

**REPORT OF THE METROPOLITAN
SPRING 2026 METROPOLITAN COUNCIL**

HELD VIRTUALLY
MARCH 10 & 12, 2026

1. *Welcome.* I welcome the members of the Metropolitan Council to our regular Spring meeting. It is good to be with you once again as we turn our attention together to the sacred responsibilities entrusted to this body.

2. *New diocesan members.* At this session, we welcome a few new diocesan delegates to the Metropolitan Council: from the Albanian Archdiocese – Archpriest Nicholas Dellerman, Rector of Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church in Philadelphia and Lisa Sotir; and from the Diocese of the West, we welcome back Archpriest Lawrence Margitich, Rector of Saint Seraphim of Sarov Cathedral in Santa Rosa. We are grateful for your new and returning participation and look forward to your contributions.

3. *Departed.* With sorrow, we also offer our prayers to our Metropolitan Council representative from the Diocese of the Midwest, Matushka Miho Ealy, on the falling asleep of her father-in-law, Archpriest John Ealy, who had been serving in retirement at Saint Stephen's Orthodox Church in Longwood, Florida, a parish he had served for 27 years. Likewise, I ask for your prayers on behalf of the recently departed Barbara Honshul, the mother Greg Honshul, the chair of our property committee. On behalf of the Metropolitan Council, I offer condolences to Greg, to Fr. Gregory, Matushka Miho, and their extended families and pray that our Lord will grant eternal rest and

blessed repose to the departed servants of God, Archpriest John and Barbara.

4. *Bishop Seraphim*. I recently presided at the funeral services for the newly-departed Bishop Seraphim, formerly of Sendai, who was a missionary in the Church in Japan for many years and served the Orthodox Church in America in retirement in the New York area. The funeral services took place at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Yonkers, along with Archbishop Michael and a number of his clergy., I am grateful for His Eminence's personal efforts in caring for Bishop Seraphim in his final days and for the dedicated labors of the clergy of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey in overseeing the funeral and burial arrangements.

5. *Dptychs*. The website of the Orthodox Church in America, through its *In Memoriam* section, regularly informs the wider Church about the repose of the faithful servants of our Church. While I will not read the names of all those who have departed this life since our last Metropolitan Council meeting in October, I encourage you to read the obituaries that are written in remembrance of their lives. It is always inspiring to me when I read even those short lines of text that seek to encapsulate a life-time of ministry and service to Christ and his Church. Here I am reminded of the remarks of Saint Sophrony in his biography of Saint Silouan in which he reflects on the fact that the record of the Athonite's life, as reflected in the monastery register, is quite meager. A few short lines are sufficient to summarize his exterior life, from his birth, through his entrance into the monastery,

and to his death. And yet, beneath those few lines is contained an entire life-time of the saint's experience of God and of the depths of prayer, an experience of his inner life that is not lost but was providentially captured by his biographer (inasmuch as this is possible) to be offered as flowers and as a life-giving gift for the rest of the Church. Though many of us may not attain the heights of great saints such as Saint Silouan or Saint Sophrony, we should be encouraged in knowing that each of us can taste of the same grace of God as we struggle in this life to serve Christ, to pastor our flocks, to raise our families, and to love our neighbors. And to recall that, even in the brief listing of those who have departed this life, we can recognize and remember their years of faithful service.

6. *Saint John of the Ladder*. As we will be reminded this week, as we come up to the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, the reality of the Cross is ever before us. We can resist the Cross as a challenge or a setback or we can shoulder it as a call for ascetical and spiritual growth. A recent example of a potential setback is the fire that broke out last Saturday evening at St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church in Greenville, South Carolina. By the grace of God, no one was injured and the damage, though significant, is not beyond remediation. You will have seen the posting about this incident on the website of the Orthodox Church in America, including a link for a *GoFundMe* campaign. I spoke this morning with Fr. Marcus Burch, the rector of the parish, who provided me with some more details about what happened. He also expressed some hopeful optimism with respect to the next steps for the community, noting that, while the assessment of

the damage is ongoing, some immediate actions have already been initiated with respect to the structure itself, the iconography, and the attendant complications, such as the insurance coverage process. More encouraging to me was Fr. Marcus's report of the manner in which his community has come together to deal with this difficulty which they are accepting as an opportunity provided by God to further the mission of the community. As you may know, St John of the Ladder is one of the largest parishes in the Orthodox Church in America in terms of numbers of faithful with an average attendance of 500 on any given Sunday, a combined number of those worshipping at the three altars associated with the parish. I asked Fr Marcus to convey my personal prayers and the prayers of the entire Orthodox Church in America to the clergy (including Fr Peter Robichau, the Metropolitan Council clergy representative from the Diocese of the South, who is assigned at St John's) and to the faithful of the community. Finally, I confirmed my intention to visit Saint John's as previously scheduled for the consecration of the temple at the beginning of next year, though the specific timeline, of course, may need to be revisited depending on the practical challenges of the coming weeks and months.

