

**Orthodox Church in America**  
**21<sup>st</sup> All American Council**  
**Plenary Session V**  
**Thursday, July 17, 2025**  
**Arizona Grand Resort**  
**Phoenix, AZ**

***Opening Prayer***

The session was convened at 1:15 PM with the singing of “The Grace of the Holy Spirit.”

Lay Vice-Chair Ms. Hollie Benton reported that the minutes of Plenary Session IV have been approved by the Holy Synod and posted to the OCA website.

***Elections Procedure***

Archpriest Sean Levine, Chair of the Council Tellers, and Priest David Bozeman, Chair of the Nominations Committee, went over the elections procedures. Fr. Bozeman announced that Priest Jeremy McKemy has withdrawn his nomination to the Pension Board.

***Credentials Report***

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

Hierarchs: 13  
Clergy Delegates: 261  
Lay Delegates: 225  
Clergy Observers: 25  
Lay Observers: 56

Total Voters: 499  
Total Present: 580

Question: Janet Van Duyn, St. Athanasius Chapel, Bronxville, NY pointed out that the instructions in superscript on the screen say to vote for 4 Clergy and Lay Members of the Metropolitan Council and 3 Clergy and 3 Lay Members of the Pension Board, not 3 Clergy and 3 Lay Members of the Metropolitan Council and 2 Clergy and 2 Lay Members of the Pension Board as is stated on the ballot. Ms. Benton clarified that delegates should vote for 3 Clergy and 3 Lay Members of the Metropolitan Council and 2 Clergy and 2 Lay Members of the Pension Board.

***Elections***

Ms. Benton noted that Fr. Levine recused himself from the counting of the ballots, as he is one of the candidates for the Metropolitan Council. Matushka Danielle Ilchuk will serve as Council Tellers Chair and oversee the counting of ballots.

### *Office of Pastoral Life*

Archpriest Nicholas Solak, Chair of the Office of Pastoral Life, delivered his report to the Council and showed a short video on the Office's work, highlighting the Financial Health Initiative, Thriving in Ministry, Synaxis, and Clergy Wives Ministry. His full report may be read in the Council Reports booklet.

### *OCA Departments Report*

Archpriest Thomas Soroka, Project Manager for the Departments of the Orthodox Church in America, delivered his report to the Council. He presented the work of the Departments of Liturgical Music and Translations, Christian Education, Evangelization and Missions, and Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministry, in providing essential resources to the parishes, missions, and institutions of the OCA. His full report may be read in the Council Reports booklet.

### *Resolutions*

Archpriest Timothy Sawchak, Chair of the Resolutions Committee, introduced a resolution from the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania. Its full text is:

"Be it resolved that the All-American Council direct the Metropolitan Council to establish standards and requirements for the vetting of candidates for the OCA Pension Board. The standards for vetting of lay candidates for the Pension Board shall include (but are not limited to) assessment of academic and/or professional background in areas of financial planning, portfolio management, and accounting. The vetting shall also consider candidates to the Pension Board with expertise in non-profit governance and fiduciary duties. Recognizing that the requirements for lay candidates to the Pension Board, if applied to clergy, would severely limit the pool of those candidates, these criteria are strongly encouraged, but not required, for clergy candidates being considered for the Pension Board.

Giving sufficient time for the implementation of this process before the convening of the next All-American Council, be it further resolved that the vetting standards developed by the Metropolitan Council be presented to the Holy Synod before their Fall 2027 session for consideration.

Be it further resolved that upon approval of vetting standards by the Holy Synod, a subcommittee of the Metropolitan Council shall undertake the vetting process of Pension Board candidates for consideration by the 22<sup>nd</sup> All-American Council.

Be it finally resolved that this process be applied in the same manner to the nominating of candidates to the Pension Board for all future All-American Councils."

Clergy Vice-Chair Archpriest Andrew Jarmus opened the floor for discussion on the resolution, instructing that there may be up to five speakers for, and up to five speakers against, it.

Proponent: Priest John Kotalik, St. John the Baptist Church, Canonsburg, PA, thought this resolution a wonderful way to forge ahead and make systematic the ground gained over the past few years. It does not require debate about the Statute. It is a way to ensure that our candidates to the Pension Board are always qualified, as is the case at this Council.

Opponent: Archpriest Geoffrey Korz, All Saints of North America, Ontario, Canada, posed a question to the mover: is the intention of the resolution to add criteria to these positions but still have members of the Pension Board be elected by the All-American Council?

