

Address of the Primate

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius, Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada, delivered the Address of the Primate to the Thirteenth All-American Council at Plenary Session I, July 22, 2002.

Remember, Rejoice and Renew

Ten years ago in Miami, on the occasion of the 10th All American Council-and the 25th anniversary of my service as a bishop-I addressed this gathering on the State of the Church. Much of what I said on that day could be repeated in the same words today, with only minor changes in nuance regarding who we are as the Orthodox Church in America and what we are called to be and to do. I will not repeat that address, but I wish to highlight some of the same themes that I consider essential to our common memory-especially at this juncture of our Church's history.

Remembrance-memory-is an essential part of life. Memories help to define us: to define ourselves as persons, as families, as Church! During every Divine Liturgy, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of Christ's words to His disciples, as He offered the bread, gave thanks, broke it and said: "This is My Body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Memory is life-giving! Memory unites us with one another! Memory unites us with Christ!

A Time to Remember

In many ways and places, God has called us to remember. God says to Noah after the flood, "I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh." After God brings his people out of Egypt, Moses says to them: "Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place." During every Divine Liturgy, we remember "God's saving commandment, and all those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious Coming."

Every All-American Council of our Church is a time for gathering and a time for remembrance. Our Church family gathers to celebrate our life together. We come to renew our relationships. We come to assess and further our work as Church. We come to realize in the Eucharist our oneness in Jesus Christ. It is in this Oneness in Christ that we remember, again and again, who we truly are as persons:members of Christ's own Body.

Today, there is much for us to remember together as members of the Orthodox Church in America. There are many generations of people gathered here. Some have witnessed the life and growth of our Church for eight decades, maybe more. Many have experienced the struggles of immigrant families that built many of our churches.

Their children have experienced the sometimes painful process of finding or articulating their Orthodox identity in a new land. Now their grandchildren and great-grandchildren are assuming leadership roles in youth

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groups, on parish councils, and at this 13th All American Council. Life goes on, and, hopefully, we continue to grow in our life together as God's family-the Church!

The Church I Know and Remember

Thirty-five years ago, I was consecrated a bishop, after only five years of service as a priest. I would have been happy to remain in a parish: to serve a local community, baptizing, teaching, serving the Liturgy, visiting the sick, and building up the "family" of believers entrusted to my care. That brief time in a parish was the happiest time of my life.

But God had other plans and I soon found myself as a young bishop in Alaska. When I arrived in Alaska I knew no one. I had been entrusted with the Church's largest diocese, which stretched-at that time-across five time zones, nearly all the way to Siberia! My flock consisted of several different peoples who spoke different languages (none of which I knew). It was extremely cold during the winter, it was lonely, and few priests were available to serve this vast territory.

It was, however, a remarkable opportunity to understand, first-hand, the missionary beginnings of our Orthodox Church in America. I lived in the house built by St. Innocent, the first Orthodox bishop to serve in Alaska and North America. I served in his house Chapel, with his chalice. I sat in the furniture he had made with his own hands. I was surrounded by countless reminders of his presence and, undoubtedly, his prayers.

Saint Innocent began his work in Alaska in 1824 by translating liturgical texts into Aleut. He familiarized himself with the native traditions of the various peoples of Alaska. He established the first Seminary, built the Mission House and Cathedral. He set a standard for all bishops and missionaries, not only in Alaska and Siberia, but also for anyone who desires to enter the mission field.

My five years in Alaska could be summarized as the experience of "mission." Our "roots" as a Church on this continent began in this wilderness territory in 1794, as a result of Russian exploration and fur trading. The Diocese of Alaska is the oldest Orthodox diocese in North America, having been founded in 1840. Our first saints of North America were missionaries in Alaska or were native Alaskans: Saints Herman, Innocent, Protomartyr Juvenaly, Jacob and Peter the Aleut.

