

## OTSA 2024 Annual Business Meeting Minutes June 7, 2024

Members Present: Teva Regule, Fr. John Jillions, Helen Theodoropoulos, Fr. Geoffrey Ready, Jim Skedros, Bishop Antonios (Vrame), Barbara Frank, Paul Ladouceur, Fr. Bodhan Hladio, Fr. Nicholas Ferencz, Ashley Purpura, Hermina Nedelescu, Fr. Philip Zymaris, Fr. Harry Pappas, Fr. Peter Baktis, Claire Koen, Aristotle (Telly) Papanikolaou, George Demacopoulos, Rachel Contos, Chris Durante, Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Fr. Roman Bozyk, Elizabeth Prodromou, Brother Christopher, Fr. Peter Chamberas, Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, Fr. Stelyios Muksuris, Fr. Robert Arida, Fr. Bogdan Bucur, Fr. Peter Avgeropoulos.

### 1. Opening Prayer by Fr John Jillions at 3:32 pm

### 2. Approval of 2022-23 Annual Meeting Minutes

Teva Regule (President) presented the minutes from the past meeting. She noted that the officers have reviewed the minutes and asked if members had any additions or corrections. No changes were suggested. Paul Ladouceur moved to accept, Susan Harvey seconded, all agreed and the motion passed.

### 3. Reports

- a) **President's Report:** Teva explained that OTSA has had a busy and productive year and a half. She noted that the Board meets regularly (once a month) and thanked them for their dedication and hard work. She began with a recap of the meeting in Volos since decisions there speak to the ongoing work of the Society. One decision of the previous meeting was to establish a working group on Orthodox–Jewish dialogue, and this was taken up. Also, the Society made some changes to our by-laws. Because the meeting at Volos entailed significant travel which prohibited some members from coming, we sponsored two online forums reprising some of the papers presented there. Both engendered good discussion.

OTSA has two operating working groups. The first is on Mixed Marriages and is led by Fr. Anthony Roeber. They have developed several papers with information and recommendations, and these papers will be discussed at a panel with the membership tomorrow, and will incorporate the feedback shared at this meeting. At that point, these will be forwarded to the Assembly of Bishops. The second working group is the new Orthodox–Jewish dialogue, led by Fr. Geoffrey Ready.

OTSA has improved communication with membership, using a new format (MailChimp) for the Newsletter, adding a member news section, memorials, and a new initiative of member “profiles,” with a link from the newsletter to a semi-private location on the website. Member profiles are brief (about 250 words in length) and are a first person

account of current research and fields of interest. The intent is to promote the exchange of ideas, networking and, collaboration. Teva thanked Helen and Fr Geoffrey for their work on the newsletter.

OTSA continued to work with the Assembly of Bishops. Since we last met, we have submitted two sets of yearly reports as mandated by the Assembly. Each report includes a full audit, a report of the workings of the society for the past year, the plan for next year, a list of names and jurisdictional affiliations of officers, and proof of insurance—liability as well as officers insurance.

In other administrative matters: We are also now professionally incorporated and recognized as a non-profit. Due to the expanded duties required of the Treasurer, we added the position of Assistant Treasurer (to the already existing positions of Treasurer and Associate Treasurer), with Fr. Geoffrey Ready taking on that position. With the assistance of all the treasurers, and the particular work of Treasurer Fr. Nik Ferencz, we fulfilled all our requirements to maintain our non-profit status in good standing. One benefit we realized as a non-profit is that we no longer need to pay PayPal and Google fees. We have instituted the new category of lifetime member and instituted invoices to members to remind them of their dues, thanks to the work of Fr. Geoffrey. At one point, our auditor suggested that we draw down the funds in the investment funds because they are too large for a non-profit. Currently those have been substantially depleted because of our travel grants to students and needy scholars to attend OTSA and IOTA conferences, so we instituted a new fundraising program spearheaded by Associate Treasurer Jim Skedros. In addition, we fund the annual meeting as a major project of our ongoing work, and tonight we are pleased to sponsor a very special format for the Florovsky lecture—a forum—with four distinguished speakers.

