

## Diocese of Great Britain and Western Europe

# Canonical Constitution

*As Approved by the Holy Synod, 24th February / 9th March 2021, with revisions;  
submitted for ratification by the Diocesan Assembly, 2023.*

## I. Introduction

1. The Diocese of Great Britain and Western Europe is a Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), established by resolution No. 362 of His Holiness St Tikhon the Confessor, the Most Holy Synod and the Highest Church Sobor dated 7 / 20 November 1920; and whose autonomous status was confirmed in the Act of Canonical Communion of 4 / 17 May 2007 as ‘a self-governing part of the Local Russian Orthodox Church’ that is ‘independent in pastoral, educational, administrative, management, property, and civil matters, existing at the same time in canonical unity with the Fullness of the Russian Orthodox Church.’ It is in all things governed by the Statutes of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, confirmed by the Council of Bishops (1956 and 1964), as rightly interpreted and implemented by the ROCOR Holy Synod.<sup>1</sup> Its highest administrative reference point is the Holy Synod of Bishops of the ROCOR under the presidency of its duly-elected and consecrated Primate (First Hierarch), headquartered at the Synodal Cathedral and Residence in Manhattan, New York, in the USA.

2. The boundaries of the Diocese are established by the Sobor of Bishops,<sup>2</sup> which, at its meeting at the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Mother of God in London on 7 / 20 September 2018, resolved to incorporate and merge all the canonical territories of the formerly-separate Diocese of Western Europe and Diocese of Great Britain and Ireland into the present Diocese of Great Britain and Western Europe. The Diocese is governed by a Ruling Bishop appointed by the Sobor of Bishops, with such a title and rank as is determined by that body.<sup>3</sup> As resolved by the Synod of Bishops at its meeting in San Francisco on 20 June / 3 July 2019, the Ruling Bishop shall govern the Diocese from the principal *cathedra* of London.

3. While its canonical jurisdiction covers all the territories described above, the Diocese shall be registered in Law in the United Kingdom, as a suitable Charitable Corporation or comparable entity according to UK Law.<sup>4</sup> A separate legal constitution or articles of incorporation, as may be required by such law, shall be drafted and updated, as required, by the Diocesan Council, for ratification by the Diocesan Assembly. It may, at the direction of the Ruling Bishop in consultation with the Diocesan Council, also establish legal entities in

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<sup>1</sup> See the *Statutes of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia* (1956, 1964), I.1, 4; and III.29.h, i, v, etc. All references in the present Constitution are to this document unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, II.11.f.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, II.11.g.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, V.48.

its name (e.g. charities, trusts, associations) in the other countries of its canonical territory, or incorporate or re-purpose existing such entities inherited from previous diocesan structures, for integration into the Diocese's functioning in those places.<sup>5</sup>

4. The task of the Diocese is the spiritual nourishment of the Russian Orthodox flock within its boundaries, independent of nationality; and in particular, the preservation and strengthening in the souls of the faithful flock, of the purity and wholeness of the Holy Orthodox Faith; and the encouragement of the devotion of the flock, dispersed throughout the Diocese, to the God-preserved Mother Church.<sup>6</sup>

5. The Diocese, in its inner life and administration, is guided by Holy Scripture and Tradition, by the Holy Canons and Church laws, the pious customs of Russian Orthodoxy and, in particular, by the regulations, resolutions and declarations of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.<sup>7</sup>

## **II. Diocesan Administration**

6. As stated in the Statutes of the Church Abroad, 'The Diocesan Bishop, as the head of a local church (the Diocese), enjoys, by divine ordinance, the complete fullness of episcopal power, that is to teach, to perform Divine Services, to administer a court and give judgements within the boundaries of his Diocese.'<sup>8</sup> The Diocesan Bishop possesses the right of initiative and direct leadership in all aspects of the life of the Diocese of Great Britain and Western Europe, in conformity with the Statutes of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.<sup>9</sup>

7. The Diocesan Bishop shall reside within the boundaries of the Diocese.<sup>10</sup> His name shall be commemorated in all Divine Services in all churches and monasteries of the Diocese immediately after the commemoration of the First Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.<sup>11</sup> One or more Vicar Bishops may be appointed to be 'the closest assistant to the Diocesan Bishop', by determination of the Sobor of Bishops of the ROCOR, subject to the normal statutes concerning Vicar Bishops.<sup>12</sup> Such Vicar Bishops are to be commemorated in the church of their appointment after the name of the Ruling Bishop, and in other churches of the Diocese when the Vicar Bishop is present within for Divine Services.