When I arrived in Alaska in 1967, the Diocese was in great financial need and had almost been forgotten. Worse yet, the Cathedral in Sitka, built by St. Innocent, had recently burned to the ground. Standing in the very center of town, it had been a towering sign of faith, reflecting the rich history, tradition, and spirit of the people!

It is the people of Alaska-Aleut, Yupik, Athabascan and Tlingit-who were, and still are, the spiritual foundation of our Church in America. St. Michael's Cathedral was rebuilt and stands again, thanks to the support of many people. As a Church, we must never forget this "cornerstone" of our Church in North America. We must never cease to remember the people of Alaska, and ask them for their prayers-as we continue the mission of the Church on this continent.

Unfortunately, I must report to you that the Diocese of Alaska recently experienced tragic difficulties involving serious canonical infractions which resulted in the removal of Bishop Innocent (Gula) the auxiliary bishop from the Diocese of Alaska on March 21, 2001. On August 16, 2001, he was suspended and, subsequently granted retirement October 16, 2001. Bishop Innocent, who had remained in Alaska after his retirement, died in Anchorage on May 6, 2002.

The Diocesan Assembly of Alaska met in October of 2001. At that Assembly, His Grace, Bishop Nikolai (Soraich), who had been elected my auxiliary with the title Bishop of Baltimore by the Holy Synod of Bishops in March 2001 and consecrated in April 2001, was elected by the Diocesan Assembly to serve as Bishop of the Alaska Diocese. The election of Bishop Nikolai was confirmed by the Holy Synod of Bishops at their semi-annual meeting in November 2001, and he was installed as Bishop of Sitka and Alaska on March 5, 2002 in Saint

Michael the Archangel Cathedral in Sitka. I was joined at Bishop Nikolai's installation by His Eminence, Archbishop Herman, His Eminence, Archbishop Gregory (retired Archbishop of Sitka and Alaska), His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, His Grace, Bishop Seraphim, and His Grace, Bishop Jovan of the Western Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Our concelebration of the Divine Liturgy was a strong reminder of the unity of the Church and what can be accomplished when we are of one mind and one heart. I was also present at the March meeting of the Board of Trustees of St. Herman's Seminary. After my visit to Alaska and participation in the seminary board meeting, I am glad to report that under the leadership of Bishop Nikolai, both the mother diocese of our Church and its seminary are experiencing a rebirth.

Our Church-The Past Thirty-five Years

Many of my recollections of the past thirty-five years as a bishop have already appeared in print, so I need not dwell on the many things I have experienced or witnessed during this time. I do feel the need, however, to reflect on the "State of the Church" at the time I was consecrated as bishop. Many of you were not yet born; many of you were being raised in another church tradition or perhaps had little or no experience of Christian life. Those who were active in the life of the Orthodox Church in America in 1967 may recall just how different things were.

When I was consecrated as bishop, I was only the third American-born member of the episcopate. The first, Archbishop Benjamin (Basaliga, 1887-1963), had died four years earlier. The second, Bishop Vladimir (Nagosky), consecrated five years earlier, was serving in Japan.

All the other bishops of our Church were immigrants whose first language was not English; some spoke no English at all. Today, most of our bishops are American-born and all of them speak English fluently. More than half of our bishops are men who were not born and raised in Orthodox families, but as adults entered into the Orthodox Church out of theological conviction.

Thirty-five years ago, the All-American Councils were conducted in Russian, although English translation was also provided. English has been the language of the Council since 1971, the first year after the granting of autocephaly. Thirty-five years ago, it was difficult to find Orthodox books and publications in English, since only a few titles were available. Today, we not only have books and publications from our seminaries and numerous Orthodox publishers, but cassettes, videos, "cd's", the OCA website and the new Focus education web page with over 1,000 pages of educational resources.

As you can see yourselves, much has changed in the past thirty-five years and we are a very different-a more diverse Church, committed to the propagation and witness of the Orthodox faith in cooperation with our Sister Churches throughout the world.

