



Orthodox Christian Laity

June 8, 2021

Translation of the Relics of Theodore the Commander; Kalliope the Martyr; Melania the Righteous

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

Your Eminence,

Christ is risen! The Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) again wishes you good health in these pandemic times as we continue with our suggestions for the new Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOAA) Charter.

The role of the Orthodox Church in pluralistic democracies like the USA and Canada is much different than the role of the Church in societies like Greece, where the Orthodox Church is the dominant religion and the Church and State often support each other. It is also vastly different than the Church in monolithic and non-democratic societies like Russia, where the Church is funded and protected by the State in exchange for keeping the largely Orthodox population placated and the government's dictatorial and self-serving policies accepted, both domestically and internationally.

The Orthodox Church, like all other religions in western, pluralistic democracies is free from State interference, but it is also without State support. The Church must also be cognizant of religious comparisons, since so many faiths co-exist here. In our western societies, the people play an important role in civic governance through free and transparent elections, constitutional guarantees, protected individual rights, an independent judiciary, etc. Active, informed participation in every aspect of political, civic, corporate, labor and non-profit activities is the norm in these democracies. These concepts are part of our societal makeup. **We intuitively respect others, but we understand that trust is earned and must be mutual. Blind obedience is as foreign to our DNA as it is to Orthodox ecclesiology which expects its adherents to be "reason-endowed" followers of Christ.**

It follows that Orthodox laity here must have a significant role in Orthodox Church governance. **Adopting a new GOAA Charter is an opportunity for the Church to return to its roots as a conciliar Church.**

The diminished role of the laity in our Churches here has contributed to the disenfranchisement and even loss of faith of so many of our brothers and sisters, as well as our children. A new Charter must enable the re-evangelization of those who have left for other faiths and those who now have no religious affiliations.

In summary, our seven Letters on the GOAA Charter topic suggest that significant decisional lay involvement in Church governance must be explicit in our Orthodox Church Charters and Regulations and that Amendment Procedures must be respected. The concept that financial/administrative/legal matters are the responsibility of elected laity must be clearly stated. Transparent elections must be an intrinsic part of our Church processes. Church documents should ensure that commonly understood norms of procedural due process need to be respected and protected in all areas of administration and must preclude unilateral decisions removing elected lay leaders, nullifying elections, ignoring or refusing to enforce its own Regulations without recourse, etc. **The Orthodox Church is a conciliar Church and a more balanced co-ministry between Clergy and Laity is essential to its survival here.**

We hope that Your Eminence will accept our suggestions in the spirit of love in which they are offered. The decline in active adherents in the Orthodox Church here over the recent decades is reflected in countless surveys. A Church that is not growing is in the process of dying. An Orthodox Church structure that respects our tradition of the separation of Church and State and that promotes, rather than limits, the active participation of the laity in Church governance can reverse these losses and can welcome all seekers of the Holy Tradition of Orthodoxy as an indigenous faith whose promise is only limited by the vision of its faithful. We again ask for your prayers in these challenging times.

Yours in Christ,

Argo Georgandis Pyle, President

George D. Karcazes, Secretary

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

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