Teva spoke of coming to the close of her time as president and thanked the team of officers for working so well together. She expressed the hope that we have made a difference.

Telly Papanikolaou asked if the auditor was assigned by the Assembly of Bishops. Teva explained that they did not recommend or assign an auditor, and we found him—Fr. Michael Palamara—through the efforts of Fr. John Jillions. He has a finance degree, was excellent, and graciously worked gratis.

- b) Treasurer's Report:** Fr. Nik Ferencz reported that we researched hiring a professional for the audit, but it would be very costly—as much as half our budget. Fr. John found Fr. Michael Palamara. The audit is available for anyone who wants to view it, and Fr. Nik offered to email it to any member interested in reading it.

Fr Nik explained that OTSA's non-profit status entails more paper work, but has some positive aspects. Another change he instituted is that our Annual Financial report now follows the calendar year. The report he provided to the membership at this meeting is this official Annual Report, but it ends on Dec. 31, 2023; for that reason, he also included a financial report *to date*, but that is not official since still in process.

Fr Nik then presented the 2023 official Financial Report, with ordinary expenses and income on the front and the savings and investment accounts income and expenses listed separately on the back. Paul Ladouceur noted that this was problematic; he had trouble reconciling the tables since the accounts were not combined. In addition, he commented that the investment accounts have done well. Jim replied that this was due to the foresight of Bishop Antonios (Tony) Vrame who set this up in 2002; it is now at \$69,700, and does quite well. Bishop Tony explained that OTSA had been saving its money in CDs and felt we could do better. He invested in a SPDR account and, later, OTSA invested in a Social Index fund. Jim also mentioned that the fundraising project has generated about \$3000. Chris Durante asked what is in the Social Index fund. Bishop Tony replied that the bulk of the socially invested index funds are in technology and electronics, although those are general categories. Jim will take a look to see if he can give more detailed information on this in the future.

Fr Nik thanked the other treasurers and explained that our operating budget barely makes ends meet, and we are afloat today because of the investment funds undertaken by Bishop Tony (treasurer for many years). Jim then explained that we have no established policy on how to managing or use these funds. [At present, the fund is used to fund travel grants, grants for worthy Orthodox initiatives and, at times, the Florovsky event.] This needs to become explicit. As officers we need direction from the membership to determine if we turn it into an endowment, or keep as is; we need a policy to guide this. Fr Nik pointed out that money with no purpose is problematic; we need to designate a purpose for this money, to protect what we have. We will address this again in new business.

Paul L moved to approve the Annual Financial report; Bishop Tony seconded the motion. All agreed, except Barbara Frank who abstained because she was unable to view the report. (She was a remote participant and the report was more readily available at the meeting for those present. Teva noted that this report had been made public; the link was made available in the newsletter and is on our website). The motion passed.

Fr Nik then presented the Financial Report to date: 1/2024–5/2024. This enabled the members to see our operating expenses and understand what the society is doing through the year. Much of the money comes in and goes out at the time of the annual meeting. Fr Nik said he asked Fr Geoffrey to take over member invoicing. Fr Geoffrey reported that we have 211 members on our members list. In 2022 and 2023 we had 69 members current in their dues plus 17 lifetime members, and in 2024 (to date) we have 62 plus 17 lifetime members (for a total of 79). Going forward, we should look at trimming the number on our list to something more accurate. We need to see who has been involved more recently and list only members recently and currently active.

**c. Secretary's Report:** Member Communication. Secretary Helen Theodoropoulos reported that her duties over the past year included preparing the business meeting minutes and the minutes for all the monthly officers' meetings; handling all correspondence for the Society; greeting and collecting information of new members and keeping them informed; and all the communications associated with the Annual meeting

(gathering proposals, requests for travel grants, etc). In addition, every month she prepared the content of the newsletter, which Fr. Geoffrey then formatted in MailChimp. Many thanks to Fr Geoffrey for the lovely new design and excellent format for the newsletter. Through the newsletter, members are informed of the work of the officers, the interaction of OTSA with the Assembly of Bishops, members' news (publications, awards, major lectures, etc), remembrance of members who have fallen asleep, the new section on members' profiles, and more.

