



GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY  
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INCORPORATED  
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΤΑ ΝΟΤΙΑΣ ΑΥΣΤΡΑΛΙΑΣ

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

### Introduction

The subject of reunification with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia (GOAA) has been a contentious issue amongst the community for over six decades. South Australia remains the only state where such a wide-spread division still exists, with the exception of the small, independent Communities of St Albans (Vic) and Newcastle (NSW).

For the past two years, the Greek Orthodox Community of South Australia (GOCSA) Administrative Council has endeavored to create awareness and transparency around the issues severely impacting our community from an ecclesiastical perspective, and has provided various platforms to provide an opportunity for community members to express and discuss their concerns.

In June 2023, the Administrative Council hosted a forum at the Olympic Hall and discussed the ecclesiastical challenges we face, ways to protect the assets of our community, and also discussed some of the constitutional obstacles that are attached to some of these challenges.

In November 2023, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, and His Grace Bishop Silouan of Adelaide made an historic visit to the Olympic Hall, where they spent time taking questions from our members and engaged in fruitful discussion about the prospect of reunification between our community and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia.

Following the meet and greet, His Eminence wrote to GOCSA summarizing 7 key-points that were discussed at the meeting. A copy of the correspondence is attached to the proposed Deed for your reference.

The Extraordinary General Meeting has been called by the Administrative Council with a core purpose to determine whether the Community wishes to enter into a Deed of Agreement with the GOAA, which in turn will provide the GOCSA Churches with spiritual and ecclesiastical coverage by the GOAA, under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

## **Background**

At present, ecclesiastical coverage is provided by the **Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of America and Australia (AGOCOA)**, and has been since it was officially registered in 1970. Prior to the division, the GOCSA was receiving ecclesiastical and spiritual coverage through the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate under the umbrella of the Metropolis of Australia and New Zealand (which later became the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia).

In March 1924, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople founded the first Metropolis of Australia and New Zealand, with the first Metropolitan being Christophoros Knitis. The foundation stone of the original Greek Orthodox Church of Archangels Michael and Gabriel was laid in 1936 by then Metropolitan Timotheos Evangelidis and Archimandrite Germanos Heliou; the first Greek Orthodox Church in Adelaide's central business district.

The GOCSA officially broke away from the Archdiocese in June 1960 after several disagreements and, since 1970 has been an independent Community receiving ecclesiastical services from the Autocephalous Church (AGOCOA).

Although the religious services provided by the Autocephalous Church are recognised by the Australian Government (being a recognised religious denomination for the purposes of the Marriage Act), the sacraments provided to the Community are not recognised by any mainstream Orthodox Church as they remain outside of the canonical church.

Consequently, the Autocephalous Church has been operating without any spiritual Head (such as a Bishop and/or Archbishop) and has faced consistent difficulties in sourcing Priests to provide services to our Community.

## **Overall objective**

The overall objective of the proposed resolutions, Constitutional Articles and Deed are to:

- maintain ownership, control and members' decision-making processes as to the real estate assets of GOCSA, including its Churches, without external restriction;
- resign GOCSA's membership of the Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of America and Australia;
- follow and conform with a specific interpretation of "Orthodox Faith" and "Greek Orthodox Faith" which is consistent with the interpretation of such faith by the GOAA;

- thereby facilitating the ongoing provision of ecclesiastical and spiritual coverage for GOCSA by the GOAA, including:
  - recognising historical sacraments such as baptisms and marriages which were previously undertaken by the Autocephalous Church; and
  - appointing clergy to GOCSA's churches, whilst working in good faith as to whether clergy presently appointed by GOCSA will be appointed as clergy of the Archdiocese on a case by case basis;

and on other terms which are set out in more detail in the proposed Deed.

The **overall intent** of the proposed resolutions, Constitutional Articles and Deed are to achieve those objective in a way that:

1. ensures that decision-making processes remain in the hands of the financial members of GOCSA, rather than only in the Administrative Council;
2. is consistent with Article 2A of GOCSA's Constitution, primarily by ensuring that GOCSA's internal governance and management, and decision-making are controlled and maintained by GOCSA; and
3. preserves all existing constitutional requirements, whilst adding more protection in respect of GOCSA's assets;

on the basis that the approval thresholds for the proposed resolutions:

- are deliberately high, where matters of faith are affected, so as to ensure that the wishes of the vast majority of the membership of GOCSA are respected; and
- are no less than the constitutional requirements where additional protections are proposed.

### **Motion 1**

The Constitution is presently silent as to the decision making process regarding the sale and transfer of GOCSA's assets, including its churches. The proposed Articles 29 to 32 are designed to ensure the assets of GOCSA are not sold or transferred unless:

- it is in the best interests of GOCSA, and receives fair, market value;
- it is approved by at least 75% of the financial members present, at a meeting called for that purpose in accordance with the Constitution; and
- quarantines the proceeds of sale of the assets for (only) the purposes of:
  - GOCSA purchasing other real estate; or
  - maintaining / improving / refurbishing existing real estate assets owned by GOCSA - or repaying any associated loans (if they exist in the future);

without affecting the (already existing) ability of GOCSA to charge or mortgage its real estate assets.

Proposed Article 33 is designed to ensure that any alterations to the operations of GOCSA's churches is a decision requiring approval by at least 75% the financial members of GOCSA at a general meeting, rather than a decision of only the Administrative Council.

## **Motion 2**

It is proposed that the ecclesiastical and spiritual coverage will be provided to our Community Churches and its members by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, rather than by the Autocephalous Church.

The proposed Deed ensures that:

- the **independence** of decision-making processes of GOCSA is preserved at all times;
- the Archdiocese **will not** close any of GOCSA's churches;
- the Archdiocese **will recognise past sacraments** upon application and at *no charge*;
- the Archdiocese **will not request any annual contributions** from the community's churches; and
- the Archdiocese **will not seek any transfer of titles** or deeds; GOCSA will **retain legal ownership and control** of GOCSA's churches.

It follows that:

- GOCSA will resign its membership of the Autocephalous Church;
- GOCSA will enter into a Deed with the Archdiocese in the form enclosed with this Notice, consistent with the matters set out above;
- any proposal to exit the Deed must receive approval by 75% of of the financial members of GOCSA present at a general meeting called for that purpose;
- in order to give confidence to both parties of the intention to keep churches operating in a similar manner, it is proposed that:
  - GOCSA will not sell or otherwise change the use of the Association's Churches for a period of five years.
  - such decisions thereafter will always be in control of the financial members of the GOCSA.

### **Motion 3**

This motion has been drafted to reflect Article 2B of GOCSA's Constitution, which gives the power to the financial members of the Community to determine, from time to time, the interpretation of "Orthodox Faith" and the "Greek Orthodox Faith" which they wish to adopt.

The motion is accordingly intended to adopt the interpretation which is consistent with that of the Archdiocese and other Churches under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The motion further proposes that any future change to that interpretation will require approval by at least 75% of the financial members present at a general meeting called for that purpose.

### **Concluding remarks**

The proposed resolutions will help to achieve the following

- a. **Preserve Community independence and protect assets:** the proposed articles will help safeguard the organisation's independence and strengthen property rights;
  - b. **Bridge the divide:** heal the division between the GOCSA and the GOAA, whilst strengthening the South Australian Greek diaspora; and
  - c. **Secure Ecclesiastical and Spiritual coverage:** provide the GOCSA Churches with canonical, ecclesiastical coverage under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, administered through the GOAA.
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