A New Realization of Our Identity

It was in 1967 that a very modest proposal was made to change the name of our Church from "The Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North America" (also referred to as the "Russian Metropolia) to "The Orthodox Church in America." A special commission of thirty members that included bishops, priests, theologians and laymen, had been entrusted with studying the situation of our Church in America, and its relationship-or lack of relationship-with the Moscow Patriarchate (whose church life at that time was still restricted by the Communist government). The Commission unanimously came to the conclusion that the "temporary self-government" of our Church (proclaimed in 1924) be brought to an end. It recommended that the needs of our Church, as well as canonical order, required a new self-definition. After months of deliberation, it proposed a "first step"-that the next All-American Council accept a "Preamble" to the Church Statutes. The essence of that Preamble was to eliminate the term "Russian" from our Church's self-definition, and proclaim herself the permanent local Orthodox Church in America.

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As the 13th All-American Sobor of the Russian Metropolia convened in 1967, the Holy Synod of Bishops, the majority of whom were foreign-born, was hesitant to make such a change. After much debate, a recess was called and the Holy Synod tried to find a solution to satisfy both the bishops and the clergy and lay delegates. The Holy Synod designated me-as the junior bishop-to chair the next session of the Sobor. A "straw vote" was recommended and (after explaining to the bishops what a "straw vote" was-that it wasn't binding, but would indicate, at least, the opinion of the delegates), the vote was taken. The result was over-whelmingly in favor of the direction taken by the proposed Preamble.

As I look at the meaning of that "straw vote," I realize that it had a providential character. While the vote very clearly affirmed a direction, it did not make a decision. I believe the controversial "straw vote" opened the way to the negotiations of our Church with the Moscow Patriarchate in the late 1960's, and the granting of autocephaly by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1970. We thus became the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America, not by our unilateral decision, but rather by the common decision of the Churches of Russia and America. And what a gift this autocephaly has been!

Today there is much talk of autonomy and self-government in American Orthodoxy. What seemed uniquely controversial about our Church's autocephaly more than thirty years ago is today the central theme and primary focus of discussion for many Orthodox Christians in North America. As the conversations between the Moscow Patriarchate and our Church were beginning in the later 1960's, the question on the table was: "Will it be autonomy or autocephaly?" Why was the answer "It can only be autocephaly?"

Some hold the view that the choice was made in favor of autocephaly because of the Cold War. In this analysis, Americans at the time of the Cold War could not accept any dependence on a Church which lived in a communist society.

I strongly believe that such an analysis is shallow and inadequate. The fact of the matter is this: at the time of our autocephaly, Orthodoxy had been planted in North America by Russian Orthodox missionaries nearly two hundred years earlier. Our faithful were North Americans not only by citizenship, but by birth, education, and conviction. It had been clear for many decades that the Orthodox Church was in America to stay. We were not "guests" here. We were not Orthodox in diaspora!

Furthermore, it is unmistakably part of the Orthodox tradition that a Church which achieves the necessary maturity and lives in circumstances very different from its "mother church" attains self-government. This self-government-which in our case is called autocephaly-is by no means the road to isolation. To the contrary, our autocephaly is a constant reminder to us that the Orthodox Church in America lives in communion with all the canonical Orthodox patriarchates and autocephalous churches, and indeed in communion with the Orthodox jurisdictions in America which are today archdioceses and dioceses of patriarchates in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East.

We continue to live in the hope that the full canonical unity of Orthodoxy in North America will be achieved in God's own time and providence. This dependence of ours on God by no means relieves us of the duty and calling to work for unity, with energy and zeal, with vision and commitment. Let us not forget our mission and our responsibility.

