

--- In Orthodox-Forum@yahoo.com, "oneuschurch" <oneuschurch@y...> wrote:

Dear Fr. William,

To answer the question you posed earlier today, I was effectively silenced in this matter by Syosset when I attempted to ask questions about these same issues back in, I believe, 2000.

(Editor's note: The actual date was November, 1999).

-Allow me to explain.

Right before the Fall meeting of the Metropolitan Council in 2000 (I think that is the correct date: I don't have my files and notes before me), I learned that the chairman of the OCA internal auditing committee, John Kozey, had asked to address the Metropolitan Council regarding his concern about the continuing lack of proper audits, the existence of unaudited "secret" accounts not disclosed to the Metropolitan Council, and the general state of chaos that infected the finances of the Chancery and national church.

It is my recollection that when Mr. Kozey, an experienced professional in the financial world, asked to address the Metropolitan Council about his grave concerns, he was told by the Metropolitan or the Chancellor that he could not come to the meeting. Mr. Kozey then sent a letter to all Metropolitan Council members, outlining his concerns, explaining that he had been barred from speaking to the Metropolitan Council, and begging the Council members to ask the right questions at the upcoming meeting. I was at that time the lay alternate to the Metropolitan Council, elected at the All-American Council in Pittsburgh in 1999, and I received a copy of Mr. Kozey's letter. I had heard bits and pieces of the then-rumors swirling about financial mismanagement at the Chancery, so when I read Mr. Kozey's letter, it immediately got my undivided attention. (I believe I have a copy of that letter in my files, and I will attempt to retrieve it.)

After all, when the respected chief auditor of the Church says there is a serious problem with finances and suggests improper conduct, while noting that he has been denied the privilege of addressing the Metropolitan Council, the body that is charged by statute with assuring the financing of the operations of the national church, one would have to be an absolute idiot not to take sit up and take notice! These were, after all, not the ravings of some anonymous source or a disaffected parishioner, but the measured concerns of the OCA's nationally elected auditor.

Although I was not planning to attend that particular meeting of the Metropolitan Council, I decided to rearrange my schedule and go. Two days or so before the meeting, I called the Chancery to advise, as a courtesy, that I would be attending the meeting after all. I was connected to then-Deacon (now Father) John Hopko, Secretary to the Metropolitan. I told Deacon John that I had changed my plans and would be attending the meeting. I specifically recall telling him that I, of course, would be paying my own room and transportation to attend, since I was the alternate. (I knew that I had attended and participated in previous Metropolitan Council meetings after being elected the alternate by two previous All-American Councils, and that other lay alternates, including Matushka Julianna Schmemann, had routinely attended meetings over the years as the alternate, granted the right to speak, but without the right to vote if no other members were absent.)

Deacon John cordially took my message, and told me he would inform His Beatitude of my change in plans. The following day, Deacon Hopko called and told me that Metropolitan Theodosius advised him to notify me that I would not be permitted to attend this Metropolitan Council meeting.

When the shock wore off, I asked Deacon John if there was a reason being given for my being barred from the meeting. He apologetically responded in the negative. I thanked him, and asked him to convey to the Metropolitan my extreme unhappiness at this action. This was an especially hurtful decision because I respected the Metropolitan, a native son of Western Pennsylvania who, before his election as Primate, had served as my diocesan bishop, and who had relied on my father, Lew Nescott, as legal counsel in diocesan matters.

More to the point, Syosset's refusal to permit me to attend that Metropolitan Council meeting gave enormous credence to the concerns being raised by John Kozey. I asked myself, "Why am I being excluded?" Surely, they didn't fear a few honest questions? Did they not have enough chairs at Syosset to seat me at the meeting? Or, could the fact that I was a federal prosecutor have anything to do with it?

The actions of Syosset at that time effectively silenced John Kozey, who had been charged by an All-American Council with protecting, through audit, the integrity of the finances of the OCA. Not long thereafter, John Kozey was no longer an auditor for the Church. And what was the legacy of John Kozey, who dared to ask the questions and do the job that he took an oath to do, as all laity elected to the Metropolitan Council and Auditing Committee by All-American

Councils do at the solemn closing service at Councils? Well, although outside audits of ALL accounts of the OCA used to be the norm, such unqualified outside audits have not been performed since, I think, 1997.

The actions of Syosset at that time effectively also silenced me, when I had been charged by an All-American Council with protecting, through oversight on the Metropolitan Council, the integrity of the finances of the OCA.

My story had a different ending than Mr. Kozey's. When I realized that I would likely be barred from future Metropolitan Council meetings, I did not attempt to attend the next two meetings in 2001. Instead, I made it a point to get myself elected at my next diocesan assembly as the diocesan lay representative to Metropolitan Council, and attended the next meeting, in the Spring of 2002, where the "Fair Share" concept was introduced. (But that's a story for another day.) New internal auditors were in place, and John Kozey and his legitimate concerns had been forgotten by most.

To my knowledge, I've never met John Kozey, and I've never spoken to him. But I certainly haven't forgotten him.

So, Father William, the silencing and intimidation over the past month of the voices of those who have the temerity to ask respectful and proper questions about financial accountability in the national church, out of a love for God and for the truth, is nothing new for Syosset. It is a tactic that has been used successfully before. And for that, we should be very afraid.

---Gregg Nescott, Pittsburgh