



# Orthodox Christian Laity

February 16, 2021

Martyrs Pamphilius & Valens; Holy Hierarch Flavian, archbishop of Constantinople

His Eminence, Archbishop ELPIDOPHOROS  
The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America  
10 East 79th Street  
New York, NY 10021

Your Eminence:

Thank you for your response to our February 2, 2021, letter regarding a proposed new Charter of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

In our letter of February 2, we made the point that: **“the role of the laity in our Church has diminished, and this should be corrected so that Church governance regains a more balanced co-ministry between clergy and laity”**.

The diminution of the role of the laity in Church governance over the years is a recurring theme heard from OCL leaders, supporters and others. It is documented by Paul Manolis in “The History of the Greek Church in America: In Acts and Documents,” published in 2003, as well as by other authors. The definitive document on this topic might very well be Dr. James Counselis’ 1982 article, “Historical Reflections on the Constitutions of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America 1922-1982,” comparing the various Charters (1922, 1927, 1931 and 1979). Counselis clearly demonstrates how the laity’s role has eroded drastically over time from substantive to advisory to pro forma.

Two glaring examples of the marginalization of lay participation in the governance of the Archdiocese are the unilateral decisions involving the Charters of 1979 and 2003 made in violation of the Amendment Procedures set forth in those Charters.

Article XXIV of the 1979 Charter states:

“The Charter herein may be revised **upon request of the Archdiocesan Clergy-Laity Congress** as the need therefore arises. Revisions thereto shall be submitted to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for approval and ratification.”

Article 25 of the 2003 Charter states:

“The present Charter regulating the affairs of the Holy Archdiocese of America as an ecclesiastical institution, may be amended in its entirety or in part **after a proposal of the Holy Eparchial Synod** submitted to the Ecumenical Patriarchate **following the appropriate procedure in the Archdiocesan Council and the Archdiocesan Clergy-Laity Congress**, and after the approval of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to which the proposal has been submitted.”

**No** Archdiocesan Clergy-Laity Congress **requested** that the 1979 Charter be revised. All Amendments to the Charter proposed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate raised by the Archdiocesan Council and voted upon by the Clergy-Laity Congress were ignored by the Patriarchate. Likewise, to our knowledge, the Holy Eparchial Synod **did not submit a request** to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for any revision (much less a suspension) of the 2003 Charter.

The changes unilaterally imposed are in contravention of the Amendment Procedures detailed above. Does this not invalidate these Charter changes/suspensions, on a moral, if not on a legal basis? Remarkably, we have discerned no lay participation in these changes. Depriving the laity of its historic and Orthodox role in Church Governance alienates the faithful and divides the Body of Christ. Any new Charter must not only include wording on Amendment Procedures that require lay input, but must also forbid and control for any contravention to them. Any further overhanded disregard for the Charter may result in the new document having no meaning whatsoever.

Please accept these ideas on the new Charter in our shared belief that a full and open collaboration between clergy and laity is the cornerstone of our Orthodox Christian faith.

In Christ,

Argo Georgandis Pyle, President

George D. Karcazes, Secretary