

Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th AAC Completed

The fourth Plenary Session of the 20th All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America convened today in Baltimore, MD. Metropolitan Tikhon opened the meeting with a statement on pressing concerns within the Church.

The first issue is the need for clergy financial support in the Diocese of Alaska, where many pastors labor faithfully for meager compensation. In response to this concern, His Beatitude established a charitable fund to assist Alaskan clergy. He then personally committed \$10,000 annually for ten years to the fund. The second pressing concern within the Orthodox Church in America is the education of clergy in the Diocese of Mexico. The need for seminary training in Spanish will be met by the construction of Saint Basil Academy in Mexico City. His Eminence Archbishop Alejo is establishing a charitable fund with the hope of raising \$80,000 to complete the project. Metropolitan Tikhon personally committed \$10,000 annually to this fund over three years.

Next, His Eminence Archbishop Michael of New York and New Jersey offered a statement on behalf of the Holy Synod concerning the continual rise of views on human sexuality and gender identity that are contrary to an Orthodox Christian world view. Quoting multiple Biblical passages, he emphasized that the Church teaches that God has created human beings as male and female—a reality that cannot be altered. Furthermore, human sexuality can only be blessed within a Christian marriage of one man with one woman. Archbishop Michael also cited previous official statements of the Orthodox Church in America and affirmations of pan-Orthodox statements as evidence that the teaching of the Church has not changed or can be contravened. He then warned that any clergy or laity who publish or teach opinions not aligned with Orthodoxy on human sexuality or gender identity will be disciplined. His Eminence received a standing ovation from the assembly.

Archpriest Thomas Soroka, Project Manager for the Departments of the OCA, presented his report on the ongoing work of the various departments of the Church. The Department of Liturgical Music and Translations will soon be offering a choir director certification program to aide parish singers. They have also received approval to designate the Sunday

after the feast of Saint Romanus the Melodist to be OCA Church Musicians Sunday, recognizing the importance of liturgical music in the worship of the faithful. The Department of Christian Education will soon be releasing new resources for Vacation Church School. They also will be hiring a national director of youth to oversee youth ministries in the future. Another project of the Department of Christian Education is the publication of a free, online adult catechism for use in preparing individuals for reception into the Church. This resource will become available in December 2022.

The Executive Director and CEO of International Orthodox Christian Charities [IOCC], Constantine Triantafilou, addressed the delegation on the work of his organization around the world. He concluded his presentation by remembering his friend and co-worker at IOCC, the late Archpriest Leonid Kishkovsky, former Director of External Affairs of the Orthodox Church in America.

A resolution was brought to the floor to designate the Sunday closest to the feast of Saint Herman of Alaska on December 13 a day to remember the clergy of the Diocese of Alaska, and to take up a collection in each parish to assist their ministry. It passed unopposed. A second resolution was brought to the floor condemning the aggression against Ukraine, thus affirming the statement previously released by the Holy Synod. The resolution called to mind the catastrophic effect of the war on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church helmed by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry, and commended the Holy Synod for their continual support of this sister Church. The resolution passed nearly unanimously.

The final reports presented were from the seminaries. Archpriest Chad Hatfield, President of Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, NY played a short film about the life of a seminarian, and then urged the audience to continue their financial support of students who will become the future clergy and leaders of the Church. Archpriest John Parker, Dean of Saint Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary in South Canaan, PA spoke of the rich history of his seminary and its connection to the Saints of North America, and invited all to support the work of the school.

The final order of business *Con't next PG*

Fourth Plenary Session Con't

was the election of new members to the Metropolitan Council and Pension Board. Elected to the Metropolitan Council were clergy delegates Archpriest Justin Patterson, Archpriest Lawrence Margitich, and Archpriest Thomas Moore; and lay delegates Lynnell Brunswig, Elizabeth (Lisa) Mikhalevsky, and Alexis Liberovsky. Elected to the Pension Board were clergy delegates Archpriest John Dresko and Archpriest Chad Hatfield; and lay delegates Melanie Ringa and Matushka Mary C. Buletza Breton. All newly-elected members of the Metropolitan Council and Pension Board will be confirmed Friday at the fifth Plenary Session.

