

NURTURING STRONG INTER-ORTHODOX RELATIONS



MATERIAL IN PREPARATION FOR THE 16TH ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL INTER-ORTHODOX RELATIONS WORKING GROUP, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

The purpose of this “Read-Ahead” is to provide participants in the All American Council (AAC) with the benefit of the initial thinking that has been done to date on this important issue in the life of the Church. It is meant as **STARTING POINT FOR YOUR OWN DISCUSSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS** and does not represent *official* Church positions. Please feel free to add to, modify, take away, correct, or challenge any of the ideas in here. It is through your collective inputs and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we will be able to discern the best path forward in this area for the life of the Church during the next decade.

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1. INTRODUCTION

We may be at a historic point in a move toward greater Orthodoxy unity in North America. In many locations throughout North America, there has been an increasing sense of Orthodoxy unity at the level of the individual bishop, priest, and parishioner. This may be seen in local Pan-Orthodox Clergy Councils as well as in pan-Orthodox outreach efforts such as the International Orthodox Christian Charities, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, and Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve. And now, in preparation for a Great Council, the patriarchs have convened Episcopal Assemblies of all the canonical Orthodox bishops in North America to look at how we could move toward Orthodoxy unity in North America. These efforts are not without their challenges – but all things are possible with God – and we in the OCA are firmly committed to the vision of a fully united territorial and autocephalous Orthodox Church in North America, embracing all Orthodox Christians, with one Synod of Bishops.

This goal, “Nurturing Strong Inter-Orthodox Relationships”, focuses on the actions we can take, both at the local and the episcopal level, to help move us toward such unity. In preparation for your discussions at the upcoming All American Council this read-ahead contains 4 background ‘articles’ on aspects of the move to Orthodoxy unity in North America as well a set of questions for you to reflect on before arriving at the All American Council.

Now, let us move on to the background ‘articles’.

2. ORTHODOXY IN AMERICA: DIASPORA OR CHURCH BY THE VERY REVEREND LEONID KISHKOVSKY

The most common image of Orthodoxy in America is the image of immigrant communities, of parishes and dioceses gathered according to the organizing principle of cultural and linguistic heritages. Often, this is the view of Orthodoxy in America held in the patriarchates and “mother churches” of Europe and the Middle East. Often enough, this is the view of Orthodoxy held by the mass media in the United States and Canada. And it is all-too-common for many Orthodox Christians in America to see themselves in light of the “immigrant image.”

As a result, any definition of Orthodoxy in America built on the “immigrant model” has more in common with sociological interpretations and cultural categories than it does with ecclesiology. This makes the question “Is Orthodoxy in America Diaspora or Church?” a relevant starting point for my paper on the Orthodox understanding of the Church in the American experience.

The historical origins of the Orthodox Church in North America are connected not to immigration but to mission and evangelization. In 1794 missionary monks from Valaam

Monastery arrived on Kodiak Island in Alaska. The mission they inaugurated brought the Gospel of Christ to the native tribes of Alaska. At the center of their endeavor was the evangelization of the Alaskan peoples, and not the dissemination of Russian language and culture. Indeed, at the heart of the missionary approach of the monks from Valaam was a respect for the native cultures and customs and a desire to baptize what was legitimate and valid in the native cultural traditions.

Thus the first dimension of Orthodoxy in America was the apostolic dimension, a genuine missionary impulse to evangelize.

With the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, a new stage in the history of Orthodoxy in North America opened. The American diocese was soon created, and the bishop for North America was no longer an auxiliary bishop caring only for the Orthodox flock in Alaska. Now Orthodox began to arrive as immigrants in such cities as New Orleans, San Francisco, and New York. The new diocesan center was established in San Francisco. The new parishes varied greatly in character. Some were mixed ethnically, with Greeks, Russians, Serbs, and Arabs sharing the same parish. Others were ethnically homogeneous - Arabic, or Greek, or Russian, or Ukrainian. Yet others were composed of former Uniates who were Carpatho-Russian or Galician or Rusin.

The streams of immigrants from the Middle East and Central and Eastern Europe continued through the decades, sometimes representing waves of economic immigration, sometimes representing waves of political refugees who were fleeing from totalitarian regimes and wars, and sometimes slowing down or even stopping. Today, there is a renewal of immigration from the post-communist societies.

During the 1960s a new phenomenon of conversion to Orthodoxy emerged in American and Canadian societies. Beginning in the mid-1960s, for example, approximately one half of every class entering St. Vladimir's Seminary has been composed of converts. These are men and women who have been received into the Orthodox Church as adults. They have made a conscious decision to confess the Orthodox Faith. Some have been active and convinced members of Christian bodies, but have come to an understanding of Orthodoxy as the fullness of the Christian faith. Others have lived in secularism or agnosticism or atheism, and have encountered the Gospel of Christ in the Orthodox Church. Yet others have come from non-Christian religious traditions. When they are received into the Orthodox Church, they bring with them family histories which have nothing to do with Orthodox cultures. In every case they represent a rich, though sometimes difficult, encounter of Western cultural habits and traditions with the Eastern Christian theological vision.

Thus the reality of Orthodoxy in America is as complex as America. Many of the histories and cultures and backgrounds which compose America also compose Orthodoxy in America.

The reality of Orthodoxy in America is also as complex as Orthodoxy. Every patriarchate and church of the Middle East, Europe, and Africa is represented within American Orthodoxy. Every culture and language found in the Orthodox world is found also in North America.

Until the Communist revolution in Russia, there was only one Church hierarchy in North America. Although the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural mosaic of Orthodoxy in America was already diverse, multiple ecclesial “jurisdictions” did not exist. In ways both formal and informal, the diversity of Orthodox communities was contained within an ecclesial unity.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the North American diocese was led by Tikhon (Belavin), first as bishop and then as archbishop. The future Patriarch and Confessor of Moscow, and the future canonized saint, showed a remarkable pastoral spirit and ecclesial vision in his labors and in his thought. He fully understood and affirmed the diversity of his flock. He also understood and affirmed the need for ecclesial unity. His vision and plan for Orthodoxy in America was a Church in which the varying needs of a diverse Orthodox population would be given pastoral care by Arabic, and Greek, and Serbian, and Russian bishops (and bishops coming from other cultural and ethnic traditions as needed), yet the unity of the episcopate – and therefore of the Church – would be protected in a canonical structure in which the bishops, led by an archbishop, acted as a united and conciliar body. He envisioned an autonomous Orthodox Church in North America, and in one document even used the word “autocephalous,” though he carefully placed a question mark after this word.

This plan was slowly implemented. A bishop for the Arabs, Raphael (Hawaweeny), was the first Orthodox bishop consecrated in North America. (Bishop Raphael was recently canonized by the Orthodox Church in America, with the participation of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America.) An auxiliary bishop was consecrated for the Alaskan flock. And steps were envisioned for the consecration of Greek, Serbian, and other bishops for the diverse Orthodox communities in the United States and Canada. The recall of Archbishop Tikhon to Russia in 1907 slowed down the movement for which he had laid careful plans. And World War I, which was followed by the Communist revolution in Russia, followed by the Civil War in Russia, distorted the development of Orthodoxy in North America.

