

Orthodox body seeks new leader in wake of financial scandal: Misconduct at the highest levels

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Reeling from an internal investigation that revealed financial misconduct at its highest levels, the Orthodox Church in America has vowed to work on “building a culture within the church which fosters communication, transparency and personal responsibility.”

The church’s top official, Metropolitan Herman, retired September 4, a day after a special investigative commission recommended “discipline” against him, former metropolitan Theodosius, former chancellor Robert S. Kondratick, two former treasurers and a former comptroller.

The 32-page report confirmed accusations that church leaders had either personally “squandered” millions of dollars or participated in covering up the diversion of the funds for personal expenses and to cover shortfalls.

The 27,000-member church, which was granted independent status from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1970, is based in Syosset, New York. Church leaders commissioned the special investigative committee in 2007, composed of a bishop, two priests, two lay members, an attorney and a retired police chief.

Church leaders have begun implementing some of the committee’s 19 recommendations, said Andrew Jarmus, an OCA spokesperson.

“Both the Holy Synod and the Metropolitan Council have been working very hard and with due diligence to address the issues and to come up with solutions, and certainly a plan to ensure that this kind of thing doesn’t happen again,” he said.

“There will be an increased level of accountability and transparency in the work of the church and the central administration, and making sure that we have qualified individuals doing the work of the church.”

Herman, 75, announced his retirement after being denied a medical leave of absence. He was elected to lead the church in 2002, succeeding Metropolitan Theodosius, who had retired after 25 years in the position. Kondratick was defrocked last year, and the OCA is involved in a legal action over his alleged embezzlement of church funds.

The OCA's next metropolitan will be selected during a gathering of more than 1,000 clergy and lay representatives at its All-American Council on November 11 in Pittsburgh. Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas and the South and Archbishop Seraphim of Ottawa and Canada are overseeing the OCA in the interim.

The OCA has appointed a management team in its central administrative office, which "allows for better peer supervision and a greater degree of checks and balances," Jarmus said. The church's treasurer since November 2007 has been Michael Tassos, a certified public accountant, he added. *-Religion News Service*