



### Protocol No. 34/2025

#### Encyclical on the Establishment of Regional Vicariate Councils

June 6, 2025

To the Reverend Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful Stewards of the Holy Metropolis of Chicago:

Beloved in the Lord,  
Grace and peace be with you in the name of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ.

With deep gratitude to God and a sense of pastoral clarity I write to you regarding my desire to institute Regional Vicariate Councils across the Metropolis of Chicago by September 1, 2025. God-willing, these councils will mark a significant step forward in our collective effort to become a more unified, vibrant, and mission-oriented Church.

It is especially meaningful that this encyclical follows the Feast of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea. This event laid the foundations for a conciliar and collaborative Church—one that could respond to emerging challenges with clarity, unity, and faithfulness to Christ. The council was pivotal in the growth of the Church, offering new structures through which the Gospel could be proclaimed more effectively across the known world.

#### **Ministry Happens Locally—But Not in Isolation**

From the early days of Christianity, ministry and growth in the Church have occurred at the local level—in the parish communities where the faithful gather to worship, serve, and bear witness to Christ. While the bishop inspires, teaches, and encourages, the real fruit of the Gospel is planted and nurtured in our local churches. No vision, no matter how bold or beautiful, can flourish unless it is embraced and enacted where people live, pray, and serve each day.

At the same time, the people on the ground—our local clergy and lay leaders—have the clearest understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and spiritual conditions in their regions. They know the terrain, the faithful, the neighborhoods, and the needs. This local insight is indispensable to the larger work of the Church.

## **Oversight, Responsibility, and Shared Vision**

As your Metropolitan and ἐπίσκοπος (epískopos)—a word found in the Scriptures meaning “overseer” (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1–2)—I have been entrusted with the spiritual oversight of the entire Metropolis. This is both a profound responsibility and a sacred privilege. And yet, as one person, it is impossible to simultaneously walk in every community or see every individual tree while tending the whole forest. This is where the structure of the Church reveals its wisdom: through our clergy and lay leaders across our parishes, the Metropolis extends its reach and deepens its care.

The establishment of Regional Vicariate Councils reflects this shared responsibility. It is an acknowledgment that your insights and your service are not only needed—they are essential. You are not simply “participants” in a program; you are **partners** in the ministry of the Church.

## **An Ecclesial Model Rooted in Conciliarity**

This initiative is not a modern invention or corporate strategy. It is a natural and ecclesiastical structure, grounded in the life and tradition of the Orthodox Church. From the apostolic era, the Church has embraced conciliarity—the sacred practice of discerning truth and guiding the faithful through collaborative leadership. This conciliar spirit is not only exercised among hierarchs, but also between clergy and laity, and among all who labor in Christ's vineyard.

The Regional Vicariate Councils embody this conciliar vision. They offer a space where priests and lay leaders from neighboring parishes can gather, reflect, support one another, and shape the life of the Church together under the pastoral guidance of the Vicar, who represents the Metropolitan.

## **A Structure in Harmony with the Archdiocese**

The establishment of Regional Vicariate Councils is not only rooted in the ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church, but also fully consistent with the Charter and the Uniform Parish Regulations of our Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. These documents affirm the collaborative nature of Church life and the importance of lay participation, conciliar governance, and local ministry.

While these Councils do not possess executive authority over parishes, they function as advisory and collaborative bodies that support the pastoral leadership of the Regional Vicar and the overall direction of the Metropolis. Their purpose is not to create an additional layer of governance, but to enhance unity, communication, and shared responsibility in a way that reflects the best practices encouraged by our Archdiocese.

## **A Unified Body, Acting In Love**

Through these councils, we will:

1. Share best practices and strengthen communication.
2. Identify and mentor future clergy and lay leaders.
3. Offer mutual support, especially to struggling parishes.
4. Promote unity and growth while maintaining local distinctiveness.
5. Build a Church that is both accountable and generous in spirit.

This structure allows us to act more deliberately as one body, with many members, each playing a vital role. As Saint Paul reminds us, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:26–27).

## **Your Participation Is Needed**

I call upon each of our parishes to participate fully and joyfully in the life of the Vicariate Councils. I ask our clergy to offer their wisdom and time, and our lay leaders to offer their gifts and perspectives. In doing so, we strengthen not only our local communities, but also our collective witness to Christ across the Midwest.

