



Orthodox Christian Laity

May 19, 2021

Hieromartyr Patrick, Bishop of Prussia

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

Your Eminence,

Thank you for your positive response to our April 22, 2021 request for participation in the drafting of the new Charter of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA). Having our President, Argo Georgandis Pyle and our Secretary, George D. Karcazes as members of the newly-established Advisory Committee will bring OCL's over 30 years experience as a pan-Orthodox North-American organization to the Committee and hopefully contribute to the process.

Continuing our thoughts on the new Charter, we have previously made the point that the laity's role in Church governance has eroded drastically over time. For this to be corrected, **lay representatives**, from the parish and up, **should actually be ELECTED**, not appointed or designated by the clergy (bishops, priests, deacons), thus making them only nominal lay representatives, doing the clergy's bidding. **Transparent ELECTIONS bring credibility and trust to lay involvement.**

Effective, meaningful and decisional lay involvement must be reintroduced at every administrative level of the Church. Parish Council, Metropolis/Diocesan/Archdiocesan elections must be free and open in order to assure that lay representatives do not merely endorse or acquiesce to Clergy directives. Investing the Clergy with the power to disqualify or remove elected lay Council members for any, or no reason, makes a mockery of lay participation in Church administration. The removal of any person (Clergy or Lay) from any position in the Church must only be for "good cause" and only after all norms of procedural due process have been followed.

Financial/administrative/legal matters are primarily the responsibility of elected lay members who report to the faithful at Parish, Metropolis/Diocesan and Archdiocesan Assemblies/Congresses. Using independent auditors and legal advice when needed makes these activities transparent and credible. By shielding the clergy from matters financial/administrative/legal, for which they are often ill-prepared, they could not be held accountable for mismanagement of same. The clergy could then focus on what they have been trained, i.e., the spiritual well-being of their flock. In all cases, information should be shared so that a conciliar and transparent clergy-laity cooperation is achieved.

When a priest vacancy occurs, the Parish Council should either recommend candidates for hierarchal approval or ask the hierarch to suggest at least 2 potential candidates who then meet the Parish Council in order to gain Parish Council acceptance. Likewise, the clerics will obtain a better understanding of their potential new position and have the right to accept or refuse it. Since a symbiotic relationship must exist between clergy and laity at all levels, unilateral hierarchical assignments are simply not as effective as a collaborative approach to clergy postings. Also, Diocesan/ Archdiocesan Congresses should be comprised of delegations from each parish, the majority being **ELECTED lay representatives**, and the Parish Priest. These Congresses **ELECT the Diocesan/Archdiocesan Councils** and have the same laity-clergy ratios.

All Episcopal positions should be locally elected from eligible candidates who have either been born here or who have become naturalized citizens here. After a vetting process by the respective Diocesan/Archdiocesan Council and local Synod, at least 2 candidates should be presented to the respective Congresses for **Episcopal ELECTIONS**.

Transparent ELECTIONS are a form of "Axios-Anaxios" as originally intended (a question from the Altar seeking an answer from clergy AND laity, and NOT a pronouncement from on high) **and should be viewed as an intrinsic part of our Church processes.**

Please know that we appreciate your kind attention, and we ask for your prayers and blessing.

Yours in Christ,

Argo Georgandis Pyle, President

George D. Karcazes, Secretary

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

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