



The HOLY SYNOD
of the
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

**Statement from the Holy Synod Regarding
the Resignation of Metropolitan Jonah**

July 16, 2012

To the Clergy and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America:

We have hesitated to release further details surrounding the resignation of Metropolitan Jonah as Primate of our Church, this in a desire to preserve his dignity and to prevent further harm to an innocent party. We did this knowing there would be appeals for additional information regarding our decision. We also harbored some hope that Metropolitan Jonah would show a willingness to accept responsibility for his actions and failures to act. However, things said and written by Metropolitan Jonah since his resignation have demonstrated that he is not accepting that responsibility.

Why did we ask Metropolitan Jonah to resign?

In slightly less than four years as our leader, Metropolitan Jonah has repeatedly refused to act with prudence, in concert with his fellow bishops, in accordance with the Holy Synod's Policies, Standards and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct (PSPs), and in compliance with advice of the Church's lawyers and professionals in expertise in dealing with cases of sexual misconduct.

The most disturbing and serious matter, indeed the final matter that caused us to ask the Metropolitan to resign or take a leave of absence and enter a treatment program, involves the Metropolitan's poor judgment in critical matters of Church governance, lack of adherence to the PSPs, and the risk of serious harm to at least one other person. While the names, dates and other details must be held in confidence to minimize the risk of further harm, we can say the following.

At some point after his enthronement as our Primate, Metropolitan Jonah unilaterally accepted into the OCA a priest known to him and to others to be actively and severely abusing alcohol, which more than once was coupled with episodes of violence and threats toward women. One of these episodes involved the brandishing of a knife, and the other the discharge of a firearm, the former resulting in the man's arrest. The man was also incarcerated for three days in yet another incident, shortly after he was accepted into the OCA by Metropolitan Jonah. While under Metropolitan Jonah's omophorion, this priest is alleged to have committed a rape against a woman in 2010.

Metropolitan Jonah was later told of this allegation in February 2012, yet he neither investigated, nor told his brother bishops, nor notified the Church's lawyers, nor reported the matter to the police, nor in any other way followed the mandatory, non-discretionary PSPs of the OCA. The alleged victim, however, did report the rape to the police. We know, too, that the alleged victim and a relative were encouraged by certain others not to mention the incident, and were told by them that their salvation depended on their silence. As recently as last week Metropolitan Jonah was regularly communicating with one of those who tried to discourage the

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reporting of this crime by the alleged victim and her relative. In addition, the Metropolitan counseled the priest to pursue a military chaplaincy, without informing the military recruiter of any of the priest's problems. Finally, the Metropolitan attempted to transfer the priest to other Orthodox jurisdictions, and ultimately did permit him to transfer to another jurisdiction, in each case telling those jurisdictions there were no canonical impediments to a transfer.

We have started an investigation into the rape allegation, and cannot assume whether the allegation is true or not. We only know that earlier allegations of misconduct by this priest were handled by Metropolitan Jonah in a manner at a complete variance with the required standards of our Church.

Moral, canonical and inter-Orthodox relations issues aside, in light of the recent widely-publicized criminal cases involving sexual abuse at Penn State and in the Philadelphia Archdiocese and the Kansas City Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, the extent of the risk of liability to which the Metropolitan has exposed the Church cannot be overstated. We knew already from past experience with Metropolitan Jonah that something had to change; we had hoped that change would come about as the result of Metropolitan Jonah fulfilling his promise to comply with the recommendation given him by the medical facility to which he was admitted for evaluation and treatment last November, as he assured us he would do at our last All-American Council in Seattle. That promise having gone unfulfilled, when this latest problem came to our attention at the end of June, we felt that we had no choice but to ask him to take a leave of absence or to submit his resignation. The moral, human, canonical and legal stakes were simply too high.

Leading up to this most recent problem, there has existed for several years now a repeated pattern by Metropolitan Jonah of taking other unilateral actions that were contrary to the advice of the Holy Synod and/or the Church's lawyers, which prolonged or caused litigation involving the OCA, which substantially increased legal fees, which created confusion in negotiations, and which exposed the OCA to otherwise avoidable additional financial and legal liability.

He withheld information from his brother bishops and from the Church's lawyers concerning litigation matters, and matters which might have resulted, and still might result, in litigation.

He has spoken unilaterally with and provided sensitive information to opposing counsel and opposing parties concerning pending and threatened litigation, although he had specifically been warned many times of the perils in doing so.

He gave to unauthorized persons a highly sensitive, painstakingly detailed internal Synodal report concerning numerous investigations into sexual misconduct, risking leaks of names of alleged victims and alleged perpetrators. While those who now possess the report are wrongfully in possession of OCA property, they have not yet returned their copies of these highly confidential and sensitive documents, further exposing our Church to potential legal liabilities.

What we have said here is based on the Metropolitan's own words, both during numerous Holy Synod and Metropolitan Council meetings, and established in documentary evidence. We cannot release that publicly, and the Metropolitan Council members have legal and moral obligations to maintain in confidence information pertaining to threats to individuals and alleged crimes. We have however been communicating with and will continue to communicate with law enforcement authorities.

Our request for Metropolitan Jonah's resignation, or that he take a leave of absence for treatment, came at the end of a rather long list of questionable, unilateral decisions and actions, demonstrating the inability of the Metropolitan to always be truthful and accountable to his peers. The Metropolitan's freely-chosen resignation has been characterized by him and others as the result of politics and internal discord among the members of the Holy Synod. Quite to the contrary, the other members of the Holy Synod stand firmly together in our unanimous astonishment at the Metropolitan's actions. We cannot stress enough that while the most recent

events are likely the most dangerous for the Church, these represent only the latest in a long series of poor choices that have caused harm to our Church. We understand and agree that an ability to work or not work well with others, or a challenged administrative skill set, or Metropolitan Jonah's refusal to comply with the recommendations of the treatment facility, while not the reasons for his requested resignation, were fundamentally related to the consequences of his actions.

Each bishop of the Orthodox Church in America has a duty to Jesus Christ to shepherd his respective diocesan flock, and to be a good steward and trustee of the temporal properties of the Church entrusted to his care. After the developments of the past few weeks, we knew, individually and together acting in one accord as the Synod, that we could no longer exercise our duties as shepherds or as trustees and stewards without asking for the Metropolitan's resignation.

There are some who are seeking to promote a variety of rumors or other reasons for the Metropolitan's resignation, in their conversations or on the Internet. Some argue that the resignation had to do with moral or political views publicly expressed by Metropolitan Jonah that conflicted with the views of others in the Church, the so-called "culture wars." Such views have never been a point of contention in Holy Synod or Metropolitan Council meetings. These issues were discussed, and statements and actions of the Holy Synod have demonstrated their unchanging position on traditional Orthodox views of morality. This speculation as to other motives behind the resignation is simply not true; the reasons for the resignation are detailed in this message.

We continue to pray for Metropolitan Jonah's spiritual needs even as his brother bishops have provided for his immediate material needs. He has no Church assignment obligations, allowing him to focus on himself and his family. Meanwhile, he is drawing full salary and benefits until at least October, when the Holy Synod next meets.

We ask your prayers for the Church, for Her clergy and faithful and for Her mission in the world.

The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America