

Address of the Primate

*His Beatitude, Metropolitan HERMAN, Archbishop of Washington and New York, Metropolitan of All-America and Canada, delivered the Address of the Primate to the 14th All-American Council
Toronto, Ontario, Monday, July 18, 2005*

Your Eminences, Your Graces, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, Monastics, Beloved Faithful, Honorable Representatives of other Churches and of the Ecumenical Community, Distinguished Guests, Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ!

I am pleased to welcome all of you to Toronto as the Orthodox Church in America gathers for the 14th All-American Council. For the second time in the history of our Church, we have assembled in the Archdiocese of Canada. The archdiocese encompasses the entire Dominion of Canada, a nation rich in history, tradition, and culture. Canada is a large country, spread across the expansive plains, mountains, and prairies of North America. It is a land of vast breadth that is blessed with great agricultural, marine, and other natural resources. We have gathered in Canada's largest city, Toronto, located within the country's largest metropolitan area. Most of you have already had some experience of Toronto's cosmopolitan character and ethnic diversity. People representing over 100 ethnic groups have made their homes here, bringing with them their languages, cultures, and traditions, evident at almost every turn. These varied peoples and ethnic groups, with their unique characteristics, add to the rich fabric of Canadian society.

It is fitting that we have gathered in this country and city for, in a sense, the diversity of both Canada and Toronto reflects the diverse nature of the Orthodox Church in America. We are a Church comprised of peoples from all over the world, made up of many ethnic groups with their own languages and traditions, their unique histories and cultures, and their own personal experience of Christ and the Gospel of salvation. From this diversity, we have been formed out of many peoples into the one Body of Christ in North America. Gathered from many nations, we are "no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" [Ephesians 2:19-20].

The All-American Council in the life of the Church. We have gathered here as the Orthodox Church in America, the local territorial Church on this continent, the Body of Christ in this time and place. The All-American Council is a clear expression of what in Russian is called sobornost. Sometimes translated as "conciliarity," sobornost may be understood as the responsible and right-ordered participation of the entire People of God in the Church's life and work. This shared involvement in the Church's life – by hierarchs, clergy, and laity alike – means that every Orthodox Christian, having received the Holy Spirit, may properly express concern for the Church, discuss the Church's challenges and needs, and suggest insights and answers to the challenges faced by the Church, as long as this is in keeping with the Church's Faith and Tradition. However, such participation and involvement in the life of the Church is not based on some form of "democracy" which would make clergy and laity co-administrators of the Church, for the responsibility to assure that we remain in agreement with Orthodox Faith and Tradition remains the role and responsibility of the bishops.

In reflecting on the role of the All-American Council in the life of the Church, the ever-memorable Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann wrote, “The [All-American Council] is thus the expression of the common concern for the Church of all her members and the expression also of her hierarchal structure, and this is what sobornost and sobornal mean in Orthodoxy. It is a cooperation, in which each member of the Church is given full possibility to express his views, to enrich others with his experience, to teach and to be taught, to give and to receive. The hierarchy can profit immensely from this cooperation with the laity, just as the laity can be enlightened on the various dimensions of the Church’s life. But all this does not mean ‘egalitarianism,’ a transformation of hierarchy into laity and vice-versa. It is a sad fact, a tragedy indeed, that under the influence of secularism and legalism, the whole emphasis in our understanding of the [Council] activities has shifted to ‘decisions’ and ‘motions’ which are being considered as the main task of the [Council], whereas its real value is in the wonderful opportunity to clarify the mind of the Church by a common discussion, by sharing the concern for the Church, by deepening the unity of all members of the Church.”

The All-American Council is a sacred moment, a blessed opportunity for the Orthodox Church in America to manifest itself as a communion of faith, of hope, and of love; as such, it can be seen as a true blessing for our Church and the icon and model of who we are and what we are called to be. Gathered in council, the hierarchs of our Church, entrusted with the apostolic ministry of guiding and shepherding the flock, surrounded by those who have been called to serve as ordained ministers and the faithful in Christ, are the One Body that shares the One Bread and One Cup.

We gather every three years to reflect on the life and mission of the Church in North America. As we gather for the 14th All-American Council, we do so with common hopes and concerns, and with a sense of common purpose. We reflect upon our shared vocation and mission: to proclaim the Gospel and live the Orthodox Faith as the Church in North America at the beginning of the 21st century. As we gather in Toronto, we recognize the richness of the experiences represented here, in the lives of all who are present. We recall the words of the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Church in Corinth: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” [1 Corinthians 12:4-6].