Our Church: Faithfulness in the Midst of Change

In modern history it was only in America, in our Church, that the vision and pattern of conciliarity and freedom in church life was passed on, uninterrupted, from generation to generation. The All-American Church Councils, the Holy Synod of Bishops, the Metropolitan Council all reflect the vision of conciliarity which was given institutional form by the Church of Russia at its Council of 1917-1918. The conciliarity we practice is one in which the canonical and administrative areas of competency are clearly delineated. The central role of the episcopate is affirmed. The participation of clergy and laity is assured. It is a structure of ecclesial life and governance that is remarkably suited to church life in America.

Today, we take for granted that we are the Orthodox Church in America: that our vision and goals are innately appropriate to our life and responsibilities as Orthodox Christians living in and among the diverse peoples and societies of North America. It is here we must engage in witness, in mission and in service-with love, charity and compassion for all.

This is our home and, as in any family, we may not always agree with other members of our family. We may behave differently because of cultural diversity, upbringing, religious differences or economic influences. We need always to remember that God's image is in us. The image we present to others by our attitudes, our demeanor, our willingness to offer a small word or act of kindness to anyone we encounter-on the bus, in a supermarket, in our hurry to get somewhere-can change a person's day and what they will or will not do in their encounters with others. Father Alexander Schmemmann often said: "It's the little things that count!" In our daily lives as Orthodox Christians, we are or can be that "grain of mustard seed" whose branches grow as the greatest of bushes to shelter the birds of the air. The Orthodox Church in America is and can be a home, a shelter, for people seeking God's truth, God's love and God's mercy.

In our Church today, among its clergy and lay people, are found a great variety of backgrounds and histories, races and cultures: Alaskan native peoples, Albanians, Greeks, Arabs, Russians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Poles, Galicians, Carpatho-Russians, Norwegians, Germans, French, Italians, English, Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, African Americans, Mexicans, Canadians-both English Canadians and French Canadians-as well as the other ethnic groups of Canada. (I know I may have missed some who constitute the membership of our Church, for new people are finding the Orthodox Church in America and increasing our diversity daily.) Our history-or perhaps it would be better to call it "our story"- shows many streams coming together to form, with God's blessing, one mighty current.

A Time to Rejoice in God's Blessings

St. Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians, calls us to:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say Rejoice!...

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus."

As I look back upon the 35 years I have served as a bishop and the 25 years I have served as Primate, I am humbled by the struggles, mission and growth that have led us to become the Orthodox Church in America. And I rejoice in the blessings that have been bestowed by God upon our Church on this continent.

Our Church began in 1794 as a Mission of the Church of Russia-a mission planted and nurtured by a small company of monks who made a journey of nearly 10 months and 7,327 miles. Beginning their journey by land from the Valaam Monastery in Karelia, they traveled across European Russia and all of Siberia to the Kamchatka Peninsula, where they boarded a ship that took them by sea to Kodiak Island. Their mission took them across one-third of the world's circumference while never leaving the Russian Empire. The courage shown by these missionary monks as they labored to bring the Orthodox faith to the North American continent may be the story of an unparalleled feat in the history of Christian missions. For this we all rejoice and offer prayer and thanksgiving to God!

I rejoice also in the sacrifices of the waves of immigrants who came to our shores from Eastern and Central Europe and the Middle East. Having left their villages and cities to seek a new life in North America, they carried with them their Orthodox faith to this new land. They sacrificed much for their families, and in spite of the hardships they endured, they contributed "with glad and generous hearts" out of their meager earnings, to the

building of churches throughout this continent. For this we continue to rejoice and offer thanksgiving to God.

Changing Times and A New Era of Development

During the century that has just passed, the normal growth of Orthodox Churches was hindered for decades by many catastrophic events throughout the world: the Revolution in Russia and the spread of Communism in Eastern Europe, the Depression years and two World Wars, eras of change and conflict in the Middle East, and more recent conflicts, and now, terrorism around the world.