7. *Church Growth and Clergy Health.* This recent challenge at Saint John's provides us with one example of the growth of the Church, a growth which has been the topic of discussion for all of us in the past two years, especially with the so-called "surge of catechumens and inquirers." This is a challenge and an opportunity for each of our local communities, each of our deaneries, and each of our dioceses. At

the same time, it is a challenge and an opportunity for the Orthodox Church in America as a whole. I am encouraged by the overall efforts on the local level but equally by the energy that is being applied to these challenges by specific institutions and bodies, such as our seminaries and the various offices of the central administration. In the past two months, I have participated in meetings of the Board of Trustees of both Saint Vladimir's Seminary and Saint Tikhon's Seminary. Each of them is taking seriously the need for robust strategic planning even as they each move forward with programs and approaches to address the pastoral formation and educational needs of the Church. While this is primarily focused on the need to form and prepare clergy and lay leaders for the Church, there is an acknowledgement of the importance of strengthening the life of the dioceses and parishes as they receive new converts and look to plant new missions and communities. Likewise, the work of the Office of Pastoral Life, under the direction of Fr. Nicholas Solak, is actively expanding the resources and support that are available to our clergy, our clergy wives, and their families. We will hear a fuller report from Fr. Nicholas on Thursday but I want to say here that I maintain, and ask that we continue to maintain, our strong support for the work of strengthening our clergy and their families as they labor sacrificially to expand the mission of the Orthodox Church in America.

8. *The Metropolitan Council.* It is, of course, the responsibility of our Holy Synod as the highest canonical authority, to oversee the overall trajectory of our Church in facing the challenges and responding to the opportunities that lie before us. It also falls to this body, the

Metropolitan Council, to represent the entire Church in this sacred work. Each of us brings the input of our respective dioceses or serves as a representative from the All-American Council. It is our responsibility to serve, as the Statute informs us, as the “permanent executive body of the Church administration.” This is not a small task and there are many aspects to the responsibilities that fall to us, not only financial and legal, but in the broader sense of exercising fiduciary responsibility for implementing and continuing the work of the All-American Council. Our agenda this week reflects the variety of ways in which we accomplish this. I encourage each of you to contribute to open and honest discussion about sometimes difficult subjects. It is precisely so that we might hold these discussions in a fraternal and respectful atmosphere that we gather in this way. Thank you for your participation in this valuable process.

9. *Archdiocese of Washington.* One of the ongoing matters for which we will receive updates this week is the ongoing process of the relocation of the chancery to the greater Washington area, particularly the status of the sale of the Westwood property. At the same time, I continue to oversee the administrative refreshing of the Archdiocese of Washington that I have outlined previously to the Metropolitan Council. As you may recall, this is not the introduction of something radically new but rather the clarification and implementation of the original intention of the Holy Synod, forty-five years ago, when it established the Archdiocese of Washington as the unique primatial diocese for the Orthodox Church in America. In that conception, the Archdiocese is composed of three deaneries: a territorial component

(that is, the present 11 parishes and missions), the military chaplains, and the stavropegial clergy. To express this structurally, it should be understood that the Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America also serves as the Chancellor for the larger Archdiocese and each of the three deaneries is overseen by a Dean. At present, there is no formally appointed Dean for the stavropegial clergy but Father Alessandro continues to assist me in a “Dean-like” capacity as he has traditionally done and Fr Ted Boback remains in place as the Dean of the Military Chaplains. With respect to the territorial parishes and missions, I have appointed Fr. Gregory Safchuk to serve as Interim Dean for the Washington Deanery. Although the title of Dean is new, the role and responsibilities of the Dean remain in large part the same as those fulfilled by the former chancellor.

10. *Saint Nicholas Cathedral.* In connection with the renewed archdiocesan structure, I have also made several changes to the clergy assignments at Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Washington, DC. Father Alessandro has been appointed Cathedral Dean, taking on rectoral administrative and liturgical responsibilities in addition to his chancellorship and Father David Bozeman has been assigned as Associate Priest at the Cathedral while continuing to serve as Secretary of the Orthodox Church in America. Father Valery Shemchuk remains as a full-time Associate Priest and primary pastoral contact, continuing his special ministry to the Slavic community.
11. *Officers.* Here, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the officers of the Orthodox Church in America. It has been a great blessing to have

