

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL HUNCHAK (1.18.06)

Stokoe: Where do we begin?

Hunchak: As some clergy know, throughout my employment by the OCA, I strove to uphold the integrity of the Statute as well as the Church's other administrative guidelines. It is no coincidence that this theme was often emphasized in the letters, speeches, reports, and sermons that I wrote for my superiors. So I begin with the Report of the Chancellor to the 1996 Spring Session of the Holy Synod of Bishops, which I wrote, and Fr. Kondratick delivered:

“Several matters over the past three years involving civil litigation, potential litigation, or the prevention of litigation have called attention to our Church's adherence to guidelines and procedures. Moreover, the cases have initiated a review of the relationship between the parish, diocese, and the church as a whole, as well as the relevance of church-wide guidelines upon these entities.

Following the adoption of guidelines, policies, and procedures by the various administrative bodies of our Church--the Holy Synod of Bishops, the Metropolitan Council, the All-American Council--it is the responsibility of the administrative offices of the chancery to adhere to and seek compliance with them. While in some cases guidelines and policies are followed, in too many others they are disregarded or compromised, resulting in potentially unfortunate circumstances, misunderstandings, and unnecessary legal expenses. We realize that there are occasional exceptions; however, if exceptions become the rule, then the guidelines and procedures must be reexamined. We humbly ask for cooperation throughout the Church on all levels for adherence to all the guidelines, policies, procedures, and to the Statute.”

Stokoe: Are you saying that these words from 1996 apply to the current scandal?

Hunchak: Yes.

Stokoe: If you believe what you just quoted is no less true now, as it was in 1996, why have you not spoken out before?

Hunchak: Other than inquiries by my immediate family and subsequent employers, I haven't been asked to comment about my employment at the OCA “chancery” or the management of the OCA's finances until now.

Stokoe: Paul, for those who don't know you, what did you do in Syosset?

Hunchak: After graduating from St. Vladimir's Seminary in 1990, I joined the staff at Syosset as an Administrative Assistant. I later spent several months at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland. From 1993-2000 I was the Assistant to the Chancellor, and from 1995- 2000, the Secretary of the OCA. In addition, I was appointed Secretary of the Preconciliar Commission in 1993, and advised and assisted OCA administrative units and boards. I resigned in April 2000.

Stokoe: Did you have anything to do with the finances of the OCA in between 1993-2000?

Hunchak: While my daily responsibilities did not concern the usual financial operations, I was quite familiar with the financial operations. As an officer of the Church I authorized disbursements and was privy to financial records.

Stokoe: So you knew what was going on?

Hunchak: Yes. The pattern of financial (mis)management outlined in Eric's (Wheeler) letters is accurate. As I

mentioned above, I signed checks, many to the AMEX accounts Eric discusses. I learned quite a bit from the Church's legal counsel, Jonathan Russin, in August 1999.

There was so much going on during this period. Eric had been trying to find out for years where all the money was going. In June 1999 John Kozey (OCA Audit Committee Chairman) blew the whistle. As an aside, I recall that Fr. Kondratick spent hours that summer shredding documents from his private filing cabinet that held, among others things, the only records of bequests given to the OCA. It was a rather late Spring cleaning.

The All American Council in Pittsburgh in August 1999 was so hard for me, because I knew the game was afoot. The team of Richard Rock and William Turbey (a co-worker dubbed them the "ecclesiastical tailors") were running around in the background, writing letters, arranging the cover-up, and a newly-hired Church employee (Fr. David Brum, now Secretary to the Metropolitan) was also writing, trying to change the Statute behind the scenes. Meanwhile, the Council was happily going on as if nothing was happening, because no one knew what was really going on...

Stokoe: Let's get specific. Wheeler admits to once smuggling large amounts of diverted cash to Russia. He alleges Fr. Kondratick did this more than once..."

Hunchak: It was done for every trip. I am not sure how the US Customs functions today, but I know in the 1990s it seems black outfits and religious visas did not fit any profile, so there were no searches. In Russia, as the saying goes, cash is king, and in post-Soviet Russia, Benjamins meant prestige. No wonder some Metropolitan Council members always questioned the high budget lines for "external affairs"...

