



THE APOSTOLIC WORK OF THE CHURCH
ADDRESS OF THE METROPOLITAN TO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
EIGHTEENTH ALL-AMERICAN COUNCIL

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
July 20, 2015

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

R E A L I T I E S

*O Eternal God, Holy King, Maker of Heaven and earth,
Jesus Christ,
Son without beginning of the Father
without beginning,
Who with incomprehensible goodness hast called me
from nonbeing to this life
Who hast granted to me the blessing of baptism
and heavenly rebirth
And hast set the seal of Thy Holy Spirit
on the members of my body,
As Thou has kindled the desire to seek after Thee,
the only one true God,
Hear now my prayer.*

Your Eminences,
Your Graces,
Honored Abbots and Abbesses and monastics,
Very Reverend Fathers and Clergy Wives,
Distinguished Delegates of the All-American Council and Guests,

I introduce this, my address to the delegates gathered this evening in Atlanta for the Eighteenth All-American Council, with this morning prayer of Archimandrite Sophrony, of blessed memory, not only because it is good to begin all things with prayer, but as a reminder to all of us and to myself; a reminder that we have an eternal God to Whom we owe everything; a reminder that this eternal God saw fit to call me, and all of creation, from nothingness into being; a reminder that, no matter how far I fall from this high calling of being created by such a God, I

can still receive His illumination through baptism and repentance; a reminder that there is no-one and no-thing that I can desire or seek after that will fill me more than Jesus Christ, the Son without beginning of the Father without beginning.

My hope is that all of us, Orthodox Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ, will remember these realities as we prayerfully approach our work in council this week. It is only through prayer, and the life that flows from prayer, and the virtues that are engendered by prayer, that we can reach our goal; and our goal is not the passing of resolutions or the compiling of minutes; our goal is not to debate issues or share our opinion; our goal is not to get to the end of this week or even to set the agenda for the next triennium.

Our goal is to seek God above all, and to let this desire illumine our work together, so that we might make our own the words of Saint Herman of Alaska:

“And I, a sinner, have tried to love God for more than forty years, and I cannot say that I perfectly love Him,” ... “at least let us make a vow to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this very moment, we shall strive above all else to love God and to fulfill His Holy Will!”

THE WAY OF MARTYRDOM

We gather in Council at a time when the world, as it is wont to be, is enshrouded in military conflict, economic hardship, civil war and persecution. Even if we remain somewhat shielded from these global realities in our own North American context, we nevertheless feel the weight of these worldwide struggles even as we wrestle with our own challenges in the economic, political, spiritual and moral spheres.

What can we, as the Orthodox Church in America, offer in the face of these challenges? How can we, small and numerically insignificant, imagine contributing even a bit of light in the midst of such darkness?

The only way to do something is to heed the words of the Lord, who tells us: *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it; Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)*

The way of the Church, and the path of Christians walking along that way is difficult, painful and full of sorrow because it is the way of the Cross. But the way of the Cross is also the way of the Resurrection, though this way may lead us through hell itself. And through the Cross and the Resurrection, we find the love of Christ, Who bore the former and gave us the latter. The way of the Church is the way of sacrifice and martyrdom – this has been so since the foundation of the Church and it remains true for us today. But it is a sacrifice that begets life and a martyrdom that is victorious in Christ’s holy resurrection.

A few months ago, I made my official Irenic - peaceful - visit to the ancient Church of Georgia, a Church which has witnessed the martyric life of Christianity from its foundations even up to more recent times. Exactly four hundred years ago, in 1615, the Persian shah, Abbas I, led his

great army in an attack on the country of Georgia. At one point during his campaign, he was drawn to a flaming column of light high up in the mountains of the Gareji region. He asked about it and was told that there was a great monastery located there. It was the night of Holy Pascha and the monks of the Davit-Gareji monastery were circling the Church three times with lighted candles in celebration of the Lord's resurrection. When the Persians arrived at the monastery, the Abbot, Arsen, approached the leader and asked that the monks be given a bit more time to finish the service and for all the brothers to receive Holy Communion. The Persians allowed for this and the fathers partook of the Holy Gifts, encouraged one another, and then presented themselves clad in festive garments before the unbelievers, who straightaway beheaded the Abbot and massacred a total of 6,000 brothers.¹ Those martyred brothers now "as a cloud of witnesses" intercede before the throne of God for the salvation of those in the Church of Georgia.

My dear brothers and sister in Christ – we cannot begin to speak about how to expand the mission, the theme of our Council this year, if we do not begin with the reality of martyrdom, which is the only authentic foundation for our Apostolic work.

WHERE TO EXPAND THE MISSION

This Apostolic work is not just a theory, just as martyrdom is not just a theory or principle. They are realities of our Church life that challenge us where we are. And we are here, in North America, called to be apostles and martyrs for Christ.

