July 28, 2015
St. Irene of the Monastery of Chrysovalantou

Reverend Fathers and esteemed Metropolis and Parish Council members of the Holy
and God-Protected Metropolis of Pittsburgh,

Many of our communities are beset by uncertainty in the ability to carry out the work of
God in their vineyards. Some parishes face the effects of demographic and economic
shift, others see youth drifting away from the life of the Church, and still others see a
movement away from strict adherence to Christian life. Many of our Church leaders,
both clergy and lay, face additional challenges in the management of the affairs of the
parishes, with shortages and aging of volunteers, the challenges of putting on festivals,
and the maintaining and increasing of stewardship despite the socio-economic
challenges.

One response to these challenges is to seek forms of fundraising that will allow the
parish’s operations to continue unimpeded, or better, grow. We know that our
communities need adequate financial resources in order to fund the personnel and
programs necessary to tend to the flock, and to maintain the vibrant Church facilities
that serve as a focal point for so many occasions of worship, celebration, comfort, and
joy. Various parishes in past years employed alternative fundraising activities to
supplement the traditional stewardship/dues drives and festivals. Those years saw a
slew of activities that involved games of chance, that is to say “gambling,” as a means to
raising funds for Church activities and budgets.

Our states and governments rightly define as “gambling” any activity that involves
three key elements: Consideration, the buy-in (payment) of the participants in order to be
eligible; Reward, the offering of a prize; and Chance, the awarding of said prize in whole
or in part by lot, chance, or the happening of an event over which the person taking the
risk (participants) has no control. The above definition of “gambling” covers many
activities that parishes have encouraged in the past: bingo, raffles, “Chinese auctions,”
door-prize raffles, casino games, etc. By engaging in acts of gambling, we seek easy
ways to get other people (including, and to some degree especially, non-parishioners) to
take care of our Churches, not as acts of goodness or stewardship, but rather because of
the opportunity to win something.

Often we try to justify “charity gambling,” saying that “It is good, for the Church,” or,
“People don’t really expect prizes – it’s essentially a donation.” The intentions may be
good, but that isn’t sufficient to encourage an activity that contradicts the spirit of
Christian Stewardship. As the Church of Christ, collectively acting as His Body and His ambassadors to the world, we must hold ourselves to a high standard of conduct, not encouraging vice or going out of our way to tempt our brethren (especially within our houses of worship), but rather assisting our fellow pilgrims on the spiritual odyssey to avoid the siren song and steer clear of the rocks.

Yes, other Metropolises allow raffle-style fundraisers. But our Metropolis has taken the justified stand that raffles, as gambling, are not fit for fundraising in the Church, a stand which was not only codified over 30 years ago by my predecessor, the now retired Metropolitan Maximos, but was supported by our Metropolis Council, made up of clergy and laymen from across the Metropolis, and the Clergy-Laity Assembly, a voting body consisting of clergy and lay representatives from each parish.

Therefore, considering the above principles of Christian life and the historic stand of our Metropolis, His Eminence has reaffirmed that games of chance, including raffles, raffle-style activities, and other forms of gambling, are not sanctioned within the Metropolis of Pittsburgh. Our parishes and parish organizations (Philoptochos, GOYA, etc.) are not to engage in such activities or attempt to benefit from the proceeds of gambling held by others.

You may feel that your parish engaging in these activities does not affect any others. However, your activities do not go unnoticed, scandalizing your brothers and sisters who strive for a better way. One parish pursuing prohibited fundraisers affects its neighbors and undermines the work toward proper Christian Stewardship by their own community as well as others.

This prohibition is not maintained with a “blind eye” toward the challenges facing many of our parishes within the Metropolis when it comes to raising the necessary funds for the operation of our Church communities. We are aware of the needs and constraints that the communities face, and are ready to face them head-on. We encourage you to build up the proper sense of Orthodox Stewardship within your parishes; we support your efforts to both fund-raise and extend hospitality through your parish festivals; we are willing to collaborate with you to find creative non-gambling fundraisers for your parishes.

We also encourage you to take advantage of the resources available through our Metropolis and Archdiocesan Ministries. Our Metropolis Council and its Stewardship Committee stand at the ready to assist you in your endeavors. The Stewardship co-chairs, Rev. Fr. Theodore Petrides of Stroudsburg and Archon Steve Poulos of Canton, have pledged the full support of their committee of dedicated volunteers to help. The Archdiocesan Department of Stewardship, Mission, and Evangelism has many
wonderful ideas and resources available for your community. Please utilize their talents and creativity by contacting them.

Your servant in His vineyard,

+ Fr. George S. Callos
Chancellor