



ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN LAITY

LAY ADVOCACY • TRANSPARENCY • ACCOUNTABILITY • UNITY

**Orthodox Christian Laity
Correspondence with
Archbishop Elpidophoros
Regarding the
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese
of America**

**Orthodox Christian Laity
Occasional Papers Series • No. 11 • 2021**

OTHER OCL OCCASIONAL PAPERS IN THE SERIES

Remembering Orthodox Christian Laity Board Members: Eulogies and Tributes. George Matsoukas, 2020. (#10)

The American Orthodox Church is Holy, Catholic and Apostolic - It Must Now Be One. 2016. (#9)

Religious Pluralism, Fundamentalism and Contested Identities in North American Orthodox Religious Life: The Case of the Greek Orthodox Church in North America. 2018. (#8)

New Strategy Needed To Save Endangered Ecumenical Patriarchate. Peter Marudas, 2006. (#7)

Greek Philosophy and the Theology of the Greek Orthodox Church. John Mavroides, Ph.D., 2006. (#6)

An Orthodox Christian Church in the United States: Unified and Self-Governed. Peter Haikalis, Ph.D., 2000. (#5)

The Challenge of Outreach. Nikolas K. Gvosdev, Ph.D., 1997. (#4)

The History and Future of the Female Diaconate.

Compiled by Timi Loomos Freshman (assisted by Valerie Karras, Demetra Jacquet and Dr. Ellen Gvosdev) by request of Archbishop Spyridon, 1997. (#3)

The Theological Foundation of the Role of the Laity in the Church, Daniel J. Sahas, Ph.D., University of Waterloo Ontario, Canada, 1997. (#2)

Transition, Renewal: One Faith, One Church, Bishop Iacovos of Catania, 1997. (#1)

The Series is available at: <https://ocl.org/oclpublications/>

INTRODUCTION

For more than three decades, Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) has focused on creating awareness and insight regarding continuous critical aspects of Orthodox Church life in America. Our OCL logo highlights: lay advocacy, transparency, accountability and unity. Faithful and concerned Orthodox Christians from parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America (GOAA) founded OCL in 1987 as an Illinois not-for-profit organization with the following purpose: "To restore and strengthen the role of the laity in the Orthodox Church for the continuous regeneration of the Church in its Apostolic Mission."

While OCL was established as a pan-Orthodox ministry with the overarching goal of uniting all Orthodox in North America as one autocephalous Church, it has often seemed to focus specifically on GOAA issues. One reason is that the incorporators of the organization are active members of that jurisdiction and more informed about its distinctive issues. Another reason is that the GOAA is the largest of the ethnically-denominated "jurisdictions", and the leaders of the others insisted that "coming together is impossible without the GOAA."

One of the major challenges addressed in the past and once again in the present is the GOAA Charter. According to an October 8, 2020 communique, the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople announced that: "It placed into abeyance the force of the Charter of the Holy Archdiocese of America, with the objective of constituting a joint Committee of representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Archdiocese for the composition of a new Charter." Helpful information for this action was not offered to the faithful.

In 2003, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, ignoring the Amendment provision of the 1977 Charter, the established

procedures of the Clergy-Laity Congress, and the voices of many members of the Archdiocesan Council, as well as OCL members, imposed the current Charter upon the GOAA. The recent and sudden, unilateral suspension of the 2003 Charter by the Patriarchate in 2020, compelled OCL to embark on a collective effort to inform and energize the laity to have a meaningful voice in the drafting of the new charter. **The Charter of the GOAA is of critical importance for the future of Orthodoxy in America.** The process is essential. It must not be clothed in a pro forma "ratification" by unquestioning advocates of the Patriarchate's unilateral and absolute authority.

Following a series of in-depth discussions, the OCL Board, having met with His Eminence, Archbishop Elpidophoros at the Archdiocese shortly after his enthronement [*see photo on page 3*] and having been assured of his desire for dialogue, began a correspondence aimed at bringing data and concerns of the Laity to His Eminence's attention. As the Archbishop is also the Chairman of the Assembly of Bishops of the USA (AOB) and Orthodox Unity is a major focus of OCL, the Board envisioned the correspondence as an opportunity to communicate with all Orthodox Christian jurisdictions in America. Every jurisdiction of the AOB has a governing document (charter/by-laws) that incorporates a particular formula for the participation of the laity and clergy in matters of church governance. For the Church in America, the creation of a new charter for the GOAA, if done correctly, can serve as a thought-provoking model of what the charter of an autocephalous Church in America could look like.