Saint Tikhon of Moscow, the Enlightener of North America, understood this fully when he addressed a similar gathering to ours 106 years ago. He entitled his talk with the words which we have chosen as the theme of this week's Council; and he did it with the full realization that the question "how to expand the mission" could only be answered with a full acceptance of the martyric life of the Church and a commitment to live that life where he was, where the Church was, and where the Church could be.

Twenty-two years earlier, Saint Tikhon had addressed his new flock in San Francisco with the following words:

By the will of God, I, too, in my unworthiness, was called to apostolic service here, and so now I too *will say to those called 'not my people,' 'You are my people; I will call 'beloved' the one called 'not my loved one.'* Until now, we had been strangers to each other, and did not know each other. Henceforth, the Lord Himself is placing us into a bond of closeness, into a mutual relationship of bishop with his flock and flock with her bishop.

Just as the Georgian monks facing certain death on the feast of Holy Pascha, so Saint Tikhon clung to the joy and the hope of the resurrection which would be the foundation of his apostolic work, and this, without any foreknowledge of the Cross that would be his to bear as Patriarch of the Russian Church.

¹ The Lives of the Georgian Saints, page 279.

The same year that the martyrdom of the 6,000 Holy Martyrs of the Gareji Wilderness took place (in 1615), an entire continent away, a different kind of tragedy took place when arsonists set a fire which destroyed the town of Wymondham, in England. Surviving that tragedy were George Packard and his wife Mary, who in that same year, gave birth to a son, Samuel. This was a time of religious and political foment in England, and though Samuel was not old enough to remember the destruction of his town, he quickly became aware of the difficulties and changes that his country was undergoing. At the age of twenty, Samuel married Elizabeth Conant, and two years later, in 1638, with one child and another on the way, they set sail on the good ship “Diligent” bound for Boston, Massachusetts, following the thousands of pilgrims who had already sought out the New World as a place of religious and political refuge.

The Puritans brought to the New World an expression of Christianity that may seem far removed from the ancient Christianity preserved within Orthodoxy. And yet the reality is that this expression of Christianity helped to create the environment into which later waves of immigrants, from many parts of the world, would enter and the context within which Orthodox missionaries, including ourselves today, would be called to labor. We are familiar with this history within the Orthodox world, familiar with the questions of ethnicity and the challenge of forging an authentic Orthodox identity here, in the midst of a very complex social and cultural context, which was coming into being two hundred years before the arrival of the Monastic Missionaries to Kodiak, Alaska, and which context continues to evolve to this very day.

CHALLENGES

WHY EXPAND THE MISSION

The Apostolic Work of the Church does not happen automatically, as the simple result of our physical presence in North America. We, as members of the body of Christ, the Church, are called to bear witness (martyria), and we are called to do this in many ways, each perhaps unique to our calling and our personal gifts, but each directed towards one goal: our healing and salvation in Jesus Christ and the proclamation of this healing and salvation, and the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven, to the broken and wounded people of the world.

And when we speak of the world, we refer not only to the global community as portrayed in the nightly news on television, but to our own local communities. In North America, we face a) the continual disregard of human life (from abortion to the selling of the body parts of aborted children), b) moral and ethical challenges (from addictions of various kinds – drugs, alcohol, pornography, to distorted understandings of the human person and marriage), c) spiritual struggles (from a general spiritual malaise to distrust of organized religion) and d) all the ills that flow from the self-centered individualism of our secular society.

Even if one were to try to ignore the extreme examples, such as the violent attacks on innocent people, or the story of three-year old Jack, who one day in the car decided that he was unhappy being a boy, prompting his mother to immediately take him to the store to buy girl’s clothing for him, and to seek the support of a therapist, leaving not only this family but most likely an entire community (whether they realize it yet or not) in a state of spiritual and emotional confusion – even without such extreme examples, an Orthodox Christian might rightly wonder if the world really has gone mad.

It is precisely because it has indeed gone mad, and has been that way since the time of the first confusion wrought by the deceiver and father of lies. And it is our work as the Church to help bring about sanity and wholeness to the foolishness and brokenness wrought by the passions that afflict mankind, which can only be accomplished through Christ's victory over corruption and death.

This is why we must expand the mission.

Immediately following the recent *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court decision, our Holy Synod of Bishops issued an initial statement of response. But it is also clear that, in an analogous way to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision, the implications of this most recent decision are far-reaching and will require careful theological, pastoral, and legal consideration.

Our Holy Synod is already in discussions about ways to approach the long-term consequences of this decision, including the consideration of the withdrawal of our clergy from serving as agents of the state in civil marriages altogether and taking proactive measures to help our parishes deal with the new pastoral and legal realities that will confront them. These are complex matters and will require much discernment, as well as dialogue with the other jurisdictions in North America within the Assembly of Bishops.

