



“MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER IN CHRIST”

**15TH ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL
NOVEMBER 10-13, 2008
PITTSBURGH, PA**

Feedback Received at the ideasforaac@oca.org Email Address

In December 2007, an email address was established to receive feedback from OCA members about the upcoming All-American Council. The intent of this email address was specifically as a means for our members to share input on the AAC, not as a forum to discuss the general state of the OCA. Ideas that fall within the mandate and competency of the Commission will be considered, with these suggestions being published here.

Responses have come from a broad section of contributors. These comments are the opinions of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the beliefs, governing documents or policies of the Orthodox Church in America or the OCA's Preconciliar Commission. The Preconciliar Commission continues to be open to suggestions and takes them into account as the development of the ACC agenda continues.

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I would hope this upcoming All American Council will focus on a new means to provide income for the National Church. The present head tax or assessment system very one sided in that it taxes only a part of the church, excluding the so-called ethnic groups. They, in turn, give a token donation to the national church and then receive it back in the form of bishop stipends.

If there is a refusal to eliminate the head tax, then it should be capped at \$50.00 per supporting member. The national administration used the last two Councils to push increases, during the time it was known by that very same group that money was being misused. What an insult to the supporting portion of the church.

I hope the upcoming Council would introduce a tithing system and set up a budget based on this income.

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I hope you allow Observers at the AAC.

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□ At the 13th AAC in Orlando, a room was set aside in the hotel for recovering attendees to meet and engage in the fellowship that helps keep them sober. Announcements were made from the podium during sessions, that the “friends of Bill W.,” a cryptic invitation known worldwide to recovering addicts and alcoholics, were welcome to meet in the Flamingo Room. I personally found this invaluable and would encourage the committee to make similar provisions for Pittsburgh. I would be happy to be of whatever assistance necessary and would be glad to contact Pittsburgh area contacts to make up a list of nearby meetings.

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□ A full and complete disclosure regarding the scandals in Syosset and Alaska.

REMOVE HISTORICAL PASSIONS

First of all, it is my greatest hope that the OCA (some arm of it) release a somewhat comprehensive report on the financial collapse of the church...how it occurred...how it could have been prevented...and who really allowed it to happen. Without this reporting, the AAC is destined to be a shouting match similar to annual meetings I experienced as a boy at a Greek church, where ouzo was a required beverage to settle things down. Failure to report will result in a complete failure of the AAC. To me, this is the most difficult duty of the Preconciliar Commission and it would be wise for the Commission to make a public statement to this effect. Much like President Gerald Ford found it necessary to pardon Nixon, the Commission needs to address the Metropolitan and the SIC and express the importance of reporting on the past (enough so that the future can be considered). I pray you are wise enough to make a statement to the Synod and MC and to guide the church beyond historical concerns to future concerns. The Synod and the MC owe this to the Commission. In the absence of a good report, the AAC should be cancelled in my opinion. As a member of the Diocese of the Midwest, the DoM actually appears to have the potential of not having representation at the AAC. This is an equally important issue for the Preconciliar Commission to address. If a report is not released that is satisfactory to the signer by year end 2007, the Commission owes the laity of the church a letter to the Synod demanding a report that meets the simple, attainable request of Abp. Job.

REFRAME THE STATUTES AND EMPOWER THE MC

Secondly, the Statutes of the OCA are clearly not adequately written for proper governance of the national church. The financial collapse would not have happened in a small parish like mine in Saint Paul. Why? In a small church, if the parish council overspends, they get voted out in two years typically. The priest (Metropolitan) doesn't decide, he just gives guidance. My point is the OCA financial collapse wouldn't have happened in a small parish because there are rules in place that prevent it. In the national church, the laity is represented by the MC, but the MC doesn't get to vote every two years on who the Chancellor should be, etc. See? The collapse would have never happened if the national administration were governed like a small church. The MC needs authority in the process, even if its a voting authority. Reframing the Statutes to reflect the way a small church runs is probably my biggest hope for a 2008 AAC. The MC needs some teeth, or people like me aren't going to give a hoot anymore and the MC will have continued resignations as a norm, as members realize they are powerless and wasting time. It simply isn't correct to place all the burdens on outside auditors and the Metropolitan. The people, on the other hand, need the right to recall any member of the MC for failing to meet the obligations of their office. The MC could actually give up or down votes on the administration and its members every two years. A down vote would need review by the Synod before any action would be taken. The MC/member of MC has never written a letter to any church expressing concern over the misuse of temporarily restricted funds, for example.. Why not? This is really quite absurd. Today, Metropolitan Herman is blamed for intimidation. Does this mean he intimidated the MC? See what I mean? The MC needs some teeth. They are the people (like a small parish) and need to act (vote up/down on activities of the administration (budgets and performance) and report back

to the laity with regularity. If this doesn't happen, the MC members should be able to be recalled through a special action or 3 year term limits as well. For example, if the MC voted on the Chancellor, Treasurer, Secretary every two years and one year the voting was split and an audit had failed, the laity that elected that member of the MC should have to opportunity to recall their member the voted in favor of a failing administration. Just an idea, hopefully you won't miss my point. The relationship of the Synod, MC, and administration really need to be like a small church priest, laity, and parish council, respectively. It works well. If the Metropolitan hires and fires the administration, why bother with having an MC? To me, this is the greatest flaw in our church. If Metropolitan Herman won't allow this discussion, I'd move for the discussion of his removal. It is that serious to me.

CONCERNS OVER MEMBERSHIP

The last two years have been interesting for me because I've found out a lot about the OCA, but I've also started to develop a lot of questions about whether any fire in the OCA is just anger and not passion for Christ and His Teachings. The OCA really needs more than just financial reporting and successful audits. The best measure of success isn't positive cash. The best measure is in membership. The churches have a "head tax" problem. That is, if they report truthfully, it costs them a lot of money. And, the head tax doesn't help represent the needs.

For example, suppose a church in Alaska has an income statement with 35k in revenues and 30k is to the priest. Suppose it has 20 members that can afford to pay dues. It might have another 70 people that can't. The problem is the only way the OCA can recognize a poor parish with a high need is if someone steps up and says they are a poor parish and can't pay the 'head tax'. I'm for tithing from 5 to 15% of revs, depending upon the past and other details and then collecting information about membership. Let me make the case for a different 5% church. Let's take Saint Elizabeth Orthodox Mission in Eagan. And let's say the church has a mortgage to pay for the next 20 years. If the church has 50 members, a simple \$100 per person is 5k. If the church has annual income of \$120k, tithing is 6k at the bottom, and 12k at 10% typical. If it has 100 members, its income would get even higher. The 5% allows for a new church to take a mortgage, too. The benefits here are great. Reporting the number of regular people become real and true and reporting the churches income becomes real and true and a new bit of detail for the OCA to use for developing new churches and meeting the mission of God to spread the Word.

Wouldn't a new beginning for the OCA be to be able for churches to declare actual members and income, rather than not knowing what you have where and where you should be growing the church and where you should shrink it?

In concert with this effort, what has happened to membership in the last 20 years and has the OCA addressed its growth or shrink?

These three are my ideas after two years of commentary, usually objective on OCANEWS.ORG.

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It is my belief that nothing will be accomplished until the crisis in the OCA is dealt with completely and truthfully with no cover-up and with full disclosure of the facts to the faithful. I am hopeful that that will occur before the ACC. Then the ACC will be able to elect a new Metropolitan and begin the process of rebuilding the Church. It must change the Statutes in ways that will prevent this type of scandal from reoccurring. It must address including widowed priests in the election of Bishops . It must discuss ways to heal the pain and distress that this crisis has brought to individuals and parishes.