In the 1920s multiple “jurisdictions” emerged in America, setting the stage for many decades of the ecclesiological nonsense of canonical Orthodox Churches sharing the same territory and dividing the Orthodox according to the principles of nationality, culture, and language. The energies of the “jurisdictions” were now directed to the preservation of the various national-cultural heritages – Russian, Greek, Syrian-Lebanese, Serbian, Romanian, Albanian, Bulgarian, etc. Gradually, both in America and in the “mother churches,” Orthodoxy in North America began to be viewed as a “diaspora.” Or, to be precise, as specific national and ecclesial “diasporas,” united in Orthodoxy, but divided ethnically, culturally, canonically, and administratively.

From time to time, initiatives were undertaken to create structures of unity. These were efforts to bring the Orthodox together into a relationship of consultation and co-operation. The most prominent such effort was the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA). Formed in 1960, SCOBA remains the primary forum for inter-Orthodox collaboration in the United States. Though the SCOBA itself is not a strong institution, and does not possess any canonical authority, it does provide a framework for common work and mission. There are several agencies and organizations authorized by the SCOBA which have been able to build their work “as if” the Orthodox in America were united in one Church.

Nevertheless, the fundamental “canonical position” of the SCOBA is the preservation of parallel “jurisdictions.”

Another approach to the future of Orthodoxy in America was taken in 1970, when the Church of Russia granted a Tomos of Autocephaly to what was then called the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North America and became the Orthodox Church in America. In the context of the persecution of the Church of Russia by the Communist regime in the 1920s, the American diocese in 1924 declared a “temporary autonomy.” The one diocese gradually became a Church with several dioceses, and was often called the American “Metropolia.” Since the Moscow Patriarchate did not recognize the self-declared autonomy of the Metropolia, until 1970 the Metropolia was in schism from the Church of Russia. In America, on the other hand, eucharistic communion was maintained between the Metropolia and the new Orthodox jurisdictions of Constantinople, Antioch, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria. The Tomos of Autocephaly restored communion between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church in America. It also gave the OCA the mandate to build up the life of Orthodoxy in America while maintaining communion and good relations with other Orthodox Churches and striving for the full canonical unity of Orthodoxy in North America.

The granting of the Tomos of Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America provoked what the late Protospesbyter Alexander Schmemmann called “a meaningful storm.” Since the Orthodox Churches saw Orthodoxy in America as “diaspora,” the creation of an autocephalous Church in America presented a difficult challenge. The breaking of eucharistic communion was a distinct possibility, which would have meant a schism in America, and possibly even beyond the North American continent. Although schism was avoided, and co-operative relations within the SCOBA were eventually restored, canonical unity remained out of reach.

In the 1990s, visits of the Orthodox Patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, Moscow, and Serbia to the United States showed the fundamental unity of Orthodoxy in America. Though the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, and Serbia were making pastoral visits to their own flocks, their own “diasporas,” and the Patriarch of Moscow was a guest of the Orthodox Church in America, Orthodox Christians in the United States saw the visiting patriarchs as signs of Orthodox unity.

In this atmosphere and context, two significant inter-Orthodox institutions were authorized by the SCOBA. International Orthodox Christian Charities and the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, respectively the humanitarian agency and the mission agency of Orthodox Christians in America, have labored fruitfully for more than ten years, acting “as if” full canonical unity has already been achieved.

In 1994 the hierarchs of the SCOBA convened for the first time a conference of the canonical Orthodox episcopate in America. Some forty bishops met at the Antiochian Village in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, the conference and retreat center of the Antiochian Archdiocese. The hierarchs issued two documents – a “Statement on the Church in North America” and a “Statement on the Church Mission and Evangelism.”

The “Statement on the Church in North America” was a respectful and humble appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch and to the Primate of the other mother churches. It referred with gratitude to the “love and concern exhibited by the prominence given to the ‘diaspora’ on the agenda for the forthcoming Great and Holy Council evidenced by the Adopted Texts of the Preparatory Commission.” It continued:

“We await the next meeting of the Commission referred to in the Adopted Text of November 1993. We maintain that it is critical that the Church in North America be directly and concretely represented in that and future meetings. How is it possible for there to be discussion about the nature of the Church in North America in our absence? We must be present to share two hundred years of experience that we have had of preaching the Gospel and living the Orthodox faith outside of those territories that have historically been Orthodox...Furthermore, we have agreed that we cannot accept the term ‘diaspora’ as used to describe the Church in North America. In fact the term is ecclesiastically problematic. It diminishes the fullness of the faith that we have lived and experienced here for the past two hundred years.”

The “Statement on the Church Mission and Evangelism” was a strong declaration that mission “is the very nature of the Church, and is an essential expression of apostolicity.” Reference was made to the vigorous Orthodox missionary history – the missions to the Slavic peoples, missions in Siberia, China, Korea and Japan, the evangelization of the Alaskan native peoples, and contemporary mission in Africa, Indonesia, and Albania. An appeal was made to the Ecumenical Patriarch to convene a world conference of mission representatives “to help coordinate Orthodox mission strategies and efforts around the world.” And, finally, the statement ended in this way: “We Orthodox in North America commit ourselves to bringing our household into order for the preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ, His Incarnation and His teaching, His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection, and His presence in the Church through the descent of the Holy Spirit.”

These statements, though intended to be respectful and meant to make a contribution to progress towards Orthodox unity under the guidance of the patriarchates, caused much controversy and harshly negative reactions. They failed to secure the support of the patriarchates for a coherent movement towards Orthodox canonical and administrative unity in America.

During the past two years the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America has engaged in a vigorous process of consultation, even debate, with the Patriarchate of Antioch concerning “autonomy” for the Archdiocese. The result has been a resolution by the Holy Synod of Antioch affirming “self-rule” for the Archdiocese: “The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America is and shall remain self-ruled within its present jurisdiction (The United States of America and Canada) and shall constitute one unified ecclesiastical Antiochian entity.” Other provisions of the resolution create dioceses within the one archdiocese, establish the rules for the election of bishops for these dioceses by appropriate action of the Archdiocese itself, and define the election of the metropolitan-primate in a way which assures that the nominations of three candidates are made by the Archdiocese, and the election of the metropolitan-primate is performed by the Holy Synod of Antioch. An eparchial synod has until now been composed of auxiliary bishops and chaired by the metropolitan-primate. As a result of the recent resolution of the Holy Synod, the members of the eparchial synod will in the future be diocesan bishops. A

general convention, composed of the episcopate, as well as clergy and lay delegates from all parishes, is convened regularly.

Within the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America some have expressed the view that the ecclesiastical “autonomy” of the Archdiocese within the Patriarchate of Constantinople is a necessary and legitimate goal. In the meantime, the Greek Archdiocese of America has dioceses which are ruled by diocesan bishops (the archbishop and the metropolitans), and the metropolitans are members of a Synod under the presidency of the archbishop-primate. An archdiocesan council, with mixed membership of bishops, clergy, and laity has financial and administrative responsibilities. A clergy/laity congress gathers the episcopate and clergy and lay delegates from all archdiocesan parishes.