#### 4. Old Business

##### a) Incorporation Responsibilities

Teva reported that since our last meeting we have completed two audits, our filing with the State of Massachusetts, our I-990 filing, and our filing for 501c3, fulfilling all the requirements.

##### b) Assembly of Bishops Review: since our last meeting, OTSA has experienced two annual reviews by the Assembly of Bishops. Teva provided reports of our audits, extensive reports of our activities over the year and plans for the coming year, proof of insurances, and all other required documents. OTSA remains an Affiliated Professional Association of the Assembly in good standing.

##### c) Working Groups

- **Mixed Marriages working group.** Fr John Jillions reported that the working group has prepared several reports which he shared with the members. These reports were included in the packets for everyone who attended the meeting. As of Spring 2024, the group has almost concluded their work. Tomorrow, on the last day of the Annual meeting, there will be a panel to present the findings of the group, and receive input on the papers, which the group will try to incorporate as appropriate. Fr John acknowledged and thanked those who participated in the group and in preparing the papers: Fr Anthony Roeber (who led the group), Peter Bouteneff, Nadia Kizenko, Gayle Woloschak, Fr Harry Linsinbigler, Fr Philip LeMasters, Paul Meyendorff, and Fr. Nicholas Ferencz.

- **Orthodox-Jewish Dialogue-** Fr. Geoffrey explained that OTSA took up the issue of Orthodox Christians in Dialogue with Jews, sparked by the paper presented by George Demacopoulos at OTSA in 2023 at Volos and the recommendation of the members at the business meeting. There will also be a panel at the conference on this tomorrow. He reported that the group has moved away from the task of addressing only a few texts in the hymns of Holy Week, as this anti-Jewish sentiment is extremely problematic on many levels. They determined that the wider issue is the preaching and teaching of the Church on Jews. The focus of the group is now more foundational and theological than amending a few texts. Fr. Geoffrey has pulled together a team of world experts—some 85/90 scholars, and have included Jews. They have held two seminars and six meetings of various sub-groups so far. This is now bigger than OTSA, but they are drawing more people into the orbit of what we are doing.

The Orthodox-Jewish Dialogue group has held two online seminars for OTSA members—April 2023 and February 2024. The initial seminar outlined some of the group's work and the subsequent seminar introduced the group more fully as well as its motivations and paths forward.

Elizabeth Prodromou asked how the group has facilitated our learning about what they are doing. Fr Geoffrey replied that he will be presenting a paper at the International Conference of Christians and Jews about what he has learned about being Orthodox from participating in dialogue with Jews. They are trying to get down to theological issues: how is it that we (Orthodox) claim to be Israel, and what that means when there is an ongoing Israel. We Orthodox have a unique opportunity to talk to Jews of all types and locations; for generations we have had relationships with Jews across the spectrum of Judaism.

**d) Web – Member directory:** Teva reported that we now have posted the member directory. At this point we just post the name as given to us. Since the name is listed how the person sent it, we do not have consistency in the listing. She reminded the members that anyone who wants to be listed differently needs to contact us, and we will make the change. It will be updated as we welcome new members.