However, in very recent years, we have also witnessed and participated in the recovery and restoration of Orthodox Churches in traditionally Orthodox lands. It is good and right that we have given both financial and moral support to them. In relation to this support, we have also a cause for rejoicing in the establishment of organizations such as the International Orthodox Christian Charities, where Orthodox Churches in North America now work together as one Orthodox Christian body, to relieve the sufferings of all people who are in need, both here and abroad. I rejoice in the wonderful work of IOCC as they minister, on behalf of us all and with us all, to the hungry and thirsty, the homeless and naked, the sick and imprisoned.

Beginning in the mid-1950's and continuing today, cooperative efforts in the fields of Christian Education, Campus Ministries, Missions and Humanitarian Aid have brought Orthodox Churches and people together in America to develop and focus on building up our common life and ministry. The outreach of these programs has now extended to other Orthodox Churches throughout the world. The Orthodox Church in America has continued to participate in all of these efforts, for these programs and developments are significant signs that manifest our common desire for unity. But it is not enough to simply do things together.

True unity is to be truly "One" in Christ-manifesting our Orthodox Faith and Life as One Church! How many times have any of us been asked the question referring to our religious affiliation: "What Are You?" When we answer: "Orthodox," there is usually a follow-up question or comment: "Is that like Greek?" or "Are you Russian?" "If we answer "no," the next follow-up may be: "Oh, you're Jewish!" By this time we make it clear that we are "Orthodox Christians," which is followed by the response: "Is that something like Catholic?" Most of you know the rest of the conversation or explanation, which is usually more than what the questioner wanted to know! Many of us have experienced this type of conversation for 40, 50, 60 or more years!

Even the (frequently-suggested) effort to have a common logo on a street sign-with the name and address, or an arrow pointing the way to an Orthodox Church-has often been proposed. It is enacted in word (voted upon), publicized, and then discarded for lack of action or follow up. Although such a project may not be a critical priority in our life here, it is at least a symptom of the malaise, denial or unwillingness to eliminate any of the elements that continue to confuse or camouflage our presence and witness in society. So, until we are truly One Church in North America, we should not be too surprised if our public presence and impact here are expressed primarily by photos with Presidents or Prime Ministers!

A Time to Renew

Every year on the Feast of Pentecost, we hear the words of the Kontakion:

When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations;

But when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all to unity,

Therefore, with one voice and heart we glorify the all-Holy Trinity.

As I reflect on the past 35 years of my episcopal ministry and the past 25 years of my service as Primate, I am

heartened and rejoice in the growth and life of our Orthodox Church in America (nearly 250 new parishes, missions and communities, and over 350 ordinations of deacons and priests). In recent years, God has blessed us with the glorification of five new saints of America: Father Jacob Netsvetov, the first native American priest, and a co-worker of St. Innocent Veniaminov; Father John Kochurov, missionary priest in Chicago, builder of Holy Trinity Cathedral, who was killed in 1917, the first priest-martyr in Russia after the communist revolution. Father Alexander Hotovitzky, a missionary priest in America, co-worker of bishops, editor of the Russian-American Messenger-the official newspaper of the Church-and the builder of St. Nicholas Cathedral in New York, was martyred in the Gulag in 1937. Saint Alexis Toth, the great missionary, worked tirelessly to bring his people back to the Orthodox Faith of their forefathers. Bishop Raphael Hawaweeny, a missionary priest of Arabic origin who studied and taught in Russia and was brought to America and consecrated bishop by Archbishop Tikhon of America (later Patriarch of Moscow) to serve the needs of the Arabic-speaking community here. These dedicated men were men of the Church as well as men of their times. As servants of Christ and His Church, they utilized everything at their disposal to further the cause of Christ and the proclamation of the Gospel. They did not hesitate to engage the cultures in which they lived in order to achieve the goal that motivated their every action: to bring the world to Christ.

If we wish to follow their example, we can do no less. However, we often remain timid or somehow afraid to engage the culture and society in which we live in order to introduce it to Christ. If we wish to preserve and promote the missionary legacy of which we are so proud, we must necessarily enter the world and engage it in order to transform it. As we begin a new chapter in the history of the Orthodox Church in America, I exhort all of us to rededicate ourselves to the mission we have received as Orthodox Christians living in North America. Through our efforts and dedication to the work of the Gospel may the seeds of faith that were first planted here over two hundred and eight years ago continue to grow and blossom.