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- 1. Resolution of support for Bishop Job and Archdeacon Wheeler.
- 2. Search committee for possible hierarchs among widowed clergy
- 3. A forum in which the Synod may hear and answer the questions so many of us have about their silence and complicity, and their refusal to deal with a Metropolitan who clearly needs to be removed, and a bishop now reducing the numbers of the faithful in Alaska.
- 4. Discuss the appropriateness of issuing an invitation to Father Dionysius of Greece or someone like him to establish a monastery for men in the New England/New York area. We need some monastics from a deeper and older tradition that is available here in this "new" mission field to help us in this crisis and to provide a context for providing spiritual resources for our hierarchs.
- 5. Discuss the weakness of the present style of life which our hierarchs are dealing with: loneliness, lack of accountability, no monastic sojourns, no communication and the ensuing defensiveness which disables them from serving the church.

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- We have already heard that there may not be an AAC Youth program, or that it will be truncated in comparison to past councils.

On behalf of several individuals in our Archdiocese, I would strongly encourage the planning committee to proceed with the full youth program. Without such a program, attendance will undoubtedly drop, and the faithful will inevitably seek Orthodox community (i.e. family) activities elsewhere (i.e. at home), and stay away from the AAC.

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- This AAC is going to be crucial for the future of the OCA and its membership.

I think that attendees should be allowed to ask the Holy Synod and members of the Metropolitan Council (both in attendance jointly) questions about the ongoing scandal in the church. AAC time (at least 3 hours or more) should be dedicated to public comment and input from the laity and clergy both. No lawyers.

This AAC time would be governed by procedural rules. Only questions and responses, not diatribes or comments. Time for a question and response would be established. Time could be allotted by diocese as well as by attendee (clergy and laity).

I recommend a public service of repentance.

I also recommend an all night prayer vigil for the OCA to be held in conjunction with the AAC.

How about a "prayer request" for the scandal among attendees? Attendees submit the names and prayers for which they would like to see public intercessions during a service.

Despite the need to acknowledge the scandal, for greater transparency and disclosure, and for leadership, this AAC also needs to be focused on doing

something. Together, at AAC let's all agree to do something to build-up the church....an activity or something. Also, something that everyone can take back, something positive to build-up the church is important.

I would like a discussion to ensue with regard as to why certain "ethnic groups" within our Church do not pay assessments to the OCA. This has been going on for years and it needs to finally be addressed. They either are or are not members of the OCA. It is not fair to the rest of us who willingly pay assessments each and every year. I'm beginning to think that certain "groups" have joined us solely so that their clergy can participate in the OCA Pension Plan.

In the year of our Lord 2007, there is absolutely NO REASON why certain bishop's and their respectful flock's don't see this issue as a concern.

During these most difficult times within our church, this is one way in which we can see some serious effort on the part of many.

I do not care what "deals" were made in the past. What's fair is fair and the current system is in no way fair.

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What is a central church administration? Why is it needed at all? Why can't diocesan structures do the business of the church - uniting parish communities to a bigger whole?

Instead of the continual down sizing of the OCA which we are currently going through - trying to replicate what we used to have but on a smaller scale, let us have a serious discussion about building an OCA from the ground up. Let us start with the basics - what is the absolute minimum the OCA central administration must have - say from the Canons, from the Statutes of the OCA. Let us start with the absolute minimum and work from there. This would mean selling off the property in Syosset and having only what we need right now, expanding later only as need dictates. To operate this basic minimum, what is the minimum income we need? Let us cut back the assessment to meet this need, increasing it only as need demands.

We need to set priorities straight - if the meeting of the Metropolitan Council and Synod of Bishops is required, mandated, needed, let us fund these things first. If the archivist can be farmed out to a seminary, let us do that. If an AAC is mandated by the Statutes then let us fund it through the normal assessment, not through special or additional assessments.

Is it possible that the "central church administration" really is supposed to be mostly a temporary structure that appears from time to time - the Synod of Bishops, the AAC, the Metropolitan Council, rather than a permanent and full time structure? Maybe we are trying too hard to recreate old world structure which don't serve well our mission in the 21st Century and in America.

What is it that the central church administration must do that diocesan chanceries cannot do? Anything? What things are better done by the diocesan chanceries?

What will it take to overcome the we-they thinking at every level of the church? Including how the hierarchs see themselves as above and opposed to the clergy and laity. Syosset vs. the Dioceses. Syosset vs. parishes. Bishops vs. priests, laity vs. priests, Syosset vs. the rest of the OCA. What structures, practices and policies would better promote unity and cooperation and mutual love at every level? What are the current stumbling blocks to better unity and cooperation with the church.

How can we get the central church into 21st century America where communication, transparency, honesty, integrity are expected as the normative way for a church to operate? If the central church is not going to be transparent and produce accurate reports on every aspect of its work including that of the Synod of bishops, then exactly why do we need a central church at all? Just to collect the assessment?

The Central church has been far too concerned with and employed too many people to care about its stock and status among other Orthodox Churches. It is time for the entire Church to embrace that our real purpose in life has to do with our parishioners, our local communities, our witness to our neighbors and friends.

What forums do we need to establish to better prepare, train, and select candidates for leadership in the Church? The very role of the bishop is to be a manager/overseer of the diocese. Yet we never expect our episcopal candidates to show even the slightest competency in managing people, organizations or money. Yet read 1 Timothy 3:4, before selecting a bishop the scriptures say we are to make sure he knows how to manage well! We on the other hand seem to pick men who don't seem capable of doing anything well and so conclude they must be bishop material. A much more open and clear process for the selection of church leaders is sorely needed. What can we do to establish this? Our bishops seem to be chosen from men who not only never managed a household well, they haven't even lived in community including family community at all. St. Paul would say they are unqualified to be bishops by the criterion he established for the church.

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We need as a Church whole to discuss what it means to be an autocephalous Church; either we are or we aren't. There are responsibilities which go with being autocephalous, one of which is to take the necessary canonical actions and steps to communicate with out Orthodox brothers and sisters in Christ from other jurisdictions planted in North America that it is a sin against the Body of Christ to establish and maintain parallel, alternative episcopacies within the territory of this autocephalous Church. We need to discuss as a Church Body, what are the attributes and responsibilities of an autocephalous Church; which ones are we fulfilling, which ones aren't we fulfilling? Why not? What is our plan to do so? The present crisis within the Church is not only our opportunity to get our house in order, but to show the rest of Orthodoxy how a mature Body deals with such significant issues. I agree with using the term "crisis" to describe what is happening in our beloved Orthodox Church in America; it is a moment of judgment and decision. Being first generation born in USA from immigrant parents, I could not as a youth and now cannot abide the ethnic captivity which satan has perpetuated on the Holy Church of Jesus Christ. The clear presentation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ continues to be hindered and restricted from a human perspective in this country because of this ethnic captivity and the dysfunctional ecclesial state of Orthodoxy in this country. Forgive me my brothers and sisters for come on so strongly with this response but this is a matter which has long been on my mind and in my heart.

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I would like you to consider a "voice" (even if not a vote) be considered for ALL PRIESTS, retired, attached, etc.

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If there is to be a 'success' of the next AAC then the agenda is clear.

Truth must be told. A new metropolitan must be elected. We must end the silence and attendant confusion and fear it has engendered.

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With deepest humility I would ask that you address and reconsider our tragic involvement and even "guilt by association" with the scandalous distortions and false teachings that are so prevalent and visible within the heterodox WCC and NCC.