It must be noted that the Russian Metropolia, has adhered to the church structure and order established by the 1917-1918 Council of the Church of Russia, and has led the way in America by example. Thus, regularly-convened All-American Church Councils are composed of the entire episcopate, and clergy and lay delegates from all parishes. (The fact that Council of the Church of Russia was composed of clergy and lay delegates from dioceses, while the Church Councils in America have been composed of delegates from all parishes is simply the result of the differences in number of parishes and dioceses.) The Holy Synod of Bishops is the highest canonical body in the Church; it meets twice a year and is composed of all diocesan bishops, with auxiliary bishops also attending. A Metropolitan Council, composed of clergy and laity elected by the All-American Council, as well as clergy and laity elected by the dioceses, is chaired by the primate.

As a matter of historical interest, it should be noted that in America the practice of convening clergy and laity to meet with their hierarchs to make common decisions in ecclesial life even preceded the decisions of the Russian Church Council of 1917-1918. Archbishop Tikhon took the initiative of convening the first council in America when he organized a meeting of clergy and laity in Mayfield, Pennsylvania, in 1907. In a style typical of his archpastoral leadership, he made it clear that he wanted open discussion and conciliar decisions. Thus, the American Orthodox experience, under the guidance of the future saint and confessor, drew clergy and laity into co-responsibility with their hierarchs even before the decisions of the Council of 1917-1918 in Moscow.

Similar structures of church governance, involving clergy and laity in appropriate decision-making and advisory capacities under the leadership of the hierarchy, now exist in most of the Orthodox “jurisdictions” in North America.

This account has demonstrated that Orthodoxy in America has dimensions of mission, immigration, and conversion to Orthodoxy. We have seen that the Tomos of Autocephaly granted by the Patriarchate of Moscow to the Orthodox Church in America has affirmed the Orthodox ecclesiology by affirming the principle and practice of “local Church,” and thus implicitly rejecting the notion of “diaspora.” We have observed that the canonical Orthodox “jurisdictions” in America have tried to build structures of co-operation and unity, while preserving the concept of parallel “jurisdictions,” in creating the SCOBA. We have also described the effort of the Orthodox hierarchs, convened in the first episcopal assembly in

America, to define the experience of Orthodox life in America in terms of Orthodox witness in America, and not in terms of “diaspora.” And we have noted that the structures of church governance in America, involving the central role of the hierarchy, and the appropriate participation of clergy and laity and giving space to a conciliar approach, have basic similarities among the Orthodox Churches in America.

Orthodoxy in America is only one of the examples of a vigorous Orthodox life “outside of those territories that have historically been Orthodox.” We find Orthodox archdioceses and communities in Western Europe, South America, and Australia. The question as to whether Orthodoxy is “Church or Diaspora?” is as relevant in these places as it is in North America.

On the whole, it appears that for the Orthodox patriarchates and autocephalous churches in the “traditionally Orthodox territories” the witness and the future of Orthodoxy in North and South America, Western Europe, and Australia are marginal questions. In response to this, it must be stated – and with a sense of urgency – that the witness and future of Orthodoxy in what one might broadly call the West are of cardinal importance. The Orthodox Church considers herself to be catholic, and not only in the sense of being “whole,” but also in the sense of being “universal.” Still, the wide-spread, and in many ways justified, view is that Orthodoxy is limited to its traditional regions in central and eastern Europe and the Middle East. Orthodox witness in the “West” is vitally necessary to affirm the catholicity of Orthodoxy in today’s world.

With sadness it must be admitted that when Orthodoxy is found outside the “traditional” regions it is found in the form of parallel “diasporas.” It can even be said that today’s Orthodox worldview is comfortable with parallel “universalisms.” It is assumed that each of the Orthodox Churches is legitimately “universal,” legitimately establishing its presence as a heritage, as a jurisdiction, as a “diaspora” in any country or region. It is further assumed that the Orthodox Church can be expressed within the category of “diaspora.”

The only way out of this dead end is a renewal of authentic Orthodox ecclesiology, a renewed faithfulness to the ecclesial vision of the apostolic calling of the Church. “Diaspora” is a concept not at all adequate to the apostolicity of the Church. Those who believe that the Orthodox Church, when living outside historic Orthodox territories, is living in “diaspora” in practice diminish the Church’s apostolicity. To be apostolic cannot be limited to the notion of having “roots” or “foundations” in the places where the Apostles of Christ preached and established churches. To be apostolic is also to continue, in new circumstances and lands, the apostolic vocation.

The concept of “parallel jurisdictions,” which is a natural child of the “diaspora” worldview, is alien to Orthodox ecclesiology. When a defense of “jurisdictions” is attempted, this usually amounts to concealing the ecclesiological nonsense and even sin of “jurisdictions” under the garments of unity in faith and unity in sacraments. It is precisely unity in faith and unity in sacraments which demand unity in episcopal conciliarity and oversight, concrete unity and coordination in the witness and mission of the Church!

One dares to say that “parallel jurisdictions” are a greater threat to the Orthodox ecclesiology and theology than schism or even heresy. The dangers and deformations of schism and heresy are

usually clear and unambiguous. Only those who fall into schism or heresy find for themselves justifications and explanations. The Church as a whole stands firmly against schism and heresy, rejecting their distortions.

In the case of “jurisdictions” and their apologists, a beautiful and harmonious justification is constantly offered by pointing to unity in faith and unity in sacraments. “We are already united, both in faith and in sacraments, and therefore there is no need to worry ourselves about unity in one local Church.” This is a view of Orthodoxy in America which is today accepted in the Orthodox Churches as self-evident and acceptable. It is little noticed that this view contradicts - both in practical terms and in theological terms – the Orthodox teaching about the Church.

Adherence to Orthodox ecclesiology must, of course, have a pastoral character. The concern of the Church is the salvation of souls, the salvation of persons, the right orientation of Christian believers towards God, the Church, and each other.

In this perspective it is obviously necessary to take into account the cultures and languages of concrete people and communities. When immigrants arrive in new lands, they naturally see themselves in the beginning as a “diaspora.” Pastoral sensitivity to their self-understanding is required of the Church. Indeed, this pastoral sensitivity to Orthodox immigrants with a “diaspora” consciousness is just as important from the point of view of missiology as is pastoral sensitivity to converts, and to those men and women and communities who are not Christian or are not Orthodox.

The contradictions and problems emerge only when the Church herself is seen as diaspora, and diaspora becomes the organizing principle of Church life. It must be strongly maintained that the Church of God can and must be sensitive to those who see themselves as diasporas. The Church is a larger and more spacious reality than diaspora, and can pastorally contain within itself ethnic, national, and linguistic communities regarding themselves as diasporas.

It is when the attempt is made to fit the Church of God into the diaspora framework that we sin against the nature of the Church, making her serve goals and purposes which are not at the heart of her mission and task. In such cases we also fail to offer Orthodox people the proper theological perspective and ecclesial orientation. Those who see themselves as a cultural or national diasporas must be assisted in placing these relative values within the larger and more spacious household of the Church of God, which is oriented towards the fullness of God and which is by its nature inclusive of many cultural and national communities.

Another aspect of the distortions brought about by the “diaspora” consciousness is the loss of credibility for the Orthodox Church’s witness. One of the strengths of the Orthodox witness in ecumenism and in the world is the clarity of the ecclesiological teaching of the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox understanding of the nature of the Church has been an important and influential Orthodox contribution to ecumenical dialogue. It has also been a significant element in the attraction Orthodoxy exercises on those who encounter Orthodox theology in their quest for an authentic expression of Christian life, an authentic expression of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Sadly, when those who are nourished by the theological perspectives of the Orthodox faith and by the ecclesiological self-understanding of the Orthodox Church encounter

the empirical reality of Orthodox life and Orthodox church order, they are wounded and scandalized by the contradictions they encounter.

