

**Mr. Michael Jaharis, Vice Chairman
Archdiocesan Council
Executive Committee & General Session
Remarks
October 18, 2012**

Your Eminence and Colleagues,

A funny thing happened on my way to Phoenix this summer... which deterred me from giving a variation of this address to a larger audience. In my remarks today, I am going to touch upon many of the topics I was going to address then. Consequently, the address I am about to deliver may be even more relevant and appropriate today as it relates to our new Council.

Firstly, I would like to welcome our new members and also thank the returning members for their great work: time, treasure, and talent.

My address today will cover some of the milestones that we celebrate as successful achievements of the Church, Council and Community; and I will also present an overview of the areas we have to work together on in order to sustain this progress and overcome various challenges that the contemporary times may bestow upon us. It is important to keep examining how we can sustain this and support the future growth of our Church and community.

So for the first part of my presentation, I would like to go over some of the milestones of progress we have made as a Church and as a community. So, on to examining the progress:

When His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios took office, some thirteen years ago, the Archbishop and we, the Archdiocesan Council, were greeted by an incredibly unwelcoming state of affairs and political infighting – things that are detrimental to any institution and also, more importantly should not be associated with our essential purpose or the *raison d'être* of the Church. Not only was this the case but we also discovered that there was an inherited debt of approximately \$7 million or more resulting from accumulated annual operational deficits and legal costs -- and this was inspite of receiving parish commitments and individual gifts in the amount of approximately \$8-9 million. So the first and most critical problems for the Archdiocesan Council were:

- on the one hand, to assist the Archbishop in establishing peace and unity in the Church;
- and, on the other hand, to alleviate the financial discrepancy, a continual indebtedness that could potentially put the Church at risk for bankruptcy.

I say this not for any specific reason other than to identify the reason why first and foremost, major efforts and priorities were set up to insure the operational stability and sustainability in moving forward.

For example, as soon as the Archbishop took office, in September 1999, we started a very strong and continuous multifaceted effort -- the difficulties were enormous and seemed

relentless. In addition to all other financial difficulties, we had significant legal expenses related to inherited unresolved cases of sexual misconduct that had happened in the distant past but resurfaced. Thanks not only to the steadily increasing contribution by our communities but also to amazing generosity of some of our people, we made considerable progress in implementing various measures.

To return back to the issue of the “main debt”: Subsequently, at some point of time a few years ago, a superlative effort started initially by three people including Mr. Jerry Dimitriou, Mr. George Vourvoulis, and Mr. George Mathews, who together with a strong Finance Committee, were able to effectively create and implement a financial policy that has since ameliorated the situation. More importantly, with the help of the people on the Executive Committee and Archdiocesan Council, and with several trips to/from each Metropolis (at these individuals’ own expense) developed a basis upon which each parishes’ total commitment would be based on a factual non-prejudicial formula (which took into account each parishes capabilities). As a result of this, we have long since eliminated this huge inherited debt. The annual budget of the Archdiocese of America is approximately \$25 million (65% in total commitments) which is significantly higher, i.e. more than double of what it was 11-12 years ago; also, I am happy to report that this is essentially a “balanced budget” -- but as I will address later, it is not a “complete” budget.

Concurrently, this model of a process was not only successful in meeting the “financial needs of the Church” but it also benefitted of each of the various ministries (Youth, Education, Religion, Family etc.) in that they were also able to reach out directly to each Metropolis and its parishes.

I am thus convinced that these efforts will continue to improve and will result in a more effective discourse and network of collaboration among the people which should lead to even more positive growth for the Church based on the following pillars/principles:

- Comprehensive Financial Plan and Planning
- Practical Fairness
- Effective Committee Work
- Effective Communication enhancing the Church’s *raison d’etre*

So, to what do we owe this success to? I believe that over the last 12 years we have seen an increased participation of our communities in their financial contribution to the Archdiocese and at the same time we developed an Archdiocesan Council which is not only “sit and listen at meetings” but a group of individuals with various professional specializations (legal, financial, communications, planning, etc) who generously and most actively volunteer themselves and their exemplary skill sets (or to use the Greek word, “*arête*”) throughout the year to promote various aspects to enhance further positive growth and also keep lines of communication clear and open for dialogue and collaboration.