The experience of the Orthodox Church in America and its vision of Church life, as expressed through the All-American Council, are unique among the world’s local Orthodox Churches. We have an understanding of the Church which is not a narrow understanding. This broader, more involved, and more engaged understanding of the Church is reflected in the All-American Council. Convened every three years, the All-American Council is a microcosm of the diversity and unity of the Orthodox Church in America and of its unique role within the larger community of Orthodox Churches throughout the world. As I stated in my first words to the Church, immediately after my election as Primate, “The Council is, indeed, an icon of the Church. The Church’s bishops, together with the clergy and laity, are gathered around Christ. This is seen with special clarity and in its highest expression when we gather for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is also seen in the deliberations and decisions of the Council. It is evident that the Church is neither the hierarchy alone, nor the clergy alone, nor the laity alone. Rather, the Church is the Body of Christ, composed of bishops and clergy and laity acting together.”

Three years ago, we gathered in Orlando, Florida, for the 13th All-American Council. Our last Council was unique in that it not only represented the gathering of the Church from across North America, but it also prayerfully expressed its gratitude to His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius, as he retired from active archpastoral service after serving as Primate of the Orthodox Church in

America for 25 years. We remain grateful to Metropolitan Theodosius who, in retirement, continues to serve the Church as his health allows. As preparations were made for the election of Metropolitan Theodosius' successor, and as that process actually took place, our Church showed that it is, indeed, mature, stable, and capable of directing its own life.

Upon the retirement of Metropolitan Theodosius, I was elected to the office of Primate, and accepted the awesome responsibility given to me, looking for hope and support in the lives and examples of archpastoral service in the long line of those ever-memorable servants of God who carried the burdens of this office before me. In my first words spoken as Metropolitan of All America and Canada, I admitted the overwhelming sense of humility with which I accepted my election as Primate of the Orthodox Church in America. Throughout these past three years, I have come to know that to be the first among the bishops of our Church means to be the servant of all. I have also come to know that to be the servant of all I must depend in all things on Christ's presence in our midst and on Christ's ongoing ministry in and through His Church.

Our historical and spiritual roots. My first official act as Metropolitan of All America and Canada was to travel on pilgrimage to Alaska, to the mother diocese of our Church, in order to walk the ground hallowed by the lives and apostolic labors of Saint Herman of Alaska, Saint Innocent, Saint Juvenal, Saint Jacob of Alaska, Saint Peter the Aleut, and the missionaries who first traveled from Karelia in the north of the Russian Empire to Alaska to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and indicate to the peoples of Alaska the way into the Kingdom of Heaven.

During my pilgrimage to Alaska, I visited Spruce Island, that small island in the Gulf of Alaska sanctified by the life and labors of Saint Herman, the first saint to be glorified by the Orthodox Church in America. I prayed before his relics, now enshrined in Holy Resurrection Cathedral in Kodiak, and asked his heavenly intercession on behalf of the bishops, priests, deacons, monastics, and faithful of our Church, as well as for all Orthodox Christians in North America. This trip to Alaska was, in a sense, a pilgrimage to our spiritual and historical roots, to the place where the Cross of Christ was first planted in North America, and where the Gospel of Jesus Christ was first proclaimed by Orthodox Christian missionaries to native North Americans over 200 years ago.

This year, as we mark the 35th anniversary of the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America by the Russian Orthodox Church, we also celebrate the 35th anniversary of the glorification of Saint Herman of Alaska. And so, as we gather in Council, it is appropriate that our thoughts turn to Alaska, to Saint Herman, and to those missionaries and the peoples who first received the Gospel from them. The native peoples of Alaska who first received the Gospel were not – and are not – a single, homogenous people. Rather, they are several peoples, each with its own culture and language and understanding and appreciation of life. Nonetheless, the Gospel of Christ and the Orthodox Faith have formed them into the one Body of Christ in Alaska. This is what we are called to be throughout this continent. Whatever our diocese or parish, whatever our ethnic or linguistic heritage, we are called to form one people, one body, one Church.

The life of our Church today. Over 200 years ago, a small group of missionary monks began to evangelize the native peoples of Alaska. This inaugurated the Orthodox Church's apostolic labors in North America. Because of our Church's missionary heritage and evangelistic legacy, we remain committed to the mission of evangelization. Today, we are a diverse community of native peoples and immigrants, of those born to Orthodox families and those converted to the Orthodox faith. Though we are a diverse community, we are united in one faith and one vision, and we are eager to share Christ's love and the depth and riches of the Orthodox Faith with the many communities that

exist in North America. We are committed to the preaching of the Gospel and to the growth of the Church.