Our commitment and determination to engage our culture and society must be fully conscious of the context and time in which we live. Less than a year ago, on September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks brought massive atrocity, violence, and death to thousands of innocent people. As a result, thousands of families and hundreds of communities-and indeed all the people of the United States and their friends throughout the world-have felt the shock of suffering and bereavement. The Orthodox Church in America, together with the other Orthodox Churches in this land, has prayed for those who died and has accompanied those who grieve. When I visited Ground Zero in New York City on the ninth day, led prayers in Washington for the military, and joined other Orthodox hierarchs, as well as representatives of many other religious communities at Yankee Stadium for a time of public commemoration and grieving, I was the visible representative of the faithful of the Orthodox Church in America.

Much has changed in the American outlook and perceptions in the aftermath of September 11th. America Orthodox Christians are certainly called to participate fully in the endeavor to ensure both the peace and safety of American citizens and the American commitment to liberty and justice for all.

While responding to the challenges of each particular context and historical moment, we must at the same time always remain faithful to what is timeless and unchanging in the faith which inspires us and the values which guide us. In this way we will not be at the mercy of "news cycles" and "sound bites" and our contribution to American society will not be the contribution of citizens, but the contribution of men and women who follow the way of the Gospel of Christ.

My reflections as primate, as bishop, and as priest encompass the past forty years of our Church's life and mission. The saints who laid the foundation of the Orthodox Church in America, beginning with St. Herman of Alaska, encompass more than two hundred years of Orthodox ministry in America. Their image, their example of faith and humility, make firm the foundation of our Church. Their sanctity, their holy lives, give us the certainty that Christ is the cornerstone of our mission and ministry, of our past, our present, and our future.

Examples of faith and humility, are to be found in the ministries of so many who have given me life and inspi

ration. My heart is full of gratitude - to my father and mother, as well as other family members, who nurtured in me a love for the Church; to Father Basil Horsky and his wife Maria, who shared with generosity of spirit the joy and love at the heart of Church life; to my teachers in Seminary, especially Fathers Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff and Professors Nicholas Arseniev and Alexander Bogolepov, Sergei Verhovskoy and Veselin Kesich, who imparted a love for theology and the Orthodox Tradition as the very heart of service and mission; to all my brother priests and bishops in the Orthodox Church in America, for their cooperation and kindness and support; to my brother hierarchs in the other Orthodox Churches in America, especially Metropolitan Philip and others for their collaboration in the quest for Orthodox unity; to the Patriarchs, especially His Holiness, Patriarch Aleksy II of Moscow, and the other Metropolitans, and Archbishops throughout the world who have extended their warm greetings to me, and through me to the whole Orthodox Church in America; especially to the Orthodox primates and other hierarchs who have received me in their churches with gracious hospitality and brotherly love.

My heart is full of gratitude for the co-workers He has given me when I was a parish priest, a diocesan bishop in Alaska and in Western Pennsylvania, and Primate of the Orthodox Church in America. Many of these collaborators and friends have already fallen asleep in the Lord in hope of the resurrection, some are living in retirement (and have much to teach me about retirement!), others are currently members of my Chancery family.

The very heart of the Chancery for many years has been the tireless, patient, and wise Protopresbyter Robert Kondratick. Father Robert has been indispensable in all the work of the Chancery, and in performing his duties he has been a man of joy and faithfulness. He and his wife Betty have been both "official family" and "unofficial family" for me, and I will miss them.

An important service of representing me and the whole Orthodox Church in America in many inter-Orthodox, ecumenical, and inter-faith contexts has been performed by Archpriest Leonid Kishkovsky, whose ministry in the Chancery began even before I became Primate. I am grateful for his assistance and counsel.