Answer: Priest Paul Witek, All Saints Church, Olyphant, PA answered that yes, those who are vetted under the resolution could be elected by the All-American Council.

Point of clarification: Archpriest John Hopko, SS. Cyril and Methodius Church, Terryville, CT stated that there seems to be a misapprehension – nominees for the Pension Board need not be present at an All-American Council to be elected to the Pension Board.

Proponent: Archpriest Nikolai Breckenridge, St. Nicholas Church, Bethlehem, PA echoed that Pension Board nominees do not need to be present at the All-American Council. He supported the resolution for many reasons. It is helpful to have codified language on what we expect of Pension Board members. Secondly, it provides a runway, built into this resolution, to give the Synod sufficient time to find qualified, vetted candidates. Lastly, this year all the people on the slate are very qualified, but we can't count on the fact that it will 'just happen' like that every time.

Friendly Amendment: Matushka Tamara Patterson, St. Athanasius Church, Nicholasville, KY moved to postpone the implementation of this proposed resolution until after it has been vetted by OCA General Counsel and Pension Board Counsel.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Bob Graban, Holy Transfiguration Church, Livonia, MI.

Fr. Jarmus stated that the Council would now entertain up to five arguments for and up to five arguments against the friendly amendment.

Proponent: Archpriest David Garretson, SS. Peter and Paul Church, South River, NJ, believed the amendment is crucial. My concern about the original resolution is that it pierces the veil between the fiduciary responsibilities of the Metropolitan Council and the unique and separate fiduciary responsibility of the Pension Board. The role of the Pension Plan Trustees and the Pension Board members is not to be subject matter experts. They are chosen and entrusted to act in good common sense. He wholeheartedly endorsed the amendment, and resolution, if the amendment passes.

Proponent: Priest Joel Brady, Holy Apostles Church, Lansing, NY, questioned the wording of the amendment, suggesting that instead of saying "to postpone," it would be better to say "implementation of this resolution will be contingent upon review of the OCA General Counsel and Pension Board Counsel."

Matushka Tamara Patterson accepted the change in wording.

Question: Archpriest Michael Meerson, Christ the Savior Church, New York City, NY, asked how the resolution would be implemented given the word “postponed”?

Answer: Matushka Tamara Patterson responded that the reason for this friendly amendment is to ensure that the original resolution does not jeopardize the Pension Plan under tax law. We want to make sure this does not breach any fiduciary duty. If it is found not to comply with tax law by both legal opinions, then it would not be implemented. If it does comply, it would be implemented.

Opponent/Question: Priest Athanasios Kombos, St. Paisios the Athonite Mission, Nacogdoches, TX, agreed with the wisdom behind the amendment, as it is very common to have legal counsel review an amendment before it is adopted. If the purpose is to have a legal review, why have the Pension Board Counsel review it as well? Would not the General Counsel's opinion be more than sufficient?

Answer: Matushka Tamara Patterson replied that the Pension Board has an attorney on retainer. This attorney has specific expertise in pension law and tax code that would apply to this resolution.

The Secretariat read the resolution with the addition of the proposed friendly amendment (“The implementation of this resolution will be contingent upon review of the OCA General Counsel and Pension Board Counsel”) added.

Fr. Jarmus called the question on the friendly amendment. The amendment passed by unanimous verbal acclamation.

Discussion on the resolution resumed.

Opponent: Mr. Graban pointed out that there is an understanding that these resolutions are phrased as “should.” He did not think that this resolution has statutory force. These actions are under the competence of the Metropolitan Council, to do on their own when there is more time, to take legal issues into consideration in a mature way. This action is premature and too short notice to try and force in the form of a resolution.

Proponent: Mr. John Malinchok, Holy Ascension Church, Frackville, PA, stated that this resolution helps to ensure that the quality of candidates we see today will be as high at future All-American Councils.

Opponent: Deacon Harrison Russin, Three Hierarchs Chapel, Crestwood, NY voiced his reservation that the resolution does not carry the same force as an amendment to the Statute. It would need to be an amendment, since if we vote for this as a resolution, it would not have any force in a statutory way.

Proponent: Reader Chad Harris, Archangel Gabriel Mission, Weatherford, TX, said it sounds like the Pension Board has been making great strides. Let us continue to professionalize and enhance this.

Proponent: Fr. Witek pointed out that the Pension Plan and the Pension Board have been discussed for the past two councils. This is indeed important, but the Church needs to move on to issues of evangelization, the marginalized, clergy health, the Gospel. He urged approval of this motion.