During these past three years, I have had the opportunity to visit many of our Church's dioceses, parishes, monasteries, seminaries, and Church institutions. In visiting communities of the faithful throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico, I have been touched by their highly visible witness to the Orthodox Faith. Our clergy and our faithful are zealous in their love for Christ and His Church. I have been touched by the tenacity and dedication of those members of our older parish communities who, due to the reality of demographic trends, often struggle to maintain the rich and historic traditions of parish life and community, particularly in inner-city areas. I have also visited many new, younger parish and mission communities. I am grateful for those clergy and faithful, many of whom are converts to the Orthodox Faith, who enthusiastically look for the ways and means to share the Orthodox Faith in the face of the multi-religious context, as well as the anti-religious sentiments, of contemporary North American society.

As I travel, I often hear our clergy and laity alike express concern for the growth of the Orthodox Church in America. These concerns are voiced primarily because of the limitations placed on our smaller communities in the areas of human and financial resources. We are acutely aware of a decline in the number of financially supporting members of the Orthodox Church in America. At the same time, we know that new missions continue to be established, while some of our older, established parishes also continue to grow and welcome new members. Clearly, the Lord has blessed us and established His Holy Church here in North America to reach out and proclaim the Good News of salvation to all who live on this continent. As the local Church in North America, we are able to provide resources for those communities willing to evangelize in order to bring others into the one flock of Christ. It is my hope that everyone at this Council will recommit himself or herself to the work of evangelization and will continue to support and encourage those who dedicate their time and energies to the important work begun by Saint Herman of Alaska and those who accompanied him to this continent.

Clearly, one of the most difficult challenges faced by the parishes and dioceses of the Orthodox Church is found in the area of finances. Small communities often find it difficult to support full-time priests; yet, without the services of a full-time priest, the community finds itself struggling to grow. At the same time, many of our older parishes have memberships that are advanced in age, living on limited incomes. Despite their desire to be generous, they also must face the reality of paying for increasingly costly health care. This is true as well on a Church-wide level. The work of the Orthodox Church in America – the services provided to dioceses, parishes, clergy, and faithful by its various departments – is increasingly constrained by financial realities. It is crucial for us, as members of parish communities, as members of dioceses, and as the Orthodox Church in America, to exercise stewardship in a manner rooted in the Gospel, taking into consideration the Lord's call to "give as a gift that which we have been given as a gift."

From its earliest days in Alaska, our Church's mission has been one of evangelization, outreach, and the engagement of and interaction with society at large. This remains true in the present day. I am increasingly edified by the social commitment of so many of our parish communities and by their outreach to the wider community and to society as a whole. Works of charity – opening soup kitchens or pantries, distributing clothing, caring for the elderly, and other forms of social ministry – are effective and faithful ways by which the clergy and laity of our Church are reaching out to serve Christ in our neighbors. Such Church programs and other forms of outreach are in the tradition of

our Church from its first days, when Saint Herman and his monastic companions preached the Gospel by word and by deed.

Proclaiming the Gospel in the modern world. Saint Herman and his monastic companions traveled to Alaska during a different period of history, in a different age. However, they made use of everything available to them to preach the Gospel and serve God's people. Their missionary outreach took place within the context of their time and with whatever means were at their disposal. Saint Innocent traveled the Pacific coast by boat and bidarka and communicated through letters that often took months to arrive at their destinations. Since then, the Church has used new means of transportation and communication for the same purpose and mission: to make known the fullness of the Christian Faith found in the Orthodox Church. I am pleased to note that our Church continues to develop the methods to reach out to the world around us, providing instruction to Orthodox Christians throughout North America, preaching the Gospel to those who are seeking the true faith, and touching the lives of the unchurched.

Our Church, through its seminaries and publishers, is the leader in the work of offering English-language Orthodox Scripture studies, theological works, spiritual writings and instruction, religious education resources, Church history texts, etc. This is one important means of making known the "Good News" of the Orthodox Faith. Our Church newspaper, *The Orthodox Church*, also provides the clergy and faithful of our Church and a large number of other subscribers with comprehensive coverage of the life and mission of the Orthodox Church in America and its dioceses, parishes, and institutions, as well as coverage of significant events in the life of the Orthodox Church throughout the world. It also provides articles and reflections concerning the issues faced by Orthodox Christians in contemporary society.