One of the most recent additions to the Chancery staff is Archpriest David Brum, who as my secretary has quickly become a valued co-worker. And lest you have the impression that only priests are valued co-workers, I wish to express my gratitude also to Dr. Constance Tarasar, an important contributor to many aspects of our Church's ministry, especially in education, and to Mrs. Arlene Kallaur, for her labors in humanitarian assistance. And to my personal aide, Jason Vansuch, for his care and concern for me especially during my illness and times of stress and fatigue.

All of my co-workers - many of whom will be acknowledged appropriately in the address of the Chancellor - are completely dedicated to the Orthodox Church in America, to our Church's mission in the world. While I express my appreciation of them in a very personal way, their commitment, like my own, has always been a sincere commitment to the Orthodox Church in America.

With the conclusion of this address I will conclude also my service as Primate of the Orthodox Church in America. What are the central themes and convictions which I would like to leave with you as a testament?

The Orthodox Church in America embodies a vision and experience of Orthodox life and mission in America. Our vision, tested by experience, affirms the truth that the Orthodox Church is fully alive in America. Orthodox Christianity in North America is not in diaspora. The Orthodox Church in North America is here to stay.

The autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America, received by us from the Moscow Patriarchate, is a strong affirmation by the Churches of Russia and America that the Orthodox Church is not confined or limited by factors of ethnicity, or culture, or language. This means that Orthodoxy in America is not restricted to Russians, or Greeks, or Romanians, or Albanians, or Bulgarians, but is for all people. Autocephaly, consequently, is not

only the appropriate and canonical way of organizing church life. It is a necessity for effective mission in America.

The Orthodox Church in America understands and lives its autocephaly not only as self-government, but also as the duty and joy of communion with all the Orthodox Churches. Thus, we sincerely welcome the blessing which the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Antioch has given to its Archdiocese of North America's desire for autonomy. We sincerely welcome all the ways in which Orthodox co-operation and unity in America are advanced - from the meeting of Orthodox bishops convened by the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) in Washington, D.C., in May 2001, to the important collaborative work accomplished in and through the various commissions and agencies of the SCOBA.

We nevertheless return again and again to the vision and experience of autocephaly. The only fully canonical and fully traditional way of ordering the Orthodox Church's life in North America will be the full unity of all Orthodox in one Church, with one hierarchy meeting in one Holy Synod.

It is my conviction that the Orthodox Church in America, together with the other Orthodox "jurisdictions" in America, must strongly request the Orthodox Patriarchs and Holy Synods for their guidance and support in the movement towards one autocephalous Orthodox Church in North America before it is too late.

I believe that the movement towards Orthodox unity in North America is urgently needed by the Orthodox Churches throughout the world. Often, the Orthodox Church is perceived as an Eastern European or Middle Eastern Church, as a Church frozen in the past, as a Church without relevance to the modern world. In truth, the revival of Orthodox Church life in post-communist Europe as well as the Orthodox Church's painful and heroic struggle for survival in the Middle East show a contemporary vitality. A strong movement towards Orthodox unity and autocephaly in North America would bear witness to the catholicity of the Orthodox faith, showing that Orthodoxy is not limited to the East, and is fully alive in the West.

Finally, my beloved brothers in the episcopate and in the priesthood, my dear brothers and sisters in the "priesthood of all believers" - it is of the utmost importance and urgency for us "to love one another, so that with one mind way may confess Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in essence and undivided." In these words of the Divine Liturgy I see the whole life of the Church. At each Divine Liturgy, whether we celebrate the Eucharist in a parish or monastery church, in a seminary chapel or temporary storefront church, we are united in love and compassion, we are united in the joy of the Resurrection of Christ. I pray that the ministry of every bishop and priest and lay member of our Church may be full of this love and compassion and joy.

