



2020 VISION

Preamble

We, the Hierarchs of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States of America, with one voice affirm the following common vision for the future of our Assembly:

We are supremely grateful to the Most Holy Patriarchs and Primate of the Orthodox Churches for initiating the Assembly process at the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan Orthodox Conference in Chambésy, Switzerland in June of 2009. By their prophetic action, our venerable fathers offered the world an icon of sacred unity, of ecclesiastical cooperation and of brotherly collaboration. We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ will strengthen them and enable them to continue providing such an apostolic image of pastoral care and ecclesiastical leadership for the sake of the unity of the Holy Orthodox Church, which sojourns throughout the world. We commit ourselves to implementing that same vision here in our region.

We offer our wholehearted support for the goal expressed by the Pre-Conciliar Conference to organize each region in accordance with Orthodox ecclesiology, and the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church. We offer the last ten years (*see attached historical summary*) of the work of the Assembly as the fruit of our efforts to reach this goal, especially through the work of the Committee on Canonical and Regional Planning, the Committee for Pastoral Practice, and the Committee for Youth.

We commit ourselves *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (Ephesians 4:3) by adhering to the principles of canonical order, of liturgical concelebration, and pastoral cooperation on every level of our Church life. In particular, we pledge to dedicate ourselves and to lead our respective flocks in the fulfilling of the following 16 Strategic Goals over the coming months and years. We invite all our clergy and faithful to join us on this journey by reminding all of the words of the Apostle that *there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all* (Ephesians 4:4).

Purpose, Mission, and Vision

Assembly of Bishops STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Assembly, in bringing together the Orthodox Christian hierarchy, will serve to bring the clergy, monastics, and laity closer to Christ and each other.

Assembly of Bishops MISSION STATEMENT

The Assembly will preserve and contribute to the unity of the Orthodox Church in the United States of America by furthering her spiritual, theological, ecclesiological, canonical, educational, missionary, and philanthropic aims.

Assembly of Bishops VISION STATEMENT

In His High Priestly Prayer to His Father, Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ prayed for His disciples, the members of the Church that He established ... “that they all may be one; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that You have sent Me” (John 17:21).

TOWARD A COMMON VISION

Within the next three years, the Assembly will measurably enhance:

- a. Orthodox Christian Unity & Outreach;
- b. Common Orthodox Witness;
- c. Ministries & Initiatives; and
- d. Organizational Excellence.

Goals

STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

To achieve the Vision, in addition to the other Assembly Committees continuing their work to achieve their charters, in the next triennium, the Assembly will accomplish the following 16 Strategic Goals:

A. ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN UNITY & OUTREACH

1. Clergy Matters Committee will:

- a. establish and revitalize strong pan-Orthodox Clergy Brotherhoods (“Clergy Brotherhoods”) and develop a prototype for pan-Orthodox Clergy Brotherhoods, including protocols for affiliating local Orthodox Christian ministries;
- b. work with the Committee for Canonical Regional Planning to identify entry points for studying and strengthening Clergy Brotherhoods; and
- c. collect, collate, and study the protocols and policies of the member jurisdictions concerning various clergy related matters.

2. Canonical Regional Planning Committee will:

- a. work with pan-Orthodox Clergy Brotherhoods (“Clergy Brotherhoods”) and inter-Orthodox Parish Associations “Associations” (consisting of clergy and lay representatives from all Orthodox parishes) to efficiently facilitate and maintain pan-Orthodox parish-to-parish communications, activities and cooperation (the “One Church Initiative”) in the pilot metro areas;

- b. work with the Committee for Clergy Matters to identify entry points for studying and strengthening Clergy Brotherhoods; and
- c. expand the One Church Initiative to help establish effective Clergy Brotherhoods and Associations in several other metro areas to be determined.

3. Ecumenical Relations Committee will:

- a. sponsor and publicize the significant achievements of the meetings of the:
 - i. Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation; and
 - ii. Joint Commission of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches.
- b. identify and implement other ecumenical and inter-Orthodox relations dialogues and initiatives that will be most effective to achieve the Assembly's WHY, Mission, and Vision.