We live in the electronic age, a period in history which depends largely upon electronic media as the principal means to disseminate news and information. While the Truth we proclaim is ageless, the manner in which we proclaim it continues to develop with the times in which we live. Our Church's web site – www.oca.org – has developed into an invaluable tool for promoting the Orthodox Faith. In addition to reporting on the life of the Church, and providing a directory of clergy, parishes, and other contact information, the web site is an invaluable source of educational materials, including the daily Scripture readings, information on feasts and iconography, and musical resources. Through our website, we are able to communicate to our clergy, our faithful, and others the various special and ongoing activities in the life of the Church. Our Church newspaper and web site are to be seen as appropriate and effective tools given to the Church for the work of proclaiming the Gospel in our own time and place.

I am increasingly convinced that the electronic media are a source of many blessings for the work of the Church. At the same time, I am concerned that one of the most troubling influences upon the lives of our clergy, and thus upon their service to the Church, and upon all the members of the Church, are those same electronic media, most especially the internet. I would like to suggest that the various "clergy discussion lists" be used more responsibly by all the members of our Church. There are those who will state that the use of such lists is helpful, providing mutual support among the clergy and faithful. However, from what I have been able to observe, most exchanges that take place are neither constructive nor helpful and, in some cases, are even detrimental and harmful to those who participate in them. It is regrettable that something that can serve as a useful tool for building up the Church all too often works against it, most often against the clergy themselves and, just as often, against the hierarchy of the Church. Those who have used the internet as a means to discourage and disparage, both clergy and laity alike, would do well to recall the words of Saint Paul

to the Philippians: “Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things” [Philippians 4:7-9].

The local community and clergy. The mission of preaching the Gospel and teaching the Orthodox Faith takes place, first and foremost, within the local parish community. It is in our parishes and missions that the faithful most directly take part in the life of the Church, participate in the divine services, hear the Gospel, are nourished with the Holy Mysteries, receive spiritual guidance, are instructed in the Orthodox Faith, live the liturgical cycle of fasts and feasts, and share in the Church’s community life.

Regrettably, however, there are those who do not see beyond their experience of Church life within the parish. Members of parish communities must be invited to an awareness of being part of more than the local community. Writing almost 50 years ago, Prof. Serge Verhovskoy noted, “The parish must have a consciousness of being an organic part of the Church, to be the Church as it exists in a given locality. A truly Orthodox community will never oppose its diocese or the rest of the Church. It will freely and gladly accept the authority of the Church and Orthodox tradition in its entirety.... A truly Orthodox parish will not be pervaded by the spirit of indifference and selfishness, but will wholeheartedly participate in the life of the Church and support it.” These words, written almost five decades ago, remain just as applicable today. The presence at this Council of so many clergy and lay delegates from our Church’s parish and mission communities provides the opportunity to share the good news of what our Church is accomplishing on so many different levels and to provide your faithful flocks and fellow parishioners with a greater vision of the Church in America and the mission to which we have all been called.

Because the Gospel is proclaimed and the life of the Church is experienced first and foremost on the local parish or mission level, it is the parish priest who is on the front line of the Church’s evangelizing and missionary activity. This is just as true within our long-established parishes as it is within our new, fledgling mission communities. And we are pleased to note that the clergy of our Church are well-prepared for the important, essential task of serving Christ’s faithful people within the local parish and mission communities.

Our Church is blessed with three seminaries, schools of theological education and priestly and pastoral formation. Saint Tikhon’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and Saint Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary provide theological education and formation for those who will serve the Church as clergy and through other forms of ministry. Saint Herman Orthodox Theological Seminary has been entrusted with providing theological education and pastoral formation for those called to serve in the Diocese of Alaska. While experience has shown that there are exceptions to the established requirements for ordination to the priesthood, we are committed to seeing that established procedures must be followed concerning the theological education required of those who are to be ordained to the diaconate and priesthood. The established norm for the theological education and pastoral formation of candidates for ordination in the Orthodox Church in America is attendance at an Orthodox theological seminary. To dispense with this requirement, except in extremely rare situations, is to deprive not only those who are called to serve the Church but, more importantly, those whom they will serve.