At the same time, I would like to assert very clearly a number of related points.

At his ordination, every single bishop promises the following: “to observe the canons of the Holy Apostles, and of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and of the pious Provincial Councils, the traditions of the Church, and the decrees, orders and rules of the Holy Fathers. All things which they have accepted I accept. All things which they have rejected I reject. I promise to preserve the peace of the Church, and firmly to hold and to teach with zeal the people entrusted to me. I promise to devise nothing whatsoever which is contrary to the Orthodox Catholic Christian Faith all the days of my life.”

This is the only foundation upon which we, as a Church, can stand. And therefore, I would like to state very firmly and clearly that the Orthodox Church must continue to proclaim what she has always taught: that marriage is the union between one man and one woman and the Orthodox Church in America can in no way deviate from this teaching, and as we have not in the past, so we will never in the future, bless or recognize same-sex unions in any sacramental way.

At the same time, the Church must fulfill her apostolic work, which is to bring humanity closer to Christ God, our Creator, Redeemer and Lord, through the process of healing of every human person by means of the grace of the Holy Spirit and our own small efforts. And this needs to be done within the public, legal and civil context we find ourselves in, which always makes things complicated.

In relation to this particular debate, Fr. Thomas Hopko, of blessed memory, wrote: “The homosexual Christian is called to a particularly rigorous battle. His or her struggle is an especially ferocious one. It is not made any easier by the mindless, truly demonic hatred of those who despise and ridicule those who carry this painful and burdensome cross; nor by the

mindless, equally demonic affirmation of homosexual activity by its misguided advocates and enablers.”²

We must be careful, as members of Christ’s Holy Church, to avoid falling into either of these extremes. The Church can no more align herself with the Westboro Baptist Church, with its ferocious and mean-spirited certainty that “God hates fags”, than it can with those who misguidedly hail the recent Supreme Court decision as a testimony that “love wins.” Just as our response to the tragedy of war cannot be, as was common several decades ago, to shout: “make love, not war” so we must be sure that our stand is taken solely on the life of Christ and the teachings of the Gospel.

There have been, and will always be political and constitutional debates in North America. As the Church, however it is our task to prayerfully and carefully navigate these choppy waters. And this should be nothing new for us. In 1808, having fought and been wounded in the war of American independence, having lived through the turbulent period of the founding of the United States, having received their Divinity Degrees from Harvard University, two of Samuel Packard’s grandsons, the Reverend Asa Packard and the Reverend Hezekiah Packard began their ministries in the context of this fledgling nation. Even then, in 1808, Reverend Asa wrote to his brother the following:

I am going to Town Meeting with a heavy heart. The meanest, most vicious, ignorant and contemptible democrat will nullify my vote by depositing his own. This single circumstance, [namely] the suffrage of the rabble (always dupes to the most artful demagogue) is a mortal, destructive germ in our constitution. But what remedy is possible? I wish I could repel every tho’t of political matters, which cannot affect my usefulness; repel it as effectually as an impious man casts off fear and puts far away the evil day.

As it was in those days, so it is today: we all have our opinions about the political, social and cultural context we find ourselves in. However, we cannot afford, as Christians, to define ourselves narrowly as republican or democrat; as conservative or liberal; as viewers of Fox News or listeners of NPR; as East Coasters or West Coasters; as Confederates or Unionists – if these things distract us from Christ.

I am reminded of the words of David St. Hubbins, who once said:

“It’s such a fine line between stupid and clever.”

And the reality is that, on both sides of any human debate or issue, there are those who are wise and those who are foolish. Our task as Orthodox Christians is not to align ourselves on the political spectrum, but to find that fine line between clever and stupid, which can only be found in the wisdom of Christ and the foolishness of the Cross.

When Saint Nicholai of Zicha was imprisoned in the Dachau concentration camp during World War II, he spoke about how he survived the hardships of his imprisonment:

² Hopko, Fr. Thomas, *The Homosexual Christian*, OCA Department of Christian Education.

“You sit in the corner and say over and over again, ‘I am dust, I am ashes, take my soul.’ And suddenly your soul is taken up and sees God face to face. But you cannot endure this, and you say to Him, ‘I am not ready, I can’t... send me back.’ And so once more you sit there, for hours on end, repeating: ‘I am dust, I am ashes, take my soul.’ And once more, the Lord catches you up. Were it possible, I would exchange what remains of my life for one more hour in [Dachau].”

Such experiences should put matters into perspective for us all.

WHO IS TO EXPAND THE MISSION?