Stokoe: You are talking about a total disregard not only for the OCA Statute, but the law itself...

Hunchak: Well let's just say that during the latter part of my employment, my supervisor and his advisors would invoke the First Amendment, the same way others invoke the Fifth. That's the way the Metropolitan's "advisors" (or as the present Treasurer called them "the Metropolitan's counselors", Messr. Rock and Turbey), had the Chancellor set it up when too much was being revealed. If you claim it—the money—was all put in discretionary accounts, which are ecclesiastically sequestered by a synodal resolution, it often stops the government from pursuing the matter. The government is reluctant to tell a Church how it can spend its money....

Just think about this scenario ...you could deposit checks written out to the "Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church" into an account, spend it on yourself or your friends, since "you raised the money" and are entitled to determine its use – and nobody is the wiser. The government won't determine if these funds are not being used for charitable purposes and therefore subject to income tax. And the Church won't know the existence of these funds since they are "discretionary" and therefore not subject to anyone's oversight.

Stokoe: Is that what they did?

Hunchak: They are abusing us all, and nobody in the Church seems to care. I think the bishops, clergy and laity really had no idea how many millions were involved; and the priests were afraid of what the Church administration could do to them. They were all of losing their parishes, of being suspended, afraid for their pensions. Most of the laity just don't seem to care.

Although slightly tangential to the financial issues raised by Eric, let me offer the following account relevant to the management style practiced at Orthodox Church in America, Inc. during the 1990's:

You see, the Orthodox Church in America, Inc. purchased a residence for Father Kondratick - but somehow, no record of its purchase ever appeared in the minutes of the Metropolitan Council. Some people in the

Church knew about this transaction—the Administrative Committee—but surprise, surprise, this sale was never noted in any official documents of the Metropolitan Council or thus, made known to the Church at large. In July 1999, I became aware of secret meetings held during the Independence Day holiday about this property.

Stokoe: 216 Martin Drive is Fr. Kondratich's personal residence?

Hunchak: Yes. At the time, yes--officially a parsonage according to Nassau County's property tax roles. I wouldn't know today. A visit to the Nassau County records office confirmed in July 1999, and regularly re-confirmed until my resignation in April 2000, that this property was still owned by the Orthodox Church in America, Inc. I do not know its status today. Given the way the property was purchased "under the cover of darkness" it would not have phased me in the least if the property was transferred to him in a similar manner.

For those interested in my concern about this matter, consult with former members of the Alaska Lands Commission about quit claim deeds. A final random thought on this matter - as a lay employee of the OCA, I always questioned about the need to provide a housing allowance to a person who was already provided a house and a salary....

Stokoe: Paul, how did this all come about? How did it go so wrong?

Hunchak: During my final year at Seminary, the Orthodox Church in America, Inc., was facing a financial crisis. During my years of employment, I wrote several reports for my supervisor about the Church facing a financial crisis. Now in 2006, I learn that the Church is facing a financial crisis. Why is this always the case? I think the answer is clear. Paraphrasing Mr. Felt ("Deep Throat" of Watergate fame): "Follow the money."

Stokoe: Paul, why did you resign?

Hunchak: In the best possible world I would have stayed, but given the way things were going, my role in Syosset was diminishing. Given the fact that the scandal was ongoing, they wouldn't/couldn't tell me much about it, and I wasn't going to be part of it. I knew then I would be ineffectual in whatever I tried to do. It was no longer the place I went to work for.... But I also knew how they worked, how they disparage anybody who doesn't agree with them, cooperate with them, challenges them. So I waited until I was reappointed, and in Spring 2000, I convinced Fr. Bob I needed a change, as did my family. I got out.

Stokoe: Any final comments?

Hunchak: Truth, deception, right, wrong....it is always what the person wants to see. However, the plumb line of a financial audit always reveals what is misaligned.

Stokoe: Thanks for speaking with me, Paul.