

Orthodox Church in America
21st All-American Council
Plenary Session II
Tuesday, July 15, 2025
Arizona Grand Resort
Phoenix, AZ

Opening Prayer

The session was convened at 10:48 AM with the singing of “Many Years” for His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon on the occasion of his birthday.

Nominations Procedures

Lay Vice-Chair Ms. Hollie Benton invited Priest David Bozeman, Chair of the Nominations Committee, to go over the nominations procedures.

Fr. Bozeman reported that the slate of candidates for the Metropolitan Council and the Pension Board was posted with biographies on the website of the Orthodox Church in America. The committee is still receiving nominations until 5:00 PM today. A nomination may be submitted to any committee member or to the email provided on the nomination form.

OCA Chancellor Archpriest Alessandro Margheritino made further remarks on the election of members of the Metropolitan Council. He emphasized the importance of these elections, as the work of the All-American Council does not end with the conclusion of the Council. Rather, the elected members of the Metropolitan Council continue working on behalf of the Church for the next three years between All-American Councils. He also reminded the Council that the Church relies on the professional expertise of those serving on the Metropolitan Council and Pension Board.

Resolutions Procedures

Ms. Benton recognized Resolutions Committee Chair Archpriest Timothy Sawchak.

Fr. Sawchak asked the other members of the Committee to stand and be recognized. He stated it is vital that resolutions be submitted in writing. They may be submitted at any time during the Council. He also urged those submitting resolutions to keep in mind the question: “Is this resolution in the purview of the All-American Council?” when submitting resolutions.

Metropolitan’s Report

His Beatitude delivered his attached report covering the following aspects of his primatial ministry:

Conciliarity

His approach to primatial ministry

Strides the OCA has made in the past triennium

- Canonization of St. Olga
- External Affairs of the OCA, particularly noting that the Holy Synod has officially recognized the canonicity of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Ohrid Archbishopric, and is planning a concelebration with His Beatitude Archbishop Stefan to take place in Washington, DC, which will mark the recognition of autocephaly
- Internal matters, specifically regarding Stavropegial Institutions and Central Administration

His Beatitude entertained questions from the floor at the conclusion of his report.

Theophan Neisler, Holy Spirit Church, Wantage, NJ asked if the Canonization Commission has under consideration any other possible canonizations.

His Beatitude replied that various names have been put forward, most notably Metropolitan Leonty. He asked Archbishop Daniel, Chair of the Canonization Commission, to comment. His Eminence clarified that the commission listens to the voice of the faithful in this regard.

Priest Andrew Nelko, St. Nicholas Church, Weirton, WV asked regarding the Serbian Orthodox Church's recognition of the OCA's autocephaly.

His Beatitude replied that it is unclear. While the Serbian Orthodox Church did not formally recognize the OCA's autocephaly when it happened, we have maintained good relations. Fr. Alessandro traveled to Serbia this year for just that reason, to reestablish good relations.

Archpriest Peter Baktis, Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow Church, Princeton, NJ asked if the liturgical commission is working to standardize translations.

His Beatitude replied that the Department of Liturgical Music and Translations is working on this, but it is difficult to discern a better mechanism for making decisions regarding translations than His Beatitude simply deciding his personally preferred translation.

James Class, All Saints of America Church, Alexandria, VA asked about potential engagement with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders now that the chancery has moved to the DC area.

His Beatitude stated that from the beginning of the process of relocation, that effort to engage with that area of life was never the primary purpose of relocation, nevertheless, it does offer the opportunity for our church to have more visibility, to speak in a manner that none of the other jurisdictions can speak - on our own - to the concerns of the hopes and desires of the local Orthodox Church on this continent. Mainly, this means personal interactions with people in government.

Priest Alexis Baldwin, SS. George and Alexandra Mission, Fort Smith, AR asked about the possibility of recognizing mothers and clergy wives in some way. Particularly, this would include recognizing those raising large families in our churches, in a manner exemplified by the Patriarchate of Georgia.

His Beatitude agreed that recognition is good. He was particularly impressed by the level of activity in our parishes, as seen in the Call to Reflection responses that he received. In an active parish with families that show great effort and exemplary service, there is no reason not to recognize them. Recognition in the Church ultimately is in the manner we recognized Matushka Olga as a saint. And we do recognize our clergy wives particularly. But it can be harmful to recognize people too much - rewards and awards can become an end in and of themselves. Ultimately, we recognize the transformation of the person.

Ms Hollie Benton requested that further questions be deferred until the end of the session, time allowing.

Chancellor's Report

Archpriest Alessandro Margheritino noted that his attached report was made available in its entirety in the delegate handbook. Instead of reading each section of his written report, he gave a reflection on the 21st All-American Council theme – “Gathered Together by Christ”.

