

Understanding Church Hierarchy and the Role of the Parish Council

Objectives

- Review Hierarchical Structure of the Greek Orthodox Church in America
- Define the Role of the Parish Council
- Understand the Relationship between the Parish Priest and the Parish Council
- List Expectations of Parish Council Members

“all things should be done decently and in order”

Saint Paul

I Corinthians 14:40

Ecumenical Patriarch



- Heads the Holy and Sacred Synod
- Governs the Eparchy of the GOAA
- Source of
 - Administrative power
 - Spiritual leadership
 - Holy Chrism



Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

- Functions under the leadership of:
 - The Archbishop
 - Holy Eparchial Synod
 - Archdiocesan Council
- Governs by:
 - Faith, Tradition and Holy Canons
 - Charter and Regulations of GOAA
 - Decisions of Holy Eparchial Synod
 - Clergy-Laity Conventions
- Serves the needs of both Metropolises and Parishes



Metropolis of Atlanta



- Headed by Metropolitan Alexios
- Assisted by Metropolitan Council
- Concerned with the life, growth and health of the Metropolis:
 - Ministries
 - Finances
 - Institutions

Parishes

- Supervised/Guided by Metropolitan
- Led by Parish Priest
- Assisted by Parish Council
- Governed by:
 - Faith, Holy Traditions and Canons
 - Holy Sacred and Eparchial Synods
 - GOAA Charter and Regulations
 - Local Parish By-laws

Parish Council

- Elected to serve Parish and assist the Priest
- Locally accountable to Parish Assembly
- Along with Parish Priest accountable to Hierarch
- Responsible for Welfare of Parish and being faithful to its mission

Ministry of the Parish Council

“In the typical long established small church the parish council often functions as a **committee of the whole and focuses on details not policy.**”

The Small Church is Different

Lyle E Schaller

Ministry of the Parish Council

“As a parish grows they need a council that can rise above day to day and think about the bigger picture –not just annually but all the time.”

Governance and Ministry –Rethinking Board Leadership

Dan Hotchkiss

Role of Parish Council

“I, _____, do solemnly affirm that I will uphold the dogma, teaching, traditions, holy canons, worship and moral principles of the Greek Orthodox Church, as well as the Charter and Regulations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, and that I will faithfully and sincerely fulfill the duties and obligations required of a member of the Parish Council. So help me, God.”

