

Dear Members,

On Monday the 28th of June 2021 at 19.00, the first meeting organised by His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas Lioulias took place.

All the Chairmen and Treasurers from the Greek Orthodox Communities within UK were invited, and in fact 67 people attended the Zoom meeting.

It was a great opportunity to come closer to the Archdiocese and Archbishop Nikitas. Some people in the communities, like us, had concerns about the recent changes in the organisation of Archdiocese.

Below is a summary of the key points from the meeting, from my perspective. The meeting was recorded and is available upon request.

His Eminence, Archbishop Nikitas, was very clear in his messages, which is that the Archdiocese' work within different as indicated below:

- Theological
- Administration
- Philanthropic
- Support

Other keys areas of discussion were as follows:

- Co-operation with Church of England - Archbishop of Canterbury and other organisations
- Organise activities for poorer people - like free meals, free funerals and other philanthropic activities
- Give opportunities to young people to join the clergy group - 35 young men have shown an interest to join
- Recommend all the communities to support the local police organisation
- The number of staff within the Archdiocese office has been reduced
- There are over 20 new communities that have joined the Archdiocese
- Every clergy candidate will have gone through an evaluation and a mental health check before joining
- Some communities used the Archdiocese Charity number for their financial activities – this must stop, as it is illegal and goes against the rules of the Charity Commission. Communities have to register and use their own number for their own events. The communities have to follow the laws and the Charity Commission's guidelines.
- When dealing with money, there must be no cash used, as every penny needs to be registered in the books with an auditable trail. For donations, it is recommended to use electronic payment / donation by using a POS (Point of Sale) gadget. There are already a number of churches following these guidelines
- We can register a small amount of donations for the Gift Aid report to HMRC, and get tax relief of up to £8,000.00 per year per building. For us, this means that for the 3 buildings that we have, we can get Gift Aid Tax Relief on collections for the church, school, and church hall / community centre, which are the three buildings that we own. In order for this to comply with the guidelines and rules, we do need to change the name from Mermikides Community Centre to St Michael Church Community Centre. However, we can name the lower part of the Walmer Castle as "Mermikides Hall". By doing this we will be able to receive 3 x £8,000 = £24,000 of Gift Aid Tax

Relief, which is an increase of £3200.00 per year, just for using Gift Aid Tax Relief as additional funding

- Membership registration allows for the right to vote and the right to be elected. All of the committee members have to be registered as members of the Community. Elections will take place between September and October, even if the candidates have been in post for less than 12 months (according to the constitution)
- The Archbishop can appoint up to four committee members. These would be individuals who are considered to be important members of the Community, but who aren't necessarily keen to participate within the committee. But if the Community needs them, then the Archbishop can help us to convince them to join the Committee
- The Archdiocese can help / recommend / guide, but not be involved in, the legal and financial activities of the communities
- The communities they have to act within the Word of Jesus Christ, and not just with money in mind
- Many communities are having problems within the organisation, that is the relationship between Trustees, committee members, The Archdiocese, and The Charity Commission
- Membership registration and elections are also other issues in the communities
- The Archdiocese will arrange for a series of seminars for the communities regarding the organisation / constitution and elections

Note from the Church Committee Chairman:

After the Zoom meeting, I have changed my views on the Archdiocese' work, and I would like to share these views with you, which I have set out below:

- The Archdiocese and His Eminence himself want to help the communities
- They are there to help us spreading the word of Jesus Christ
- The Archdiocese is "our" diocese
- The Archdiocese is a part of us
- We cannot act alone because we are a part of the Archdiocese
- We need to stay close, we need to work together with love respect and appreciation
- New challenges are around the corner
- We need the youngsters to come closer to us within the Community
- We cannot afford to create "enemies" inside of our organisation. It is enough, the enemies and the competitors of our Diocese

This is the message and the advice that I am sending to all of you:

- stay together
- stay side by side
- be a good example for the next generation
- show love respect kindness and appreciation

With love and kindness to all of you

Dr Kostas Papadimos
Chairman of St Michael Greek Orthodox Church