02/07/2020

Spring Meeting of the Archdiocese Council Convenes Virtually

ORTHODOX OBSERVER NEWS

New York, NY – On June 29, 2020 His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America convened the Spring Meeting of the Archdiocese Council. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, travel and meeting restrictions, and public health concerns, the meeting was held virtually via video conferencing in two separate sessions.

The Archdiocese Council meets twice a year and is the deliberative body of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in the interim period between Clergy-Laity Congresses. Members of the Council include the hierarchs, leaders of affiliated institutions and representatives all of the Metropolises and the Direct Archdiocesan District. The Honorable Judge Theodore Bozonelis, Secretary of the Archdiocesan Council, presided over, on behalf of the Archbishop, the two consecutive sessions that ran from 12 noon to 8:30 pm.

The Archdiocesan Council meeting offered an opportunity to test the software that will also be used at the September 2020 virtual Clergy-Laity to assure the full and complete engagement of the delegates and a transparent and clear voting system.

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros said in his opening remarks:

“My dear brothers and sisters, during this time of anxiety, fear, unrest, and

confusion, the Church must shine brighter than ever before. People, all people, want and need something to believe in. We have the greatest gift that the world has ever known, the experience of God's love that can transform even the hardest heart into a loving, caring, and decent person. I thank you once again for your steadfast dedication and unwavering devotion, and I embrace each and every one of you as my co-workers in Christ. Together, we must seize this moment and make it the proudest one that our Church in America has ever known."

Following the Keynote Address, Vice-President of the Archdiocesan Council John Catsimatidis

offered welcoming comments. Hellenic College and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology President George Cantonis reported on the status of the School and on plans for paying down the accumulated debt. "Friends of St. Nicholas" Chairman, Dennis Mehiel, stated that construction has resumed and the Shrine is on track for a 2021 opening.

Elaine Allen presented the Treasurer's and Audit Reports. The Archdiocese released its audited financial statements for 2019 that display continued sound accountability in its financial results. This is the earliest the audited results have been issued by the Archdiocese in over 15 years and is a positive demonstration of the Archdiocese's commitment to transparency and accountability.

The Archdiocese's expenditures were reduced by $800,000 in 2019 as compared to 2018 levels in accordance with budget reductions that were implemented in early 2018. Revenues increased to $33.8 million in 2019 from $31.7 million in 2018 while the total commitment revenues from our parishes remained at the same levels in 2018 and 2019. The net result was an excess of unrestricted revenues over expenses of $2.2 million in 2019 and a total excess of revenue over expenses of $5.5 million continuing the positive results achieved in 2018. These positive results partially eliminated many years of deficits and also allowed the Archdiocese to increase its support to Hellenic College Holy Cross and the pension plan for our Clergy and lay employees with no additional burden to parishes.

Furthering the Archdiocese's commitment to strengthened internal controls and processes, the Archdiocese's Audit Committee announced that our auditors had found no deficiencies in the Archdiocese's internal controls. This is another first-time achievement for the Archdiocese and is reflective of the investments made over the last two years to upgrade financial talent and systems.

First quarter of 2020 financial results were also issued to the Archdiocesan Council

and reflect continued improvement in the strength of the financial position of the Archdiocese. Recognizing the impact of COVID-19 began to be realized in the first quarter, the Archdiocese implemented additional cost controls and ended the quarter with a slightly better than break-even of revenues over expenses.

The Administration Committee Report was presented by its chairman, Constantine Caras. Three motions for amendments to the Uniform Parish Regulations were advanced for recommendation

to the Clergy-Laity Congress for discussion and approval. If they are approved, they will be forwarded to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for ratification.

The chairman of the Archdiocese Benefits Committee, Fr. James Paris, reported on the Committee's recommendation to explore the transition from a defined benefits plan to a defined contribution plan. While acknowledging that this is a difficult transition, this change must be done in order to save the future retirement benefits of the clergy and lay employees who are participants.

Archbishop Elpidophoros addressed the concerns regarding the Pension Plan saying that it is time to address this issue, inasmuch as the current plan is not sustainable and cannot be saved. He stated that we need to respect funds we receive and be more active in informing clergy and lay members of the steps we must take to maintain benefits. He announced that there will be a special Archdiocesan Council meeting before September's Clergy-Laity Congress to review a detailed proposal for this transition.

The deficit of the Pension Plan is underfunded by more than $50 million, due to inattention for the past two decades. Treasurer Elaine Allen underlined the obligations to the clergy and their families, as well as to the lay personnel. "We need to listen and be responsive to their concerns. Therefore, whatever is proposed needs to be funded and needs to provide benefits that were promised and is responsive to both younger and older participants," Allen said.

In his report, Finance Committee Chair Louis Kircos stated that the Committee is working with the Benefits Committee to find a fair process to transition the current plan to defined contribution. He stated that the Archdiocesan budget would be held flat, however the increase in Total Commitment will go directly to fund the transition. He then reviewed, in detail, how the funding would be received from the parishes to fund the new contribution plan.

He also reviewed the 2021 and 2022 proposed budgets stating that the budget has changed to support the priorities of Archbishop Elpidophoros and that ministries

programs will be evaluated to determine effectiveness and financing of their programs and projects. All aspects of the Finance Committee Report were approved and will be recommended to the upcoming Congress.

In his closing Archbishop Elpidophoros thanked the presenters and the members for their constructive comments and continued service to our Holy Archdiocese. He also thanked those behind the scenes who made this unprecedented virtual meeting successful, overcoming the challenges of COVID 19 and offering a blueprint for a successful virtual meeting that can be used by other organizations with similar needs.

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