Such perspective is what the Orthodox Church in America has gained over the past ten heavy and difficult years. A painful series of complex financial and administrative crises yielded deep fracturing within the body of the Church, fracturing that was felt within every member of that body: in our dioceses, in our parishes, in our monasteries, in our seminaries, and in our families. Such division bore unhealthy fruit in frustration, disappointment and anger within the hearts of many, which resulted in defensiveness, distrust, judgment and resentment between brothers and sisters in Christ. Indeed, the very fabric of our life was torn, leaving many wounded in heart and broken in spirit.

Have we found healing from this brokenness? Although a certain appearance of calm has recently settled on the Church, the effects of the above struggles are still being felt very keenly on all levels. The time has come for every one of us to genuinely enter into the spirit of mutual forgiveness which will lead us on the path to reconciliation, healing and a refocus on the one thing needful: our own salvation and the salvation of the world. Although it is above all God’s grace that can truly heal our wounds, each of us is called to accept our responsibility for those wounds so that we might “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” as Saint Paul reminded us in Sunday’s Epistle reading.

In order to receive in its fullness the light and joy of the resurrection, it is first necessary to confront death, corruption and the passions within our own hearts, as we do during the season of Great Lent. The first step on that journey is the asking of mutual forgiveness, and therefore, as we begin to discern where our apostolic path will take us, I would like to ask forgiveness of each of you for all the ways that I have contributed to our past fracturing and the painful events that we have passed through. I offer this as an expression of sorrow and repentance for the pain and suffering that so many of us have endured and I ask that the Lord will strengthen all of us with His mercy and His grace as we both evaluate where we are now and where we should be going in our apostolic journey.

If we ask ourselves, who is to expand the mission, we cannot but answer that it is every single one of us, every single one of us who has perhaps been wounded but also strengthened by the struggles of the past ten years. In particular, though, I would like to take a moment to speak specifically about the clergy.

For the past several years, clergy sexual misconduct matters have occupied our attention and have yielded some positive response in terms of both the protection of the young and the vulnerable in our communities and the healing of those who have fallen prey to these

temptations. But the progress that has been made should not obscure an even deeper problem that needs our attention: the spiritual, emotional, physical and psychological health of our clergy.

A greater coordinated effort, involving the Holy Synod, our seminaries, our dioceses and our parishes and families, needs to be implemented in a positive effort of strengthening the health of our clergy so that they can do the work of missions and evangelism, preaching and teaching, healing and comforting, that they are ordained to do.

Already, much has been done towards this end. Our clergy have been participating in many opportunities for enrichment through the Department of Continuing Education and the recently re-established Department of Pastoral Life, which will provide a means of beginning to address this critical area of Church life. Other established areas, such as the OCA Pension Plan have been in place for many years as a means of concrete financial support to our clergy and their wives at the time of their retirement. The Holy Synod continues to remind all our parishes that this plan is, in fact, mandated for all our clergy and encourages all of our parishes to fulfill this obligation. In addition there is much work that needs to be done in the area of clergy compensation, but also in the broader area of the spiritual and physical well-being of our clergy.

This must be a priority for us.

WHEN TO EXPAND THE MISSION

If we are to expand the Mission, we must begin today and we must begin at this All-American Council. This does not mean that we have not begun already, but only that we must, with the Psalmist, continually say: *And I said, now have I made a beginning; this change hath been wrought by the right hand of the Most High. (76:11)*. This verse is often cited in the context of the ascetical struggle and discipline of the monastics, which requires a daily renewal and effort to preserve enthusiasm. As Saint Anthony the great said on his deathbed:

You know the treacherous demons -- you know how savage they are, even though weakened in strength. Therefore do not fear them, but rather draw inspiration from Christ always, and trust in Him. And live as though dying daily, paying heed to yourselves and remembering what you heard from my preaching.

Although the fracturing of the last ten years has left all of us wounded, it has been an opportunity for us to make a new beginning and to draw inspiration from Christ. Through these new beginnings, our Church has seen some good fruit: a healthy implementation of accountability and transparency within the central administration, a stronger bond of brotherhood within the Holy Synod, and a recognition within the body of the Church of our fragility and of our need to pull together in facing the challenges before us.

From the beginning of our autocephaly, there have been voices that have been critical of that status, as there are today voices that claim that our place here in North America is not welcome and that our contribution has been weakened by the past years of struggle. Certainly, all that has happened humbles us, but at the same time, we know that it is through being humbled that we learn humility, which is not weakness but strength.

Beginning in 2009, a process was begun on the world Orthodox stage when the fourth pre-conciliar commission meeting in Chambésy instituted Episcopal Assemblies in the thirteen regions of the so-called diaspora. The Assembly for North America was later divided into the **Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States**, with a separate Assembly being created for Canada. The Assembly for the United States has probably been the most active of all the Assemblies to date.