a full complement of officers after a substantial period of transition last year. I will re-iterate what I said in the Fall by emphasizing the great benefit that these appointments have brought to me as the Primate, to my office as a whole, and to the Orthodox Church in America. I am personally grateful for Fr. Alessandro's tireless efforts which reflect his love for the Church and his devotion to the administrative life of the Orthodox Church in America; likewise for the pastoral and professional contribution which Fr. David brings to the position of Secretary. You have received the written reports from both, but those reports do not come close to conveying the amount of work that goes on at the Chancery – work that is not simply administrative but work which is above all pastoral, canonical, and sometimes disciplinary. All of this is often very heavy for a small staff. Although he is not physically present in the office, the third indispensable member of the team of officers is Andrew Smith, our hard-working Treasurer. Even in a part-time capacity, he remains watchful and vigilant over the finances of the Church and their proper accounting, but approach these as a wise steward. I am also thankful for the equally dedicated labors of the other full-time staff at the chancery, Fr. John Mikitish and Deacon Alexander Woodill as well as Matushka Jennifer Levine, who has ended her service at the chancery due to the military reassignment of her husband, Fr Sean Levine. We will miss Fr. Sean and Matushka Jennifer in our geographic area but I am confident that they will continue to contribute effectively to the work of the Church.

12. *External Affairs.* More globally, we continue to experience an increasing level of war and geopolitical conflict in various regions of

the world, including the most recent events in Iran, which have added to the conflicts in the broader region of the Middle East, and of course, the ongoing war in Ukraine and other conflicts. The position of the Orthodox Church on war is clear: we always call for and pray for peace. Not the peace of one side's military victory over the other side, but a just and lasting peace that respects human dignity and ends suffering. While we can debate the theological aspects of war and peace, we ought to, without hesitation, pray for all who suffer and refuse to allow geopolitical divisions to fracture our communion with one another or with any part of the Orthodox Church. This becomes more challenging when certain conflicts impact our local community, where we find faithful with family or ancestry in specific war-torn regions or people who follow these events from different backgrounds and with different loyalties. Nevertheless, all of us experience genuine anguish and, as we are reminded during this Lenten season, our attention ought to be directed to salutary prayer and repentance – not out of selfishness but, in fact, out of care for the world and to remind ourselves, as Saint Silouan reminds us, that “our brother is our life.”

13. In spite of geopolitical and ecclesiastical tensions, the Orthodox Church in America maintains her commitment to full communion with all the canonical autocephalous Orthodox Churches of the world. Even though the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America has not made any major international travel over the past year, we continue to maintain that commitment in other ways. Recently, Fr. Alessandro travelled to Poland on my behalf, and in October of last year, travelled also to Romania and the Czech Lands and Slovakia. These are

significant trips which serve to further our good relations with other Churches, which is one of my primary responsibilities as the Primate. His Grace Bishop Gerasim recently represented me and the Orthodox Church in America in the country of Georgia for the feast of Saint Nino (which you can read about on our website). More locally, the Assembly of Bishops of the United States convened its annual Assembly in Denver, Colorado, in November, at which I and several of our bishops participated, either in person or virtually. As has been a long tradition, there were numerous celebrations of the Sunday of Orthodoxy in which hierarchs, clergy, and faithful of the various jurisdictions came together. One such event was the liturgy held at Saint Catherine Greek Orthodox Church in Braintree, Massachusetts at which His Beatitude, Archbishop Joani, the primate of the Albanian Orthodox Church, presided, along with numerous bishops of the Assembly of Bishops. The Orthodox Church in America was represented by His Grace Bishop Nikodhim, of our Albanian Archdiocese, and His Grace Bishop Benedict, of our Diocese of New England. In addition, His Beatitude served again with Bishop Nikodhim this past Sunday at the Saint George Cathedral in Boston. These are visible signs of the mission of the Orthodox Church in America as the local autocephalous Church called to maintain communion with all the Orthodox Churches, doing this not merely as a formality but as a living witness to the unity of Christ.

14. *Local Travel.* Although it is, of course, within the territory of our own Church, I did travel to Mexico in the middle of January for my annual visit there, which included a visit to the Saint Basil Pastoral School and the blessing of waters at the Cathedral in Mexico City. Back in the Fall, I travelled to the Diocese of the West for the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Fort Ross, to Montreal, Canada, for the 100th anniversary of the Saint Peter and Paul Sobor, and to Trenton, NJ, for the 110th anniversary of Saint Vladimir's Church. More recently, I participated in the Annual March for Life here in DC and also presided at Saint Vladimir's Seminary for the patronal feast of the chapel on the Feast of the Three Hierarchs.

15. *Conclusion.* I am grateful to the members of the Metropolitan Council for their continued faithful service to the Orthodox Church in America and for their attention to the matters before us. Thank you for your prayers.