## 5. New Business

- a) **Member Networking – Web Profiles:** Helen explained our recently launched initiative of member profiles. These are brief (under 250 words), first-person accounts of ongoing research and areas of study and interest. We post new ones in the newsletter, and provide a link in the newsletter to all the profiles; this link is the only way to access these profiles, making them semi-private for members. The main purpose of sharing these profiles is to facilitate networking and collaboration among members.
- b) **Initiative: Assembly of Bishops-OTSA Inter-Parish Association:** Fr. John reported that the Assembly of Bishops received a substantial grant from the Lily Foundation to organize 12 regions where parishes of various Orthodox jurisdictions can collaborate and share ideas and resources. The program is currently directed by Spyridoula Fotinis. The Assembly of Bishops has asked OTSA to provide a theological foundation for this work. OTSA is planning a seminar to bring together OTSA members, a social scientist appointed by the Assembly of Bishops, and members of the Assembly to discuss the rationale for establishing these associations and to explore what these associations can do in their local areas for themselves and to reach out to the wider community. The hope is to run this seminar in the Fall of 2024. It is a new and exciting initiative.
- c) **Management of Investment Accounts:** From the money in our investment account, we have given, over the last few years, money to IOTA for seed money for their first International Mega-Conference; scholarships for student scholars and travel grants for needy scholars for both the 2019 and 2023 Conferences; and travel grants for our own conferences. We have also awarded two small grants this year: formatting costs for the

Festschrift for Vigen Guroian, requested by Carrie Frederick Frost; and funds for travel grants for our members to participate in the Orthodox-Pentecostal Dialogue. Also, on occasion we have used these funds to cover expenses incurred by the annual meeting, especially the funding of the Florovsky Lecture. Our costs of having a meeting are no longer covered by registration fees or membership dues. However, we have no specific, directed plan for these funds and for several good reasons need to establish a plan for them.

At this point, Paul Ladouceur asked if we are charging expenses directly to the management fund. Fr Nik explained that we try to run all the expenses through the checking account. When we need extra funds, we take some money from the savings funds to cover expenses. All ordinary expenses run through the PayPal and Bank of America checking accounts. Teva then refocused the discussion on the question of how to manage the savings fund. Bishop Tony pointed out that it would be beneficial to codify our plans and give direction, but also leave it flexible and open; we can identify (but not require) what we want it to do, but list (as a requirement) what we CAN NOT do. For example, we can specify no salaries for the board; but then we can allow travel grants, scholarships, and small grants.

Fr Harry Pappas suggested that we establish a positive plan (that is, identify how to use the money), but include a clause that allows for the discretion of the officers. Chris Durante pointed out that these policies more often than not utilize positive rather than prohibitory rules, but thought we needed minimal boundaries listing what aligns with what we as Christians attest to. He suggested a committee that meets once a year (or so) to evaluate the investments. Fr Peter Baktis asserted that as a non-profit it is necessary that we establish a financial policy of investing, and that we list our objectives with the money, designating how the money is to be used. Fr Nik pointed out that we have a lot more in savings than in the annual budget. Fr Peter added that whatever we do might require a change to the Bylaws. Fr Nik reminded us that this year we established a formal finance committee, consisting of Fr John (vice-president), the three treasurers (Fr Nik, Fr Geoffrey and Jim) and an outside person for the audit. This committee plans to discuss how we will use the money. They will establish a suggested plan for the investment account and bring that back to the membership for consideration and approval, with the requisite suggested change to the By-laws, if necessary, for the next Annual meeting.

- d) **2025 Annual Meeting – When? Where? Possible themes?** This year we intentionally returned to HCHC as part of the plan to honor our foundational members. For the same reason, we hope to hold the next meeting at St Vladimir's Theological Seminary. We asked Fr Bogdan Bucur to explore this. He agreed that it is important to involve the Seminary and to promote a reconnection with OTSA, and he will lobby for this. We then discussed the best time frame, and most of the members agreed that the end of May/early June seemed best. Teva pointed out one possible problem is that special IOTA sponsored conference on the Council of Nicea and Orthodox-Roman Catholic unity is scheduled to be held in Rome on June 2–8, 2025 in this time frame. We agreed that the new officers will work with SVOTS, and consider competing events, to determine if we can manage this time frame. Teva then mentioned that in 2027 the next IOTA Mega-Conference will

be in the country of Georgia and suggested OTSA consider holding its meeting in conjunction with IOTA there (as we did in Volos) for our 2027 meeting.