Whereas in the past, the Orthodox Church in America was usually placed in a defensive position vis-à-vis her status as an autocephalous Church, the current context of the Assemblies provides us with a significant opportunity to contribute to the creation of a plan for the canonical reorganization of our region, which is one of the mandates of the Chambésy process. Several plans have been considered by the US Assembly over the past two years, with none of them gaining traction among the entire Assembly.

The Holy Synod of the OCA contributed a response to the document that we were asked to comment on, in which we proposed that the best plan for canonical reorganization in our region is a fully local Church with its own functioning Holy Synod, whose purpose would be to minister to the faithful of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Discussions are continuing in this direction and we are preparing ourselves for the sixth gathering of the Assembly of the United States this coming September.

As part of those preparations, I travelled to Constantinople in December, as part of a delegation representing Saint Vladimir's Seminary. More recently, I was asked to join the Executive Committee of the Assembly of Bishops (on which the OCA is currently not represented) on a visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate to discuss the work of the Assembly here in the United States. It is my hope that we will continue our good relations with all the worldwide Orthodox Churches, even as we continue to work in close collaboration with all the jurisdictions here in North America.

One of the roles of the Metropolitan is to represent the Orthodox Church in America in relation to world Orthodoxy, since no matter how strong a spirit of independence we may have inherited from our nation and from our forebears, we remain part of a universal and ecumenical Church. We cannot expand the mission in isolation from the rest of the Orthodox world.

Since becoming Primate, I have met with the Primates of all the Orthodox Churches except for Patriarch Daniel of Romania and have concelebrated with 9 of the 14 Primates. It is also the ancient custom for a newly-elected Primate to make official Irenic visits to the other autocephalous Churches, and I have make such visits to the Church of Russia and the Church of Georgia. Discussions are in motion for possible visits to others.

H O P E S

THE APOSTOLIC WORK OF THE CHURCH

Last week, as I was walking on the grounds of the Chancery early in the morning, I came across a small bird, who was visibly wounded and hopping along with great difficulty, its head to the ground and pushing itself with great effort through the tall grass. I wondered to myself whether I

should try to help in some way, or just leave nature to care for itself. Choosing the first option, I scooped up the small bird, placed it in a shoebox lined with a towel and drove it to a nearby wildlife care facility. The veterinarian examined the bird and handed it back to me saying that the bird was fine, that it was just a baby and that I should place it back where I found it. So I drove back to the Chancery and did as the expert had told me, leaving the bird where I found it. I made the sign of the cross over it and returned back to my work with a small prayer that the bird would survive.

I did not check again until the next day, when I found the bird, a few hundred feet beyond where I left it, lying dead in the grass, its feathers scattered and ants already beginning to crawl over it.

I offer this story as an image of the pastoral life of the Church, which, more often than not, is very messy, confusing and full of uncertainty. Sometimes our best intentions, as bishops, priests or concerned laypeople, are thwarted by the realities of the world and the choices of individuals. None of us can be certain that the choices we make or the help that we offer will bear fruit. Sometimes all we can do is make a decision and trust that our Lord will bring about healing. We have to accept that we will make mistakes, accept that not everything will be perfect, that sometimes even the guidance of experts will fail those whom we seek to help, but nevertheless always trusting in God's mercy and kindness as we act upon what we pray is beneficial for our salvation and the salvation of our brothers and sisters.

This pastoral work is the Apostolic Work that falls to each of us. This is another reason why we seek to expand the mission.

HOW TO EXPAND THE MISSION

Following the All-American Council in Seattle, the Orthodox Church in America entered upon a Strategic Plan process which has yielded some very concrete projects and positive results, which reflect where our clergy and faithful think the Church should be directing her energies. The Strategic Plan process, which is presently in the stage of being rolled into the life of the Church, presented a model for broad cooperation within our Church, and we offer our thanks to all who spearheaded and participated in this process, which is an on-going one.

But we must not stop there. This All-American Council is pivotal for the Orthodox Church in America and there are several concrete measures that we must consider this week.

The first is the **Statute Revision**.

In 2013, the Holy Synod blessed the Statute Revision Commission, the fruit of whose excellent work will be considered tomorrow. The proposed Revised Statute has undergone a period of Church-wide review, which for some, may not have been sufficient. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that we have had the benefit of last the forty-four years of operating under that Statute, which itself was founded on a series of historical precedents. In addition, the revision we are considering is itself open to further review and amendment in years to come.

The Holy Synod has reviewed the proposed Revised Statute and strongly supports its approval by this All-American Council at our plenary session tomorrow morning. It is truly a remarkable

document which both clarifies areas of ambiguity and fills in those areas that are missing, such as stavropegial institutions, the monasteries and the competencies of various bodies within the Church. More broadly, it takes into account the actual experience of the Church over the past forty years, including the lessons learned during our recent difficulties, as well as the realities of a changing legal environment in the world around us.