16. *Concluding remarks on Thursday.* On Tuesday, one of the clergy members of the Metropolitan Council asked me what words of comfort or exhortation I might offer to address questions from parishioners who are disturbed, anxious, or fearful about the current state of the world, where evil seems to be increasing not only with global wars and conflicts but in domestic turmoil and political drama in various sectors.

17. It is certainly understandable that such happenings would bring to people's minds ancient or contemporary prophecies from saints and elders about the end times, World War III, or the coming of the antichrist (among other topics). It is also understandable that these would bring up feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and even fear. At the same time, we know that the Church has navigated through many such periods of turmoil throughout her history. I recall traveling to the Holy Mountain as a young novice in 1991. You might recall that the following year, 1992, was being proclaimed (at least in some quarters) as the year in which the antichrist would appear. I remember asking about this on the Holy Mountain. From a few isolated voices, I received confirmation that, indeed, 1992 would be the year in which the antichrist would appear, and that he already amassed his armies in secret underground caverns under various Mediterranean cities. More substantially, I received reminders from many of the fathers that we are in the Church and, as such, we have Christ with us now and always – so while we indeed await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come, and we do speak of the dread judgment seat of Christ, we should recall this reality – that, in fact, Christ is already with us, strengthening us even as we struggle in our personal life of faith, prayer, and repentance. As we proclaim at the liturgy of the presanctified gifts: “the light of Christ illumines all.” The “all” here refers to everything, including the darkness of hades and the darkness of the world.

18. That would be my first response to those who feel anxiety in our age. But I would also reflect a bit on perhaps a more specific

expression of the recurrence of anxiety-inducing events, which seem to come in cycles within society. Here I speak of the rise of so-called “Artificial Intelligence.” Obviously, this is an extensive subject which likely has occupied a lot of time and discussion in our conversations of late. Although the particular aspects of the value of this technology for use (or not) by Orthodox Christians should be considered dispassionately, I myself have been giving some thought to the broader aspects relating to Artificial Intelligence: the ultimate goal of those who are pouring billions of dollars into the raw hardware and research resources required for this enterprise and of the expected end result of the exponential increase in computing capacities, data, and the attainment of “Artificial General Intelligence.” Here, I cite a brief summary (generated by Artificial Intelligence) of what one well-known proponent (Sam Altman) considers to be the goal of Artificial General Intelligence: “to create highly autonomous systems that outperform humans at most economically valuable work, acting as a massive lever to accelerate human progress. Altman aims for AGI to boost global economic growth, foster scientific breakthroughs, and provide individuals with, for example, a ‘remote coworker’ capable of handling any cognitive task.”

19. Such language might elicit in us, as Orthodox Christians, similar fears and anxieties as those we might have with respect to the coming of the antichrist. Here, I would only note that the singular emphasis on the AI enterprise is on the cognitive work of the brain and the intellect (and what we might call in the Church, thoughts). As we know machines cannot pray. They cannot fast. They cannot stand

before God in repentance and receive His mercy. They have no heart. And it is the heart — according to Saint Gregory (whom we commemorated last Sunday), according to the whole hesychast tradition, and according to the Gospel itself — that is the organ of our salvation. All of our structures, all of our plans, all of our intellectual activity (which can indeed be used for the good) exist for one purpose: to create the conditions in which hearts can be opened to grace. That is our mission. That is why we are here. Saint Gregory Palamas, is a preeminent theologian of the apophatic theology who articulates with the greatest clarity what it means for a human being to enter into genuine communion with a God who is, by nature, beyond all human knowing. His teaching is profound, but his message is remarkably simple: it is not the energies of the mind that bring us to God, but the heart — the heart illumined and transformed by divine grace. I believe that this is really the key with which we ought to approach challenges such as the explosion of AI or any future unknown challenges of a similar nature.

20. This also brings me back to our current work as the Church, and more precisely, the work of this Metropolitan Council. Much of our work might be defined as the work “of the intellect,” meaning that we are, rightly, focused on administration, on finances, on legal matters, on the questions of planning and fundraising. But we should remember that all of this is part of our fiduciary responsibility, which is a sacred responsibility, giving meaning to what would otherwise be merely administrative. I am very pleased with our discussions this week and grateful that we have been able to engage in fruitful

discussions about the life of the Church. I am further encouraged by all the blessings that God has granted us in the Orthodox Church in America: a certain level of financial stability, the continued strengthening of the pension plan, the effective ministry of the Office of Pastoral Life and, more broadly, the growth and expansion of our parishes and communities. May our Lord continue to strengthen us in this work and may he bless our continued Lenten journey as we draw closer to the life-giving passion of our Lord and prepare to greet his glorious resurrection.