Let us walk this path together—clergy and laity, parish and Metropolis—so that the Church entrusted to us may grow in holiness, in service, and in love.

With paternal love in the Risen Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Metropolitan Nathanael". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of "Metropolitan" being a large, stylized "M".

† NATHANAEL  
Metropolitan of Chicago



### Structure and Function of Regional Vicariate Councils

#### Introduction and Purpose

A Regional Vicariate Council (“Vicariate Council”) serves as a vital advisory body to the regional Vicar, supporting his ministry by advancing the mission, vision, and strategic priorities of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago. Vicariate Councils work closely with the Vicar General, who receives oversight and direction from the Chancellor.

Each Vicariate Council encourages collaboration among the parishes of its region, helping them to share resources, solve problems jointly, learn from one another, and pursue opportunities that enrich the Church’s witness and vitality. This effort is rooted in the overarching mission of our Metropolis: *to receive and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the Orthodox Christian Church through liturgical life, personal spiritual discipline, education, philanthropy, and loving service to all.*

By facilitating this local collaboration, Vicariate Councils bring to life the aspirations of our Metropolis’ Five-Year Vision. That vision calls us to become a Christ-centered, joyful, and vibrant community that lovingly serves, educates, and welcomes all people. Vicariate Councils help us grow the Church organically, cultivate capable leaders, foster accountability, and nurture a culture of generosity and service.

These councils are not isolated or experimental projects; they are a strategic and necessary component of our ongoing development as a healthy, united, and mission-driven Metropolis. Through them, the Church becomes more responsive, accessible, and faithful in every corner of the Midwest.

#### Mission

To extend the reach of the Holy Metropolis of Chicago regionally by:

- Strengthening communication and unity among parishes in each vicariate.
- Identifying and developing future clergy and lay leaders.
- Sharing effective practices to enrich parish life.
- Supporting renewal efforts, especially in struggling or underserved communities.
- Advancing the growth and evangelistic witness of the Orthodox Church in the Midwest.

## Meeting Frequency

Vicariate Councils shall convene no fewer than once per quarter. Additional meetings may be scheduled as necessary by the Regional Vicar or upon request by the Council.

## Term Limits

Each member of a Vicariate Council may serve up to **three consecutive two-year terms**. Terms commence on **September 1** and conclude on **August 31**.

With the Metropolitan's blessing, a member may be granted **one additional two-year term**, not to exceed **four consecutive terms** in total.

## Membership Requirements

### Eligibility Criteria:

- All **lay members** must complete an **annual religious literacy course as defined by the Metropolis**.
- All **lay and clergy members** must complete the **Archdiocesan Youth Protection Training** and a **background check**.
- All **lay and clergy members** must actively contribute to their parish's **stewardship or tithing program** and to the **Annual Vision Campaign of the Metropolis**.
- It is strongly recommended that lay members have **previous experience on a Parish Council**.

## Council Composition

- **Regional Vicar** (President)
- **Presiding Priest** of each parish in the vicariate
- **One lay representative** from each parish in the regional vicariate

### Officers:

- **President:** Regional Vicar (appointed by the Metropolitan)
- **Vice President:** Lay member (appointed by the Metropolitan)
- **Secretary:** Lay member elected by the Vicariate Council

## Lay Member Selection Process

By **Monday, July 28<sup>th</sup>** each **Presiding Priest** shall recommend at least **two qualified lay parishioners** from his parish to his **Vicar**, who will forward these nominations to the **Vicar General** by **Friday August 1<sup>st</sup>**. The Vicar General will present the nomination packets of all candidates to **the Metropolitan** for his review and appointment.

Each nomination packet must include:

1. A **brief biography** of the candidate
2. A **letter of support** from the Presiding Priest explaining his recommendation
3. A **personal statement** from the candidate describing their desire and vision for serving on the Vicariate Council

The Metropolitan will appoint **one lay member** from each parish. If a parish fails to submit a nomination, or if its candidates are deemed unsuitable, the Metropolitan may appoint an additional member from another parish within the region.

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*Vicariate Councils embody the spirit of mutual ministry that unites our parishes. Through them, we express our collective commitment to a Church that is vibrant, generous, and anchored in Christ's love—reaching faithfully into every community of the Midwest.*