In America, as elsewhere in the so-called “diaspora,” it is not in fact difficult to begin immediately a responsible, visible, and viable process for the building of the unity of the Orthodox Church. This requires a common commitment among Orthodox Churches to move towards the creation of local autonomous or autocephalous Churches. There will need to be a quest for the right ways to express the unity of the episcopate, the right ways to express the exercise of primacy, the right ways to provide for the coordination and collaboration of the Churches. Progress along these lines would not deprive the patriarchates and mother churches of the support of the communities they have so far envisioned as “diasporas.” On the contrary, more vigorous and useful support for the patriarchates and mother churches would be generated. Progress along these lines would not deprive the emerging local Churches of the support, wisdom, and guidance of the patriarchates and mother churches. On the contrary, such support wisdom, and guidance would be welcomed.

The “right way” which is needed is readily found in the ecclesiological vision of the Orthodox Church. The problem is not that new formulas or principles must be found. The problem is that the ecclesiological vision of the Orthodox Church must be affirmed theologically and applied practically.

The answer to the question “Diaspora or Church?” must be unequivocally “Church and not Diaspora!” In America, in other places where Orthodox Church lives in “territories not historically Orthodox,” and in the historic centers of Orthodoxy there is today no greater need than the need to live Orthodox faith in full faithfulness to the true ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church. This is the way to deter or overcome divisions and schisms. This is the way to bear credible witness in the world and among other Christian bodies. This is the way to offer the members of Christ’s Body the joy of ecclesial experience and good pastoral care, equipping them to a life in service to the Gospel of Christ.

November 19, 2003

*Paper was delivered at
The International Theological Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church
“The Orthodox Teaching about the Church”
Convened by the Synodal Theological Commission
November 17-20, 2003
Moscow*

(Edited in May 2004)

3. LIGONIER REVISITED: TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF HISTORIC MEETING OF ORTHODOX BISHOPS SCOPA BISHOPS 1994

(PUBLISHED BY THE WORD, NOVEMBER 2004)

This month marks the tenth anniversary of the historic meeting of Orthodox hierarchs in Ligonier, PA. During this meeting, the members of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America changed the course of history for Orthodoxy in America by articulating their commitment to cooperation, mission and an acceptable canonical structure. This meeting produced papers and statements that are certainly worthy of our attention and review today. In this issue of *The WORD*, we present the original documents, as well as some brief reflections from our Church leaders ten years after the meeting. . . .

Statements from bishops on Diaspora

I think of Ligonier as a moment in the history of Orthodoxy in North America when a love for the missionary mandate of the Gospel transcended ethnic and cultural barriers and concerns. Ligonier provided a venue where Orthodox bishops offered words and visions of ecclesial unity. Ten years ago, the prophetic spirit of Ligonier stood opposed to jurisdictional pluralism even when other hierarchs, here and abroad, sought to justify the uncanonical status quo. Ten years ago, the bishops of Ligonier expressed a oneness of mind which exposed the falsehood that jurisdictional pluralism does not impede Eucharistic unity when, in fact, the presence of two or more bishops in one city undermines the very reality of ecclesial and, therefore, Eucharistic unity.

Over the last ten years, the national and international stages have drastically changed. People across North America and the world are divided by religion, race, politics and economics. A divided world needs the unifying voice of Christ. But the voice of Christ, if it is to properly convey its healing power, demands the unity of His Church here and across the globe. The work begun ten years ago must continue and be brought to fruition. As long as there are those who hear and do the word of the Lord in North America, the message of Ligonier will not be silenced.

Metropolitan Herman

Primate, Orthodox Church in America

November 30 to December 2, 1994 was the brightest moment in the history of Orthodoxy in North America. For the first time, twenty-nine Orthodox bishops from the United States and Canada gathered at the Antiochian Village to pray together, discuss Orthodox problems together and formulate a common vision for the future. This brotherly and well-meaning meeting caused an unexpected earthquake in some of the ancient Orthodox Patriarchates. Let us hope that the spirit of Ligonier will be born again and our dream for a united Orthodoxy in America will never fade away.

Metropolitan Philip, Primate

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

America needs Orthodoxy, without Orthodoxy becoming Americanized. Orthodoxy must continue to develop in spirituality and maturity, growing gradually and appropriately toward a developed polity. I am concerned that aggressive attempts toward premature separation from the mother churches of the old lands will result in disarray and schism. Instead, we are called by the Lord to continue in humble growth and obedience to our organic link with the Patriarchates. We hope and pray for the direction of the Holy Spirit in the future life of our church.

**Metropolitan Nicholas of Amissos, Ruling Hierarch
American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese
Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople**

What we — the canonical Orthodox bishops — had done 10 years ago was good. But there are no results so far. It is only a good desire. That means — such is God’s will. Without Him we can do nothing.

Therefore, I beseeched the Lord to teach me His statutes. After my prayer as usual I opened my Bible with closed eyes and put my finger on the right place. For the first time I opened Revelation 1:3 — “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” I asked the Lord: “O Lord! What about until then?” And again I opened the Bible, that time on 1 Timothy 1:15 — “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” And for the third time I tempted the Lord, saying: “O Lord! I am not an Abraham nor a Jew, I’m a sinner, but involve me to understand Your Will.” And then I opened the Book of Sirah — Joshua — 24:29-30, where I read in the new American Translation: “Said to myself, I will water my plants, my flower bed I will drench; and suddenly this rivulet of mine became a river, then this stream of mine, a sea. Thus do I send my teaching forth shining like a dawn, to become known afar off. Thus do I pour out instruction like prophecy and bestow it on generations to come.”

And now it is clear for me, that this prophecy should be fulfilled, but not during my life. I think that all of us, Orthodox bishops, who were born and came to America from the old countries, like me, and now control the jurisdictional eparchies, must die. The Holy Orthodox Church needs new generations of Americans to come after us, who shall fulfill the Lord’s instructions and prophecy. Because now, as Fr. Vladimir Berzonsky writes: “Spiritually we are still drinking mother’s milk, not yet ready for loftier and deeper experiences of the life reaching out to us from Christ and present through the Holy Spirit within our hearts.”

**Metropolitan Joseph
Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese of the USA, Canada and Australia
Statements from the bishops**

The meeting in Ligonier of Orthodox hierarchs in North America in November, 1994 was extremely encouraging and positive in its decision-making. It concluded that there was need for canonical unity in America among the Orthodox jurisdictions. The gathering offered great hope for the unity of Orthodoxy in America. My vision for the future remains the same — One United Canonical Church in the Americas.

**Archbishop Kyrill of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania
Orthodox Church in America**

Congratulations on the November, 2004 The WORD issue, commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Ligonier meeting of our Orthodox North American Bishops. Unfortunately, things have not drastically changed since that time. We still hope and pray for complete and visible unity in the Orthodox Diaspora of North America. Let us hope that, as promised to us in Washington, D.C., fourteen years ago, the ranking Orthodox jurisdiction, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, will assume a leadership role in order for this to happen, hopefully during our lifetime.