I will acknowledge that there are some good reasons to maintain dialog with the heterodox in general but some of the more blatant and heinous errors that have been adopted by the liberal elements within these organizations threatens not only to confuse but even to mislead many within the Orthodox laity. This results not only in the relaxing of our steadfastness in the narrow path but is amplified by the virtual silence and/or subdued objections that our representatives occasion to offer in response to these travesties. This can (and does) in fact mislead our faithful into believing that economia has little or no bounds and that compassion for others is to be equated with acceptance of their erroneous doctrines as just "another flavor" of true faith. This is, indeed, the temperament of our times and has led to all varieties of "tolerance" within our society and culture and has possibly poisoned us all with complacency to one degree or another. Added to this is the issue that our involvement with the WCC/NCC provides fodder (and perhaps only an excuse but nonetheless a temptation) for some of our Orthodox brethren to separate themselves from one another leading to the even greater evil of schism within the Church. The ripples that emanate from our membership in the WCC and NCC are far reaching, complex, and neither purely positive nor purely negative to state it fairly.

Though I would hope for us to completely withdraw from the WCC and NCC (I acknowledge that that may be an emotional and rash stance). At the very least might we not discuss some manner to more clearly distinguish ourselves from these more liberal factions that so slander the true faith?

Dialog is important but it appears to some as if we have sold ourselves and our faith for the privilege to be included with an increasingly dubious lot. Where do we really stand? And do we really stand where God would have us?

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Pursue administrative unity with the Antiochian Archdiocese. Maybe the Greeks will come along after that.

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I have four suggestions, but before I get to them, let me thank you. It is very good that you are asking for input.

Suggestions:

1. Stream the main sessions and services via the internet and make all documents available on the OCAwebsite
2. This assembly is not about anything good. It is about dealing with corruption in the chancery. Schedule 1/2 day for the assembled clergy and laity to question Metropolitan Herman regarding the scandals in his chancery and his mismanagement of the chancery.

3, Schedule a service of repentance to immediately follow the questioning of the Metropolitan, I think Protospesbyter Hopko already suggested this.

4. Since this is going to be such a grave meeting, a meeting no one really wants to have, dispense with all the banquets and receptions, and just do what needs to be done and get the whole business over with.

I am encouraged that you are asking for input on the AAC.

Hoping that this message will not be censored, lost, or modified before it gets to the Commission, here are some initial thoughts. Even if there is a major turn-around and clean up in the OCA before the AAC (and there is NO substantial evidence up to this point, despite the heroic efforts of many, that there is any desire by the Holy Synod to get to, or to have revealed the root of matters, or any desire on the part of the Metropolitan to make it possible for the administration of the Church to be carried out in anything like a responsible manner) – even if there is a major turn around, the Holy Synod has to come to the Assembly prepared to hear from and address the reasons why these things happened and how the Church is to be healed. This is the bottom line.

It is absolutely clear to me that, with the exception of Archbishop Job, the members of the Holy Synod long ago decided that there are certain matters (crimes, sins) underlying the financial and organizational crisis in the OCA which cannot be revealed, or rather, which they will not investigate or reveal. If this is indeed their “bottom line” then they need to state that clearly and that that is their decision which the rest of the Church has to accept and trust and move on from.

The Metropolitan and the Synod simply continue to lose credibility by pseudo-investigations and manipulating information and propaganda to make things look like they are trying to deal with matters when they have no intention to do so.

1. The Synod must be prepared to accept the consequences of stating this decision not to pursue a thorough and investigation. If there is revolt, or refusal to accept this decision the Synod of bishops will have to handle this “disobedience” or refusal to accept this decision in whatever ways they deem appropriate and accept the consequences of administering that decision. They must stand up and act as men and not lie to the people and pretend to be concerned about setting things right.

2. The Synod must provide proof that changes have been made which will prevent financial “mismanagement” continuing. This proof will be given when (a) they have ensured that those who have been implicated are removed from influencing financial management. Since all(?) of those implicated have been removed from the central offices except Metropolitan Herman, he must go, and be gone in such a way that he cannot influence matters still in other capacities.

3. This proof will also come when those who are entrusted with management in the central office are allowed to do their jobs and are not at the mercy of a Metropolitan or bishop, but rather, management must be kept separate from other considerations. E.g. funds must be used for that which they are designated and the Metropolitan and Synod of Bishops must be subject to “best practices” (and I don’t mean signing a document, I mean acting in accordance with its principles). For example, should the hierarchs want to establish policies which would put more weight on creating fancy churches than on planting churches, that would be their decision, but they would have to do that forthrightly, by declaring that that is what they are doing, and take the consequences in terms of financial donations. We don’t live in Russia. The Church is dependent to a significant extent on the donations of its members, and they will not throw their money to thieves or to those who waste it, when the Church and society are in such need. This is not a political manoeuvre, but simply a matter of loss of enthusiasm and confidence. Why would I have any heart to continue to pay money for lawsuits and for cover-ups and for PR to pretend that all is well, when the work of the Gospel is being neglected.

So here are some general suggestions.

1. THE ISSUES OF THE SCANDAL MUST BE ADDRESSED!!!!

The agenda will have to be such as to help people decide to go. Why spend money and time if nothing of substance will be dealt with. It is absolutely clear at the present moment that the Holy Synod is not prepared to discuss anything of substance with regard to the present crisis and certainly not to discuss it openly and clearly and fully. One can only conclude that from 1999 when the Synod most emphatically declared that the discretionary accounts were not be audited under any circumstances (yes, this has been changed in principle recently – why?, why were we not given an apology from the Synod for their previous very bad decision?) that the Synod had decided that matters related to misuse of funds and all that was entangled with it, blackmail? payoffs regarding sexual scandal? etc. would not ever be open for discussion. In fact, from the initial reports of irregularities and unacceptable financial practices earlier and the replacement of Protodeacon Eric Wheeler, etc. this stance was established by the Synod of Bishops. If the bishops won't hear from the people and respond to them, then we have a Church which is basically the Bishops. There is no need for anyone else in the Church, except to carry out what the bishops want, to provide bodies for PR (public relations or Proskauer; Rose, it doesn't matter) and to provide money for misuse by the Bishops, or at least for the misuse of some, while the others refuse to stand up and challenge this abuse of the Church. If this is going to continue to be the situation one might as well be Roman Catholic, where one man has the direct line to God and God speaks to the Church through him. Who needs the Holy Spirit? Yet bishops in great numbers and whole Councils, have upheld heresies and been involved in all kinds of evil-doing over the course of the history of the Church.

2. THERE MUST BE WORKING SESSIONS WITH ALL DELEGATES!!!

Information should be prepared which takes up the major unresolved issues of the scandal, and a bishop should be assigned to a group of delegates, who would discuss what needs to be done. This then should be brought back to the plenary session. It might be good to have a lay delegate and/or priest report with the bishop from each working group, as to the conclusions reached or proposed actions needed, as agreed upon by each group. I would be good to have the working groups discuss one or two key issues at a time and meet a good number of times during the Council. I also think that it would be good to change the membership of the working groups for each new topic. Perhaps there could be a good number of sessions so that most people get to work with a good number of different bishops. If the bishops cannot face the people and try to work with the reality of their concerns, whether or not the bishop agrees, and to report the consensus or not, or outcome to the larger group, then we don't want such cowards or tyrants as bishops. No one would be threatening their authority, unless they are not man enough to listen to what people think and feel.

3. PARISHES SHOULD HAVE INFORMATION ABOUT EACH AREA OF THE SCANDAL AND WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT AND TO MAKE SURE IT DOESN'T HAPPEN AGAIN

This information is necessary for delegates to come equipped to enter into the discussions. Furthermore, they need this information to get feedback from their fellow parishioners whom they are representing, before they go to the Council. This will also ensure that the whole Church is aware of and praying for, the Assembly as one body. It will also pave the way for reports from the Council, and the follow-up to the Council which must take place across the Church in order to heal the Church and to be united and move on. At the present time my own parish is unaware of the crisis, though it will be as we prepare at our annual meeting to choose delegates for the AAC. A good number of priests, often with good intentions, are neither informed themselves properly, nor willing to inform and lead their people properly in response.