Fifth Plenary Session of the 20th AAC Completed

The 20th All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America concluded today with the fifth Plenary Session. The morning began with a presentation by the youth. After preparing throughout the week with the youth program leaders, they sang liturgical hymns in two-part harmony for the delegation. The youth program for the All-American Council brought together 103 children from across the Orthodox Church in America for five days of education and activities.

A resolution was brought to the floor that advises ways to improve communication between the Pension Board and Metropolitan Council. Among the points the resolution recommends include regular and in-depth reporting on the OCA Pension Plan, and professional pension training for Pension Board and Metropolitan Council members. The resolution passed by majority.

In lieu of the report on military and veteran chaplaincy, Archpriest Peter Dubinin and Priest James Parnell offered presentations on the work of chaplains and the need for more candidates to pursue this path. Archpriest Steven Voytovich then outlined the work of institutional chaplains in his report. He emphasized that this vocation is not limited to ordained clergy, but can also be a career opportunity for lay men and women.

The delegation viewed three short videos produced by ELEOS Poland, the charitable organization of the Polish Orthodox Church, which outlined the work undertaken for Ukrainian refugees. Earlier this year, ELEOS Poland received more than \$720,000 from

the Orthodox Church in America to further their care for those affected by the war in Ukraine. This donation is the result of the largest single charitable collection ever taken up by the Orthodox Church in America.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon offered his closing remarks, connecting today's feast of Saint Mary Magdalene with the theme of the Council, "Becoming Vessels of Grace." Just as Saint Mary proclaimed her experience of the Resurrection to others, he remarked all the members of the delegation should take what they have experienced over the past week and "offer it to God's people."

The 20th All American Council closed with the installation of the new members for the Metropolitan Council and the Pension Board, led by His Beatitude.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon Presides at Divine Liturgy of 20th AAC

On July 21, 2022 His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon presided at the celebration of the hierarchical Divine Liturgy at the 20th All-American Council in Baltimore, MD. Concelebrating with His Beatitude and the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America were the OCA Chancellor, OCA Secretary, Diocesan Chancellors, and the heads of Stavropegial Institutions.

During the Liturgy His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel offered the homily where he remarked on the Lord's parable of the wheat and the tares. He said that we had been gathered at the All-American Council from all over the continent to recognize that North America is the field which we have been given to tend as our duty and that we must only plant the one seed we hold in common: the gospel of Jesus Christ, even if the wheat of the gospel and the tares look similar and sometimes cause us confusion.

Those at the Liturgy enjoyed a special choir performance from the Youth of the AAC who sang "Their Proclamation", "I Give You My Peace", and the Polyeleos during communion of the clergy and faithful.

Following the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, His Beatitude awarded Archpriest Peter Dubinin and Priest James Parnell with the Military Cross for their service as chaplains in the armed forces.

His Beatitude also thanked the choir directors Ms. Juliana Woodill, Mr. Zach Mandell, and the AAC Youth choir for their efforts during the Liturgy.

Youth Presentation at the 20th All-American Council

On July 22, 2022 during the fifth Plenary Session of the 20th All-American Council, in Baltimore, MD the youth of the AAC made a special presentation to the Holy Synod of Bishops and council delegates.

The presentation began with the youth processing to the front of the council area while singing the Troparion of the Cross, “O Lord, save Thy people”. Father Benjamin Tucci, the youth program director for the AAC, thanked the Holy Synod and wider Orthodox Church in America for its support of the youth and being attentive to their needs. He further thanked all the many staff helping with the youth program this year “for being vessels of grace”, the theme of this year’s Council. He emphasized the great responsibility that youth ministry carries and which often presents challenges.