Clarification: Alexis Liberovsky, Metropolitan Council, OCA Archivist responded to Dn. Russin's reservation, stating that he is correct in that the resolution would not have the force of a Statute Amendment, but there have been times in the past where because an amendment could not be adopted, there have been resolutions that provisionally made mandates on issues that are not in the Statute. For instance, there was a resolution on property held in trust many years ago that eventually made its way into the new Statute adopted 10 years ago.

Opponent: Ms. Maureen Jury, St. Seraphim Cathedral, Dallas, TX, questioned how many of the delegates had read the CVs of the current Pension Board candidates. The effect of this resolution could be that we will either exclude potential nominees or discourage qualified personnel from seeking or accepting nomination.

Fr. Jarmus called the question. The resolution passed by an overwhelming show of votes.

#### ***St. Tikhon's Seminary Report***

Archpriest John Parker, Seminary Dean and Chief Operating Officer, addressed the Council. The full Seminary report may be found in the Council Reports booklet.

#### ***St. Vladimir's Seminary Report***

St. Vladimir's Seminary Dean Dr. Ionuț-Alexandru Tudorie addressed the Council. The full Seminary report may be found in the Council Reports booklet.

#### ***Housekeeping***

Protodeacon Peter Ilchuk made a number of housekeeping announcements.

#### ***Questions / Discussions:***

Fr. Jarmus opened the floor to questions on any reports given at Plenary Session V.

Question: Priest Benjamin Garcia, St. Herman Church, Oxnard, CA asked if there has been an analysis of effects of cuts to Medicaid and SNAP on seminarians.

Answer: Fr. Parker replied that such analysis has not been done by the seminary.

Question: Priest Ryan Bishop, St. Olga of Alaska Mission, Edmonton, Alberta: What is the nature of the online courses to be offered through St. Tikhon's Seminary this coming year? Are there any prerequisite qualifications for participants? Will there be any degree or certificate to mark completion of these courses?

Answer: Fr. Parker said that many courses in the Seminary curriculum truly should be completed prior to matriculation. Classes for the first four of these eight introductory courses have been audio-recorded. We anticipate two tracks: one is to audit (i.e., listen to) the course; the other is to receive a certificate upon completion. The goal for the next four to five years is just to advance general knowledge of the Orthodox Faith for all who are interested. The eventual goal is to have seminary students complete these courses before they enter the residential program.

Question: Priest John Black, St. Herman of Alaska Church, Shillington, PA, stated, regarding the Departments report, that sometimes the Church recognizes the need to rehabilitate an existing parish, as existing parishes can have the same challenges as new missions. He asked if there has been the thought to create programs or grants for such situations.

Fr. Soroka was not available to answer the question.

#### ***Election Results:***

Parliamentarian Mr. Joe Neglia reported a problem with the ballots. There are 499 voters reported in the credentials, but 503 ballots were counted. He recommended looking at the vote totals. If the differences in votes between candidates are greater than four, then there should not be an issue. It appears the differences are greater than four for those elected.

Fr. Jarmus stated that the parliamentarian's recommendation could be accepted by consensus.

Fr. Cox moved to accept the Parliamentarian's recommendation. Archpriest Marcus Burch, St. John of the Ladder Church, Greenville, SC, seconded.

The recommendation was approved by verbal consensus.

Matushka Danielle Ilchuk delivered the election results.

#### **Metropolitan Council Clergy:**

- Archpriest Sean Levine 325 (elected)
- Archpriest Christopher Foley 323 (elected)
- Archpriest Timothy Sawchak 300 (elected)
- Archpriest Justin Mathews 232 (elected alternate)
- Priest John Kotalik 226

#### **Metropolitan Council Laity:**

- Matushka Miho Ochiai Ealy 309 (elected)
- Mr. David Lane 257 (elected)
- Dr. Peter Bouteneff 255 (elected)
- Mr. Alexis Liberovsky 250 (elected alternate)
- Ms. Elizabeth Mikhalevsky 174

- Mr. Bob Graban 122
- Mr. Ray Steeb 96

Pension Board Clergy:

- Archpriest David Garretson 362 (elected)
- Archpriest Eric Tosi 303 (elected)
- Priest Athanasios Kombos 254 (elected alternate)

Pension Board Lay Members:

- Matushka Tamara Patterson 377 (elected)
- Mr. Ivan Rudolph-Shabinsky 219 (elected)
- Ms. Carol Skinner 197 (elected alternate)
- Mr. Theodore Peterson 144

Fr. Jarmus declared Plenary Session V closed at 3:39 PM. Plenary Session V closed with the singing of “It Is Truly Meet.”