I feel confident that when this Council approves this document, we will have a strong foundation upon which to focus on the work of expanding the mission through the better operation of our parishes, dioceses and the ministries that allow us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned and become icons of Christ.

This past Sunday, we visited the Loaves and Fishes Ministry, a ministry to which the image of the bird I gave earlier applies. It is a great ministry, but not every one can do it, nor is there sometimes full support from the parish. And this is the reality in all of our parishes. We try, we encourage good works, we have many ministries: feeding the homeless, Agia Sophia Coffee Houses and other bookstores that are spreading throughout our dioceses... All of these things are messy. They don't happen magically. We can do these things because we have a solid Statute in order to do these messy works and to enter into those ministries with zeal and courage.

A second concrete proposal we are considering, also tomorrow, is the **Finance Resolution**.

The Holy Synod has expressed its full support for this resolution which is the fruit of four years of discussion, debate and wrestling within our Church, in an attempt to fulfill the mandate of the 16th All-American Council in Seattle to find a new and better way to support the life of the Church. The Holy Synod has also expressed its full support of the work of the OCA Chancery, which is not simply the "central administration" but part of the life of our Church.

This is really a crucial moment in the life of our Church. For how many years have we discussed and debated making the move from an assessment-based and per capita-based system of funding the Church to one that is based on proportional giving and a stewardship model that is more sound. Although we can be sure that further debates and discussions will take place over the next triennium and beyond on this question, the resolution we will be considering takes us to a point that we have never been as a Church. And if we can deal with this resolution in unity and with trust in God's guidance for us, we will be in a much better position.

THE PILLARS OF OUR EXPANSION

I have already mentioned clergy health and our progress in terms of external relations. These are two elements of four that I have made to the Holy Synod for the setting and implementation of a long-term direction for the Orthodox Church in America. Under the guidance of the Holy Synod, I will be appointing a Mission Expansion Advisory Board to assist me in forging this direction along with the fullness of the Church.

I. The Spiritual Life

When I visited the Holy Mountain for the first time as a novice, I was filled with the expectation of finding paradise – and I did. The sacredness of the Holy Mountain of Athos is a reality and

should not simply be dismissed as an idealized or romantic vision found here in the West. But neither should we forget that there are human beings struggling in that paradise. I went there with the sense that our monastic life in North America was weak and with the hope that I would find perfection. There was a moment which made a deep impression on me:

The monks were gathered for an all-night vigil, it was cold, the wood fire was barely heating a small section of the temple, and I observed an elderly monk, standing in his stall, holding a prayer rope, deep in prayer. Another elderly monk came by him, pointed to the prayer rope and then to himself, indicating that he thought that this was his prayer rope. They started to tug, each on one end of the prayer rope, until finally one of them gave up.

But that moment was the moment I knew that it was alright for me to return to my monastery in South Canaan and to struggle there.

The Monastic Life can help us because we all have idealized visions of what our monasteries should be, what our parishes should be, what our own spiritual life should be. But true monastics remind us that, while we do need to strive for perfection, yet we are really only wretched creatures in need of God's love and healing. So we need to strengthen our monastic life in North America.

A Synaxis of Monastic Superiors was held last year at the Chancery at which a dozen representatives from our monasteries shared in very candid and in-depth discussions concerning the life and challenges of our monasteries. At the end of October this year, a second Synaxis will be held at the Saint John of Shanghai Monastery in Manton, California.

In addition to supporting our monasteries as institutions, it is important for all of our clergy and faithful to recognize the great contribution that the monastics make to the Apostolic Work of the Church. It has historically been the monasteries that were on the forefront of the missionary endeavors of the Church, beginning with the example of the early Church. But the life of prayer and repentance is required of all of us. We are grateful for the example and the life of the monastics, and we need to encourage our children to consider this sacred life.

We are extremely blessed to have three **Seminaries** within the OCA and the Mission Statements of all three of our schools reflect that they are a primary source for the rekindling of our apostolic fervor, not only within the seminaries themselves but within our dioceses and parishes.

Parishes need to support the 1% resolution adopted in Seattle: when you set your parish budget, set aside at least 1% to support the seminary or seminaries of your choice. But beyond that, we need to re-emphasize the central role of our seminaries in the life of the Church. Especially now, with the growing need for theologically sound teaching, for pastorally grounded ministry and for missionary growth, the seminaries remain, along with our monasteries, as the chief centers for such knowledge.

We need to have properly trained and educated clergy who will serve our parishes with zeal and enthusiasm. We also need to acknowledge that three years of seminary is not enough to provide all the resources and experience necessary for our clergy and so we must support our seminaries as centers of continuing education, both for the clergy and for the laity.

It is also important for all of our seminaries to work together towards this goal. As part of this endeavor, I will be calling for a joint meeting of the Board of Trustees of all three of our Seminaries sometime in the Fall in order to address the common issues that face all of our seminaries. I ask all of you to pray for, and contribute to, this work on the local level.