4. THERE MUST BE A VOTE ON METROPOLITAN HERMAN STEPPING DOWN, RETIRING, ETC. IF HE IS NOT REMOVED AT THIS TIME BECAUSE OF HIS BLOCKING OF ALL SOLUTIONS TO THE SCANDAL, HE SHOULD BE REMOVED WITHOUT PENSION IN THE FUTURE.

I don't know how this would be handled, but the Metropolitan and the Synod and the people need to have the results of such a secret ballot, in order to understand the extreme concern on the part of the priests and the people regarding the last two and a half years especially, but also the build-up over 8 or more years, with Metropolitan Herman as a key player in the Administration. As I have said to Archbishop Seraphim, you can't run a Church with a lame-duck Metropolitan, who is compromised on many fronts, but in particular is determined to prevent the roots of the scandal being known and not willing to face the Church in finding a solution. There is absolutely no good in his continuing, regardless of what one thinks of Episcopal prerogatives, etc. Why does he not resign? It could be obstinacy, but my strong guess is that it might open the doors to a thorough investigation and that might have unthinkable consequences for him as well as a good number of others, including other bishops.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS ABOUT POSITIVE DIRECTIONS BEYOND THIS ACC, SHOULD IT BE A COUNCIL, AND NOT, LIKE THE ACC, A EXERCISE IN KEEPING THINGS UNDER CONTROL

We had apparently tried in the Archdiocese of Canada to have Fr. Thomas Hopko speak at our last Assembly in July on Orthodox Ecclesiology in relation to this crisis, though not addressing the crisis directly. At an Archdiocesan Council meeting the issue of understanding and misunderstanding of Church order had been raised by a number of people in conjunction with the crisis. Apparently Fr. Hopko was unavailable. I say "apparently" simply because, in comparing the materials coming out of the Synod, Syosset, the Met Council, etc. over the past couple of years, quite apart from any of the "awful stuff on the internet" (oh, I forgot, the official church propaganda is also on the internet!), there are so many discrepancies, contradictions, lies, changes in stories, etc. that I am having difficulty trusting that simply stating what was said, or carrying out what was decided, or delivering money to the cause for which it was given, can be assumed. The crisis has shown up a great many significant areas where there are major flaws and confusions in our administrative structure, statutes, understanding of ecclesiology (including – or perhaps foremost – among bishops), etc. This could all be a positive revelation to the OCA if there were not things being hidden which are creating all kinds of strange workings and ways of operating, as well as further confusion, and if there were not a fear of the truth and of the people, and/or a distorted sense of their authority on the part of the bishops. We could then move on to positive work on learning, education, dialogue, and setting in order the administration, theology, ecclesiology, proper and full communication, etc.

The stance taken by the bishops that total silence is golden, and that where one must speak, not telling the truth at any cost is necessary to hold the fort and keep the peace, is literally **KILLING** the Church. I would say it is a sin against love in the Body of Christ, and therefore a huge sin against God, who is Love.

These are some beginning thoughts. As someone who is normally comfortable working by not being in command, and affirmative of PROPER Orthodox ecclesiology and proper respect for the role of the priests and bishop, and who is only reluctantly and very slowly brought to oppose those in authority, and only on issues of huge consequence, I must say that at this point I have no confidence in the Synod of Bishops as a whole. Even those whose character and dedication I would normally praise highly, I am now very uncertain about, since I see only very worldly principles at work in how this scandal has been dealt with for at least 8 years by the Synod. I think that a huge gap has been created between bishops on the one hand and many clergy and laity on the other hand. It appears that the Holy Synod knows only how to speak platitudes about not being angry and forgiving, but totally unable to appreciate what people are feeling, thinking and saying and TOTALLY unwilling and adamant about dealing with the scandal, with the exception of Archbishop Job. (And I am tired of hearing aspersions regarding his character whenever the scandal is discussed, as if that means one can avoid dealing with the reality of the scandal). If I were a bishop I would want to know the realities of my people in order to deal with that reality, not to keep dismissing them and criticizing them. As a parent with considerable experience, I have nevertheless had to admit more than once that the family was not coping, and we had to take drastic action, and get help.

It is not good to shout in large, bold print. People don't like shouting. People who don't like shouting, though, should ask, why are people shouting – it may be because no one has said, "I hear you." Not "I agree", but "I hear you" and we can talk about it. I am shouting because, though I have hopes for the pre-Conciliar Commission, I have little hope or expectation, after 8-years of this atrocity in a Christian Church, that any suggestions such as the above list, will get anywhere with the Synod. The Synod of Bishops, and especially the Metropolitan, are prepared to see all kinds of injustices done to people so long as their own sins and injustices, or their conspiracy of silence about them, never see the light of day. This is not, in my opinion, the proper behaviour of shepherds, but of cowardly wolves, prepared to have the people pay the cost of the sins of others who are being protected, and every principle they are operating on in this scandal seems to be opposed to the way of light, truth, repentance, change of ways, etc. "This is the judgement: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he has done has been done through God" (John 3:19-21). This is the judgement. I would be glad to hear how the Metropolitan and the Holy Synod explain their silence and secrecy and scuttling of attempts to get to the truth, and attempts to put a good face on regular dismissals of everyone who has worked at Syosset, except one, without apparently any basic improvement in our situation, can match with this simple statement of the Truth.

All of the sacrificial, determined, and heroic efforts of the people, to try to come to terms with this crisis and to take positive and responsible action are basically nullified by, first of all the Metropolitan, and either the unwillingness of the Synod to take him to task, or the unwillingness of the Synod to deal with the truth behind the scandal and crisis. The Metropolitan and the Synod are killing the church. How can one expect an assembly to bear fruit and why would one want to go to one where the bishops say, "That is not your business". "That is a matter for the Synod". "You can't discuss this". "You have one minute to say what you want to say and you are already overtime, etc". There is a very, very huge gap building between bishops and the rest of the Church. An assembly which is not geared to having both engage each other is pointless, and such can't happen if the bishops won't engage. So we are in a house divided and it is a very, very serious situation. What will continue to happen is greater and greater reticence to provide money for anything other than local parish work, as the only avenue for people to communicate their concerns and to have an impact, though they still won't be heard. Yes, I'm aware that money has been donated for mission parishes (let's have it publicly stated and clarified that it has indeed gone for such a purpose!), as support for efforts in the administration to do things properly. Please note that the money did not go to the administration.

How can the bishops be leaders or shepherds if they don't want to talk to their people? Do they really want us to follow their example of trying to save face, save reputations, etc. at the expense of the suffering of all kinds of people and destroying the OCA?

Finally, I would confidently suggest that if substantial recommendations come from the Pre-Conciliar Commission they will not make it through the Synod of Bishops with any punch left in them. On this basis I would encourage my parish at our upcoming Assembly to consider using the money for delegates on some worthy local purpose.

P.S. If the Commission has any indication from the Synod of Bishops that matters of the scandal and continuing work on dealing with the problems of the Church will be able to be discussed at the 2008 Assembly, please let me know as soon as possible, because otherwise I shall be encouraging our parish to use the money necessary for sending delegates on some worthy local purpose.

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□ During the summer of '05 I worked with Fr Anderson in the youth department helping to prepare the AAC program. I floated an idea at that time which was shot down because of lack of time, an idea which I think can be very helpful when thinking of a road to reconciliation.

I proposed to set up a booth (like an old time photo booth) with professional voice recording equipment in which individuals or pairs could record and share their experience of being in the Orthodox Church in America. When I floated the idea in 05 I proposed for the youth to interview their clergy, delegates from their parish or just the random passer-by. Obviously for 08 we would eliminate the youth element.