Parish Council Oath of Office

Governance

Is an extension of the
Eucharistic Assembly



Eucharistic Assembly

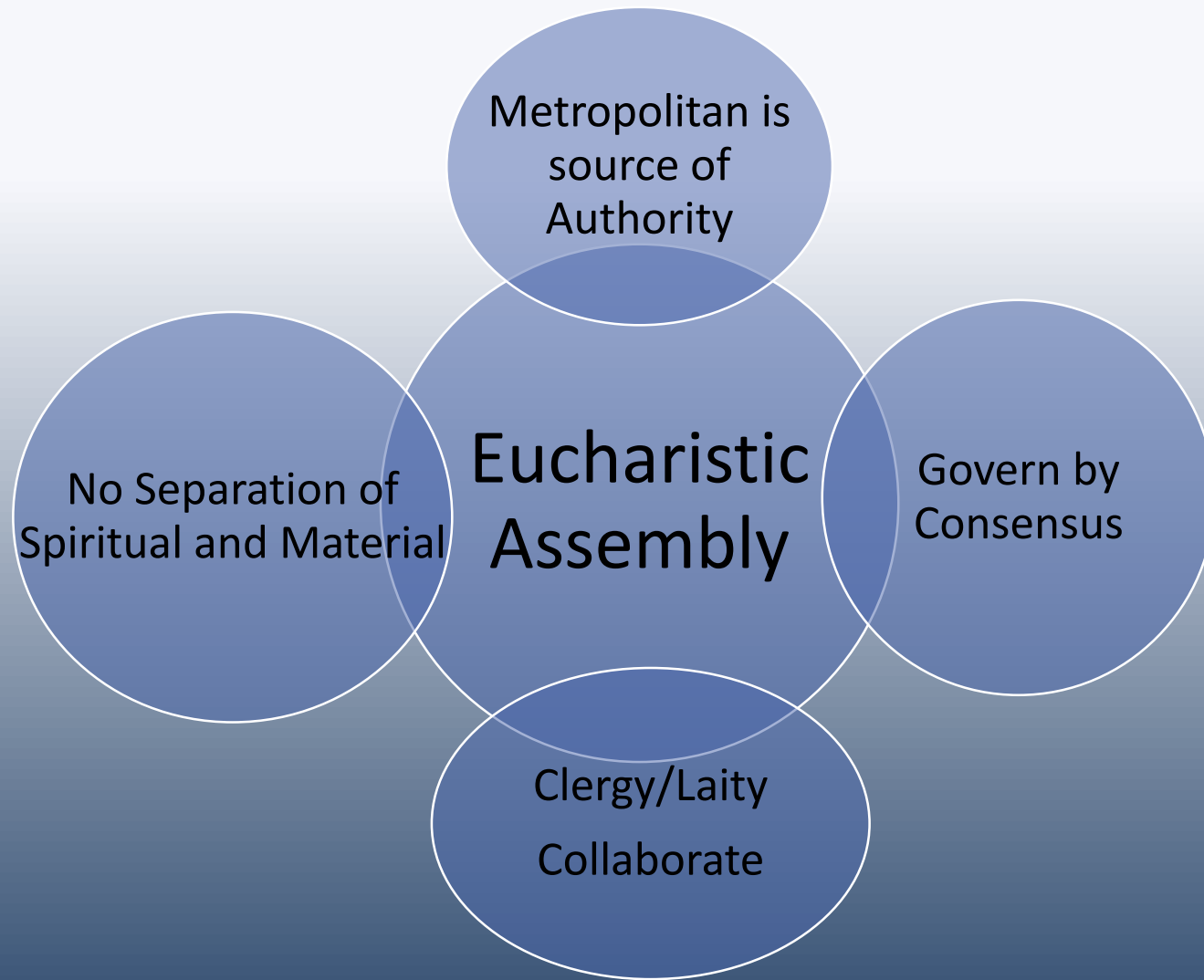
- Eucharist in the Divine Liturgy is an example of how the church should act
- Church Functions as the one, holy, apostolic faith
- This is a paradigm for the workings of the church

“American Orthodoxy and Parish Congregationalism” Fr. Nicholas Ferencz

Eucharistic Assembly Paradigm

- Christ-centered, grace-filled assembly for a common purpose
- Priest leads with blessings of hierarch and the “Amen” of the laity
- Laity actively involved
- Fulfillment of the Church

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Past Influences on Parish Leadership

Leadership Vacuum

- Inaccessible priests/bishops
- Temporary Assignments
- Poor Leadership Skills
- Distance



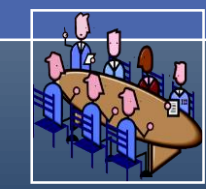
Orthodox Turmoil

- Jurisdictional Competition
- Nationalism
- Ethnic Differences
- Communism



Outside Influences

- Lay Societies (owned buildings, de facto authority)
- Protestant influence (hiring priest, Boards)
- Req Property ownership
- American Freedom separation of powers, Democracy



Key Factors and Impact

Orthodox Ecclesiology

- Eucharistic model
- Authority lies with Bishop
- Material AND Spiritual
- Clergy AND Laity both people of God; distinct yet equal
- Harmony & Unity between priest and laity

Deviations in American Practice

- **Leadership vacuum**

Bishop accessibility

Temp assignments

Leadership Skill Distance

- **Orthodox Turmoil**

Jurisdictionalism

Nationalism

Ethnicity

Communism

- **Secular Influences**

Lay Societies: de facto authority

Protestant Influences
("Boards", hiring)

Property Ownership

American Democracy:

freedom of choice

separation of powers

...Leading to...

- Laity needing to play a strong leadership role - “our parish”
- Sense of ownership not stewardship
- Retain control of our destiny
- Disconnect from Diocese/Metropolis
- Distrust/vilification of Clergy

And often Resulting in...

Congregationalism

- Parish exists for “us”/by us
- Separation of spiritual & material
- Priest is an employee
- Parish “boards” concerned with buildings; budgets
- Parish autonomy; independence from diocese
- Attitude – Legalities, Membership, Voting, Motions, Dues, Entitlement, Ownership
- Primary loyalty/responsibility to the “corporation”

Parish “Models”

A comparison

Purpose

Trustee/Congregational

- Parish Exists for “us”
- “Sovereign” -
Metropolis/Archdiocese
responsibility “optional”
- On its own; for its own

Eucharistic/Conciliar/ Stewardship/Hierarchical

- Exists for Christ; to do His
work in the world
- Constituent part of
Metropolis/Archdiocese
- Mandate to exist from
Hierarch
- One, Holy, Catholic, &
Apostolic

Attitude

Trustee/Congregational

- Legalities
- Membership
- Voting
- Motions
- Dues
- Entitlement
- Ownership

Eucharistic/Conciliar/ Stewardship/Hierarchical

- Stewards
- Hierarchical
- Conciliar
- Eucharistic
- Consensus Building

Priest

Trustee/Congregational

- Employee
- Hired Specialist

Eucharistic/Conciliar/ Stewardship/Hierarchical

- Leader of Parish
- Appointed by Hierarch
- Authority flows from Hierarchical authority

Parish Council

Trustee/Congregational

- Material Issues only-
bills/budgets/building
- Priest: "Spiritual Advisor
- Elected "officers" & trustees

Eucharistic/Conciliar/ Stewardship/Hierarchical

- Focused on TOTAL MISSION of
Parish
- Material & Spiritual concerns
- Extension of Eucharistic
Assembly
- Priest is Leader
- Collaborative
- Co-responsible

Eight Basic Expectations

1. Come to Church

Sunday plus

2. Model Good Orthodox Behavior

Set good example-duty, commitment, humility,
excellence Christ Followers

3. Offer Generous Financial Support

Meaningful, First Fruits

4. Personal Ministry Engagement

Time & Talent

Eight Basic Expectations

5. Contribute in Meetings

A council member who does not vote is failing to perform a duty.

Attend.	On time.	Be prepared.	Build consensus.
Regular.	Participate.	Team player.	

6. Know the Parish

Seek Divergent Marginal Opinions;

Set aside personal desires/beliefs for the good of the “whole”

Actively communicate with Parish

Eight Basic Expectations

7. Nurture a sense of love & community within Parish.

Promote Trust

Welcome new members

8. Build other/new leaders

Mentor & encourage

Collective Expectations

- Stewards of God's Resources
- Urgency Builders
- Risk Takers
- Synthesizers of Opportunities Challenges
- Articulators of a Future
- Structure Definers
- Drivers
- Communicators
- Connectors

Discussion

- How effective was your parish council last year?
 - Did you move the parish into the future?
 - How was that evaluated?
 - What does a good year look like?
- What is a reasonable risk your parish or PC could take in the next year?
- In what ways do we hold council members accountable for progress/"performance" & stewardship?
- What are the obstacles to developing greater interest in serving on parish council & parish ministries?
 - How can we break down these obstacles?

Conclusions

- Parish Council members are to be Stewards in Good Standing in their faith and in their church
- Stewards in Good Standing understand the authority of the Hierarchy and the leadership role of the parish priest
- Our unorthodox history of church growth in America, created influences in the leadership style of parishes, which was not Eucharistic, not Conciliar and not Hierarchical
- A hierarchy exists in the order of the Orthodox Church from the Patriarch to the parish council

Sources

Ferencz, N. “American orthodoxy and parish congregationalism.
Holy Cross Orthodox Press. 2015.