Following Father Benjamin’s presentation, two youth representatives, Daniel Rentel and Elizabeth Vallena, delivered five points which they wished to bring to the Council:

- 1) That the Orthodox faith is a beautiful and mystical faith yet still rational.
- 2) The disconnect which they think exists between the wider, secular society and the Orthodox Church. They elaborated that life’s answers can be found within the Church and we need to do our best to communicate them and since we don’t fit the world’s stereotypes, we should not be ashamed or embarrassed to do so.
- 3) The question: “What does it mean to be Orthodox?” This question, they affirmed, must be answered with an invitation to others to come and see for themselves since the spiritual experience is deep and the true way to communicate this is to show it by our actions.
- 4) A recognition that the youth enjoy shared community and have strong bonds with each other, bonds which they want to strengthen on the local level.
- 5) A point of gratitude, thanking Father Benjamin Tucci, Matushka Elizabeth Wyslutsky, and all the teachers and chaperones on behalf of all youth participants.

Following the youth representatives, a video slideshow was shown presenting the youth events of the week accompanied to audio of the youth choir singing during the Council’s Thursday hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Among the photos and video clips were highlights from the time His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon spent with the youth, His Grace Bishop Andrei of Cleveland visiting with the youth at the National Aquarium, a brunch with His Grace Bishop Gerasim of Fort Worth and His Grace Bishop Andrei, excursions to the National Aquarium, Six Flags amusement park, and the Science Center, amongst others.

The youth presentation concluded with the gathered youth singing several repetitions of the Jesus Prayer, “O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”, the Trisagion, and finally “The Angel Cried”. During the final hymn, the assembled delegates were invited to stand and join singing with the choir.

Father Alexander Rentel, OCA Chancellor, spoke and thanked Father Benjamin Tucci, Father David Subu, and all the volunteers. Father Alexander asked His Beatitude to recognize Father Michael Anderson who first put the youth program together several decades ago. Father Alexander then asked the youth participants to think how they might in turn become leaders in their own right, to go to seminary, and become vessels of grace.

The youth ended their presentation by singing the Troparion of the Cross again as a recessional as they exited the Ballroom where the Council was being held.

On Friday, July 22, 20th All-American Council delegation viewed three short videos produced by ELEOS Poland, the charitable organization of the Polish Orthodox Church, which outlined the work undertaken for Ukrainian refugees. Earlier this year, ELEOS Poland received more than \$720,000 from the Orthodox Church in America to further their care for those affected by the war in Ukraine. This donation is the result of the largest single charitable collection ever taken up by the Orthodox Church in America.



Youth Choir

STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SYNOD ON SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, Diocese of New York and New Jersey, Secretary of the Holy Synod, read the following statement on behalf of the Holy Synod:

There was a resolution proposed to affirm the Church's stance on issues of same-sex relationships and sexual identity. This matter, however, falls outside the competence of the All-American Council, since, in the words of the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America, "All matters involving doctrine, canonical order, morals, and liturgical practice" are within the competence and jurisdiction of the Holy Synod.

Nevertheless, meeting under the presidency of His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon, the Holy Synod has issued the following statement:

The Orthodox Church teaches that the union between a man and a woman in marriage reflects the union between Christ and His Church (Eph. 5). As such, marriage is by this reflection monogamous and heterosexual. Within this marriage, sexual relations between a husband and wife are an expression of their love that has been blessed by God. Such is God's plan for male and female, created in his image and likeness, from the beginning, and such remains His plan for all time. Any other form of sexual expression is by its nature disordered, and cannot be blessed by the Church in any way, whether directly or indirectly.

