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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****The Orthodox Church in America's Office of Pastoral Life Awarded \$1.25 Million Grant to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders**

By the Grace of God, the Orthodox Church in America's (OCA) Office of Pastoral Life (OPL) is thrilled to announce a \$1.25 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. that will better equip clergy and their families to face economic challenges that can persist throughout their careers.

OPL supports clergy as they fulfill their vocation of pastoral service by offering resources that promote personal, spiritual, and educational growth and health. Through workshops, seminars, retreats and Thriving in Ministry peer learning groups, OPL seeks to equip clergy, clergy wives and clergy families with resources and tools to maintain and enhance their ministries so that they may better lead the faithful across North America.

The OCA is one of 13 organizations to receive grants through the fourth phase of Lilly Endowment's National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. The aim of the initiative is to assist select denominations and their agencies, foundations, and other ministry-serving organizations to address and alleviate economic challenges that hinder the ability of pastors to lead congregations effectively.

"Clergy health and economic stability are perennial challenges facing our Church," says His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon. "Now more than ever, it is crucial to renew our efforts to foster the physical, spiritual and emotional health of our clergy so that our parishes and institutions will be guided by pastors who can fulfill the Apostolic work of the Church."

OPL Director Fr. Nicholas Solak added, "This initiative provides a promising opportunity for our clergy and the communities they serve. Strengthening the financial stability of our clergy is essential for them to dedicate themselves fully to their pastoral responsibilities, free from the stress of economic uncertainty. The Office of Pastoral Life is committed to utilizing these funds to establish a sustainable and supportive financial foundation for our clergy and their families. We are excited to announce that this new program will be called the Financial Health Initiative (FHI). A portion of this grant includes a matching fund requirement, offering the faithful a chance to contribute to and support this vital work."

This grant and its activities result from an extensive research and planning process conducted by OPL. As part of this process, focus groups were conducted and specialized surveys were sent to more than 1,000 OCA

priests, priests' wives, parish lay leaders, and bishops. The results clearly show that a positive transformation throughout the Church's culture can occur by supporting clergy during three specific arcs of their ministries: early, middle and final season of their ministries. OPL will tailor specific financial literacy training, coaching, and direct support to clergy who are at each of these phases. It is our hope that this grant will strengthen pastoral vocations, build responsible stewardship, and provide an opportunity for the faithful to express gratitude for the sacrifices of clergy families.

In the coming months, OPL staff will work with hierarchs, diocesan chancellors, and key lay leaders to promote the Financial Health Initiative (FHI) grant activities so that all eligible OCA clergy and their families can participate. To support this grant, and the broader work of OPL, a new website was recently launched, <https://opl.oca.org>, where anyone interested can learn more about OPL's goals, mission, and activities.