We thank and appreciate His Eminence, Archbishop Elpidophoros for his openness in considering our requests and suggestions. We also thank members of the OCL Board, its advisors and supporters for their dedication in advancing OCL's mission.



NEW YORK—July 31, 2019. Pictured with His Eminence, Archbishop ELPIDOPHOROS (center) are (L-R): George Matsoukas (Executive Director), OCL Board Members Argo Pyle (President), Peter J. Petkas, George Karcazes (Vice Presidents) and Dr. William Tenet, Advisory Board Member.

The year 2022 marks the Centenary of the first Charter of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America which established an Autonomous Archdiocese. **A new Charter restoring the autonomy of the Archdiocese as a steppingstone toward an administratively-united autocephalous Orthodox Church would be a noble action and fruitful blessing that the Holy Synod of Constantinople could grant to the Orthodox faithful of North America at this time.**

Argo Georgandis Pyle
President

George D. Karcazes
Secretary

Orthodox Christian Laity Executive Board

We express our gratitude to Alice Kopan (member of the Executive Board) and David Oancea (Executive Director) for editing and formatting this publication which also appears online (bit.ly/GOACharter).

(#1) Letter of February 2, 2021

February 2, 2021

Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

His Eminence, Archbishop ELPIDOPHOROS
The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
8 East 79th St, New York, NY 10075-0192

Your Eminence:

The Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) thanks you for your recent messages and we pray for your good health in these pandemic times.

We also appreciate the opportunity to share some of our ideas with you regarding the proposed new Charter for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Having heard from many of our leaders, supporters and others on this issue, a common thread ties them together: 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. Comparing the role of the laity in the original Charter of 1922 with the succeeding Charters of 1927, 1931, 1977 and 2003, we see a steady and disturbing erosion of the laity's role in Church governance.

The laity are co-responsible in Christ's Church, along with the clergy (bishops, priests, deacons), no more, no less. Their role has diminished drastically over time from substantive, to advisory, to pro forma. This should not be the case in the Orthodox Church.

The new Charter for the Archdiocese should restore the historic role of the laity in the governance of the Church. The Charter and following Regulations should explicitly state the role of the laity in all administrative and financial matters, including independent and transparent auditing, while respecting the spiritual, hierarchical and conciliar nature of the Church.

The interdependency of clergy and laity should be at the core of the new Charter. The laity's roles and responsibilities in administrative/financial matters and in clergy nominations/elections should be clearly defined. Likewise, the spiritual and hierarchical roles and responsibilities of the clergy should be clearly set forth. Both should be scrupulously adhered to. The collaboration of clergy and laity should permeate the entire Charter.

We thank you for your attention and ask that you pray for OCL supporters, Orthodox Christians and all those suffering the ravages of the ongoing worldwide pandemic.

In Christ,

Argo Georgandis Pyle
President

George D. Karcazes
Secretary

**Response of Archbishop Elpidophoros
to February 2, 2021 Letter**

February 4, 2021

Mrs. Argo Georgandis Pyle, President
Mr. George D. Karcazes, Secretary
Orthodox Christian Laity
PO Box 6954, West Palm Beach, FL 33405

Dear Mrs. Georgandis, Dear Mr. Karcazes,

I greet you warmly in the grace and peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Having received your letter dated February 2, 2021, I would like to thank you for sharing your thoughts and ideas with me. Kindly know that I appreciate your time and effort in compiling your recommendations, and have shared them with the Administration Committee of the Archdiocesan Council, whose membership, as you know, mostly consists of lay individuals.

Thanking you once again for your input, I extend to you and all the members of OCL my archpastoral blessings and prayers, and remain

With paternal love in Christ,

+ ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America

(#2) Letter of February 16, 2021

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 St, 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 Counelis’ 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). Councils 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

(#3) Letter of March 8, 2021

March 8, 2021

Ven. Hierarch Theophylactus the Confessor, bishop of
Nicomedia

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

Your Eminence:

Thank you for your letter of February 4, 2021, to which we responded on February 16, 2021. In the meantime, our Board has continued to discuss how Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) can be most helpful in the drafting of the new Charter. As you may already know, OCL has supporters and board members from parishes in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese as well as from parishes of every other Orthodox jurisdiction across North America. This combined knowledge and experience is at your disposal.

