

ERIC ALAN WHEELER

October 17, 2005

The Most Blessed **HERMAN**
Archbishop of Washington and New York
Metropolitan of All-America and Canada
P.O. Box 675
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Your Beatitude, Metropolitan **HERMAN**:

As the All American Council was approaching this past summer, the focus of discussion on the internet lists centered on financial accountability, budgets, assessments and overall matters dealing with funding the work of the church. And while I have refrained from posting any comments on the internet since I was removed from my position at Syosset in September 1999, I felt that I could no longer stand by without expressing my observations and experiences with regard to finances of the Orthodox Church in America.

Putting down on paper what transpired during the years I served the church as Treasurer and Secretary was in and of itself quite cathartic. However, upon completing my missal, I was not convinced that the best place to post the final product was the internet. Over the years I observed how controversial topics relative to church finances generated a flurry of temporary internet activity without any effectual result.

As you well know from our discussions prior, and subsequent to my removal, it was never my intention to expose the Church to scandal. If my only objective was to “get my story out and clear my name” I would have long ago joined the internet fray, being fully capable of setting up my own web site. You are well aware that my only goal was to safe guard the funds of the Orthodox Church in America – funds that were not being adequately accounted for by Metropolitan Theodosius and Father Kondratick.

Throughout the period of time I served as Treasurer I struggled long and hard to correct the financial mismanagement of the church in a manner befitting my role as a deacon – one who serves. In our Orthodox Tradition, we are called to be obedient to our leaders because our leaders are obedient to Christ. So too, we are called to practice Christian stewardship because the leaders we are forwarding our alms to are wise stewards of the funds entrusted to their care. But what if their actions are not befitting good stewardship? What then is our responsibility? I sought an answer to these questions while working for the Church, and continue to have a nagging sense that something more has to be, and can be done to correct these problems.

Since being forced to leave the employment of the Orthodox Church in America I have been contacted throughout the years, fortunately or unfortunately, by almost every individual in the church who has been discarded, dismissed or treated by members of your administration and the previous administration in a manner not becoming Christian behavior. I have also been made aware, and have been informed that you are aware, that the pattern of behavior in the handling of church finances, especially with regard to the temporarily restricted funds for designated purposes (*special appeals*), has not changed since the time I served as Treasurer of the church. This has been quite disheartening to me.

In our Orthodox Tradition, we are called to stand up for the Truth even if we end up standing by ourselves. Likewise, we will be judged for our actions. However, if we firmly believe we are upholding the Truth, we have the responsibility before God to speak out. Our Orthodox history is full of these servants -- some saints and some big sinners. I bring these concerns before you at this time because I firmly believe that what I am doing will serve to correct a terrible disservice that has been done, and continues to be done to the clergy and faithful of the church, who spiritually and financially support the work of the Orthodox Church in America.

My concerns were brought before Metropolitan Theodosius and Father Kondratik on countless occasions while I was employed by the church -- and nothing was done to bring about financial transparency. These same concerns were brought to your attention on September 21, 1999 when Father Kondratik and I met with you in South Canaan. Unfortunately, again, nothing was done to correct the lack of transparency with regard to the church's financial structure. I am therefore copying members of the Holy Synod of Bishops on this letter hoping that the highest canonical body of the church can rectify this problem that has for many years deceived clergy and faithful who took to heart pleas to support the activities and departments of the Church. The inability or blatant refusal to be transparent with regard to church finances indicates that the leadership of the church has relied more on earthly wisdom which seeks to conceal, divide and ultimately destroy.

The chancery does not have a good track record in the area of financial stewardship -- restricted funds being drained to fund the operating budgets during the financial crisis in the 1980's, questions concerning whether or not special appeal funds are being distributed for their designated purposes, and discretionary accounts balances equal to annual operating budgets in the 1990's, temporarily restricted funds for designated purposes being mismanaged, and 9-11 funds being distributed through IOCC (*or not*) during the 2000's, and on and on and on,,,,,. While an independent audit of the financial statements of the Orthodox Church in America will not serve to solve all of these problems, it will provide a model for a transparent approach to the financial administration of the church. It will also begin the process of healing the tarnished financial image of the Orthodox Church in America.

Unfortunately, the status quo is rooted in our Orthodox psyche -- a church rooted in ritual. It seems today that many are more than happy to blindly follow their leaders without question just because of the office they hold. And anyone who does question the status quo is viewed as a malcontent. We have made the living Church we received from our elders into a museum relic that we strive to preserve, using the form of our Church to hide a multitude of sin, which continues to deceive the faithful of our Church in America. We have lost the living spirit of the Orthodox faith. The life needed to proclaim the Gospel has been stifled. If unchecked, the depletion of life will result in death! I do not wish this legacy on your watch and call upon you to act in a manner befitting your office to address this ongoing scandal.

In Christ,

Protodeacon Eric A. Wheeler

cc: Archbishop **Kyrill**
Archbishop **Dmitri**
Archbishop **Nathaniel**
Archbishop **Job**
Bishop **Tikhon**
Bishop **Seraphim**
Bishop **Nikolai**
Bishop **Nikon**
Bishop **Tikhon**
Bishop **Irineu**
Bishop **Benjamin**
Bishop **Alejo**