

Convert to head Orthodox Church in America: Newest bishop promoted

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Members of the relatively small Orthodox Church in America, frustrated with its scandal-tainted leadership, voted for change last month by promoting the youngest and newest bishop in its ranks.

Bishop Jonah, 49, born James Paffhausen in Chicago, Illinois, will also be the first convert to become the OCA's metropolitan. He converted from the Episcopal Church to Orthodoxy 30 years ago while studying at the University of California, San Diego. Jonah has been an Orthodox priest for more than a dozen years but a bishop for only a few weeks. Elected bishop of Fort Worth and auxiliary bishop of the South on September 4, he was formally consecrated on November 1.

The church body, which has fewer than 30,000 members, is based in Syosset, New York; it was granted autonomy from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1970. With English-language liturgies, the OCA is often seen as the friendliest to converts among Orthodox churches in North America. The former OCA leader, Metropolitan Herman, retired recently following the release of a scathing special investigative report about OCA financial mismanagement.

Mark Stokoe, editor of Orthodox Christians for Accountability, a Web site that tracked the church's administrative crisis, listed seven candidates for metropolitan who had not been "tainted" by the investigative report, including Archbishop Job, who will retire in 2011. Jonah won in the second round of voting in Pittsburgh. He will be installed December 28 at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Washington.

After his election as metropolitan at the OCA's All-American Council, Jonah vowed to be a "servant" to the church. He excited the delegates with his aims of creating Orthodox campus housing facilities at every major university and expanding domestic charitable and health care initiatives. *-Religion News Service*