B. COMMON ORTHODOX WITNESS

4. Pastoral Practice Committee will develop agreed pastoral practices and aspects across all jurisdictions in the areas of:

- a. Clergy Release and Transfer;
 - i. develop a process for better direct communications among local affected Hierarchs to discuss potential clergy releases and transfers;
 - ii. develop a clear and uniform process for clergy releases and transfers among Jurisdictions, including in those Jurisdictions where there is not only 1 Primate or for Canonical Jurisdictions which may not be communicating regularly;
 - iii. develop a process to ensure there is no transfer of a clergyman whom a Jurisdiction has determined should no longer be available for assignment.
- b. Hospital Chaplaincy/Visitation of the Sick;
 - i. test the use of new Assembly APP as a vehicle to reach out to all Pan-Orthodox clergy in an area to facilitate the most prompt visitation of hospitalized Orthodox faithful who may not be able to be visited quickly by their clergyman;
 - ii. organize a virtual conference to teach clergy about what hospital visitations are permitted and how to expand hospital acceptance of Orthodox clergy visitations; and
 - iii. refine and distribute an effective hospital ministry process.

- c. Divorce (both Clergy and Laity);
 - i. study and discuss the different procedures and policies among Jurisdictions with different approaches to clergy divorce and work on a possible common understanding and process for addressing clergy divorce.

5. Church & Society Committee will:

- a. engage the conversation between science, theology, and the Church in America;
- b. assess and include other issues in their focus, including but not limited to, climate change, racism, human rights, etc.;
- c. develop loose networks of professionals and organizations to engage single issue topics;
- d. explore the Church's presence in digital society and how to *be Church* in that space.

6. Liturgical Committee will:

- a. harmonize our common translations of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and work toward common liturgical texts;
- b. develop common liturgical texts acceptable to all Assembly Hierarchs for the concelebration of Assembly Hierarchs;
- c. develop services of prayerful supplications to be used locally, especially at the parish level and nationally for common celebration for the year of the youth;
- d. prepare a special petition for the year of the youth that would be utilized throughout the year and translated according to the need of each Churches;
- e. compare rubrics of local churches using resources from Orthodox seminaries; and
- f. study possible common rubrics acceptable to all Assembly Hierarchs for the concelebration of Assembly Hierarchs.

C. MINISTRIES & INITIATIVES

7. Youth Committee (in conjunction with new Youth Agency) will:

- a. develop and promote events focusing on 2021 as the Year of the Youth;
- b. establish and sponsor an annual Educational and Youth Conference;
- c. expand the existing "Orthodox Youth Spiritual Formation" program;

- d. host and expand strategic Youth and Youth Ministry Worker webinars, seminars, conference calls, in-person gatherings and video-conferencing through the Orthodox Youth Directors of North America (“OYDNA”) and other groups, including sharing the best practices from each jurisdiction’s camping programs;
- e. take youth camping materials and experiences and create a parish program to encourage our youth to experience Christ in their daily lives;
- f. create a program to help adults better address their sacred ministry to their children/grandchildren/Godchildren; and
- g. maintain a current database of all the youth directors and youth ministry programs.

8. The Theological Education Committee will:

- a. Update catalogue of theological schools to include curriculum and staff changes; and
- b. Convene representatives from each of the theological schools to explore ways to better cooperate, coordinate and work together.

9. Monastic Communities Committee will:

- a. convene an annual Synaxis of representatives of all Assembly monasteries.

10. Legal Affairs Committee will:

- a. continue the COVID-19 Resource Center (as needed); and
- b. address the other Assembly legal needs as they arise.

11. Financial Matters Committee will:

- a. continue to draft the annual budget;
- b. oversee Assembly financial operations; and
- c. conduct fund-raising efforts, as appropriate.

12. The Assembly will establish a Charitable Task Force that will:

- a. identify and embrace a bold philanthropic program focused on addressing the needs of a common domestic charitable need.

D. ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

13. Agencies and Commissions, Affiliate Ministries and Associations Committee will:

- a. implement a new structure and accountability model for all Assembly affiliated organizations and ministries, and ensure their continued compliance;
- b. develop some form of affiliate relationships with existing and new third party ministries and organizations; and
- c. develop a new Youth Agency.

14. Canonical Matters Committee will complete:

- a. an updated clergy directory of all jurisdictions; and
- b. an updated a parish directory of all jurisdictions.

15. Military Chaplaincy Committee will:

- a. form an Appointed Council with members of each jurisdiction that has named the Assembly of Bishops as its endorsing agent; and
- b. develop the relationship between the US Department of Defense and the Assembly of Bishops.