**Metropolitan Maximos
Metropolis of Pittsburgh
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America**

The Ligonier meeting of the Orthodox bishops in North America was a milestone in the history of Orthodoxy in America. The vision of Orthodoxy that was seen at that meeting is still relevant today, but has yet to be realized. Orthodox jurisdictional unity in North America must be our continued vision; any deviation from this is a contradiction to the order and canons of the Orthodox Church. Let us fervently pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us in making this vision a reality.

**Archbishop Peter, Archbishop of New York and New Jersey
Orthodox Church in America**

The Conference at Ligonier was an exciting moment for many of us who were priests serving the faithful at that time. All who read of the meeting and of its call to unity were inspired with high hopes.

Ten years later, we still note that there is no place in Holy Orthodoxy for the present case of multi-jurisdictional-ism in North America and across the globe, as this only impedes the Church's evangelizing efforts. This was reflected in the Mission and Evangelism Statement issued at Ligonier: "We commit ourselves to avoiding the creation of parallel and competitive Orthodox parishes, missions, and mission programs ... and to move forward towards a concerted, formal, and united mission program in order to make a real impact on North America through Orthodox mission and evangelism."

Our prayer and efforts should be for one Holy Orthodox Church in North America, a goal that can only be accomplished in the spirit of cooperation and not division.

**Nathaniel, Archbishop of Detroit, Orthodox Church in America
Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America**

The time has come for Orthodoxy in America to move beyond simple affirmation of historical, canonical order. It is time to encourage and develop cooperation among churches, which will prove to be a genuine blueprint for greater unity on all fronts. Specific principles need to be articulated and accepted by all jurisdictions in a common commitment to work in consort. Programs of pan-Orthodox endeavor, at the grass roots, should be initiated and supported so that the faithful experience a oneness in purpose and action. Everything is achievable through mutual respect and sensitivity flowing from faith and love in Christ.

**Bishop Ilia of Philomelion
Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America**

I honestly thought after Ligonier that we were beginning a new era of cooperation and Orthodox unity on this continent. For the first time since the early years of our presence in the Americas, it seemed there was a common vision, or at least a common goal of working together, not just for the sake of working together, but toward a canonically proper end of a unified Church. For me, the chance to sit down with brother bishops, many of whom I had never met, was a great and awesome experience. What made this experience great and awesome, besides just getting together, was that there was a purpose. Oftentimes we had gotten together in the past, but just for social purposes or anniversaries, celebrations, etc. This time it was for the good of the Church. Unfortunately, what happened in the aftermath of Ligonier left us further apart and more disunited than we were in the years that led up to that historic gathering.

Bishop Antoun

Bishop of Miami and the Southeast

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

In 1994 I was a relatively new and young bishop when the now famous Conference of Bishops was convened at the Antiochian Village, and so together with another young bishop, His Grace Seraphim of Ottawa and Canada, I was appointed to the Conference's secretariat. Ligonier '94 was without doubt one of the brightest moments — if not THE brightest moment — in the history of Holy Orthodoxy in the New World. Dozens of bishops met and prayed and deliberated on that Pennsylvania mountain-top, while hundreds of thousands of our young people across the continent prayed and fasted that we might accomplish a good for Holy Orthodoxy. And, by God's grace, a great good was indeed accomplished! The common hope and vision expressed by my brother bishops during those several days and reflected in the two historic documents produced by the Conference caused a refreshing and invigorating breeze to blow across this continent, opening the doors of our Orthodox congregations with hope and joyful anticipation. But sadly and all too quickly, dark storm clouds blew in from the East, causing those doors to be slammed shut once more. Some of those doors were and remained locked to this very day, while others stand ajar, awaiting another refreshing and invigorating breeze to open them once again. May that breeze come quickly!

Bishop Basil

Bishop of Wichita and Mid-America

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

The Orthodox Church offers the spiritual healing so many need as they realize the emptiness of secularism and materialism. The task for us in the Church is to offer true spirituality rather than the empty entertainment that passes for Christianity in the West. We must get beyond duels over the Scripture with fundamentalists and revisionists, and instead challenge people with the evidence we have for the true healing and theosis found only in the Orthodox Church.

Bishop Joseph

Diocese of Los Angeles and the West

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

4. METROPOLITAN JONAH CONTINUES DIALOGUE ON “UNITY IN OUR TIME” OCT. 2009 LIGONIER, PA [OCA COMMUNICATIONS]

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah took part in the “Road to Unity” conference sponsored by Orthodox Christian Laity [OCL] at Antiochian Village here Thursday, October 29 through Saturday, October 31 [2009].

In his address to conference participants, titled “Unity in Our Time,” Metropolitan Jonah spoke of Orthodox Christian unity in North America, envisioning the creation of “a united territorial autocephalous Orthodox Church in North America, embracing all Orthodox Christians, with a single Synod and single hierarchy.

“This new American Orthodox Church would have its own primate, and entirely govern its own affairs,” Metropolitan Jonah continued, adding that it “must respect the great diversity of languages and traditions, and the different historical origins and processes that have produced each community.”

Central to the fabric of a united Church, Metropolitan Jonah added, is the need to “be missionary in every aspect of its existence, reaching out to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all its patristic and Orthodox integrity to the peoples of North America, incarnating the Orthodox Church in North America, and enculturating North Americans into Orthodoxy.

“Each [North American] church, jurisdiction, and community has done this to its own degree, individually,” Metropolitan Jonah observed. “Now we must put it all together, keeping in mind the essential goal of the sanctification of our people, our communities, our nations. Each community has something of utmost value to offer to the whole. Each community has come into existence in America through tremendous struggle, hardship and sacrifice. All this has to be taken into account, valued, sanctified.”

Metropolitan Jonah opined that Church unity is rooted in the bonds of personal relationships.

“The challenge is simply to be together: to work together, to pray together, and for our children to grow up together, our seminarians to study and pray together, and our people to marry one another,” Metropolitan Jonah stated. “There is a gradual process of integration that will take generations, and will eventually result in a completely unique American Orthodoxy. But what is necessary now is to discern how to come together so that these other processes can take root.” Metropolitan Jonah observed that a “new phase in the development of this American Church” is underway.

“This transitional period will be characterized, not by SCOBA, but by Episcopal Assemblies and their executive council, as charted out by the Chambesy Preconciliar Conference,” Metropolitan Jonah said. “But, it is a transition that will lead us, as quickly as possible, to our goal of a united autocephalous American Church.”

“SCOBA was unable to realize such a church on its own,” Metropolitan Jonah said, “as SCOBA is not itself a canonical entity... Thus, a transitional phase in which the various churches retain their ties, and their identities, and yet, can begin the process of integration, was necessary. The Chambesy accords make this possible.”

Regarding the Orthodox Church in America, Metropolitan Jonah stated that, “The OCA is the forerunner of the new autocephalous American Church. We have an important role to play as the one ecclesial body in this land that has become fully indigenous and has tried to incarnate unity in diversity in a catholic vision.”

He also shared his belief that the OCA needs, “to cooperate with [the Chambesy] process. It is an opportunity to realize that, which is the core vision of the OCA in the first place, and to go beyond it.”