We are most grateful, and specifically thank you for forwarding our thoughts and ideas concerning the proposed new Charter to the Administration Committee of the Archdiocesan Council. We note from the current Yearbook of the Archdiocese that although the chairman of the committee is identified, the other members of the committee are not. In the interests of continuing our dialogue relating to the subject of the Charter, we respectfully make the following requests:

That the following three individuals: George Matsoukas, George Pontikes and George D. Karcazes be added to the Administration Committee as "Ex Officio" members (i.e., with a voice, but not a vote). All three are active members of their local Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Parishes; all have served for many years on the Parish Councils of their respective parishes; and all three have served as delegates to numerous Clergy-Laity Congresses as delegates of their Parishes.

That the names of the current members of the Administration Committee, the procedure and timeline that has been established for the development of the Charter to replace the "suspended" Charter of the Archdiocese be provided, including any preliminary draft.

Thank you for your prayers and for your consideration of these requests made in furtherance of our mutual love for our Church and for transparency and accountability in all matters relating to its administration.

Yours in Christ,

Argo Georgandis Pyle
President

George D. Karcazes
Secretary

(#4) Letter of April 12, 2021

April 12, 2021

Holy Hierarch Basil the Confessor, Bishop of Parium

His Eminence, Archbishop ELPIDOPHOROS
The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
10 East 79th St, 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: GOAA Holy Eparchial Synod / charter@goarch.org

**Response of Archbishop Elpidophoros
to April 12, 2021 Letter**

April 22, 2021

Mrs. Argo Georgandis Pyle, President
Mr. George D. Karcazes, Secretary
Orthodox Christian Laity
PO Box 6954, West Palm Beach, FL 33405

Dear Mrs. Georgandis, Dear Mr. Karcazes,

I greet you warmly in the grace and peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In response to your letter dated April 21, 2021, and taking into consideration your concerns and requests, kindly know that Mr. George Karcazes has already been placed on the newly-established Advisory Committee for the Charter by virtue of his selection as a representative of the Holy Metropolis of Chicago. Nevertheless, with this present letter, I am pleased to appoint Mrs. Argo Georgandis Pyle as my personal addition and appointee to the aforementioned advisory committee - effective immediately.

Thanking you for your earnest desire to assist in this significant undertaking for the continued wellbeing and spiritual welfare of our Sacred Archdiocese and its Christ-loving plenitude, I extend to you and all the esteemed members of OCL my archpastoral blessings and wholehearted prayers for a blessed Pascha, and wish you good health and strength in the sacred and solemn days ahead leading up to our Lord's Holy Resurrection.

With paternal love in Christ,

+ ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America

(#5) Letter of April 21, 2021

April 21, 2021

Holy Hierarch Januarius, bishop of Benevent; Holy
Empress Alexandra

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

Your Eminence,

The Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) wishes to congratulate you and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America's (GOAA) Holy Eparchial Synod for detailing a clear Plan of Action for the development of the new GOAA Charter, as stated in your April 6, 2021 Communiqué of the Holy Eparchial Synod.

The Communiqué states that the new GOAA Charter should "...meet[s]the visions and expectations of the clergy and laity in view of the completion next year of the 100th anniversary...". It envisions:

1. "the establishment of a broader Committee, in which all the organizations and bodies of the Church and of the Omogenia will be represented,"
2. "plus four representatives from each Holy Metropolis chosen by the respective hierarch."
3. "Every member of the faithful will be given the opportunity to send their opinions to a designated email address: charter@goarch.org."
4. "The collection and organization of all opinions will be the responsibility of the Administration Committee of the Archdiocesan Council."

5. "...after receiving instructions from the Mother Church ... the composition of members from the Archdiocese to the Mixed Drafting Committee for the new Charter with the members from the Ecumenical Patriarchate will be announced."

