fall 2021 Special Session of the Metropolitan Council (November 22, 2021), the Chancellor was authorized to enter into an agreement with Cheiron to review the pension plan. In December several introductory meetings were held between the Orthodox Church in America and Cheiron, and an engagement letter was signed. The pension review was discussed fairly extensively by the officers of the Church at their recent meeting in Washington, DC, and Andrew has kept me updated on the progress of the engagement. While it has not advanced as quickly as he would have liked, it is moving forward and we maintain the goal of having a report from Cheiron later this spring.