“The creation of canonical unity in America can be accomplished quickly, if we are all of good will, and determined to do it,” Metropolitan Jonah said. “The great challenge will be how to respect the diversity of traditions, and nurture it, while at the same time creating a flexible structure that will also nurture missions and outreach to the various populations of North America.”

Other key points raised by Metropolitan Jonah were the following.

- “Perhaps the most pressing issue in the resolution of how to come to unity is the question of conciliarity... What is obvious to me is that we will need to provide institutions for the clergy and laity to have a voice in the life of the Church, to contribute meaningfully to decisions, and to participate in leadership.”
- “While the Exarch of the Ecumenical See may have chairmanship over the Episcopal Assembly, it will be extremely important to transition to a freely elected chairman perhaps even before full autocephaly... For Americans, it is the election that gives legitimacy to the office holder.”
- “While we might argue that [the Orthodox jurisdictions of North America] were not included in [the Chambesy] discussions, the papers themselves contain an acceptable process that we can use during this transition. This is simply a process, and we can make the best out of it. It will take us to our goal. But we have to make sure that we stay on course.”
- “We might also argue that the presidency of this Episcopal Assembly, and its executive committee, was given as a kind of right pertaining to the Exarch of the See of Constantinople. To argue against this, however, misses the point that only the Ecumenical Patriarchate has the responsibility and authority in the Orthodox world to call together the other Churches, and in such meetings he presides, or his representative.
- “While some would argue this is an imposed solution by the Phanar, I think we can see this as an opportunity. Someone has to chair these meetings. Once we accept the challenge in the Chambesy documents themselves, that a canonical order be worked out, and that this is to be done as quickly as possible, another order could be decided upon.”

5. ADDRESSES FROM THE 2011 EPISCOPAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA, MAY 25, 2011

Address by Archbishop Justinian:

Your Eminence, Your Grace, beloved in the Lord, brethren in Christ, Christ is risen!

I am greeting you with the words of this Paschal message because our meeting is taking place in the days when our Holy Church is still celebrating and glorifying the resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ the Savior. As the co-vice chairman of the Episcopal Assembly of the North and Central America, I am representing the Russian Orthodox Church, and I'd like to convey to you wholehearted greetings and good wishes on behalf of his holiness, Patriarch of Moscow and of all Russia, Kirill.

I am glad to welcome the fruitful work of the Assembly for the time elapsed since its first plenary meeting in May 2010. First of all, I would like to admit that we came to deep understanding among the leadership, and I can attest to the spirit of brotherly love among us from the experience of my meetings and maintaining mutual contact with the Chairman of the Assembly, Archbishop Demetrios and Co-Vice Chairman, Metropolitan Philip. In turn, this cannot but have a positive impact on the interaction of the coworkers and assistants. In fact, I have to note the excellent work of the Secretariat of the Assembly, headed by Bishop Basil. The work of the committees of the Assembly that began lately inspires great expectations for success. I can give the example of the Committee for Regional Planning, of which I am a member, and I can see how important and topical are the issues debated. Of course, on each of them we can have different opinions, which do not necessarily coincide. But the fact of living, informal discussion of these issues to achieve an agreement and resolve any existing problems is a stride in the practical realization of our unity.

And many challenges facing us, I think it is extremely important to consolidate our efforts to achieve genuine - not just in word but in deed – Orthodox unity. For us who are surrounded by a non-Orthodox majority, certain visible signs of Orthodox unity are also extremely necessary. These can be joint inter-church worship and a wide range of activities. I am convinced that these issues should be carefully worked out by the members of the Assembly.

Of course, before speaking of the implementation of unity, we have to become better acquainted with each other. At last year's meeting of the Assembly we spoke of the paradoxical situation in our region when we give spiritual guidance to the flock belonging to our jurisdiction, but often do not know anything about the life of our counterparts from other local Orthodox churches. Therefore, I would consider it essential to continue, and indeed, accelerate the work on the complete database of canonical Orthodox structures in North and Central America.

In view of the critical challenges that we face, I wish all of us God's wisdom, help and protection in our labors for the benefit of His holy Church.

+ JUSTINIAN

Archbishop of Naro-Fominsk,

Administrator of the Patriarchal Parishes in the USA

Address of Metropolitan Philip at the 2011 Assembly of Bishops

Address by Metropolitan Philip

25 May 2011

Your Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios, Chairman of this Assembly, beloved hierarchs, Christ is risen!

With this hopeful and joyful proclamation, I greet you all in the name of the risen Lord. We are still basking in the light of the glorious Resurrection, but ten days from now, next week, we will celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord. And somehow — when we stop chanting, “Christ is risen from the dead,” somehow I feel lonely, because this is the most joyful season of the year. Ten days later, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Pentecost, and we read in the Book of Acts that while the disciples were gathered in a hall in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit descended on them like a mighty wind and filled them and filled the house where they were gathered, and that was the beginning of the Church and her mission to the world.

Things were not easy. Things were very difficult. The Church went through the era of persecution, and the Church survived, because He said, *I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.*

I was very moved this morning by the address of our venerable Chairman about our problems in this country, the different practices which we have and some aspects of international Orthodoxy. Not all is well with the Orthodox Church, either on this continent or on other continents of this world. We have so much work to be done. Our Lord, according to the Gospel which was read by His Eminence today, said, *I am the good shepherd, and my mission to this world is to watch over my sheep.*

And we as successors of the Holy Apostles, we are also commissioned to watch over our sheep in a spirit of diligence and a spirit of unity. It is true that we are united in the faith; nobody can deny that. But administratively we are not united. We are still divided into various jurisdictions. And we hope that through the efforts of this Assembly and through the efforts of His Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch, and the autocephalous Orthodox Churches involved that this task will be accomplished, because we cannot live with our young people anymore. We have been asked so many questions wherever we travel — at least I speak about myself. What happens to Orthodox unity in North America? We have talked about it so much in the past, and until now we are what we are. We have not progressed, except we get together, we talk to each other and we break bread with each other and we pray together. But I feel there are so many other things which must be done for the glory of Orthodoxy on this continent.

So I ask the risen Lord to enlighten our minds and give us the strength to concentrate on these real, real issues which are facing our Church on this continent. We have our theological schools, we have our scholars, we have our venerable bishops, who are doing an outstanding job for the Church in North America. We ask the risen Lord to continue to lead us through many Pentecosts, this coming Pentecost and other Pentecosts, which we all should experience in our personal lives. Christ is risen.

Address of Archbishop Demetrios at the 2011 Assembly of Bishops

ADDRESS OF THE CHAIRMAN

HIS EMINENCE

ARCHBISHOP DEMETRIOS OF AMERICA

At the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops Of North and Central America

Chicago O'Hare Airport Hilton

Chicago, Illinois

(May 25, 2011)

* * *

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies and Your Graces,
Beloved Brothers and Concelebrants in the Holy Spirit
of the Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America,
Christ is Risen! XPICTOC ANECTH! Christos Voskrese!

1. I greet all of you in the Name of our Heavenly Father and God, and of His Risen Son our Lord Jesus Christ -- the Word, Wisdom and Power of God, and in joyful anticipation of the Holy Spirit, Who is coming to us in the Great and Holy Pentecost, *in order to guide us into all truth* (John 16:13).