I believe this to be a good idea as it will create concrete material for the OCA archive, archiving stories of all generations especially those of my grandparents generation, stories which will soon be lost except to those of us who have grandparents who were in the Metropolia and those of us who care. I believe it will also be a cathartic exercise which will allow people, if they desire, to vent their real frustrations, but I further believe it will also help to focus people on the good things of the OCA, good things of past, present and future.

Please click [here](#) to go to the Story Corp website. This is a national story project, and it is from there that I got the idea.

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□ This council may very well be the point of decision for the future of the Orthodox Church in America. There are systemic problems that have brought us to this very grave time, and we need to make a serious beginning to address those problems in a very real way. Addressing those problems must be done in a serious, all-encompassing way.

Before that council, though, and as a condition for any hope of success in changing the culture of the OCA, some very important things need to take place.

First, a **study of the culture of the OCA** needs to be undertaken. This must be done by a group of clerics and laity who have the highest competence and the highest trust of the Body of Christ that is the OCA. Failures in that culture must be forthrightly confronted, and ways for that culture to be changed must be identified.

Second, there needs to be a **confession of past misdeeds**. The confession needs to be public and sincere. And that has to be done on all levels of church life. Led by our own hierarchs all of us must confess the contribution we have made to the current crisis. I believe those confessions must be detailed, as painful as that may be. The sins of our leaders that have contributed to the current state of affairs must be confessed aloud. Those of the rest of the Body of Christ, both cleric and laic, must also confess, confess to a willingness to let things go on far too long (even a moment is too long), ignoring misdeeds that were often glaring.

Third, there needs to be **repentance**, a change in direction based on the confession mentioned above. This would be a public and verifiable document to address the abuses of the past. An example of this would be the full implementation of a comprehensive set of Best Practices, including an open set of accounting books able to be examined by any church member.

Fourth, there must be **forgiveness**. All of us need to open our souls to the repentance of others, embracing each other as we change direction. This does *not* mean covering, or hiding, the sins of the past.

Having accomplished that very large and difficult task we would be ready to open the AAC, for, if we are still dealing with the above issues at the time of the Council, it will be doomed to certain failure at the start. For the AAC *must* address the *results* of the first task listed above. It is my

belief that some of the important issues that will be discovered in the process of that task, and must be addressed, are the following:

Leadership development. Leadership in the OCA is seriously flawed - in the development and selection of those who would lead us, how they lead us once they are in office, and the response to that leadership by the Body of Christ as a whole. The development and selection points to a second systemic issue that must be addressed:

Monasticism. The monastic state within the OCA is in deplorable condition, both in quality and quantity. There are few monks and, of those, it is commonly accepted that 'bishop material' is sorely lacking. There must be a renewal of the monastic life. I'm not sure what the sources of that renewal would be, but it is possible that lay men and women might contribute in a serious way to that renewal. The only alternative to this renewal is allowing the election of married priests as bishops. That, alas, is at least several generations away.

A reevaluation of the role of lay men and women in the church. Despite the gains in education and experience of lay men and women in the past century and more, the laity is still often treated as a source of funds and nothing more. As a bishop once said "Once I speak, the proper response for the person in the pew is to reach for his wallet." A full theology of the Body of Christ, with emphases on the royal priesthood of the all the baptized and the gifts of the Spirit that differ throughout the members of that Body, must be developed. It is this kind of development that will renew parish life, bring our young adults back to church, and help the OCA become the force for renewal in American culture at large.

Liturgical renewal. The Orthodox Church has a great need for liturgical reawakening. The understanding of the Divine Liturgy, its place in our lives, the commitment it requires, the power it gives, its role in the life of the world, must become more deeply embedded in the minds and hearts of all the members of the OCA, lay and cleric alike. Just one small example: it's shocking to me how few parishes give the parish body a chance to exchange the kiss of peace before the Creed. How is a Body to understand itself if that opportunity is so often restricted to the clergy, and then only if more than one is present? A renewal of the understanding of liturgy would go a long way to effecting some of the changes mentioned above.

All of this is a major undertaking but it must be done. I am not saying that the above lists are complete or even accurate, but whatever is done will be huge. As I see it, the first set must be done before the Council begins, and the second set must be inaugurated at the Council. And we must find shepherds to lead us.

I would also like to suggest that the OCA establish a weekly day of prayer and fasting led, in a public way, by Metropolitan Herman for the success of the Council. We do too little to enlist the holiness of the OCA's Body of Christ in aid of the great need we currently face.

I write this on a very windy day in December with gale force winds clearing out dead tree branches and fallen but unraked leaves. The wind of the Spirit is more powerful than these gales and I believe that, if we open our hearts to it, it can, in short order, clear our own dead wood and give us a healthy and vibrant church in place of the ailing one we currently have.

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□ I offer the following **suggestions** as a contribution to the debate about the way forward for the Orthodox Church in America (OCA).

1. Metropolitan Herman immediately announces his resignation as primate as of the opening of the AAC in November, 2008. The first act of the AAC is to elect a new Metropolitan.

2. A proposed amendment to the OCA Statute changing the procedure by which the Metropolitan is chosen is sent in advance to the AAC delegates for action at the council. This amendment provides that the OCA Metropolitan henceforth be elected by lot. [Such a proposed amendment is already in the hands of Metropolitan Herman and other OCA officials.] If such an amendment is adopted at the AAC, it is immediately in force. If not, the present procedure for electing the Metropolitan is followed.

3. The AAC in November has only two items of business in addition to the election of a new Metropolitan. **1.** The AAC receives Metropolitan Herman's detailed report about the financial scandal, the deposition of the former chancellor and the allegations of sexual misconduct in the church. It also contains detailed information about the OCA's new central administration. **2.** The AAC adopts a concrete plan for OCA operations from November 2008 until the next AAC in 2011.

I offer the following **suggestions** as a contribution to the debate about the operations of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) until the AAC in 2011.

1. Until the AAC in 2011 the operations of the OCA central church administration are reduced to an absolute minimum so that all available resources, energy and time are given to the work of ecclesiastical reconstruction whose main purpose is to clarify the relationships of the OCA dioceses to each other, and to the central church administration. The administration's main duties during this time are **1)** to support the Metropolitan's activities as primate inside and outside the OCA, **2)** to conduct the OCA's "external affairs" and **3)** to assist in the organization and preparation of meetings of the Holy Synod and the Metropolitan Council under the Metropolitan's direction.

2. The OCA central church administration reports bi-monthly on the OCA website about all of its decisions and actions. The report contains pertinent information on the Metropolitan's activities and OCA finances.

3. The OCA central church administration continues to make special financial appeals for charities, missions and seminaries, as well as for special emergencies, but does not receive and distribute the contributions. It rather instructs all dioceses, parishes and individual donors to send their contributions directly to the missions, charities, seminaries and other institutions and agencies of their choosing.

4. The Synod of Bishops continues to meet twice a year with each bishop accompanied at all sessions of the synod by two clergymen (presbyters or deacons) elected by his diocesan assembly to demonstrate that bishops participate in the Synod as church pastors and not as individual ecclesiastical authorities in their own right. The Synod meetings last four full days. They as a rule include **1)** a spiritual retreat for the bishops led by a person invited by the Synod **2)** a report of the central church administration to the Synod **3)** a report of each bishop on the state and work of his diocese for examination and questioning by his brother bishops to insure clarity and unanimity in the church on essential issues and **4)** an in-depth examination of a specific issue in the church on the basis of materials prepared and distributed for this purpose before the meeting.

5. No new bishops are consecrated before the AAC in 2011. Vacant dioceses are governed by a "locum tenens" elected by the diocese and approved by the Synod until after the AAC in 2011 when episcopal consecrations, elections and appointments will resume.