We cannot adequately express our gratitude to our priests and deacons – and to their wives and families – for their commitment to Christ and their zeal for the work of proclaiming the Good News of salvation. God alone knows the sacrifices so many of them have made. Yet these sacrifices are

made willingly and in a spirit of trust in God and a desire for building up the Orthodox Church in America. I call upon the faithful of our Church to encourage, support, and love our clergy, just as they are called to encourage, support, and love those they have been called to serve. Our imperfect expressions of gratitude can never adequately convey our deep appreciation for our clergy and their families and all they do in service to Christ and His Church. The Lord Himself, as light and joy and faithful companion, is the recompense of the dedication and commitment to the life and mission of the Church on the part of our clergy and their families.

Esteemed clergy, dearly beloved servants of Christ: I exhort you to love one another as brothers and coworkers in the Lord's vineyard. Do not allow the spirit of competition and disagreement or the tendency to criticize and demean to enter your lives and your relationships with one another. Challenge one another to greater accomplishments for the sake of the Gospel. Forgive one another, and bear one another's burdens. Do not allow yourselves to be discouraged or distracted from the work to which the Lord has called you. Continue to serve faithfully so that, when you are called from this life, you may hear the voice of the Lord saying to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant.... Enter into the joy of your Lord" [Matthew 25:21].

Youth. As we gather in Toronto, we are joined by a large number of youth and young adults. Everyone present at the 13th All-American Council rejoiced in the enthusiasm exhibited by our youth and young adults at that gathering. Their presence with us at this Council should serve as a reminder of our commitment, not only to the life of the Church here and now, but also to its future. Just as we have been blessed by the faith, vision, and commitment of those who have gone before us, it is our responsibility to guide the youth and young adults of our Church into the future, so that following in our footsteps and blessed by our vision and commitment to Christ and His Church, they may one day assume the mantle of leadership, ministry, outreach, and missionary activity, thus continuing in the tradition of Saint Herman and the first missionaries who arrived in North America over 200 years ago.

Finances. I have already briefly mentioned that the Orthodox Church in America faces financial challenges at every level of Church life. While the Church operates well within its approved budget, the difficulty being faced is primarily due to a notable decrease in free-will giving to the Church. The reasons for this can be attributed to the current state of world affairs, the international economy, and our own domestic economy. This decrease of offerings is true, not only on every level of the Orthodox Church in America, but for all Orthodox Churches in North America, as well as for other religious and not-for-profit organizations. While we face this challenge and seek to remedy the decrease in income, we must do everything within our power to maintain the many services our Church and its departments offer to our dioceses, parishes, and institutions, and to the population at large. It is within the arena of Church finances that the challenge to fund the work of the Church directly encounters the call to responsible Christian stewardship.

Christians are called to generosity. We are called to be generous in sharing the blessings we have been given by God and to give of ourselves, our time and talents, and our financial resources for the sake of building up the Body of Christ. Every diocese, parish, and Church member must strive to help in the fulfillment and realization of our Church's mission. Regrettably, there are those who are indifferent to the needs of our parishes, dioceses, and Church. This indifference often develops first on the parish level when clergy and faithful, while often of good will, fail to rise to the occasion and respond to the Church's ever-growing needs. Instead of denying the reality of the increasing cost of living and acting as the Church, we should rejoice that our needs are increasing, as this clearly shows that the Church's mission is also growing and expanding. And this should lead us to the generous

stewardship to which the Lord calls us. Our discussion later this week of the Fair Share initiative as a means of not only adequately, but generously, supporting the Church will reveal how well we desire to respond to Christ's call to share in His mission of salvation. It also will provide yet another opportunity for us to respond generously to God, Who has been so generous to us.

Inter-Orthodox relations. As Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, one of my principal obligations is to maintain and promote our relationships with our sister Churches throughout the world. As part of this responsibility of assuring our presence and participation within the communion of Orthodox Churches, and in fulfillment of my duty to give expression to and to nurture our relationships with our sister Churches, I have made official visits to the Ecumenical Patriarch, to the Church of Russia, the Church of Georgia, the Church of Poland, the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, the autonomous Church of Ukraine, and the autonomous Church of Finland. Such visits further strengthen the ties of faith that unite the Orthodox Church in America with its sister Churches.

I have visited these Churches with the full knowledge that there are those within our own Church who do not understand the purpose of such visits, nor their value for the life of our Church. Indeed, it seems that this unfounded criticism of such visits and other forms of exchange with sister Churches, which are the prerogative of the Primate, arises even among clergy, some of whom express criticism in ways that not only demean the office of the Primate and my own leadership abilities, but also the authority of the Holy Synod, in whose name the trips are made, and the place of the Orthodox Church in America in relationship to the other local autocephalous Churches. In accepting autocephaly, the Orthodox Church in America also accepted the responsibility of nurturing unity among the Churches, both here in North America and abroad.