8. The following office-holders shall assist the Diocesan Bishop in the administration of the

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<sup>5</sup> In such cases, the practical structures of the oversight and operation of such legal entities shall be outlined in a relevant Diocesan Decree, drafted in accordance with local civil legislation and requirements.

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*, I.3.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, I.4.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, V.45.

<sup>9</sup> As enumerated extensively, but not exclusively, in *ibid.*, V.47-57.

<sup>10</sup> See *ibid.*, V.49 note.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, V.55.

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, VIII.

Diocese and be under his direct supervision:<sup>13</sup>

1. a) The Vicar Bishop(s)
2. b) The Diocesan Chancellor
3. c) The Diocesan Assembly
4. d) The Diocesan Council
5. e) The Regional Councils
6. f) The Trustees of the Diocese
7. g) Rectors of Churches and Monasteries

### **III. The Diocesan Assembly**

9. The Assembly of the Diocese shall take its terms of reference from the Statutes of the ROCOR, VI.58–66. As there indicated, it shall be presided over by the Diocesan Bishop, or in his absence, a Vicar Bishop or an appointed deputy in the rank of Priest chosen by the Bishop or the Diocesan Assembly, depending on the circumstances. The Diocesan Assembly shall normally have a regular meeting every three years, while an extraordinary Assembly can be called as required, with the customary blessing of the Church Hierarchy. Participation in the Assembly by electronic means (e.g. videoconferencing), rather than in person, shall not be normative, but may be permitted at the sole discretion of the Ruling Bishop, and only when so announced by him.

10. The Assembly may hear reports from across the Diocese; consider financial matters, missionary endeavours and religious education; and shall consider other matters brought to its attention by the Diocesan Bishop.<sup>14</sup> Further, the Diocesan Assembly chooses members of the Diocesan Council and the Diocesan Auditing Committee from suitable candidates who are themselves members of the Assembly with a blessing to stand, or who are otherwise blessed by the Diocesan Bishop to be considered as candidates.<sup>15</sup>

11. Matters in the Diocesan Assembly are decided by a simple majority with the exception of the purchase or disposal of real estate which requires a two-thirds majority.<sup>16</sup> No decisions taken by the Diocesan Assembly are final or come into force until confirmed by the Diocesan Bishop.<sup>17</sup> Disagreements not resolved during appointed sessions of the Assembly are subject to the procedures for appeals outlined in the ROCOR Statutes VI.65.

### **IV. The Diocesan Council**

12. The Diocesan Council, which is ‘a body permanently under the presidency and direct

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, V.56, modified here based on local circumstances.

<sup>14</sup> See *ibid.*, VI.62.

<sup>15</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, VI.62.a; and VI.59, 60.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, VI.63.

<sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*, VI.64.

guidance of the Diocesan Bishop,<sup>18</sup> exists to advise the Diocesan Bishop on important matters of a chiefly administrative nature, including the Diocese's registration in law, maintenance of its central finances, and the effective carrying out of its central decrees. It is appointed by the Diocesan Assembly for a period of normally three years,<sup>19</sup> though other members may be added to its number by direct invitation of the Diocesan Bishop. It shall normally consist of four to six elected members, of whom no less than half shall be of the rank of Priest, and all 'of sufficient education and of sufficient piety and devotion to the Church.'<sup>20</sup>

13. The President of the Diocesan Council is the Diocesan Bishop. He may appoint a deputy who may be a Vicar Bishop or a nominated member of Council who is of priestly rank. The President of the Diocesan Council shall appoint a Secretary to record the minutes of meetings, and a Treasurer or financial officer to conduct financial affairs and report on financial matters (working together with the Trustees on those financial matters required by law to be undertaken directly by them<sup>21</sup>). One member of the Diocesan Council shall be designated as a Safeguarding Officer for the protection of children and vulnerable adults. The Diocesan Council shall be called together on a regular basis during its term of office, between the triennial Diocesan Assemblies.