Barbara Frank thanked the officers for retaining the hybrid model this year and expressed the hope that it will be retained in the future. There are important benefits for those who cannot travel, and it is possibly an added attraction for others.

6. **2024 and 2025 Budgets Review:** Fr Nik explained that, rather than create a balance sheet for the year, he wanted to show how we are working—that is, our work in progress. The numbers for 2023 were not typical for us due to Volos. He noted that June is half way through the year, but our fiscal year is the calendar year, and it is unclear whether we should make a budget for the calendar year, for the year to date, (that is, to June) or how. Overall, in our budget our income and expenses tend to be a wash—but not exactly; at the annual meeting, expenses also tend to wash out. He noted that we take money from the savings account if needed to pay travel and other expenses. Fortunately our profit in the investment accounts helps us out.

Bishop Tony suggested that, given our expenses for the annual meeting this year, we put more into the budget for the annual meeting in 2025 and eliminate the profit listed. He suggested that we make this change in the proposed budget for 2025: we add \$1000 to the proposed expenses for the annual meeting, and delete \$1000 from profit. Fr Harry so moved, Bishop Tony seconded, and all approved, with Barbara Frank abstaining.

Paul Ladouceur expressed appreciation to OTSA for the travel grants for members participating in the Pentecostal-Orthodox Dialogue, and noted that the Pentecostals are paying all local expenses.

7. **Presentation of Candidates for Membership:** Helen presented the new candidates for membership:
  - Fr. Peter Avgeropoulos (Full: Sponsors Bishop Anthony Vrame, Fr. Bohdan Hladio)
  - Mark Chenoweth (Full: Sponsors Peter Bouteneff, Harrison Russin)
  - Courtney Haubert (Associate: Sponsors Teva Regule, Ashley Purpura)
  - Michael Kooy (Full: Sponsors Fr. Geoffrey Ready, Helen Theodoropoulos)
  - Inga Leonova (Full: Sponsors Fr John Jillions, George Demacopoulos)
  - Alexander Mihailovic (Full: Sponsors Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, Scott Kenworthy)
  - Chase Montague (Full: Sponsors Aristotle Papanikolaou, Fr Peter Baktis)
  - Tom Papademetriou (Full: Sponsors: Jim Skedros and Fr George Papademetriou)
  - Nicholas Roumas (Full: Sponsors James Skedros, Aristotle Papanokolaou)
  - Peter Schadler (Full: Sponsors Fr Gregory Roeber, Alexis Torrance)

After a brief discussion about each prospective member, Fr. Stelyios Muksuris moved to approve the entire roster of candidates, Fr Peter seconded, all members voted aye, and the motion passed. Teva welcomed all the new members to OTSA.

8. **Election of Officers:** Bishop Tony represented the Nominating Committee, which consisted of himself, Gayle Woloschak, and Fr. Anthony Roeber, and thanked the committee for their work in securing the slate of officers for election. He first thanked the current officers for all they have been doing, and then presented the roster for election:

President: Fr John Jillions  
Vice President: Fr Bodgan Bucur  
Treasurer: Fr Peter Baktis  
Associate Treasurer: James Skedros  
Assistant Treasurer: Fr Geoffrey Ready  
Secretary: Helen Theodoropoulos  
Immediate Past President: Teva Regule

Bishop Tony moved for the approval of this roster of officers, Teva seconded, all present voted aye, and the motion passed, officially installing the new roster of officers.

Teva thanked all the officers she worked with over the past five years. Jim responded that we are all deeply grateful for her selfless dedication and leadership over the years of her presidency. Everyone rose to acknowledge her work as president and offer thanks. (Later that evening at the Florovsky Event, Fr John surprised Teva with a lovely plant and a card signed by the all members present at the meeting, and thanked her on behalf of all of us for her outstanding work). The meeting concluded at 4:56 PM (Eastern).

Note: Immediately following the conclusion of the business meeting, all members present participated in a memorial service for past members.