• **The Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas.** The Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in Americas [SCOBA] remains a unique means of working for Orthodox unity, even though relationships among some of the SCOBA hierarchs remain less positive than might be hoped. As a result of what may be seen as weakened relationships, the work of SCOBA may seem to be losing ground. However, despite SCOBA's present challenges, I believe it is important for us to remain involved in its work, always looking ahead for future possibilities and greater cooperation. It is in settings such as SCOBA that our autocephaly can be observed as benefitting not only our own life and mission, but also the future unity of the Church in America. The benefits of our participation in SCOBA are most apparent in the work of the SCOBA commissions. International Orthodox Christian Charities, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, and the Orthodox Christian Fellowship are well known and respected agencies that benefit not only SCOBA but also the Orthodox Church in America and all those whom they serve. The various SCOBA commissions also make valuable contributions to Orthodox cooperation and common mission. The work of these agencies and commissions alone makes our participation in SCOBA a worthwhile endeavor.

I am pleased to offer a sincere welcome to His Grace, Bishop Dimitrios of Xanthos, the general secretary of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas. His Grace's heartfelt commitment and dedication to the work of SCOBA is deeply appreciated by all the SCOBA hierarchs. Our prayer is that the Lord will grant him strength in the work that has been entrusted to him.

• **The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia.** As we work to foster our relationships with our sister Orthodox Churches around the world and in North America, among our concerns and interests

are the ongoing developments in the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia [ROCOR]. The discussions concerning the reconciliation of ROCOR with the Russian Orthodox Church, long desired by all of us, are moving forward in a process without an apparent or, at least, an acknowledged time frame. Nonetheless, we continue to monitor all developments in this matter. We also continue to promote our own relationship with ROCOR, primarily through my personal contact with His Eminence, Metropolitan Laurus, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, and through other personal contacts with members of his administration. Several of our hierarchs also are involved, most often in informal and personal ways, in promoting harmonious relationships with other ROCOR hierarchs and clergy. This eventual reconciliation will clearly affect the Orthodox Church in America, as most of ROCOR's parishes and the offices of its First Hierarch and Council of Bishops are located in North America. It is my hope that the eventual reunion will enhance the work of Orthodox unity in North America, rather than create further fragmentation.

• **Ecumenical Relations.** The Orthodox Church in America continues to bear witness to the fullness of the Gospel through its presence at various ecumenical events and by its participation in ecumenical dialogue. We are grateful that the Orthodox Church in America can be the well-reasoned voice that needs to be heard within the various inter-Christian forums, most especially by those ecclesial bodies that, by nature, are traditional in their orientation and value the example that the Orthodox Church can give. As the result of a movement to create a new ecumenical organization comprising a wide spectrum of American Christian bodies, Christian Churches Together (CCT) recently formed. Among the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches that have joined CCT are the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the Armenian Church, and the Syrian Orthodox Church. Other members include the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches (both liberal and conservative), African-American churches, and ethnic churches (such as Korean Presbyterian). With the support of the Holy Synod of Bishops, the Orthodox Church in America has taken its place among CCT's founding members. I am well aware of and concerned about the tensions which exist as a result of our Church's participation in such ecumenical organizations. However, I am more concerned that our Church fulfills its mission, as it is our responsibility to reach out to others and to witness to the Orthodox Faith and our vision and experience of the fullness of the Gospel of Christ. Indeed, in the Tomos of Autocephaly, granted to our Church 35 years ago, we were called upon to "maintain direct relations with all other churches and confessions, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike." Our participation in CCT and in similar organizations is yet another way by which we can better fulfill the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel on this continent and maintaining and nurturing relationships with "all other churches and confessions, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike."

Our Church and the future. As we gather this week, we are invited to reflect on the theme of this 14th All-American Council, "Our Church and the Future." In considering our present challenges and the future of the Orthodox Church in America, I am pleased to note that I am hopeful, confident, and optimistic. However, this hope and optimism are somewhat guarded. My hopefulness is tempered by the many difficult and painful realities faced by the members of our Church – clergy and faithful alike – not specifically as members of the Church, but as members of modern society who are naturally affected by the cynicism, mistrust, paranoia, and suspicion that plague every area and level of contemporary life, including the Church. This, of course, is nothing new to the Church, for throughout its history, the Church has faced its opponents, even from within. However, a lack of unity and shared vision stifles, restrains, and limits the many possibilities for positive work and growth which lie before us.