6. The Metropolitan Council meets as usual to fulfill its statutory obligations. Its main work until the AAC in 2011 is to conduct an in-depth study of OCA operations in view of producing a detailed plan for the future conduct of OCA life and work. This includes the production of a concrete proposal for the inter-action between the OCA dioceses and the OCA central church

administration, clearly defining the duties of each body in order to avoid ambiguity and unfruitful repetition and overlapping of activities and programs. In a word, the task is to produce a plan for possible adoption at the AAC in 2011 that states clearly what the dioceses do and what the central church administration does to insure unity, harmony and efficient cooperation and collaboration among all parts of the one OCA.

7. The Synod of Bishops and the Metropolitan Council post reports of their meetings on the OCA website within a week of their respective meetings.

8. The new Metropolitan appoints a committee of diocesan representatives and selected competent persons to study the OCA Statutes and to propose revisions for formal action at the AAC in 2011. This work is done in concert with the production of a detailed plan of OCA organization and operation.

9. The new Metropolitan appoints the deans of the three OCA seminaries to organize an in-depth study of church structures through the ages and to produce an extended report on this subject, with special attention given to the 1917-1918 Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. The report concludes with specific recommendations for Orthodox Church structures and operations today, in the OCA, in North America, and in Orthodoxy as a whole. It is completed by 2010 in order to be used in the production of the detailed plan for OCA organization and operation presented at the AAC in 2011.

10. OCA diocesan, parochial and institutional life and work continues in the next three years with special attention given to activities designed to nurture a new generation of Orthodox Church workers and leaders in all areas of church life and work, particularly the clergy.

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Ideas posted March 17, 2008

□ In our conference call later this week, Christian Service will begin discussions about the 15th All-American Council, how we can take full advantage of the gathering of the Church to communicate parish and outreach ministry programs. Through workshops and luncheon forums this was possible at past Councils, proving to be effective in motivating clergy and laity to introduce programs back in their home parishes.

Christian Service is eager to further promote topics from the 2007 Bioethics Colloquium and Parish Ministries Conference. We understand the 15th AAC is shorter than others in the past, and the proceedings critical to the future of the OCA. The inclusion of effective ministry models can serve as a balance, to edify and inspire the faithful. We request consideration of a mealtime format, or other opportunity for parish and outreach ministries.

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□ I asked myself is there a way to move the AAC beyond the problems of the past, or more quickly through them and I would like to offer a few ideas.

First, the Holy Synod and Metropolitan Council could disclose the compilation reports dating back over the last 10 years to the greater church and disclose which people in the church got the compilations (distribution list). Those individuals, far in advance of the AAC would become known. If they are a collective group, it would greatly ease the tensions at the AAC, especially if the release of the documents was commented on by the folks on the distribution. Objectively, this would alleviate a lot of wasted time on uncertainty about the past, too.

Second, well in advance of the AAC, it should be determined whether any resolutions calling for the removal of the Metropolitan would even be attainable. Forgive me, I'm far from an expert on how this works. I would guess the Synod would have the final say and perhaps it would require an up or down vote by the Synod. For lack of a better way to explain myself, can this matter be pushed ahead of the AAC? I mean, would it be possible to let the Synod decide whether this would be allowed in advance? It seems to me that resolving this question, or at least framing it properly is important given the fact that at least 1000 or so of the churches members of 27000 or so called for his resignation. I, frankly, am not a huge proponent for this action (removal) and although my name is on that list calling for his resign, I put my name there on the basis of two issues, one of which has been corrected, and the other which still has some potential of resolution somewhat related to the first item above. Call my ten year concern impatience I suppose. Anyhow, it would be good if the Synod gave an advance notice on how it would respond.

Third, many people don't like debt, but debt can be a valuable thing sometimes (me and the bank and my house!) What Statute of the OCA would prevent a future administration from running deficit budgets for several years? (by taking on too much debt) What if you had someone in charge that thought borrowing was fine?

Final thought, I have heard from a past participant in July, 2005 that there really wasn't much time at the AAC for discussion. Wouldn't it be great if the OCA were able to use the internet or computers in some fashion that would advance the process and allow for more discussion? Like discussion on any resolutions could be done a week prior to the AAC and then discussion comments could be reviewed in advance..

Just my two cents worth... I understand the challenge you are all facing and hope I can help even a little bit.

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☐ I lived in Pittsburgh for a year and made a great number of friends there and all around Pennsylvania. Now, I live in Washington state and miss them terribly. If I go to this Council, my main purpose is going to be to reconnect with them. (I doubt that I'm alone in this regard.) For that reason, I think you need to have some sessions that are fun, enjoyable and educational. You need to break into smaller sessions with some speakers on personal and spiritual development, some sessions on topics as mundane as "Ideas for a winning Sunday School" and "How to put on a church mixer that the young adults will actually attend." (I'm not actually volunteering to organize these events; I'm trying to give an example of the tone that I think folks would enjoy.)

Having read the angry tone of the e-mails that you've received thus far, and having read two years' worth of nasty Internet postings over the financial scandal, I can't say that I'm very interested in coming to a council where the purpose is for the angriest people "to have it out" with each other like some kind of school board meeting in a small town where people hate each other.

Getting beyond the financial scandal is a necessary part of the maturation of the Orthodox Church in America as an administrative body, and the council should include the disclosure, discussion and explanation of future safeguards needed for healing. The pitchforks-and-rope crowd of miscreants need to be included, but they can't be allowed to dominate the event.

Making the event attractive for those of us coming for social/educational reasons is important for several reasons:

- You can make money off of us.
- If we have fun, we might come back to the next such council as delegates.
- We might send our kids to future events.

- We'll go back and tell other people that the next one is worth attending.
- We'll know more about how the OCA's governing structure works.

Please, include some fun in the agenda. Don't allow a small group of loud people to turn in on itself and implode.

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☐ The Flag in Church, this might not be a matter that has to be addressed in the Statutes of the church. Even a simple vote approving, or not precluding its display, would be meaningful. We are convinced that the presence of the flag would enhance the image of OCA churches in their communities and potentially lead to attracting converts. The Russian Orthodox church Nicholas grew up in still displays our flag. It seems strange that our Orthodox Church in America church does not.

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☐ Is the theme of the AAC taken from the last line of today's epistle reading? If so, then how very, very fitting. Please put this entire passage up on giant posters everywhere in Pittsburgh. Print it on the meeting folder. Eph 4:17-25

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☐ Thank you for embracing candor and openness! Most encouraging! Considering the oneness of voice in these sincere and thoughtful suggestions posted so far, it is exceeding clear what must be done. Either this next AAC is revolutionary, or it is a pathetic sham. Any attempt to quench this holy fire must be resisted by the pre-conciliar commission as further effort to hide serious canonical and legal infractions. Be brave and steadfast, or there won't be an OCA. It is a glorious vision for America; don't cede it to those who in stubbornly concealing their darkness are destroying it. If those in power do succeed in gutting the AAC, then please publicly and honorably dissociate yourselves from the commission. The faithful are counting on you for restoration and truth. The 2008 AAC is the OCA's last hope, our last chance to show cause for our continued existence. "Choose this day whom ye will serve."

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☐ Please may the faithful be advised as to when the highly revered Bishop Arseny of Winnipeg is to be glorified by the whole church? He is revered throughout Canada and an icon has been drawn of him, but still the faithful wait for formal glorification by the O.C.A. How ironic that his icon is honoured in New Zealand, but not in New York.

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☐ As a member of the last six pre-conciliar commissions, I sympathize with your current dilemma – you face the nearly impossible task of restoring peace and order within the Church. Trust on all levels has broken down, and restoring trust must be at the top of the church's agenda at the present time.

