

Orthodox Church in America
21st All American Council
Plenary Session IV
Wednesday July 16, 2025
Arizona Grand Resort
Phoenix, AZ

Opening Prayer

The session was convened at 10:42 AM with the singing of “O Heavenly King.”

Clergy Vice-Chair Archpriest Andrew Jarmus announced that the minutes of the first three plenary sessions have been approved by the Holy Synod and posted on the OCA website.

Metropolitan’s Opening Remarks

His Beatitude asked Deacon Alexander Woodill to intone “Many Years” for His Grace Bishop Gerasim of Fort Worth and Archpriest John Parker, Dean of St. Tikhon’s Seminary, on the occasion of their birthdays.

His Beatitude also referenced yesterday’s luncheon in honor of Archbishop Benjamin on the occasion of his retirement after twenty years of Archpastoral ministry. His Beatitude formally expressed the gratitude of the entire Orthodox Church in America for His Eminence’s years of patient and wise leadership. The Church will miss His Eminence’s talents offered to the Church and in service on the Synod, but we know that we will still benefit from his prayers. The Council gave His Eminence a standing ovation, and sang him “Many Years.”

His Beatitude declared the See of San Francisco vacant. His Beatitude informed the Diocese that he has appointed himself its *locum tenens*. He will preside at a special nominating assembly this afternoon. He asked for the Council’s prayers for this event.

Credentials Report

Archpriest John Cox, Committee Chair, delivered the following report on this session:

Hierarchs: 14

Clergy Delegates: 286

Lay Delegates: 237

Total Voters Present: 537

Two Thirds Majority: 358

Clergy Observers: 28

Lay Observers: 54

Total Present: 619

Pension Statute Amendment

Archpriest Peter Robichau, Secretary of the Diocese of the South, following hortatory remarks, gave an overview of the proposed statute amendment on behalf of the Diocesan Council of the Diocese of the South.

Fr. Robichau addressed known critiques of the amendment.

Metropolitan's Remarks

His Beatitude stated that he was not commenting on the merits of the amendment proposal, but he did remind the Assembly that his office is in charge of good and proper process regarding the Statute. In that light, he is asking two things:

- 1.) That we speak with precision and facts when it comes to discussing issues such as this amendment.
- 2.) That we have a respectful discussion which reflects the love of the Church and care for the building up of the Church.

Speaking on the facts, His Beatitude asked OCA General Counsel Mr. Mark C. Hamilton to comment on legal matters pertaining to the amendment.

Remarks of the OCA General Counsel

Mr. Hamilton remarked that the proposed amendment has garnered many questions regarding legal matters. He also clarified that neither he nor the Chancery Office has taken a position for or against the amendment.

He spoke on the following topics:

- The manner in which the amendment was brought to the Council
- New Pension Board member selection process
- Pension Plan Advisory Committee and potential fiduciary duties
- Pension Board members serving as Trustees
- Alternative retirement instruments
- Additional costs and potential legal liability concerns

Discussion

Lay Vice-Chair Ms. Hollie Benton outlined the parameters for arguments for (up to 10 participants) and against (up to 10 participants) the amendment.

Opponent: Mr. David Lane, Elevation of the Holy Cross Church, Sacramento, CA recalled that he was once quite concerned with the Plan. He related the efforts that had been made over the years to strengthen the Plan. It was determined that the vulnerability of the plan lay in the lack of full

participation, as is mandatory. Since Baltimore, near full participation has been accomplished; and the Plan is viable and is projected to be fully funded within 12 years. He urged a 'no' vote.

Proponent: Mr. Michael Strelka, Holy Resurrection Church, Palatine, IL spoke on concerns over removing the authority of the All-American Council to elect Pension Board Members and encouraged drawing upon the entire OCA for nominees.

Opponent: Mr. Ray Steeb, St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Allison Park, PA, stated that there is a risk, with this new amendment, of blurring the separation between the Pension Plan and the OCA, which would blur together Pension assets and the OCA assets. He noted that Pension Board nominees do not have to be present to be elected.

Opponent: Ms. Janet Van Duyn, St. Athanasius Chapel, Bronxville, NY, stated that to remove the autonomous status of the Pension Board is a bad idea. She added that to narrow the pool of candidates to only those vetted by the Metropolitan Council would not guarantee that better qualified candidates would be chosen. She also noted that our plan, as a defined benefit plan, is far superior to other types.

Opponent: Archpriest Nikolai Breckenridge, St. Nicholas Church, Bethlehem, PA, stated that while this amendment primarily intends to facilitate the selection of better qualified candidates, it contains additional elements that could result in unforeseen consequences.

Opponent: Matushka Tamara Patterson, St. Athanasius Church, Nicholasville, KY, noted multiple issues with the amendment, particularly regarding the Pension Board's fiduciary responsibility to protect the Pension Plan. The proposed amendment would create a situation in which creditors of the OCA could claim pension assets in case of a lawsuit. She added that to use the Pension Plan's finances to design alternative plans would be against the Pension Board's duty to plan members. In addition, the language regarding the advisory committee would in fact be giving the advisory committee an administrative role.

Opponent: Mr. Dismas Ingram, St. John the Baptist Church, Canonsburg, PA, expressed that the best way to get a dignified retirement is through a defined benefit pension plan, so we should not allow for any potential departure from the Pension Plan.

Opponent: Mr. Basil Kochan, St. Nicholas Church, Akron, OH, noted that the current percentage of contribution is typical for employers providing this type of pension plan. Approval of this amendment would be against all the progress that the Holy Synod and Pension Board have achieved toward fully funding the Pension Plan.

Opponent: Archpriest David Garretson, SS. Peter and Paul Church, South River, NJ, reiterated that the longstanding issues with the plan were due to non-compliance. He has concerns that the tax exempt status of the Pension Plan could be lost were this amendment to be approved. He noted that the Metropolitan Council and Pension Board have improved the stability of the Pension Plan.

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

Housekeeping

Protodeacon Peter Ilchuk made a number of housekeeping announcements.

Ms. Benton declared Plenary Session IV closed at 11:55 AM. Plenary Session IV closed with the singing of “It Is Truly Meet.”