I will again recall words written by Prof. Serge Verhovskoy almost a half-century ago: “Unity and order are badly needed in our Church. Every layman, priest, and bishop, every parish and diocese, must have a clear consciousness that they are living members of the whole Orthodox Church in America, and they must do their best to make Orthodoxy on this continent united, spiritually strong, and influential.” Unity. Order. Oneness of mind and heart. Respect for the responsibility which, by virtue of Baptism and Chrismation, each person – clergy and laity alike – has in the life of the Church. Parish communities whose lives are rooted in the Gospel. An understanding of our history and an acceptance of the mandate we received to evangelize the peoples of this continent. Continued growth. This is my hope for the future. And it is a hope that is being realized – and will be realized – with God’s help and through our willingness to cooperate with Him in the work of salvation.

As we look to the future, I think we all too often spend an inordinate and inappropriate amount of time and energy debating among ourselves the nature of our autocephaly, lamenting that there are those who do not recognize it, and looking for bold efforts to achieve recognition. What is most important for us, however, is that we remain true to who we are and what we are called to be as the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America. This means that we are called to live our life as the local autocephalous Church. We are called to take full advantage of and make full use of that which is unique to us – from our missionary heritage, to the legacy of sanctity handed on to us by the saints who have lived and worked out their salvation on this continent, beginning with Saint Herman himself, to the unique multi-ethnic character of our parish communities, to our commitment to missionary work within the diverse society in which we live.

The legacy of the Orthodox Church in America was summed up in the mission statement promulgated by the Holy Synod in 1990: “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in America, the local autocephalous Orthodox Church, is to be faithful in fulfilling the commandment of Christ to ‘Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all [things that He has] commanded,’ so that all people may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth: To preach, in accordance with God’s will, the fullness of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the peoples of North America and to invite them to become members of the Orthodox Church. To utilize for her mission the various languages of the peoples of this continent. To be the Body of Christ in North America and to be faithful to the tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church. To witness to the truth, and by God’s grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to reveal Christ’s way of sanctification and eternal salvation to all.”

Conclusion. I wish to refer again to the Apostle’s first letter to the Corinthians. Saint Paul reminds us, “...the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit.... But one and the same Spirit works all these things....”

We have been given different roles within the Church, the One Body of Christ. Those who are called to serve as bishops accept their place within the life of the Church and function accordingly. So do the clergy. So do the lay faithful. But, ultimately, it is all the same work, the same mission, the same proclamation of the same Gospel, all guided by the same Spirit. Lamentably, we all too often encounter a sense of disaffection – one group against another. This must not be, and it cannot be! Bishops must love the flocks entrusted to them. They must care for their clergy and the families of the clergy. They must lovingly instruct and guide the faithful given to their care. Clergy are to honor those who have been set over them as fathers and guides, to serve the Church with love, to

guide the faithful by word and example. And the faithful of the Church are to exercise their baptismal vocation by proclaiming the Gospel and reaching out in love to those around them.

As we look ahead to the future of our Church, and its mission and role among the other Orthodox Churches, we gratefully note that the Orthodox Church in America is in a unique, privileged position, a position unlike that of any of the other Orthodox Churches with a presence in North America. We have marked 35 years as an autocephalous Church, 35 years of new experiences and continued growth. Although, in comparison to the histories of Orthodox Churches in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, the Orthodox Church in America is relatively young, we are also a Church of great enthusiasm and energy. We are a Church that, despite its youth, has been greatly blessed by the lives, labors, and holy examples of many saints. And this fact should encourage us spiritually and call us to a greater appreciation of our identity and a stronger affirmation of who we are and who we are called to be. We are autocephalous, yet we are also well-experienced in living in relationship with the many jurisdictions also present in North America. We know what it means to live in diversity, in circumstances without precedent, and we possess the creativity to address situations that can often be very complicated. We bring to this our commitment to good Church order and our reputation for adhering to the Orthodox Church's ecclesiological and canonical principles. This is a gift we must share – and which we must share with boldness.