I have been following the OCA situation for some time, keeping in touch with large numbers of concerned clergy and laity on all sides. I have up until now avoided making any public statements or internet postings. But I have come to believe strongly in the following solution which, although

it may sound radical, has clear historical precedent, and may now be the only way to restore integrity and trust.

The Metropolitan and the entire Synod of Bishops need to submit their resignation, in humility acknowledging their individual and corporate responsibility and guilt for what has happened on their watch. These resignations are to be effective at the AAC, at which each bishop will stand for (re-)election by the clergy and lay representatives of his diocese. If the bishop is not re-elected in a straight up-or-down vote by secret ballot, he will immediately retire. If elected, he will immediately assume his post and a new Synod will be constituted. The senior bishop will assume the presidency of the Synod, and the election of a new Metropolitan will follow immediately. These steps will give us the opportunity to start with a clean slate.

Such was the process adopted by the 1917 Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in its effort to restore trust in the Church at a critical juncture in its history. Each diocese was given the right to elect its own bishop, and sitting bishops had to stand for re-election. A number of bishops, including, for example, Metropolitan Antonii Khrapovitskii of Petrograd (modern-day St Petersburg), were voted out.

The second task of the AAC will be to begin discussion of a new statute for the OCA, one that will contain appropriate checks and balances and restore true conciliarity to the Church. There is not sufficient time to do much before November 2008, and the atmosphere is currently too polluted for significant progress to be made. But the AAC could certainly elect a representative body of bishops, clergy, and laity to address this task over the next few years.

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❑ Sadly, the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) is in a grave crisis today. I can only imagine that our Orthodox forefathers on this continent (clergy and laity) are weeping as they look down from above on this situation. This said, I offer these “housekeeping” suggestions for the All-American Council (AAC) 2008:

- Council proceedings should only be attended by clergy/lay delegates and observers.
- Lectures during time allotted for lunch should be omitted so delegates can obtain nourishment through food and prayer.
- VERY LIMITED or NO vendors should be present. There are serious matters that need to be resolved and delegates running in and out of rooms only create a distraction.
- There should be no youth participation at this 2008 AAC due to the crucial and grave nature of the issues involved. I wholeheartedly supported youth participation in the past and do so in future AACs; however, the 2008 AAC is not the place. All delegates SHOULD be in attendance at ALL sessions and not sign in and then leave for a “family” day. In 1994, the OCA Holy Synod recognized FOCA as an official arm of the Church. Family vacations are encouraged during annual FOCA national conventions (2008 in Orlando, FL).
- I am in agreement with those that suggest this AAC should be scaled down in regards to receptions, a formal banquet, etc. One informal buffet (similar to a reception) at the conclusion of the last session should be sufficient.
- In order to save finances, this AAC should be short in length of days and to the point!
- God Bless Us All!

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□ In reviewing the minutes of the last All American Council, there were a number of initiatives that the Church was going to address such as Missions and Evangelism, Christian Witness and Orthodox Unity in America. If you compare and contrast the Orthodox Church in America with the Antiochian Archdiocese and examine how each of the jurisdictions is addressing these issues I believe it is very clear that there is a certain amount of duplication of effort.

Both the OCA and the Antiochian Archdiocese are trying to do almost the exact same work in America yet there is an artificial divide. This divide is rooted in fear and ignorance of the other side. The divide certainly isn't language anymore as both OCA and Antiochian use English as their primary language. It really isn't even culture anymore (or at least it shouldn't be) as both jurisdictions draw people from all nationalities. Both jurisdictions also send their students to both St. Tikhon's Seminary and St. Vladimir's Seminary.

I propose that a special commission be established at the next All American Council to formally sit down with a similar commission from the Antiochian Archdiocese to construct a plan for unification that would involve not just some sort of passive administrative unity but would fully unite both jurisdictions in one headquarters, one Holy Synod, and one set of books and records. To accomplish this the OCA could sell it's estate on Long Island and move the headquarters to either St. Vladimir's seminary or to New Jersey. It would then have approximately \$9 million in assets to merge with the assets of the Antiochian Archdiocese. Where there are two bishops in a city, the bishops' territories would be reassigned.

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□ I strongly support Dr. Meyendorff's proposed solution posted on ocanews.org as a necessary first step to restore and rebuild the OCA.

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□ It seems to us very odd that the head of a church does not reside where the church headquarters is located -- at least not most of the time. How can his responsibilities be fulfilled otherwise? One would think he would want to make himself available to those who report to him and also to oversee their activities. Who else will insure that "Best Practices" are being followed? Might "bad" practices not have been prevented by closer oversight?

Therefore, we recommend adoption of a resolution requiring that all Metropolitans be required to reside within short driving time distance to the Chancery, not to exceed one hour.

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□ I believe that it is in the best interest of the OCA to keep the AAC in the summer months. Speaking as one of the youth participants, I am concerned that the number of students will decrease due to school still in session. I know how important the AAC is to making strong ties with peers who share in the Orthodox faith and I fear that having the council meet in November will make this impossible for some. I wish for you to reconsider the months the AAC take place in the future, for the benefit of the youth.

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□ It would be valuable to each hierarch and diocese to be seated together. The current practice of a head table of bishops facing down on a mass of people implies a "them and us" arrangement (from either perspective) and refutes the integrity of each diocese assembled with its bishop. The AAC is an assembly of dioceses, not an assembly of a synod and all the other people. I suggest a

circle of hierarchs with their dioceses assembled behind them in a pie shaped arrangement. Let only the center be raised for the presenter. Video imaging of a presenter, as has been done at recent councils, will eliminate the problem of having one's back to a portion of the assembly. We as diocese spend considerable effort addressing the issues of the Central Administration. The dioceses, bishops included, are what gathers for the council, not the parishes. The seating arrangements should reflect that.

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□ I would like to strongly suggest and encourage that we plan several geographically regional gatherings, across diocesan lines, arranged so that the greatest number of clergy and laity in a given region could attend. These gatherings can be planned ahead to take place soon after Pascha, as one-day events. They should have minimal structure, and an experienced moderator. There would be no canned speeches, but effectively a Q & A -- in which the "answers" can be provided by anyone, not just those prepped for the official line (if there is one). Let them occur mid-week so that clergy are not inconvenienced, and interested lay people will take a day off if they consider it important enough.

The reason for this is that at the moment all active participation and communication takes place in secret corridors, diocesan assemblies are formal and controlled (the Washington/NY one was a prime example). Mr Stokoe's site and internet chatrooms seem to be the only venue for exasperated speakers. Since coming into office as Chancellor of the OCA, and focussing primarily on the needs and concerns of clergy, Fr Alexander Garklavs, to my knowledge has not yet reached out in such regional, organized ways, to spend time collectively with small gatherings of priests and bishops to simply talk openly about all our concerns. If I am wrong, I apologize, but I know this to be true at least in the New York area, where Fr Alex actually works. But my intent is not to pick on Fr Alex. He is an eminently good man, his heart is in the right place, and just dealing with an understaffed administration is worry enough. I am hoping rather, that together with the Preconciliar Commission, he could be instrumental in encouraging such gatherings.

For my part I wish to say that while it is easy to give advice, I personally volunteer, along with some fellow clergy, to practically organize at least one such gathering in this mid-state area of NY -- IF members of the PCC and Fr Alexander are willing to participate -- so that we can gain a true sense of the needs and desires of those who will be going to Pittsburgh next fall. Preliminary agendas and key areas of concern and proposals can be sent out by the PCC in the meantime to solicit input and reaction from the church. However, I have never seen a better substitute for personal interaction when people of goodwill gather. I don't doubt that such sessions will provoke strong sentiments, and even some hostility -- but that is the "steam" collected by the pressure of our collective silence.