As a Church, we have also been strong enough to mobilize on the philanthropic front. I would like to commend the collaborative philanthropic efforts of the entire community of parishes for rushing to aid the people of Greece as they are struggling through a crisis similar to what our nation went through during the Great Depression. Under the leadership of His

Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, the Archdiocese established a humanitarian initiative, "The Relief Fund for the People of Greece", which provided and continues to provide essentials such as food, clothing and pharmaceutical support to many thousands of Greeks on a daily basis. The Fund, through the generosity, love, and compassion of the clergy and the laity of the Archdiocese, has collected close to a million dollars -- of which \$700,000 has already been given as assistance to various ecclesiastical agencies in Greece, known for their well-organized and proven work in helping thousands of people in urgent need or humanitarian crisis. I believe that this is one of the largest international contributions of Humanitarian Aid to the people in Greece this year and it was an effort that was just initiated over the last 7 or so months. This gift symbolizes the coherence and remarkable ability for mobilization within our community for a good cause and also represents the deeply rooted love and compassion of our community for Greece and its people.

On the topic of Philanthropy, I would be remiss not to also recognize and commend one of the oldest charitable entities of the Archdiocese: the munificent, long standing, and ever-present efforts of the Philoptochos Ladies Society. For over 80 years, the Philoptochos society has led many programs offering humanitarian and sociological assistance to populations in need. Whether addressing hunger, poverty, education, medical costs -- here in the US and in Greece -- the women of the Philoptochos society, past and present, have had a resoundingly positive effect through their charitable work and outreach within and beyond the Archdiocese.

And finally, one more last bit of timely good news to share with all of you. As many of you already know, when the brutal 9/11 attacks at what is now known as "Ground Zero" occurred almost 11 years ago, the only church destroyed was the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church -- a very sacred Saint revered by those whose lives involve the Sea. After this most difficult period in our history, His Eminence, members of the Council and I were promised that the Church (which as a community dates back to 1916; the building dates back to 1922) would be rebuilt within the 9/11 Memorial Park. The Governor of NY at the time had indicated the importance of rebuilding the only Church destroyed on 9/11 and a group of Greek Orthodox volunteers formed a Committee whose purpose was to implement the rebuilding of the Church. In the early years the Committee worked carefully with the Port Authority to identify a location. Given the multiple pressures to 'thwart' the project - such as a new Chief Executive of the Port Authority attempting to pull the contract off the table without any logical reason - we were forced to file legal action against the Port Authority for reneging on their promise.

It was only after a major collaborative effort led by a small but very dedicated group of individuals, motivated by the most Christian values of love, peace and justice, that we were able to address Gov. Cuomo to study the controversy and favorably support our side. The good news is that, with the Governor's support, it will not be too long before the final components of an agreement are finalized (the basic agreement was signed already last October). There is already an external committee of advisors being formed to address the architectural and artistic integrity of the new design.

The project cost is estimated to be upwards of \$ 35-40 million with an estimated time of completion in 2-3 years from now. The significance of having the physical presence of St. Nicholas within the historical and geographic context of the 9/11 Memorial of this nation's

history is tremendous. When finished, St. Nicholas will be a visible and inspiring tribute to not only the atrocity that was perpetrated on 9/11, but also a shining spotlight on the Greek Orthodox Faith, and our core values of love, respect, peace, healing, and forgiveness.

Moving on to the second part of my presentation: What is necessary for the continued and appreciable growth of the Church in America and internationally?

I. I would like to begin the second part of my address by addressing the question of what needs to be done to ensure the healthy growth and sustenance of our Church? I will begin by examining on the macro-level an issue that is directly related to Orthodoxy internationally: the Patriarchate.

Our Patriarchate, being historically the ‘first among equals’ of Orthodox Patriarchates, has always struggled to maintain its important status even though in, for the most part, an unfriendly and most unwelcoming environment. It has had great needs for external support, which unfortunately remain and have recently become exacerbated. The refusal by the Turkish Government to recognize our Patriarchate as Ecumenical, despite the fact that Archons and others have gone as far as various legal and diplomatic actions to force such a recognition, a more recent set of problems pose new challenges for its future viability and that is finances.