There are many among us who remain preoccupied with the recognition or non-recognition of our autocephaly – that great gift granted us 35 years ago. In speaking of the granting of autocephaly at the First All-American Council at Saint Tikhon's Monastery October 20-22, 1970, Metropolitan Iriney of blessed memory, the first Primate of the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America, noted: "This is an act of freedom and creativity, an act of faith and trust, a sign that the Church of God 'never grows older, but forever younger,' and that new channels of life can flow through her ancient arteries. This is an act which blesses the young Orthodoxy in America, calling it to grow to the measure of grace bestowed upon it, and to bring its fruit also to the one treasury of Universal Orthodoxy. Undoubtedly, years shall pass before the waves of small human passions and misunderstandings raised by it finally subside. But we, witnesses of this act, can even now – with the eyes of faith, hope, and love – foresee the magnitude and joy of one Holy Orthodox Church in America, inheritor of all the gifts, all the riches, all the traditions of Universal Orthodoxy, glorifying God with one mouth and one heart. May this be! May this be!"

As we gather this week in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide and enlighten us, I wish to express my profound gratitude to the members of the Holy Synod and the episcopate of our Church. As I exercise the ministry of primacy with which they entrusted me three years ago, I am increasingly aware of and ever more grateful for the archpastoral ministry each of them exercises within his own diocese.

Since my election as Primate, the Orthodox Church in America has witnessed several changes in the episcopate. In March 2005, His Eminence, Archbishop Peter, of New York and New Jersey, retired after more than 20 years of service as ruling hierarch of that diocese. At that time, the Holy Synod determined that the former Diocese of Washington and the former Diocese of New York and New Jersey be formed into one diocese, of which I am now the ruling bishop. The Holy Synod made this decision, always keeping in mind the best interests of the Church and its faithful. The process of structuring the administration of the new Diocese of Washington and New York is presently under way. Also, since the last All-American Council, His Grace, Bishop Nikon, was elected Bishop of Boston and ruling hierarch of the Albanian Archdiocese.

In the past three years, our Church has been blessed with the election and consecration of four new bishops. His Grace, Bishop Irineu of Dearborn Heights, serves as an auxiliary bishop for the Romanian Episcopate. His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, who had been elected and consecrated Bishop of South Canaan, has been elected Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania. His Grace, Bishop Benjamin, was elected and consecrated to serve as Bishop of Berkeley and auxiliary to Bishop Tikhon of San Francisco, Los Angeles, and the West. His Grace, Bishop Alejo of Mexico City, the most recently consecrated of our hierarchs, serves as my auxiliary and assists His Eminence, Archbishop Dmitri, in his capacity as Exarch of Mexico. May Our Lord Jesus Christ, the One True Shepherd, grant all our hierarchs continued strength and health in caring for the flocks the Lord has given them.

I also wish to express my special gratitude to His Grace, Bishop Seraphim, our host bishop and chairman of the Preconciliar Commission, as well as to everyone who has dedicated much time and effort to plan and prepare for this Council. May the Lord bless them for their willingness to serve the Church by assuming the added responsibilities required in preparing for the Council.

Although I continue to reside at Saint Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, I am present at the Chancery office in Syosset, New York, on a regular basis. I am pleased to note that the Chancery office continues to run efficiently under the attentive direction of the chancellor, Protopresbyter Robert Kondratich. I am kept constantly informed of the work of the Chancery through reports and daily consultation. The Chancery staff labors faithfully to support the Church's life and mission in many ways and on many levels. The work of the Chancery affects all areas and aspects of Church life, assisting the work of the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan, diocesan bishops, dioceses, parishes, monasteries, seminaries, and the work of the All-American Council, as well as clergy, both active and retired, clergy families, and clergy widows. I am profoundly grateful to Father Kondratich, who has served as chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America for 16 years, as well as to everyone who works at the Chancery office and serves the Church with professional and churchly diligence and dedication. Working on behalf of our Church, and thus being made subject to unfair and often unkind critiques and criticism, can be a heavy burden. However, each individual who works for the Church on the Church-wide level does so with integrity, with dignity, and with a spirit of commitment to Christ and His Church. I assure each of them of my personal gratitude and my continued prayers and support.

As we begin this All-American Council, the 14th of the Orthodox Church in America, I wish to thank all of you for your presence here and your commitment to the life and future of our Church. Through the prayers of Saint Herman of Alaska and all the saints who have labored on this continent, may the work we accomplish this week be for the glory of God and the building up of the Body of Christ in America.

I wish to close by exhorting you with the words addressed by the Apostle Paul to the Church in Ephesus. May these words be lived and made manifest each day of this week and throughout the days and years to come: "I... beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 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 4:1-6].

+HERMAN

Archbishop of Washington and New York
Metropolitan of All America and Canada