As you may know, the OCL has supporters and Board members from many GOAA parishes as well as from parishes of every Orthodox jurisdiction across North America. Our 30-plus years as a pan-Orthodox organization gives us a combined knowledge and experience unique in North America. In this context:

1. The OCL, through its GOAA parishioner leadership, wishes to be part of the broader Committee overseeing the development of the new GOAA Charter.

2. The OCL will approach various GOAA Metropolitans with suggested GOAA parishioners for inclusion in their respective delegations.

3. The OCL will ask its GOAA parishioner members/friends to send their thoughts on the new Charter to the designated email address.

4. The OCL again requests to have OCL members and GOAA parishioners, George Matsoukas (OCL Board member and past Executive Director), George Pontikes (OCL Treasurer) and George D. Karcazes (OCL Secretary and Past-President) added to the Administration Committee of the GOAA (and now, on any of the

Committees herein mentioned that are tasked with the new Charter).

5. The OCL, through its representative members who are GOAA parishioners, including its President, Argo Georgandis Pyle, be considered as members from the Archdiocese to the Mixed Drafting Committee for the new Charter.

We thank you for considering these requests and please accept that we do so out of mutual love for Christ's Church. Your Eminence, in the spirit of transparency, would you consider releasing the relevant parts of the reports you made to the Ecumenical Patriarch regarding the need for a new GOAA Charter? This information would help in clergy/laity input to the new Charter. Also, releasing this would show an openness in clergy/laity interactions and be a concrete step towards forging a more meaningful co-ministry, so necessary in the GOAA and all Orthodox jurisdictions here.

Again, we thank you for considering our requests and ask for your prayers in these trying times.

Yours in Christ,

Argo Georgandis Pyle
President

George D. Karcazes
Secretary

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

(#6) Letter of May 19, 2021

May 19, 2021

Hieromartyr Patrick, Bishop of Prussia

His Eminence, Archbishop ELPIDOPHOROS
The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
10 East 79th St, 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 (GOAA). 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 two 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 two 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: GOAA Holy Eparchial Synod / charter@goarch.org

(#7) Letter of June 8, 2021

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 St, 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.

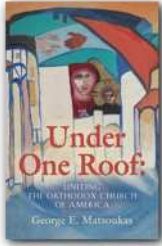
Yours in Christ,

Argo Georgandis Pyle
President

George D. Karcazes
Secretary

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

OCL'S NEWEST PUBLICATION 2021



Under One Roof – Uniting the Orthodox Church of America

The collection of essays addresses the status of the Orthodox Church in the U.S. and emphasizes the mission of Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL): unity, accountability, conciliar governance, education and renewal. This is the second collection of essays, compiled from opinion columns written during the period 2012-2020, when **George Matsoukas** served as executive director of Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL). The first collection, "A Church in Captivity: The Greek Orthodox Church of America," is also a collection of opinion columns, this one written during the period 1990-2007. This latest series of observational essays offers insight into better understanding the history of Orthodoxy in America during this 33-year period.

**Order your copy at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or here:
ocladmin.org/underoneroof**

PARTNER WITH OCL

Your stewardship, donation or legacy gift helps to provide vital resources for the creation of publications, interviews, educational conferences and forums that seek to strengthen the Orthodox Church of America.

**Visit <https://ocladmin.org/donate/> for more information or
mail your check to:**

**Orthodox Christian Laity, PO Box 6954
West Palm Beach FL 33405-6954
561-585-0245 / ocladmin@ocladmin.org / www.ocladmin.org**

HIGHLIGHTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

...The Charter of the GOAA is of critical importance for the future of Orthodoxy in America.

...Comparing the role of the laity in the original Charter of 1922 with the succeeding Charters of 1927, 1931, 1977 and 2003, we see a steady and disturbing erosion of the laity's role in Church governance.

...Transparent elections bring credibility and trust to lay involvement.

...The Orthodox Church, like all other religions in western, pluralistic democracies is free from State interference, but it is also without State Support.

...Adopting a new GOAA Charter is an opportunity for the Church to return to its roots...The Orthodox Church is a conciliar Church and a more balanced co-ministry between Clergy and Laity is essential to its survival here.

...A new Charter restoring the autonomy of the Archdiocese...would be a noble action and fruitful blessing...to the Orthodox faithful of North America at this time.