What I ask is practical and direct, there is no "result" assumed, and I am happy to make it happen. Please advise. I am of the opinion that such gatherings should be in some measure "contained" and relatively small. They need to be creative and purposeful, not just gripe sessions.

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Ideas posted June 19, 2008

□ I always find that I have tears in my eyes when I hear the Gospel story from Luke, in which the master of the feast sends his servants to the streets and the lanes, the highways and the hedges, to find the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, and to compel them to come in to the feast. Unless, of course, the blind person has a guide dog, or the person who is halt has a service dog to help with balance and mobility. Those people are not compelled to come in, they're forbidden, unless they're willing to leave their dog behind.

But why should this be? A service dog can accompany its handler to a restaurant, doctor's office, hospital, or school. The dog can accompany its handler to a movie or a ballet. They are clean, quiet, safe, and essential to their handlers' safety and well-being.

My youngest son has significant neurological and psychiatric disabilities. He is 12 years old. Church services are extremely difficult for him; the amount of sensory input, the number of people, the emotional and social demands, are more than he can normally handle. When he was younger, he normally coped by laying on the floor at my feet, curled up in a ball, with a heavy wool coat or blanket over him. By cutting out as much sensory input as he could, and simply listening to the service, he could just manage. But, while a five-year-old can get by with that, a 12-year-old really can't.

One of the tools we've provided him, to help him navigate a world that is confusing, uncomfortable, and sometimes frightening, is a service dog. The dog's responsibilities range from helping him cross streets safely to helping him regulate his level of arousal. With the dog's help, he can do many things that would be difficult or impossible for him without the dog, from participating in regular classes at the local school to attending a ballet. But the dog is not allowed to help him attend church.

I know he is not the only Orthodox Christian with a service dog. I don't know whether there is room for it on the ARC agenda, but it would mean a great deal if a policy could be put in place allowing people with service dogs to participate fully in the life of the Church, without requiring them to leave their service dog at the door.

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☐ Greetings! I a friend of mine who lives in Pitt, informed me today of a Port Authority 28X shuttle bus that goes from the airport and has a stop across the street from the hotel. She believes it's around \$3 each way.

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☐ In August 2006 I wrote to Protodeacon Peter Danilchick concerning published errors I found in the OCA Statutes. He replied to me that he thought I was correct and I have no reason to believe that he did not put the changes in the queue for the upcoming All-American Council. However, in light of the massive turnover at Syosset in the last 18 months, I wonder if you could confirm that my suggestions have been set up for consideration at the Council?

Dear Brad,

You have a great eye for detail. Thanks for pointing out these errors. No one to my knowledge has noticed them before.

- 1. the reference should read Article 5:4 as you have noted.*
- 2. yes you are right -the reference is to parish property.*
- 3. yes it looks like the Statute article 5 has an incorrect reference.*

Dear Protodeacon Peter,

I am writing you in response to your invitation to comment on the "Best Practices for Financial Accountability." I am currently an Episcopalian seriously considering changing to the OCA. I therefore have an interest in seeing that your financial affairs are set in order for the future. Naturally I would like to see the OCA set on a path to strict financial practices should I join. One does not mind so much helping to restore funds that were misspent provided there is reasonable assurance the bad practices do not continue into the future.

I took the occasion of reading your article to delve some into the Statute of the OCA. That

said, I need to point out what I think might be Reference errors in the 1st paragraph of the 2nd page of the Practices:

1. The 1st full sentence says, "In addition, the financial responsibility of the Council is evident in Article 1:5 which lists several key competencies..." I find the references to the 'key competencies' to be in Article 5 Section 4. Perhaps the 1:5 means in Articles 1-5?

2. The next to last phrase in the sentence says, "decides on the purchase, sale or mortgaging of property of the Church, except in cases covered in Article X, Section 8;." When I went to Article X, Section 8 I did not think it was appropriate to the phrase as mortgages, sale, ownership are all in Section 9 of Article X.

3. If you agree with me about item 2, then I think there is a further problem with the Statute as Article V, Section 4, Item g is where you found the reference to Article X, Section 8. Perhaps there was an amendment to Article X at one time that bumped up the Section numbers and nobody noticed the reference in Article V at that time.

Anyway, I hope I am not wasting your time with this. I wish the OCA well in their cleanup.

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On Tuesday, November 11th during the All American Council, Americans will mark the civil holiday of Veterans' Day, while Canadians will mark Remembrance Day.

Both holidays commemorate the sacrifice of those who have given their lives for our respective countries.

It would be most suitable to schedule a Panykhida (memorial) service for departed soldiers to be held this day, as part of the main agenda of the AAC.

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I wanted a definition or redefinition of what the role of a subdeacon is within the Orthodox Church. I understand that the purpose of the subdeacon is to vest the bishop, yet in the case of our church, the bishop comes to our parish once every two years at the most. I wanted to include in the definition the care for the holy items and kind of the administrative assistance to the parish priest and deacon in liturgical matters.

I bring this up, because again and again, as a subdeacon, I am reminded that I am just a "glorified server". I believe this kind of talk is demeaning to the purpose of why subdeacons are ordained.

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Review of our participation in the WCC should be made.

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The upcoming 2008 All American Council brings us to a crossroad on our path to the Kingdom of God. We have the choice to turn toward it and choose the road of forgiveness or turn away from it in a blind alley of fear and bitterness.

The fact that wrongdoings have taken place and have hurt all of us has already been established, is there a need to keep re-opening the wounds? We can pray that those who have fallen to temptation and committed those sins realize what they have done and ask for forgiveness- but we cannot compel anybody to do so. This is not the Christian way. It is misguided to believe that we

cannot heal if we do not receive an apology. If this were the case, it would not be long before all of us would be crippled by all the hurts that everyone is sure to encounter during their lifetime.

Let us first forgive freely and openly as Christ has shown us to do, with love for our brothers who fell and for the ones who are still in a position to be tempted. Let us ask for mechanisms to be put in place that will protect anyone from falling again to temptation. Let us make sure that our cure is not worse than the disease, and without patience, prayer and discernment, it will be so.

We have to show more love and understanding to our hierarchs because they will one day be asked: "What have you done to My little ones". They need our support and prayers. It does not mean that we cannot ask for things to improve and continue asking with patience and perseverance until things improve.

Confessing the sins of our neighbors does not promote an atmosphere of understanding and healing.

But while we are saying that wrongdoings have taken place and work on correcting them, let us make sure that we are not doing so in a manner that is worse than what has been committed. Who has the first stone? The people who have done wrong were at least trying to do something for all of us when they were ensnared by the Tempter. What were we doing for the OCA at that time?

A lot of our criticism toward the Holy Synod and the OCA comes from the projection of our own sinfulness and to some degree, the poor health of our parishes. It is so easy to blame the other. We should remember Adam's answer: "it's not me it's the wife You gave me". Until we really understand the full meaning of this phrase, we have a long way to go to be healthy. The OCA and our hierarchs did not materialize out of thin air, they are us, warts and all. It is not us versus them, we are one, the same essence in Christ.

Perhaps we could consider an OCA *ad hoc* committee on Parish Health, to assess current health and promote future health. It has been done in large secular organizations with success; it may be useful here. Because if we think that it is only because of corruption in the central administration that the rest of the organization is sick, we should think again. It is a two way street. If each of us keeps our backyard free of weeds, the whole city will be a beautiful spotless garden.

It is said that we get the hierarchs we deserve. It can apply to administrators, too. This can be a positive, or a negative reflection of the true state of our health, because there are no separated entities in the Church, we are all organically connected

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Is there any way to eliminate or reduce the \$21.25 per day parking fee at the Hilton? Or are there alternatives nearby?