II. External Affairs

I have spoken already about the work that is being done on the level of the Assembly of Bishops. This work, as well as our relations with the worldwide communion of Orthodox Churches, our relations with the non-Orthodox and our participation in various ecumenical bodies, needs to be strengthened and prioritized. In order to help with this, I will be calling for an **external affairs consultation** some time in the Fall.

III. Stewardship

When the Finance Resolution is approved tomorrow, the third pillar of our focus moving forward will need to be the stewardship of our assets. Not simply our physical and financial assets of the Church, but all questions affecting the life of the Church including communication, in relation to the specific question of financial stewardship. In this connection stewardship is not just a matter for parish and diocesan action. It's personal. So please join me and the Holy Synod on Wednesday evening for a reception for the **Stewards of the OCA**. And if you're not a member already, I hope you will consider adding your name and being willing to identify yourself as someone who believes in the mission of the Orthodox Church in America.

IV. Evangelism and Outreach

All the work that we do as the Church is Evangelism and Mission, that is to say, the Apostolic Work of the Church. So on the one hand, it is less than ideal to approach evangelism and outreach as a separate component of the life of the Church. It is, in fact, the life of the Church.

Nevertheless, it is sometimes helpful to hone in on specific things in order to implement this vision on a practical and realizable level. Recently, our Church received a generous and unrestricted bequest of \$1,000,000, which was to be used specifically for missions and evangelism. After a thorough process of review and analysis, and with the blessing of the Holy Synod, the first Mission School was held this year in Detroit with much success, funded entirely from the interest of this bequest.

In addition, we continue to see much from the **Mission Planting Grants** which are overseen by Fr John Parker, who also called together an Evangelism **Summit** as part of the work of the Department of Evangelization.

Just as the life of prayer and repentance is not the concern of monastics alone, so apostleship is a vocation for the entire Church. Archbishop Anastasios of Albania reminds us that: "each one of us personally, bears his or her share of responsibility, as a living cell of this organic whole. Interest in apostleship, in mission, is not the specialty of particular groups or individuals, but a

definitive characteristic of the Church herself. It is designated as the occupation of the Church. It is the *sine qua non* of its life.”³

OUR VISION

The Orthodox Church in America holds sacred its vision for a local Orthodox Church in North America and we are able to articulate this more firmly than any other jurisdiction on this continent. Not only this, but while living in brotherly good relations with all other Orthodox, we have had the blessing of being able to live the reality of that local Orthodox Church and to strive to be all things to all people, so that even a few might be saved.

We should preserve this vision with zeal both now and in the future, as our founders have preserved it and proclaimed it in the past. We should do this while also remaining committed to the work of the Assembly of Bishops and remaining supportive of the work that is taking place in all local Orthodox Churches worldwide. We are North Americans who enjoy great freedom and blessings, but our consciousness of the martyric witness of Christians, both in the past, and today, keeps us sober and humble, so that we do not, and should not, fall into any kind of triumphalism or isolationism, which are antithetical to the Gospel of Christ.

At the same time, perhaps some of us, looking at the world around us, become discouraged, skeptical or fearful. We worry about the decisions handed down by our courts of law, we are fearful of the decisions taken by our elected officials, we wonder how long our children can remain shielded from the negative and harmful ways of life that are presented to them, often very forcefully.

Saint Tikhon of Moscow once said that, “...[M]ost importantly, the Orthodox Church accomplishes her [missionary] task in silence, with humility and godliness, with an understanding of human frailty and divine power.”

Besides Saint Tikhon, we have many bold advocates for our vision in North America. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann spoke at the time of the funeral of Metropolitan Leonty, noting that His Eminence had left the Church in North America with a legacy: a legacy of unity, the legacy of his vision of the Church and the legacy of being a true man of God.

Concerning unity, Fr. Alexander said: “His whole life was above everything else a ministry, a liturgy of unity, and in this he fulfilled the first and most essential function of the Bishop. He literally kept us together in his heart, in his prayer, in his love. And his heart was big enough for all and everything. And everyone, whatever his position, his calling, his ideas, could identify himself with the Metropolitan and through him with the Church... Whenever he appeared – all knew immediately that he was the Father, the center unity; all felt immediately secure and confident in his love, understanding and response.”

Concerning his vision for the Church, Fr. Alexander wrote of the way in which Metropolitan Leonty equally united a deep attachment to Russian Orthodoxy and to what it means to be Orthodox in North America. “Paradoxically enough, in this perfect harmony between his Russian roots and his American ministry he was more American than many American-born Orthodox,

³ Archbishop Anastasios, page 266

more Russian than many newcomers. He had no fears, no suspicions, no frustrations. He was equally alien to pseudo-conservative negativism and to pseudo-progressive compromise. He simply was what he was – a Russian Orthodox truly aware that God had sent him to America to love it and to dedicate to it his Orthodox faith and his Orthodox heart.”

