



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

MESSAGE

Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 1:3).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

We, the members of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, gathered in Cleveland, Ohio, for our ninth annual meeting on October 2-3, 2018, greet you all with love in Christ as we offer glory and gratitude to Him.

Twenty-five Hierarchs assembled in order to remember and reaffirm our unity in the Orthodox faith. We express our deep gratitude to all those who planned and prepared for this year's Assembly. The Assembly opened with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy at St. Sava Serbian Cathedral. We extend special appreciation to our host, Bishop Irinej, and the community, especially the Circle of Serbian Sisters, for their hospitality.

Once again, we called to mind our brother Hierarchs kidnapped in Syria, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Paul Yazigi (brother of His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch) and the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop John Ibrahim.

In the opening session, the Chairman, Archbishop Demetrios of America, delivered his keynote address, which can be found on the Assembly's website. The officers of the Assembly, Metropolitan Gregory (Secretary) and Archbishop Michael (Treasurer) also presented their official reports.

Afterward, the staff of the Assembly ministries and Chairmen of the Assembly committees offered an overview of their work during the last year. The assembled Hierarchs discussed how to further support these ministries as well as how to strengthen the organization and effectiveness of the committees. We heard presentations from Rev. Dr. Alkiviadis Calivas, Professor Emeritus of Liturgics at Hellenic College Holy Cross School of Theology, and V. Rev. Dr. John Morris, Pastor Emeritus. They presented on baptism, chrismation and the reception of converts. Metropolitan Gregory presented highlights of the study entitled "Go and Make Disciples: Evangelization and Outreach in US Orthodox Parishes (Part 1)." Metropolitan Nicolae, Chairman of the Committee on Canonical Regional Planning, presented a summary report of the study entitled "Places of Greater Orthodox Unity in America: State of Local Parish-to-Parish Inter-Orthodox Cooperation and Communication."

After due deliberations on the role and responsibility of the Church in contemporary society, we reached the following conclusions, which we convey to our communities throughout America:

- 1) Echoing the discussion and desire of last year's Assembly regarding the instruction of children and involvement of young adults in the Church, the Hierarchs underlined the importance of the formation of all ages of youth in parish programs and pastoral outreach, recognizing and realizing their contribution as *an example for believers* (1 Tim. 4:12). Therefore, we urge our faithful and especially our youth to learn and live the commandments of the Gospel and the traditions of the Church, which illumine and sustain our lives and decisions in order that we might be the *salt of the earth*, as taught by our Lord (*c.f.* Matt. 5:13). To this end, we encourage our parishes to develop educational programs for baptism and chrismation of children and adults entering the Orthodox Church so that our parishioners may acquire and nurture a deeper understanding of the faith.
- 2) We express our compassion and support for refugees and their families, who face immense suffering and encounter severe displacement throughout the world and even in our own country. Additionally, we denounce all violence, whether caused by senseless acts related to weapons and shootings or instigated by abhorrent acts of discrimination and prejudice. Orthodox Christians are called to demonstrate their solidarity with and hospitality to all people, irrespective of race and religion, to welcome and embrace the image of God in the least of our brothers and sisters, as instructed in the parable of our Lord (*c.f.* Matt. 25:40-45). Our God is a God of love and forgiveness, of reconciliation and fellowship.
- 3) We convey our heartfelt and prayerful compassion to those who have lost loved ones and experienced devastation or deprivation caused by diverse natural disasters over the last year, from Hurricanes Harvey in Texas to Maria in Puerto Rico and Florence in the Carolinas, and most recently the Tsunami in Indonesia. We pray that God may preserve the world from such calamities, and appeal to our faithful, and all people of good will, to respect God's creation and protect its natural resources.
- 4) We do indeed confirm our unity as Orthodox Christians, for which we must carefully albeit constantly, but also prayerfully albeit passionately, strive to practice and exercise. While we acknowledge and appreciate that unity is a sacred gift from the Triune God, we are also aware and conscious that *we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us* (2 Cor. 4:7). In this regard, we refuse to surrender to the temptation of disruption of unity or division among us. For, *while we are afflicted in every way, we are not crushed; we are perplexed, but not driven to despair; . . . [we may be] struck down, but not destroyed, inasmuch as we always carry within us the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies* (2 Cor. 4:8-10). Therefore, we remain committed to the fullness of unity in faith that we enjoy as Orthodox Christians in this country.

In conclusion, we extend our paternal prayers for all of our faithful. May the abundant blessings of our all-merciful God be with you all.

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the dominion now and to the day of eternity (2 Peter 3:18).

Archbishop Demetrios,
Chairman
Metropolitan Gregory,
Secretary
Archbishop Michael,
Treasurer
Metropolitan Methodios
Metropolitan Alexios
Metropolitan Nicholas
Metropolitan Savas
Bishop Sevastianos
Metropolitan Antony
Bishop Ilia
Bishop Thomas

Bishop John
Bishop Nicholas
Bishop Longin
Bishop Maxim
Bishop Irinej
Metropolitan Nicolae
Bishop Saba
Metropolitan Tikhon
Archbishop Nathaniel
Archbishop Nikon
Archbishop Benjamin
Archbishop Melchisedek
Bishop David
Bishop Paul