I convey to all of you the greetings and the blessings of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who, as the First Throne of Holy Orthodoxy, is much desirous of encouraging and enhancing the unity of the Church, especially through the Pre-Conciliar Conferences and through the Assemblies of all Canonical Hierarchs in major geographic areas, as the present one.

2. Today, which is one year and one day after our inaugural Assembly in New York City, we convene in the great American City of Chicago, at the hub of one of the world's busiest airports. It is not without significance that we have traveled many miles to be with one another, in a spirit of fraternity, peace, fellowship and above all Christian love. As Chairman of this Assembly I am grateful for your prayerful and irenic presence, and I am hopeful that we will be able to move our nascent body forward with positive steps that will lead to tangible results for all the Orthodox.

3. As we commence our work, please allow me to make mention of three of our beloved brothers who reposed in the Lord since our last Assembly. On August 18th of 2010, the late Metropolitan Christopher, who served as a Bishop for over three decades in the Serbian Church in America, fell asleep in the Lord. This year, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, Metropolitan Nicholas of Amissos, who served for a quarter of a century as head of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese, reposed after a long battle with cancer. Both of these distinguished Hierarchs were First Hierarchs of their Dioceses and also officers of SCOBA – secretary and treasurer respectively. They were great forces for Orthodox unity and cooperation and will be sorely missed. And now, barely two weeks ago, Metropolitan Epiphanius of Bryoula – who was unable to attend last year's Assembly due to illness, passed to his eternal rest on May 9th. May their memory be eternal.

4. Even as we mourn with the hope of the Resurrection the loss of these dear brothers, we also welcome new members to the Assembly: Bishop John of Caracas, who has been a member of the South American Assembly, has taken on the responsibility for the Old Believers communities in ROCOR, succeeding the late and ever-memorable Bishop Daniel, who passed away before last year's Assembly; so we welcome him. We also welcome the newly ordained Bishop Matthias of the OCA here in Chicago, who received episcopal ordination on the Saturday of Bright Week. I must also note that Metropolitan John of the Ukrainian Church of Canada retired last July, and now Metropolitan Yuriy, who was with us last year as Archbishop, has ascended to the primacy

of that Diocese. There have been other changes as well among our ranks, and as you will note among your papers, the list of the Hierarchs with jurisdictional presence in the USA reflects these changes, as does the list for Canada. Mexico and Central America remain the same for the time being.

5. In addition, over the past year, there have been important developments in the functioning of the Assembly, and there have been important developments in the international scene of the Church universal. Allow me to look at both of these realities, for they will affect our meeting this week.

a) First of all, there is the functioning of the Assembly. As you know, our Assembly differs in virtually every respect from SCOBA, the former vehicle of pan-Orthodox cooperation and ministry in America. We not only represent every canonical episcopal presence in our region, but we ourselves constitute the Committee structure that effectuates the work of the Assembly. Of course, we can have advisory capacities among the clergy and the laity, but the substance and decision-making faculties belong only to the Assembly, as we have the spiritual, moral and ultimately the canonical authority of our Chief Shepherd Christ to provide for His Flock.

b) As for the Committees of the Assembly, thirteen in number, we will hear reports from those Committees that have had an opportunity to conference by phone or meet in person. For those that have not had such an opportunity, we can at least have some dialogue on the orientation and scope of each Committee's work. I know that each Committee Chair was encouraged to take advantage of the time that we have together during these few days to assemble the members of their respective Committees who are present, and I hope that this has, to some degree, already happened last evening. If this body so deems, we can make time during our sessions, especially tomorrow, in order to empower each Committee to examine the steps that each must take in order to fulfill its mission to the Assembly and the Church at large. We may also consider other areas for consideration by the Assembly, and how best to serve these purposes.

c) In addition, we will have an opportunity to hear about the prospects for the Assembly fulfilling its own affirmation, as contained in the Message of last year's meeting:

We as Episcopal Assembly understand ourselves as being the successors of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA), assuming its agencies, dialogues, and other ministries.

As the successor body to SCOBA, the Agencies and Endorsed Organizations are in need of direction from the Assembly, as to how and to what degree the relationship between these pan-Orthodox institutions and our Assembly will unfold. Under SCOBA, the Agencies were established as separately incorporated entities. Some of these agencies are more functioning than others, and they all perform admirable services to the Church, both here and abroad. However, there has been no uniform procedure for this incorporation, and as a consequence, the agencies are established in different states with differing regulations. Some of this was unavoidable, as at least two of the Agencies, OCMC, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, and OCPM, the Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, came from jurisdictional ministries – the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese respectively. Their establishment was conditioned by forces within these Archdioceses. For example, OCMC is located in St. Augustine, Florida. Why? Because the St. Photios Shrine of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese is in St. Augustine, and the OCMC grew up in that historical shadow.

But our responsibility is to address the relationship of the Assembly with these entities, as well as the pan-Orthodox groups that have in the past received an endorsement of their work by

SCOBA, and other pan-Orthodox organizations functioning outside any canonical administration of the Church, yet interacting and interfacing with our parishes.

As we consider these reports and updates, and indeed the work that has been commenced, it is vital that we, as Bishops, determine for ourselves the approach that we will have with these agencies and organizations. We have the responsibility to steer the Church, using the good rudder of canonical order and tradition, into waters that are free of danger and scandal.

6. And as we consider what is best for our current conditions on this continent, we must also bear in mind the inter-continental conditions of World Orthodoxy. This is because we belong to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We are part of the Body of Christ, and as one member is affected, so also are the others affected. Indeed, even the convening of this Assembly has been affected by the international situation. As I informed all of you by my memorandum of May 12th, the Local Autocephalous Churches have not all weighed in on our unanimous request for the segmentation of Canada to be a regional assembly unto itself, and for the reapportionment of Mexico and Central America to South America. This is the status quo, even though Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew had urgently requested consideration from all the Heads of the Autocephalous Churches on two separate occasions, even delivering a deadline for their answers of April 30th of this year. Nevertheless, with one of the Autocephalous Churches insisting on a Synaxis of the Autocephalous Heads in order to consider the request, and others that have not responded, we found ourselves in a delicate situation as these days approached. Of necessity we issued – albeit late – invitations to the Bishops in Canada and Mexico to join us, even though, in my letter to them in December 22nd of last year, I indicated a reasonable hope that our request would have been acted on by now. Moreover, given that the Canadian Conference of Orthodox Bishops held a meeting on March 17th of this year, and included all those Hierarchs who would rightly belong to such a regional assembly should it be granted by the Autocephalous Churches, I believe that it is clear that our Canadian Brethren are holding firm to their expressed wish to become a separate assembly. We can affirm that desire here if we so choose. The same can be said for Mexico and Central America.