Credentials Committee Report

Archpriest John Cox, Committee Chair, delivered the following report:

AT PRESENT SESSION:

Hierarchs: 15

Clergy Delegates: 296

Lay Delegates: 235

Total of 546 registered delegates

Clergy Observers: 30

Lay Observers: 72

Total of 648 attendees

TOTAL COUNCIL REGISTRATION:

Hierarchs: 15

Clergy Delegates: 324

Lay Delegates: 259

Total of 598 registered delegates

Clergy Observers: 49

Lay Observers: 118
Total of 765 attendees

Metropolitan Council Statute Amendment

Ms. Lynnell McFarland and Ms. Elizabeth Mikhalevsky presented the proposed amendment of Statute Article V, Section 3.b – Metropolitan Council, regarding terms of office for Metropolitan Council diocesan representative

Clergy Vice-Chair Archpriest Andrew Jarmus moderated discussion of the proposed amendment.

Opponent: His Eminence Archbishop Mark mentioned that the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania has their diocesan assembly in late January. This would create a scheduling conflict in the governing and election procedures within the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania that would leave the Diocese's seats vacant.

Fr. Margheritino reported that the current Metropolitan Council members from Eastern Pennsylvania discussed the matter earlier and that the Diocese's election in January of a given year would be honored as taking effect that year, with a delay of two weeks or so.

Archbishop Mark responded that the Statute should not have an exception.

Proponent: Archpriest Peter Baktis, Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow Church, Princeton, NJ offered a proposed solution for the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania, to have the terms of elected representatives delayed a year.

Question: Archpriest Theodore Boback, St. Andrew Church, Baltimore, MD asked: if someone is elected at a diocesan assembly in the fall, would they then not be on the Metropolitan Council until January?

Fr. Margheritino reminded the council that, procedurally, there is no question and answer time allowed. That is why amendments are published sixty days in advance. There are only arguments for and against.

Opponent: Deacon Matthew Prentice, St. John the Theologian Mission, Fairfax Station, VA: we often see members come and go from the Metropolitan Council. If this amendment is just to ensure that we always have a full roster and newly elected representatives are not delayed for months before taking office, then let's rewrite the amendment to accommodate those dioceses whose elections would create that delay.

Archpriest Geoffrey Korz, All Saints of North America Church, Hamilton, ON, proposed an amendment to the amendment.

Fr. Jarmus reminded the body that further amendments to proposed Statute amendments are out of order, as the Statute requires amendments to be presented at least 60 days in advance.

Opponent: Archpriest David Garretson, SS. Peter & Paul Church, South River, NJ. There has never been an issue of seating delegates from Dioceses. This is a solution looking for a problem.

The discussion concluded, Fr. Jarmus invited Archpriest Sean Levine to explain voting procedures.

After a vote, Fr. Jarmus determined the amendment to be defeated by an overwhelming show of votes against.

Additional Questions

Metropolitan Tikhon entertained further questions pertaining to his report.

Archpriest John Hopko, SS. Cyril and Methodius Church, Terryville, CT remarked that while His Beatitude mentioned the East Slavic roots of our church last night, the most pressing issue in the Orthodox world today, that of the fratricidal war of Russia against Ukraine, was not addressed. He asked His Beatitude to share his thoughts.

His Beatitude agreed that this is one of the central issues affecting our Orthodox world. He reminded the body that the Holy Synod was the first to condemn Russian aggression in Ukraine, that our church provided significant material aid to Ukrainian refugees, and that he visited Metropolitan Onufriy since the war began - something no other primate has done. He noted the complexity of the situation, and suggested that the best option in terms of advocacy is to pray for peace. We focus on prayer for a peaceful resolution.

Archpriest Michael Korolev, Nativity of the Holy Virgin Church, Menlo Park, CA thanked His Beatitude for his visit to Ukraine. He asked if there is anything specific our church can do regarding the recent revocation of Metropolitan Onufriy's citizenship.

His Beatitude replied that there is constant, high level of communication of our support with Metropolitan Onufriy, to which he replies. He stated that Metropolitan Onufriy had told him that at times, it can be unhelpful when outsiders, who do not understand the situation, say too much.

James Edwards, St. Innocent Church, Olmstead Falls, OH stated that there are some in our church who are interested in restoring the ancient order of women deacons. Where is our Church on this issue?

His Beatitude prefaced his reply by stating that the role and dignity of women is notable in our church. We have roles for women in abundance, with women serving at high levels in chancery staff, Metropolitan Council, Diocesan Councils, parish councils, parish ministries, seminary roles, and as

monastics. Regarding the specific question, simply, the female diaconate has not been handed down to us. Any conversation on the female diaconate can only take place with the blessing of the Holy Synod, and the Holy Synod has not opened this question for official discussion. But we are aware of the issue.

Housekeeping

Protodeacon Peter Ilchuk made a number of housekeeping announcements.

Fr. Jarmus declared Plenary Session II closed at 12:42 PM. Plenary Session II closed with the singing of “It Is Truly Meet.”