While we have, as a nation, funded the Patriarchate for the past several years (1 million – 1 ½ million), the majority and their main source of funds we believe have come from a purported historic property agreement with Greece -- and we are attempting to obtain further information on this and/or possibly other agreements. However, I strongly believe that, given the extraordinary dismal financial state of affairs in Greece, it might be problematic for Greece to continue its crucial support. Accordingly, the Archbishop has asked for a special committee to identify and examine the issues raised by the circumstances and possible measures to remedy this. We must not overlook the severity of the repercussions that the Greek financial crisis may bear on the Patriarchate and we must be ready to mobilize once again to offer our support. Further losses will undoubtedly undermine the Patriarchate’s position locally and internationally and this has, as many of you are aware, grave worldwide geo-political implications.

II. Next: What is needed for the continued growth of the Church in America?

While each of our Metropolises in the US has its own needs and strategies for implementing the programs of the Archdiocese, the hub of the wheel i.e. the central responsibility resides in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, which is the official ecclesiastical Eparchy of Ecumenical Patriarchate in the USA.

During the past 12 years, it has become evident that the Archdiocese, as the central organization and/or headquarters, has worked with limited space and personnel. Consequently, the ministries spread thin and widely, with a minimum of money and people with many important aspects done with a “Band Aid” type of approach. In order for the Church to continue its firmly established and recognized leadership for Orthodoxy in the US, the above deficiencies, especially ones that relate to the operational infrastructure and staffing of the Church must be remedied ASAP. Accordingly, there is the obvious responsibility that specific people and

infrastructure ‘needs’ be determined and a new budget be presented at the next and new “Archdiocesan Council.” Without a detailed account of such needs and strategy for implementing them, we will be at risk of seeing our leadership role for Orthodoxy in the USA gradually diminishing, if not lost. For example, certain fields, such as fundraising, public relations, communications, and “in-house legal counsel” have changed and continue to evolve at such a rapid pace, that it is of the utmost importance to have our Church well represented in each of these respects and offices. As a community, we have been blessed with a diverse abundance of professionally successful individuals who should feel welcomed to become more involved in aspects of the Church that may relate to their professional expertise.

III. Defining the Role of what would be considered a Executive Authority (or to use the “corporate business terminology that I am used to “a type of CEO”) for the US Church:

Furthermore, above the obvious operational requirements, I believe that there needs to be a clarification of certain items within the Church’s Charter.

If you will recall (following the departure of Archbishop Spyridon and) prior to the election of His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, the Patriarchate elevated our Bishops of each Diocese to Metropolitans of the Throne -- which theoretically at least could imply reporting to the Patriarchate and not to the Archbishop. To me – and I wish to underline that this is my personal view - this was creating the potential risks of undermining the unity as well as the ultimate authority and effective administrative function of the Church in the US. As a result, a new Charter was requested and given to us that redefined the role of a Metropolitan as a Metropolitan of a Metropolis that is part of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. And while this was thought to be sufficient to clarify the role of the Archbishop as the ultimate decision maker, the intervening years and the existence of a decisive Eparchial Synod in our Archdiocese have indicated the need for further clarification which I believe can be made with a more precise interpretation or a minor change in some items of the existing Charter.

I would like to emphasize so that there is no misunderstanding of my statement as there apparently was when I stated my position at the Archdiocesan Council Meeting in May and a certain Metropolitan of the Throne conveniently misinterpreted my statement and reported that I was requesting or suggesting that the US Church should be autocephalos or autonomous, separated from our Ecumenical Patriarchate. On the record, I am clarifying that my suggestion only related and relates to removing any doubt or ambiguity as to the so-called ultimate decision-making process and status internally within the Church in the USA. But to connect to my earlier statements commending the bilateral efforts on the part of the Metropolises and the centralized Archdiocese to promote coherence and “unity within the community” through frequent and open dialogue and understanding, we cannot be a strong national entity – in any aspect whether it be spiritual issues, political issues (such as national and international lobby groups), educational policy, religious tolerance etc. – without the authority granted to our central leadership. One just needs to examine the organizational prototypes of other religions in the USA to understand the practical and theoretical reasoning to support this.