14. The Diocesan Council shall consider matters put before it by the Diocesan Bishop, with terms of reference outlined in the ROCOR Statutes VII.77-80; however, the chiefly pastoral, pedagogical, missionary and local terms of reference indicated there shall normally be delegated instead to the Regional Councils (see below), except when for reasons of necessary central oversight these are retained or reclaimed by the Diocesan Council.

15. As an entity whose official documents are subject to review by external bodies as part of the Diocese's ongoing registration in UK Law, the Diocesan Council shall conduct its official business and keep its official records in English.

## **V. Regional Councils**

16. As the Diocese encompasses two broad geographical regions (Continental Western Europe, and the British Isles), with differing regional needs as well as legal and civil frameworks, a Regional Council shall exist for each of these general internal territories. It shall be the work of the two Regional Councils to advise the Diocesan Bishop on particular matters relevant to these areas, and the Regional Councils shall be the main venues of ongoing pastoral reflection regarding Diocesan life at the local level.

17. The Regional Councils shall take as their terms of reference the chiefly pastoral, pedagogical, missionary and local matters outlined in the ROCOR Statutes VI.77,<sup>22</sup> but shall

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<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, VII.67.

<sup>19</sup> See *ibid.*, VI.62a; VII.73.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*, VII.68, 73.

<sup>21</sup> See below, §28.

<sup>22</sup> Especially, that is, VII.77.a, b, c, e, f, g, and k.

not normally occupy themselves with matters of central Diocesan finance or legal affairs, which shall remain the purview of the Diocesan Council. To the terms of reference indicated, the Regional Councils shall also consider missionary labours and opportunities, the organisation of pilgrimages and the visitations of holy icons and relics, educational works, local training, regional safeguarding and all such matters pertinent to the particularly local context.

18. As consultative bodies, the Regional Councils shall not take decisions that touch upon the legal situation of the Diocese; but they may make recommendations of the same for consideration by the Diocesan Council or Assembly.

19. The President of each of the two Regional Councils is the Diocesan Bishop. He may appoint a deputy who may be a Vicar Bishop or a nominated member of Council who is of priestly rank; and he shall likewise appoint a Secretary of each Regional Council to record the minutes of its meetings. Members of the two Regional Councils are appointed by the Diocesan Bishop, either by his own determination or upon recommendation by any member in good standing of the Diocesan Assembly, appointed for their particular expertise, wisdom or knowledge. Each council shall normally consist of at least four to six members, apart from the President, of whom at least half shall normally be members of the Clergy.

## **VI. The Diocesan Chancellery**

20. The Diocesan Bishop shall have a Chancellery, to see to matters of organisation and practical administration of Diocesan affairs on a day-to-day basis, as well as to be a point of central contact and communication with and from the Diocese.<sup>23</sup> The Diocesan Bishop shall appoint a Chancellor to oversee this office and its works, and thus assist the Bishop in the administration of the Diocese. The Chancellery shall keep records of the Diocesan clergy and parishes; assist in the day-to-day financial operations of the Diocese under the direction of the Diocesan Treasurer; coordinate the correspondence and travels of the Hierarchy; and ensure that Diocesan correspondence is dealt with in a timely manner. The Diocesan Chancellor shall serve on the Diocesan Council, and may deputise for the Diocesan Bishop when instructed to do so by him.

## **VII. The Diocesan Spiritual Court**

21. The Diocesan Bishop shall appoint the President of the Diocesan Spiritual Court, while the remaining two or more members (and alternates) shall be nominated by the Diocesan Council and confirmed in their position by the Diocesan Bishop for three-year appointments; in all cases, members of the Court must be members of the clergy at least of the rank of Priest, selected for their experience and demonstrated sobriety of judgement.<sup>24</sup> The Court's terms of reference are described in the *Regulations on the Ecclesiastical Court of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia* (1956), I.B.5-11 and C.17-E.67.

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<sup>23</sup> See *ibid.*, V.49.