16. Executive Committee will:

- a. continue the revitalization and expansion of the Assembly through its weekly video-conferences, and in-person meetings when possible, to ensure the achievement of the 14 Strategic Goals and other Assembly adopted initiatives;
- b. with the assistance of the Assembly's Director of Operations, help form an Orthodox Volunteer Corps to encourage and support youth and staff volunteers to help in ministries, including International Orthodox Christian Charities, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center and other charitable entities; and
- c. assemble all Hierarchs in an annual gathering to address together the progress on our Strategic Goals, develop other philanthropic and ministry work and agree upon other initiatives that can help the Assembly fulfill its Purpose, accomplish its Mission and achieve its Vision.



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE FIRST 10 YEARS OF THE ASSEMBLY

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: Due to historical circumstances and pastoral requirements, the Orthodox Church in the United States, as well as in other places of the so-called Diaspora, is comprised of several jurisdictions, rather than united in every region with “one bishop in one city.”

In 2009, representatives from all the universally recognized autocephalous Orthodox Churches met in Chambésy, Switzerland at the 4th Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference. These participants acknowledged such substantial canonical “anomalies” in our country and other parts of the world. By unanimous decision, they established Assemblies of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in such regions. The purpose of the formation of these assemblies of bishops is to heal, as quickly as possible, these anomalies and other influences foreign to Orthodox ecclesiology.

SELECTED PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Since its first meeting in New York City in 2010, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA (“Assembly of Bishops”) has achieved a number of significant accomplishments to promote Church unity in the United States:

1. The **Committee for Canonical Regional Planning (CCRP)** developed a proposed model of aligning the country into one administrative structure of ecclesiastical provinces – each consisting of one archdiocesan/metropolitan see and several dioceses of parishes of all ethnic backgrounds, formed on the principle of locality – with a national synod chaired by a national primate, and provincial synods chaired by the head of each of the ecclesiastical provinces. In each province, there would also be ethnic vicariates, informal associations of parishes of the same heritage to maintain ethnic identity and culture. In working to create this model, the CCRP produced 300 pages of research and analysis.
2. The **Committee for Canonical Regional Planning (CCRP)** also undertook an in-depth study to create “**Local Parish Networks**” – voluntary associations of Orthodox parishes situated in the same geographic areas, to serve as “one Orthodox face” in the locale, with parishes helping one another by sharing in talents, ministries and programs, promoting communication and interaction, and encouraging joint liturgical events and non-liturgical activities. The Committee has identified Atlanta and Akron as the sites of these first **Pan-Orthodox Parish Associations**.
3. The **Committee for Ecumenical Relations** sponsored the bi-annual **Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation** (which was founded in 1965 and has since produced 32 Agreed Statements), and this past year has re-vitalized the meetings of the **Joint Commission of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches**.
4. The **Committee for Pastoral Practice** has produced a 168-page report on the state of **Pastoral Practices Handbook** among the jurisdictions in the areas of Baptism, Chrismation and Conversion, Marriage, Confession and Communion, Holy Unction, and Funerals and Memorials.

It also initiated an annual Conference on Pastoral Practice, published a Perinatal Loss and Infant Death Handbook for clergy, and facilitated the Assembly's conference on Marriage and Divorce.

5. The **Committee for Theological Education** produced a **study report on Orthodox theological education in the United States of America** in 2015, examining degrees and programs offered by twelve Orthodox theological schools as well as their accreditation, student body, and faculty.
6. The **Committee for Youth** has worked to bring together the **Orthodox Youth Directors of North America** (OYDNA) in conference calls, in-person gatherings and video-conference meetings, establishing the OYDNA Youth Ministry Website which hosts webinars and seminars, and sharing the workings of each jurisdiction's camping programs. The Committee has also produced the document "**Orthodox Youth Spiritual Formation**", to guide the spiritual development of the young people of our parishes – many of whom, studies confirm, are leaving the Orthodox Church as they enter adulthood. The document focuses on whether or not the young person has a living, experiential relationship with Christ.
7. Additionally, the **Assembly in 2020**:
 - a. created the **COVID-19 Pandemic Resource Center** with comprehensive resources and information to assist our parishes, dioceses and jurisdictions through the difficulties caused by the coronavirus pandemic;
 - b. created and delivered the **COVID-19 Parish Re-Opening Toolkit** to assist parish communities as they begin the process of re-opening our churches;
 - c. established a **Mental Health Task Force**, and networks have been created around thematic areas such as homelessness;
 - d. hired a **Director of Operations** to help the Secretary of the Assembly run the day to day operations; and
 - e. established a new **Orthodox Volunteer Corps** is being established to staff the renewed support efforts for Project Mexico, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), and the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC).