

FROM: Ethics Committee, Metropolitan Council, Orthodox Church in America  
June 9, 2011

TO: Archpriest Alexander Webster, PhD

Fr. Alexander,

I am responding to your complaint filed against Mr. Mark Stokoe, received in two parts, one dated May 15, 2011; and one dated May 23, 2011. This matter has been handed over to me and the other members of the Ethics Committee for review by Fr. Theodore Bobosh, as he has recused himself due to Mr. Stokoe being his parishioner.

First of all, let me assure you that we take every complaint we receive very seriously and do our utmost to address all issues brought before us. Like you, I have a background in Ethics, having taught Ethics to undergraduates at a local college. I understand your concern for proper behavior and procedure by all members of the Metropolitan Council (hereafter MC) and Central Administration (hereafter CA), and we intend to address all grievances that are under our preview.

From the First portions of your complaint, dated May 15 (hereafter referred to as Section 1) we make the following observations and comments:

1. According to our Best Practices, it is generally accepted that reports of violations come generally from “employees, supervisors and managers” [Section VIII] of the Orthodox Church in America. As such, our first question was whether or not someone other than the above mentioned persons has a right to bring charges against a member of the MC, CA or others deemed involved with the CA. Even though you do not fall under the category of a qualified respondent, we have decided to accept and investigate your complaint.
  - 1.1. As to the first and second complaint of Section I, an Ethics Investigation cannot answer as to whether or not Mark Stokoe has disqualified himself from further service on the MC, based on your allegations. You state that he obtained emails “from a third party (perhaps surreptitiously)”, but it begs the question, do you have “proof” that they were obtained surreptitiously? If in fact he was given them, as you allege, without the approval or consent of the authors, should we not be investigating the person who “stole” them in the first place? It seems to us that the ethical violation occurred at their transfer, not their destination, and thus the guilty party would be one who accessed them in the first place, without the consent of the authors. Do you know who this person is? Do you think we should investigate him also?
  - 1.2. While we understand your frustration at his being a member of the MC, we are not empowered to have anyone removed from their position in the OCA. Only his bishop has the right to judge his qualification, or lack thereof, to serve. He was duly elected by the Diocese of the Midwest and placed on the MC with the approval of his bishop. We urge you to contact His Grace, Bishop Mathias, of Chicago for an answer to this question. The fact that Mr. Stokoe publishes a website is not sufficient cause for our

involvement, unless that website is directly connected to his involvement with the MC. On his website, OCANews.com, he states: OCANEWS.org is the website of "Orthodox Christians for Accountability", and is not affiliated with the Orthodox Church in America (OCA)."

- 1.3. In addition, you cite the passage from the *Best Practices*, "shall act with honesty, integrity and openness in all their dealings as representatives of the OCA." You highlighted the section "honesty, integrity and openness", but you failed to highlight the equally important section "in all their dealings with the representatives of the OCA". We feel it is equally important to note that the requirement of virtuous behavior is directed towards their work on the MC, and affiliated areas, and we have no complaint from any member of the MC, Central Administration or related entities, to support your accusation. Therefore, we find that Mr. Stokoe, in so far as he deals with the above said individuals, has acted accordingly in our judgment. While we might agree that his website is a negative for the OCA and not a positive, it has nothing to do with his role as a representative for the Midwest Diocese on the MC.
- 1.4. As to your complaint in Section I concerning his living in accordance with the Gospel, this is also outside our abilities for action. That judgment should only be made by his Father Confessor or bishop, and therefore we direct you to contact and speak with them.
2. Looking at your follow-up letter, dated May 23 (hereafter referred to as Section II), you ask us to consider the publication of certain documents as further evidence of Mr. Stokoe's reckless disregard for ethical behavior. I ask you to refer to section 1.1 above. He has only published what he has been given by a third party we do not know. Once again, it seems this is the person who has behaved without a regard for ethics. Mr. Stokoe is entitled to his opinion, as are we all, about what has been reported.

In conclusion, we find that, while much of what is reported on his own website may be unpopular and even revolting to some, it is just that, his own website. It has nothing to do with the MC or his activities associated with said council. If he were to ever publish what was discussed in closed session of the MC, that would have the potential of an ethics violation. To our knowledge, he has never done any such thing.

It seems clear from your communications that you are extremely frustrated with what you consider to be actions unbecoming a member of the MC. The duty of our Ethics Committee is to find the facts in a given complaint and test them for compliance with Best Practices, a duty-based guide for ethical behavior. Your complaint seems more founded in virtue-based ethics, which lies more in the control of the hierarchs than with us. We truly want to see a just solution to your issues, but we feel that we are not the proper body for that justice. We implore you to offer your most excellent assessment to His Grace, Bishop Mathias, as he is better equipped to answer your complaint.

No one wants to see our hierarchs or anyone in the MC or CA cast in a bad light, but sometimes that is the cross we are asked to bear. In the arena of free speech, much of what occurs may not meet our approval, but what is the alternative? To silence all those with whom we disagree? Free will and free speech are foundational to a free society and God has given us this, the most free of all societies ever imagined. It is often a blessing and sometimes a curse, but it is always better than its alternative.

May God continue to bless you and your family in all your endeavors.

Fr. David Mahaffey, Archimandrite Alexander Pihach, Fr. Matthew-Peter Butrie, and Rosalie Luster.