IV. Moving on to the topic of the “future of Orthodoxy in America,” I believe we have to next revisit the topic of Hellenic College Holy Cross Seminary:

The Archdiocese was recently requested to review and assist Hellenic College Holy Cross School of Theology in view of a pressing financially problematic issue that created the potential for significant monetary and/or property losses. After such review, it became apparent to me that poor decision making (whether it was due to lack of sufficient information or knowledge) and the lack of the fundamental cushion or foundation of a strong organizational Endowment were the causes of the problem. Why am I raising this issue? For the obvious reason, that HCHC is an essential component ensuring the Church’s existence in the USA and should not have been so vulnerably exposed to such a risk. The Church cannot grow without a strong and stable higher educational institution to train the future clergy. A strong School is a significant contributor to a strong Church. Consequently we have asked an exceptionally talented group of leaders within the Archdiocese Financial Committee, in cooperation with the officers of the School, to review the details of the specific problem and related issues so that they can make realistic recommendations on this and other aspects that they may judge need changes. From my personal perspective - which is largely based on my professional experiences as well as philanthropic experiences on Boards of other universities and educational institutions, I’m suggesting the following:

1. A much smaller Board of Directors including not only local Massachusetts residents required by State Law, but at least one (or two) experienced representatives from each Metropolis to constitute a more effective new Board.
2. The selection of a “proven” group of people with experience in the best practices of fundraising and “institutional advancement” to create a strong Development Department which can help the School establish a significant Endowment -- including, for example, among other things a review of past “restricted donations” to determine the possibility and requirements for removing such ‘restrictions’ if they are no longer practical or valid.
3. A major campaign in each Metropolis to indicate the absolute necessity and responsibility for each parishioner and Metropolis to assist in the financial viability of the School, which may also help with the national admissions recruitment strategy of the school.

While the Archdiocesan financial and other groups will continue to work with the School, it must be understood that the School must take steps as mentioned above as well as other recommendations that may result to strengthen its ability to grow since without such growth, the Church cannot continue to grow. Hellenic College Holy Cross does not just “bear fruit” -- it also bears the seeds needed for new trees and the individuals needed to cultivate the orchards. It is the “sine qua non” in the existence and growth of the Greek Orthodox Church in the USA.

V. Finally, a regrettable and most distasteful subject i.e the current status of monasteries in their relationship with the US Church.

In the US, the monasteries fall within the scope of the Charter and have certain obligations not unlike those of each Metropolis and each Parish. Over the years, it has become regrettably noticed that with respect to many monasteries, the tendency was to “flout” its

obligations under the Charter and to go beyond the traditional role of the “monastic ideal.” Sometime ago, a Committee was formed to review and examine several such matters and persisting rumors. Suspicions, however, of irregularities and of existing improprieties, and lack of cooperation, made it impossible for the Committee to further act beyond initial observations. In the meantime, a monastery situated in New York City and reporting directly to the Patriarchate and the not to the Archdiocese (because it belongs to the category of Stavropegial) was accused of inappropriate, unethical, and disgusting activities. Steps have been taken by the Patriarchate to remove those responsible for such unacceptable and reprehensible misconduct. However, the matter still remains in a (volatile) status of potential danger. We are very fortunate that these incidents have received only local publicity; but while the US Church has no authority nor ability to rectify the deplorable and condemnable matters mentioned in this particular case, it could probably be unfairly cast with the shame of the circumstances alleged at this Monastery – and, not to mention, the traumatic scars inflicted on the alleged victims and their families who are members of our community.

Lastly, as a result of a recent horrible fatality of a young person in the immediate area of a monastery in Arizona, we feel compelled to take extraordinary measures to determine the “bizarre” circumstances surrounding that fatality. Following a complete and objective investigation and in conjunction with the expected report by the local Police, we expect to take severe and appropriate action as required to remedy this existing issue – since not doing so could have long term grave consequences. If we are to “bear fruit” as a faith we have to make certain to guard our garden from disease.

Ultimately, I close my remarks with the belief and appeal that it is very important that we work together to address the aforementioned issues as they pose serious risks to our life and mission as a Church and subsequently as a community. As we celebrate our good work and good deeds, we must also make sure that the legacy we leave for our children is plentiful and sustainable.

Thank you for listening. As I have gone on beyond the time I intended to speak, I will welcome revisiting these issues within the context of the meetings.