Finally, and the most important of his legacies, according to Fr. Alexander: Metropolitan Leonty “was a man of God. He lived in and by God, and no one has ever approached him without feeling that he has touched and entered upon the reality of the spiritual world.”

This is what it means to truly be a branch of Christ. This is what is offered to us by all the saints: Saint Herman of Alaska, Saint Tikhon of Moscow, and Saint Raphael of Brooklyn, whose centennial of repose we celebrate this year as well. This is what each of us is called to aspire to as followers and worshippers of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

One year after Metropolitan Leonty’s repose, the 10th Great-Grandson of Samuel Packard was born in Boston, Massachusetts, not far from where his ancestor had landed three-hundred and fifty years earlier. He travelled to France and then returned to St Louis and finally settled in Reading, Pennsylvania. He travelled to Chicago where he embraced the Orthodox Faith and then attended Seminary, where he also joined the Monastery. He now stands before you as the one offering this address to the 18th All-American Council.

The anecdotes I related about the Packard family are part of my family history, and this history is important to me, but it does not define who I am. Rather, it reminds me of the human struggle and reminds me that there is always human effort required on my part to find God and to live a life worthy of Him.

Earlier I mentioned the Reverends Asa and Hezekiah Packard. Each of them fought in the Revolutionary War. Hezekiah, at the age of 14, heard the canons at Bunker Hill and resolved to enlist as a fifer under Col. John Dudley Sargent. His brother, Asa, also enlisted and was wounded in the battle of Harlem Heights, on September 16, 1776. A musket ball was lodged in his spine that the surgeons were unable to remove, so he carried that musket ball in his spine for the rest of his life, including his time at Harvard Divinity School with his brother and in his service as a Congregational Minister in Massachusetts. Asa recounts the following story:

In 1777, early in January, I (Asa Packard) was passing through Farmington, returning from the army in New York to my parents at Bridgewater. The wound I received in battle was not healed, the ball still troubled me. I could not walk without an arm to lean upon, and with assistance could travel but a few miles in a day. On a Sabbath morning, with snow on the ground, I was in Farmington Village, leaning on my friend who led me; striking something with my foot, I fell. Bursting into tears I said: “I can go no farther. I will die here if I must die!” I looked around upon houses in sight and selected a neat, snug-looking, one-story house, not painted, standing some ten rods east of the road on a little rising ground. “There,” said I, “we will try there.” A Mr. Thomas Cowles was its owner. We went in. The venerable aged man had his great Bible before him on a small

table before the fire. His red worsted cap, brown coat and small clothes and his blue stockings I well remember. I told my wishes and my suffering. He said he could not take me; his daughter, who took care of him, was feeble. I was in tears (and am now). "Sir," said I, or similar words, "my parents are living and reputable situated, and if your son, situated as I am, should make such a request of them, as I do of you, they would not turn him away. You must let me stay." About this time his daughter came in. She was forty or fifty years old. What she said I do not remember, but both consented to admit the poor sick boy, and greater kindness than theirs was never realized by a sufferer. How long I was there, I cannot recollect, but I was very ill and totally delirious several days. An elderly physician attended me, and when my brother came to relieve me, both Mr. Cowles and the doctor refused to take any compensation. I wrote Mr. Cowles often, and he answered me, till after my ordination. Having a direct conveyance, a little before his death, I sent him two books, and wrote in each, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in."

That musket ball, which was lodged in Asa's spine was kept in the family. I have it with me. It is not a relic, but it reminds me of where I came from, that even as an Orthodox Metropolitan, I have a history, as each of you does, both grounding you to where you are and spurring you on towards the Heavenly Kingdom. And each of you is here as a member of the body of Christ, the Holy Church. But what is amazing is that all of us are gathered here as the Church. We may have our own opinions about our countries, about social and moral issues, about immigration issues, gun control, about states rights and centralized government, about diocesan sovereignty and the central administration.

But we should never forget that every one of us is a member of the body of Christ. And this gives me hope, hope in the beauty, goodness and kindness of humanity, hope in the potential of our Church to be a true witness to the divine beauty, goodness and kindness that is offered to all of mankind, hope that, by God's providence, I stand before you as the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, and that I am able to hear your concerns and hopes, your complaints and praises, your frustration and your encouragement. And having heard them, I can be assured of your love and your prayers, as you have my love and my prayers.

I ask you to join me in this ascetical journey to discern and develop the work of the Gospel that we need to accomplish through prayer, repentance and common work for the glory of God, always remembering the words of the Lord:

Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. (Matthew 7:24-25)

AMEN