7. By now, all of you are aware that at the last Pre-Conciliar Conference held in Chambésy in February of this year, the process came to an impasse over the final issues of autocephaly and the way it is to be proclaimed, and over the order of the Diptychs. This lack of consensus among the representatives of the Autocephalous Churches has cast into doubt whether the climate and preparatory work necessary of a Great and Holy Council will exist in the near future. And of course, this affects the final efficacy of our work in the Assembly. Although this may be the case, we, the Bishops of this region, still have the responsibility to carry on with the vital work before us, whether the calling of the Great and Holy Council is delayed or not. The progress that we can make through the Assembly is in no way hindered by any uncertainties that may lie ahead. We still need to have a complete registry of canonical Hierarchs, clergy and communities. We still need to look at our liturgical life and understand the unique traditions represented by our individual flocks, and work toward and commonly held, shared linguistic traditions for the English-speaking, Greek-speaking, Russian-speaking, French-speaking and Spanish-speaking faithful of the region. We still need to examine the canonical and pastoral practices that affect the lives of our faithful, so that as Orthodox Hierarchs, we uphold the unity of the Faith while at the same time we express the diversity of our flocks.

8. As I stated last year, the problems that affect our faithful are manifold. I call them to mind again for your consideration:

- a) Some Orthodox jurisdictions receive persons from Roman Catholic and certain Protestant bodies into Holy Orthodoxy by baptism and chrismation, some by chrismation alone, and some merely by confession of faith.
- b) Some jurisdictions receive Latin clergy converting to Holy Orthodoxy merely by vesting, while others ordain.
- c) Some jurisdictions recognize all marriages performed outside Holy Orthodoxy as being real marriages (though certainly not sacramental) whether performed for an Orthodox or non-Orthodox, while others recognize no marriages performed outside Holy Orthodoxy whether performed for an Orthodox or a non-Orthodox. This results in a non-Orthodox married couple having to be married by the Church when they convert in one jurisdiction, while in another they are received without the need for an Orthodox marriage service to be performed for them.
- d) Some Orthodox jurisdictions bury suicides under certain circumstances, while others forbid the burial of suicides under all circumstances.
- e) Some jurisdictions bury a person who was cremated with all funeral rites in the church temple, others permit only Trisagion Prayers of Mercy in the funeral home, and some forbid any prayers anywhere for a person who was cremated.
- f) Some jurisdictions recognize civil divorce as complete and sufficient for ecclesiastical purposes, while others do not recognize civil divorce at all and insist on Ecclesiastical Courts.
- g) Some jurisdictions penance a person when he/she is divorced (either by civil or Church court), while others penance a person only after he/she enters into a second or third marriage.
- h) Some jurisdictions have in the past accepted clergy suspended or even deposed by other jurisdictions.
- i) Some jurisdictions ignore bans of excommunication pronounced by hierarchs of other jurisdictions.

We need to look carefully at the models of canonical regularization that we would present to a future Great and Holy Council, so that when we are called to give an accounting of our ministry here in this region, we shall be ready with an answer to the Church Universal, and help to canonize the region in accordance with Orthodox canonical practice and tradition. We also must apply ourselves to constructive interaction with our Mother Churches, so that our irenic and fraternal good relations can inform the international scene where political tensions often influence Church relations.

9. From the microcosm of the individual issues and problems that we set out to address, we must not forget the macrocosm of Orthodoxy and Christianity in the world. Of particular note is the increasing pressure on our Orthodox and Oriental Brethren throughout the Middle East. Whether it is our ancient Orthodox Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, the endangered Syrian communities of Iraq, the precariously positioned Coptic community in Egypt, or our afflicted brothers and sisters throughout the entire Middle East, we face instability, conflict, religious intolerance and outright repression. As an Assembly of Bishops, we have a responsibility to stand up for their rights and liberties, and make our voices known in the centers of power of the Western Hemisphere. I am hopeful that we will leave our meetings with such a statement of support and solidarity.

10. Ultimately, my beloved brothers in Christ, we have tremendous tasks before us all that weigh heavily on our shoulders. Yet, is this not what we accepted when the *omophorion* was first draped across our shoulders on the day of our ordinations? We have accepted to bear the burden of the flock, even unto diligently searching for the lost sheep and bearing it home rejoicing.

This is not a journey of a few miles or a few days. We find ourselves at every moment in the midst of our ongoing *diakonia* to the Lord and to the Church. Therefore, I commend to all of us words of the Festal Hymn of this day, the Leave-taking of the Feast of Mid-Pentecost:

At the middle of the Feast, my soul athirst – drink from the waters of piety! For the Savior calls aloud to all: “Let the one who is athirst come to Me and drink!” O Fountain of Life, Christ our God, glory to You!

For as the Apostle Paul reminds us, *our God is able to make all grace abound toward us; that we, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work* (II Corinthians 9:8).

Therefore we have no fear that we are not equal to the challenges ahead, but trusting in the mercy and love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, let us take up our yoke of service to Him and His Church. *His yoke is easy; His burden is light* (Matthew 11:30).

11. Together, as sons of the Father, as brothers of the Christ, as partakers in the Same Holy Spirit, let us overcome every possible difficulty to present a unified witness to our Orthodox Faith, and that we make this Assembly the vehicle for transformation of our flocks who are conscious of their Faith, their history, and their value to our society.

And let us always remember what the Lord said to His Apostles after His Resurrection: *As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you* (John 20:21). This uniquely important commission is applicable also to us today. This astonishing honor and responsibility is truly transcendent. The commission becomes even more awesome and amazing indeed when we consider the perspective attached to it, a perspective revealed in the words of the Lord addressed to His Disciples immediately before His Passion: *Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do* (John 14:12).

Beloved Brothers, no matter how unbelievable this might sound, we really are called to do these greater works, about which the Lord spoke. This is our destiny. This is our mission: to make the greater works a living reality in our Orthodox communities. Because we believe in Him Who send us, as the Heavenly Father sent Him: the living Lord, Jesus Christ.

6. AND NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO INPUT!

The preceding sections have given you some insights into the thinking and issues surrounding a move toward Orthodox unity in North America. Now it will be your turn to help refine this goal and to identify the top level steps to actualizing it. During the AAC you will participate in two three-hour Breakout Sessions focused on this Goal. Breakout Session I will focus on what the Church as a whole (parish, deanery, diocese, Church-wide all together) should do. Breakout Session II will focus on the specific programs/projects you and your colleagues in the room, networked together could do to advance this goal.

During Breakout Session I, you and your colleagues will be asked :

- What are the most critical things that need to be done by the Church as a whole to achieve this goal?
- To list up to four specific initiatives for achieving the goal.

During the second Breakout Session, you and your colleagues will focus on specific action steps (concrete projects or programs) that you and your colleagues, connected together in networks, can do to actualize the objectives identified in Breakout Session I. Specifically you will be asked to:

- List up to three specific programs and/or projects that we in this group should commit ourselves to. You will be asked to consider the answers with the context of “What *could* we do with the Lord’s help? What is “impossible with men but *possible with God*”?”
- For each program/project list the specifics of the program/project, i.e. what it will achieve, how will it be achieved, and what people need to be involved.

In preparing for these discussions, you might want to consider the questions below and to solicit input from your priest and the people in your parish as well as from other parishioners and clergy that you know, as well as your own Diocesan Bishop. Space has been left here for you to jot down your comments and bring them to the AAC for your personal reference during the discussions.

- Do you think striving for Orthodoxy unity in North America is important? Realistic?

- Would you be comfortable in attending an Antiochian, Greek or Russian parish? Why or why not? What could make you more comfortable?

- What pan-Orthodox activities go on in your local area? Are they well attended? Are people generally aware of these? What do you think would make people want to get more involved?

- What role can our Dioceses, seminaries and monasteries play in moving us toward unity?