Now, concluding twenty-five years of service as Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, my heart is overflowing with gratitude. I thank God for everything! I thank God for each and every one of you. I thank God for the dioceses and parishes, the monasteries and seminaries from which you come. I ask for your prayers. And I pray that God may bless you with joy and strengthen you with wisdom in your continuing ministries in the building up of the Body of Christ.

Retirement

As you are aware, last year, in light of the various health challenges I was facing, and after much prayer and reflection, upon the advice of my physicians, and with the support and blessing of the Holy Synod of Bishops, I requested and was granted a four-month medical leave of absence from my primatial duties. During that four-month period, with your love and by your prayers, I was able to regain my strength and resume my primatial duties. However, subsequent to my return, I realized that my physical health would continue to limit my abilities and my primatial ministry. Therefore, on April 1, 2002, I submitted a letter to the Holy Synod of Bishops asking them to bless me to submit my resignation from the Office of Metropolitan of All America and Canada and grant me the status of retired hierarch. I wish now to read this letter of official request to the Holy Synod:

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April 1, 2002

The Holy Synod of Bishops

Chancery Office of the Orthodox Church in America
Oyster Bay Cove, New York

Your Eminences, Your Graces, my highly-esteemed and dearly beloved brothers and concelebrants:

Many of you have known me before my ordination to the priesthood and consecration to the episcopacy and each one of you knows of my deep and abiding love for the Holy Orthodox Church. Throughout the twenty-five years of my primatial service to the Orthodox Church in America, I have been supported and assisted by you, my dear brothers in the episcopate, in serving the flock of Christ in North America. Indeed, since my consecration to the episcopacy in 1967, I have always been blessed with nothing but kindness and love on the part of my brother bishops. I wish you to know that I am extremely grateful to each one of you for the many ways in which you have been supportive of me-as primate, as brother bishop, and as fellow disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You are all intimately aware that these past two years have been particularly difficult for me as I have faced increasing health problems. Last Spring, in light of the strokes I had suffered and my concern for the Church as well as my own personal well-being and after consulting with my doctors and upon their advice, I decided that it was best to request your blessing for a temporary medical leave of absence from my primatial and archpastoral duties. At that time you responded to my request with brotherly love, support, and concern. The outpouring of concern that was expressed by you and by so many of our clergy and faithful was in itself a great comfort in that time of trial. Thanks be to God, the Lord blessed me to return and resume my duties. However, with the passage of the past few months, I have found that my physical condition is once again deteriorating to such an extent that, given my limited physical abilities, I find myself unable to respond to the demands of my office in the manner which the Church needs and deserves of its Primate. Thus, in recent months I have found it necessary to place increasingly greater demands upon my brother bishops and my staff. Thankfully, they have always responded willingly, with grace, and with a dedicated and loving personal concern for me as well as for the entire Church. Nonetheless, the increasing demands upon the Primate and my own decreasing strength have only served to be the cause of even yet greater inner anxiety and personal concerns.

It is out of my love for the Church and an awareness of the demands of the primatial office, and my desire to see that the Church is blessed with a Primate who can lead with strength and assuredness, that I come to you today and request your blessing for me to submit my request to you to retire from the primatial office and be granted the status of retired hierarch of the Orthodox Church in America. Please be assured that this request is not made quickly but only after consultation with medical professionals and only after much prayer for guidance and with an awareness of your love for me and your concern for the welfare of the Church. My decision to ask your blessing upon my request is irrevocable. I make this request with the prayer that the Mother of God and the Saints who have shone forth in North America will continue to intercede for Christ's flock on this continent so that the Orthodox Church in America may remain always faithful to its mission to proclaim the fullness of the Gospel to those who live in these lands.

It is my hope that you will accept my petition and that my retirement from the Office of Primate of the Orthodox Church in America will come into effect after the convening of the first session of the 13th All-American Council in Orlando, Florida.

Asking your forgiveness and assuring you of my continued loving and prayerful support for each one of you, I remain

With brotherly love in Christ,

+THEODOSIUS

Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada