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Afterfeast of the Dormition of the Mother of God

Dear Search Committee,

I am writing to apply for the position of Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America. This is not something I expected to be doing at this stage of my life, or at this time of uncertainty in the central administration of the OCA. Indeed, some wise voices have urged caution and advised against applying. But a number of people have encouraged me to get into the fray, make the application and see where it goes. And with God's help that's what I've decided to do.

I have spent all my life in the Metropolia and the Orthodox Church in America (aside from a long stint in England under Metropolitan Anthony Bloom in the Diocese of Sourozh). I believe deeply in the OCA vision of a Church that lives the Tradition of the Orthodox past, yet breathes with the freedom of the Gospel, combines hierarchy and sobornost, and is open to whatever is best in the culture of North America. But that breadth and freedom are endangered. At the Pittsburgh AAC in 1999 I remember hearing the late Jaroslav Pelikan being asked a question: "What is the greatest threat to Orthodoxy in North America right now?" His answer: "The loss of its catholicity." The Chancellor must transcend factionalism and embody the generous breadth of Orthodoxy wherever he represents the Church.

The Chancellor should have three main priorities at this critical time.

1. The primary aim will be to create a good, trusted working relationship with the Metropolitan, the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan Council, OCA officers and Chancery staff (I would add to that list the Diocesan Chancellors, Seminary Deans and directors of the various OCA Departments and Commissions). Building trust takes time and experiment, but if these relationships are not working then the rest of the tasks in the Chancellor's job description will be irrelevant.

2. If these relationships are working, then the Central Church Administration will be able to fulfill its main purpose, which is to create a stable and effective administration to support the dioceses, parishes, seminaries, monasteries and other church institutions in their direct pastoral work, because that is where the real life of the Church continues.
3. The Chancellor will need to work at overcoming the negativity that hangs like a dark cloud over the OCA. Yes, there are difficulties but the OCA's vision is life-giving, its bishops, priests and deacons continue to serve, the mysteries are being celebrated, people are being tended to, the people themselves continue to pray and to serve God and their neighbor in an inspiring variety of ways, spiritual life is maintained and many parishes are very much alive.

Can I do this? I have been blessed to have a very broad set of experiences and skills that would seem to suit the varied tasks of the Chancellor's position at this time. These include serving parishes in the USA, Canada, Australia, Greece and the UK, from cathedrals to missions to ethnic communities. My first job out of Seminary was running Saints Cosmas and Damian Adult Home, and since then I've had a number of management posts, including Principal of the Institute of Orthodox Christian Studies (Cambridge, UK). I've served on OCA departments and commissions and represented the Church at meetings in the US and abroad since 1980. Throughout my 30 years of ordained ministry I've had the opportunity to work closely with many bishops on many different kinds of projects.

But I am under no illusions, "who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor 2:16). All I can do is promise that if given the opportunity to serve the Church in this way, I will "strive with all the energy which Christ mightily inspires within me" (Col 1:29).

Yours in Christ,

Archpriest John A. Jillions