<sup>24</sup> See *Regulations on the Ecclesiastical Court of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia* (1956), I.C.17, 18.

22. Given the expanse of geography involved, the Diocesan Bishop may grant a blessing for certain works of the Diocesan Spiritual Court to be carried out electronically or by correspondence. In such cases the terms and protocols of such functioning shall be specified in a relevant Diocesan Decree.

## **VIII. The Diocesan Auditing Committee**

23. The Diocesan Auditing Committee shall be appointed by the Diocesan Assembly every three years.<sup>25</sup> It shall have as its principal role to ensure that the accounts of the Diocese are kept and presented, by the Diocesan Treasurer, accurately and faithfully and in all ways in accordance with the *Decree of the Holy Sobor of the Russian Orthodox Church on Church Property and Finances* (1918) and the *Statutes of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia*, VI.62.a, c, d, e, f, i; 72; and 77.i, j. They shall write an annual report to be received and recorded by Diocesan Council, and their reports shall be reviewed by the Diocesan Assembly.

## **IX. Deaneries**

24. Should the Diocese's growth or activities so warrant, the Diocesan Bishop may elect to group several parishes in a given area into one or more Deaneries, appointing in each Deanery one of the Rectors of the local parishes as Dean.<sup>26</sup> Such Deaneries shall serve to provide for the extended local administration and care of regions of great activity, as well as regions where regular direct contact with the Diocesan Bishop may for whatever reason be difficult. When so established, Diocesan Deaneries are constituted and administrated according to the *Regulations for Deaneries and Deans* (1959) of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

25. Deans, once appointed by the Diocesan Bishop, must be a conduit for his concern for the clergy, the parishes and their places of worship, the ordering of Divine Services, the development of parish life including their financial administration, the pastoral care of the clergy in the Deanery, and their families; and shall undertake all other matters required of them within canonical norms, at the discretion and personal direction of the Diocesan Bishop. The Bishop may also require the Dean or other senior clergy to investigate matters on his behalf.<sup>27</sup>

## **X. Trustees**

26. According to the requirements of its registration in UK Law (see above, I.3), legal Trustees may be required by the Charity Commissioners of England and Wales, in accordance with current charitable Law or similar requirements. In such cases, Trustees will normally be kept to the minimum number required by law, appointed by the Diocesan Bishop and

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<sup>25</sup> See ROCOR Statutes, VI.62.a.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, V.47.e; and *Regulations for Deaneries and Deans* (1959) in its entirety.

<sup>27</sup> On all these matters, see *Regulations for Deaneries and Deans*, 1-7.

confirmed by the Diocesan Council, unless other requirements for appointment are put forward by the relevant civil authorities, in which case these will be applied by the Bishop and Diocesan Council as appropriate.

27. The responsibilities of the Trustees shall be the required maintenance of the Diocese's legal registration and standing, outlined in required articles of incorporation or other mandated documents (see above, I.3), but they shall not otherwise act or take decisions in the realms of responsibility assigned to the Diocesan Council or other entities described in the present Constitution.

28. Where certain financial matters are required by the relevant civil authorities to be managed by the Trustees of the Charity, these shall be so managed by them in consultation with the Diocesan Treasurer. Where external audits of financial records are required by Law to be filed with relevant civil commissions as part of the annual registration of the Charity, the Trustees shall be responsible for this filing.

29. Trustees who are not otherwise members of the Diocesan Council will be invited to its meetings, without a vote thereon, when relevant matters are on the agenda for consideration. Trustees who are also elected or appointed members of the Council will have their usual vote thereon.

## **XI. Additional Regulation and Modification**

30. Any areas of Diocesan administration not explicitly covered in this Constitution, are to be determined in accordance with the Statutes and other Synodally-approved governing documents of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, as canonically interpreted by the Ruling Bishop and the Holy Synod.

31. This Constitution may be modified by proposals approved by the Diocesan Assembly and receiving the blessing of both the Diocesan Bishop and Holy Synod; or by direct modification by the Holy Synod made at its or the Diocesan Bishop's request, which will then be presented to the Diocesan Assembly for ratification.

**The End, and Glory Be to God!**

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