



Orthodox Christian Laity

April 12, 2021

Holy Hierarch Basil the Confessor, Bishop of Parium

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

Your Eminence,

OCL's continued input on Church concerns is expressed in good faith to improve and strengthen clergy-laity operational interactions for church advancement. Our February 16 letter mentioned how unilateral decisions made by senior clergy in areas where prevailing Archdiocesan Charters required lay input invalidate, at least morally if not legally, the decisions taken. This type of action leads to mistrust and is a source of discord in the Church which requires a balanced and collaborative co-ministry between clergy and laity.

We reviewed the Charters and Regulations of various Orthodox Churches and the common theme is that each Holy Synod of Bishops is the supreme canonical authority in their respective Church, responsible for all matters spiritual, doctrinal, canonical, sacramental and hierarchical. Equally, the Church's Clergy-Laity Congress (or equivalent) is the highest administrative and legislative authority in their respective Church. It establishes operating budgets, manages assets, maintains financial controls and is responsible for all legal matters. The Executive Committee implements the decisions of the Church's Clergy-Laity Congress. It cooperates fully with the Holy Synod for the good-functioning of the Church.

The Patriarch/Metropolitan/Archbishop of their respective Church is always head of the Holy Synod and most often the presiding officer of the Church's Clergy-Laity Congress and its Executive Committee. However, as a means of re-establishing the historic decisional role of the laity in the Church, it might be advisable to have a layperson elected as a co-presiding officer to cover administrative/ legal agenda items and a priest elected as a co-presiding officer to cover canonical/spiritual agenda items. The Executive Committee should also be elected at this official Clergy-Laity Congress.

With the head bishop remaining as the titular head of the Executive Committee, a lay co-President could cover administrative/legal agenda items of that committee and a priest co-President could cover canonical/spiritual agenda items. Similarly, the Chancery could have a lay co-Chancellor and staff responsible for administrative/ legal issues, while a priest co-Chancellor and staff would be responsible for canonical/ spiritual issues. The Chancery staff could then report to their respective Executive Committee Co-Presidents, cooperate fully with the head bishop and Holy Synod, and be employees hired by the Executive Committee.

These structural, administrative suggestions are based on appreciating the qualifications and potential contribution of both clergy and laity in Church governance. The clergy is prepared for its canonical/spiritual functions by attending seminary and lay people are trained in diverse professions including administration, finance and legal issues. It would be unreasonable to ask clergy to fill and/or be responsible for roles they are not prepared to handle, much as it would be unconscionable to ask an accountant or lawyer to serve as a priest without required training and preparation. By dividing tasks according to experience and educational preparedness, the Church would function more cohesively. Each one's roles would be clearly understood and we would have competent individuals capitalizing on the strengths of both clergy and laity. In this way, a more balanced and transparent co-ministry between clergy and laity would be achieved.

Again, we thank you for your kind attention and ask for your blessing.

Yours in Christ,

Argo Georgandis Pyle, President

George D. Karcazes, Secretary

cc: GOA Holy Eparchial Synod / charter@goarch.org