

May 1, 2017

Your Eminence Metropolitan Methodios

Χριστός Ανέστη!

I have been a parishioner, steward, and Sunday School teacher at St. Athanasius for twenty years. I have directed the Catechetical Sunday School for the last ten. I have been involved in many aspects of the community and parish life with faith and fervor and as such I have been recognized by our parish with the 2016 Metropolis of Boston Laity Award. I have witnessed the exciting growth of our community from the humble edifice on Mass Ave to the new location at 4 Appleton Street. I have experienced first hand the good works, faith, and unity of our parish and its people as we traveled the challenges of the re-location, finances, and diverse ideas and opinions of our parishioners. With Christ's blessings, your leadership, the guidance of our priest, Fr. Nick, and the support of the many stewards of our St. Athanasius parish, we have planted the seeds of hope for the next 50 years of our parish at our new location.

Unfortunately, the St. Athanasius community is currently facing a number of serious challenges. These challenges need to be addressed so that we can sustain the growth of our community. I have heard the voices of many concerned parishioners and stewards of this parish. Their grievances and the underlying issues and causes of these crises are significant.

Crisis of confidence and legitimacy for the current PC leadership

1. The voice of the community stewards is ignored. This was demonstrated at the December 2016 PC elections, and General Assembly decisions, where the UPR budget process was not followed for the salary of the assistant priest.
2. We have witnessed ad-hoc application of parish by-laws, and continuous undermining of the will of the parishioners. Examples include the determination of the voting majority for General Assembly meetings.
3. The PC leadership makes decisions and takes actions without transparency and consultation with its full membership. Examples include the rectory renovation project and the recent participation in the audit of the 'Homeless and Needy Fund' account.
4. Incomplete disclosures (such as partial invoicing of items for various projects so not to trigger the 20K threshold requiring GA approval) are used to avoid scrutiny of expenditures and squelch discussion (for example, renovation to the Church hall where operating moneys used for capital projects)
5. The required annual parish financial audit has not been performed for more than 2 years
6. Inability to reconcile and resolve disputes at the parish level without continuous intervention of the Metropolis administrative, legal and financial mechanisms.

Stewardship crisis

1. Stewardship is down by almost \$30K as it was presented at the PC meeting of 3/29/2017.

2. Numerous people have confessed that they are stopping/curtailing their stewardship offerings towards St. Athanasius, as they feel that this is the only way their voice may be heard.
3. Some young family stewards and some parishioners have stepped away from our community to avoid the crises listed here.

Moral crisis

1. The PC leadership has demonstrated repeated lack of respect and common courtesy for our priest of 27 plus years, specific members of the PC, and especially women.
2. The reputation of our priest is attacked directly and indirectly through rumors, innuendos and misinformation, some even emanating from PC family members.
3. Trust has deteriorated between the PC leadership, other PC members, many of the St. Athanasius stewards and Fr. Nick.
 - a. The PC leadership willingly participated in reviewing and commenting on the Metropolis audit of the 'Homeless and Needy Fund' account using documents that were not certified as complete and accurate. The audit was not shared with the rest of the PC before being finalized and being sent on to the Metropolis..
 - b. The PC leadership has been using fear tactics claiming that the 'truth' that they only know will be revealed when people demand answers.
 - c. PC members were asked to sign affidavits to obtain keys for the church building where they routinely perform required and necessary duties.
 - d. Parish stewards were accused of 'electioneering' in the December 2016 election. The absentee ballots and finally the entire election process of PC members were discredited and nullified.

Educational crisis

1. The Greek School Program has been without a principal for more than 2 years. There has been a failure of coordination and communication between the PC and the parent-run committee, obstructing progress and leading to the loss of highly qualified candidates. This may be seen as a threatening sign of the future of the Little Halos Program, as a new Director must be hired ASAP.

Identity crisis

1. We have heard the PC leadership refer to the St. Athanasius parish as a 'multi million dollar corporation'. This is offensive and incorrect.
 - a. We are a 'for profit' entity, but to profit the souls of our parishioners. Christ said 'What benefit is to you if you gain the whole world but you lose your soul?'

It is with these concerns and a heavy heart that I, and many others, approach you in hope of guidance that extends beyond statements by our priest and parish leadership. The issue is no longer whether Fr. Kastanas leaves or stays at our parish. At a recent PC meeting, we were informed by both Fr. Kastanas and the president of the parish council, Mr. Ioakimidis, that 'Fr. Nick is not going anywhere!'. We are thankful to God for these statements, but we realize that change and reconciliation powerful enough to solve the current parish issues and concerns requires the personal repentance, forgiveness and long-term commitment by all the involved parties, and each of the St. Athanasius parishioners at large.

We have already heard Fr. Nick asking for forgiveness on multiple occasions, most recently addressing a crowd of over 1100 parishioners on Palm Sunday. I hope that members of the parish council do the same as we start our walk on a corrected path to reconciliation.

My personal pledge (and I hope that of all other concerned parishioner) is to work with others to:

1. Support and enhance the multidimensional ministry of our spiritual leader, Fr. Nick, by cultivating an environment where he can confidently lead us to reconciliation and growth.
2. Restore a respectful parish administration that listens to the voices of its parishioners, and respects the Uniform Parish Regulations, and decisions of the parish General Assembly.
3. Witness a parish council that serves with transparency and accountability towards the St. Athanasius stewards.
4. Restore a parish administration that is able to resolve challenges on its own, first seeking the input, support and talents of the St. Athanasius stewards.
5. Witness a fully ratified set of parish by-laws, so that due process is understood and adhered to.

As I, and many others, work towards the difficult goal of healing the wounds of the community and supporting a long-lasting thriving Orthodox Christian parish at St. Athanasius, we ask for your prayers, blessing, advice and guidance for our historic parish. As a loving father, we ask you to forgive us, encourage us and strengthen us so that our families, children and future generations are able to strive to become 'pillars of Orthodoxy' like our patron Saint Athanasius.

Wishing you the blessings of our Resurrected Christ
With deep respect, Εἰς πολλά ἔτη Δέσποτα

Ioannis K. Moutsatsos