That said, the Holy Synod of Bishops expresses its pastoral concern and paternal love for all who desire to come to Christ and who struggle with their passions, temptations, and besetting sins, whatever those might be. The Church is a hospital for the sick; our Lord has come as a physician to heal those who are ailing. Imitating our Savior, who stretched His arms wide on the Cross, we welcome with open arms all who desire the life of repentance in Christ. Over the course of recent years, His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon and the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America have made numerous pronouncements affirming the Orthodox Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality. Metropolitan Tikhon, at the 18th All-American Council in Atlanta, Georgia, on July 20, 2015, in his opening address, stated that:

"... the Orthodox Church must continue to proclaim what she has always taught: that marriage is the union between one man and one woman and the Orthodox Church in America can in no way deviate from this teaching..."

Among the Holy Synod's affirmations of the same teaching are the "Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life," from the 10th All-American Council, Miami, Florida, taking place from July 26-31, 1992; the "Synodal Reaffirmation of the SCOBA statement titled 'On the Moral Crisis in our Nation,'" issued May 17, 2004; and the synodal "Statement concerning the June 26 US Supreme Court decision," issued June 28, 2015.

Therefore, in accord with the timeless plan of God our Creator, the unchanging teaching of Christ the Savior announced through His holy apostles and their successors, and the consistent witness of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America, the Holy Synod affirms what the Scriptures clearly and plainly proclaim and the Holy Fathers unerringly confess, namely: that God made human beings in two sexes, male and female, in His own image, and that chaste and pure sexual relationships are reserved to one man and one woman in the bond of marriage.

As such, we affirm that sexual relationships are blessed only within the context of a marriage between one man and one woman. Motivated by love and out of sincere care for souls, we call those who suffer from the passion of same-sex attraction to a life of steadfast chastity and repentance, the same life of chastity and repentance to which all mankind is called in Christ.

We call upon all clergy, theologians, teachers, and lay persons within the Orthodox Church in America never to contradict these teachings by preaching or teaching against the Church's clear moral position; by publishing books, magazines, and articles which do the same; or producing or publishing similar content online. We reject any attempt to create a theological framework which would normalize same sex erotic relationships or distort humanity's God-given sexual identity. The holy apostle Paul writes that such teachings will "increase to more ungodliness," and that such a "message will spread like gangrene" (2 Tim 2:16-17), misleading the faithful and inquirers seeking the truth.

Any clergy, theologian, teacher, or lay person who contravenes our directive thus undermines the authority of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America by disregarding the Holy Synod's consistent and unwavering teaching on these matters. We call on any such persons to cease their disruptive activities, which threaten the peace and **Con't Next Pg**

Holy Synod Statement con't from previous Pg

tranquility of the Orthodox Church in America, cause scandal and uncertainty, and tempt those who struggle against their disordered passions to stumble. Consequently, those who teach these errors become participants in the sin of those whom they have tempted or whom they have failed to correct, and thus should seek remission of this sin in the Mystery of Holy Confession. Those who refuse correction open themselves to ecclesiastical discipline.

Thus, we, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in Americas, conclude by once again affirming that all clergy, theologians, teachers, and lay persons of the Orthodox Church in America should teach nothing other than the fullness of the Orthodox Faith, which is the fullness of the saving truth.

We remind our faithful and clergy that every person of goodwill is welcome to visit our parishes.

However, reception into the Church, and continued communion in Christ at the sacred Chalice, is reserved for those who strive to live a life of repentance and humility in light of these God-given truths, conforming themselves to the commandments of God as the only path of salvation in Christ. All of us are sinners, but it is for precisely this reason that our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to “Repent and believe in the Gospel, for the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk. 1:15).



Council Day 2



**Met. Tikhon
addressing
Assembly**



The Synod of bishops in the OCA



Trudy, Fr. Andrew & Jake



Met. Tikhon



Metro. Tikhon & His Grace Bishop Daniel



Met. Tikhon with the youth



**National OCA
Chancellor AP
Alexander Rentel**



Youth performing at a session



Met. Tikhon at Liturgy



**Synod of bishops during
prayer service**