

Church Ministries / Departments

Department of External Affairs and Interchurch Relations

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Accomplishments/Progress Since the 13th All-American Council

Among the central responsibilities of the Primate of The Orthodox Church in America are the relations of our Church with other Orthodox Churches. In addition, the contacts and relations of The Orthodox Church in America with other Christian communities and ecumenical organizations, interfaith relations, and the representation of the Church to governments and to non-governmental organizations are also under the supervision of the Primate.

In his oversight of the “external” relations of the Church, the Primate seeks the advice and consent of the Holy Synod of Bishops. The Department of External Affairs and Interchurch Relations and the Chancery of The Orthodox Church in America are at the disposal of the head of the Church for the regular maintenance of all contacts and relationships.

The ministry as Primate of His Beatitude Metropolitan Herman began with visible signs of his role in building good relations and cooperation with other Orthodox Churches. In July 2002, Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, representing Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and other hierarchs of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) were present at the council at which Archbishop Herman was elected Metropolitan. Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk, chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, was present at this council, representing Patriarch Aleksy of Moscow.

In September 2002, at the enthronement of Metropolitan Herman as Archbishop of Washington, His Beatitude Sawa, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland, and His Eminence Metropolitan Daniel of Japan represented their respective Churches along with representatives from the Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Russia, Serbia, Romania, the Czech Lands and Slovakia, Finland, and Ukraine.

The traditional official visits of the newly elected Primate of The Orthodox Church in America to the other Orthodox Churches began in 2003: June — Patriarch Aleksy of Moscow and All Russia; July — Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople; August — Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev, Ukrainian Orthodox Church; September Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw and All Poland. In 2004, the visits continued: April — Patriarch and Catholicos Ilia of Georgia; September — Archbishop Nikolaj of Presov, Metropolitan of the Czech Lands and Slovakia; December Archbishop Leo of Finland. The visits of Metropolitan Herman to the Orthodox Churches will continue in 2005 - 2006.

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There are occasions when the Primate of the Church asks other hierarchs to accompany him or to travel on his behalf as representatives of The Orthodox Church in America. Metropolitan Herman was accompanied by Archbishop Kyrill of Pittsburgh to Moscow for the celebration of Patriarch Aleksy's 75th birthday in June 2004. Bishop Seraphim of Ottawa and Canada was appointed to attend the enthronement of Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria in October 2004. Archbishop Kyrill of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania and the Bulgarian Diocese of Toledo was delegated to the celebration of Patriarch Maxim of Bulgaria's 90th birthday in October 2004. Bishop Seraphim of Ottawa represented Metropolitan Herman at the consecration of Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi, Georgia, in November 2004.

In December 2004, on his visit to Finland, Metropolitan Herman was accompanied by Archbishop Nathaniel, Bishop Seraphim, and Bishop Nikon. Bishop Seraphim of Ottawa was delegated by Metropolitan Herman to represent The Orthodox Church in America at the funeral of Pope John Paul II in April 2005, and Bishop Tikhon of South Canaan was assigned by Metropolitan Herman to represent The Orthodox Church in America at the installation of Pope Benedict XVI.

Hierarchs of The Orthodox Church in America, in their visits and pilgrimages abroad, bring the presence of our Church to many churches and lands. Archbishop Kyrill has made regular visits to Bulgaria, thus maintaining good relations with the Bulgarian Patriarchate. Archbishop Dmitri has visited the Exarchate of Mexico, providing archpastoral supervision to the Exarchate. Archbishop Nathaniel of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate has visited the Patriarchate of Romania and has been active in meetings with Romanian hierarchs in western Europe. Bishop Nikolai of Sitka has made pilgrimages to Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

The maintenance of good relations with the Church of Albania has been facilitated by Bishop Nikon and by visits to Albania of the V. Rev. Arthur Liolin.

Accountability

In fulfilling their duties as chancellor and assistant to the chancellor for external affairs and interchurch relations, Fathers Robert Kondratick and Leonid Kishkovsky represent the Primate of the Church at inter-Orthodox, ecumenical, interfaith, and civil society meetings and events. They are both members of the Study and Planning Commission of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas. Orthodox Church in America representatives are members of SCOPA commissions and agencies, which include the Orthodox Christian Education Commission (OCEC), International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC), the Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), the Orthodox Christian Network (OCN), the Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting (EOCS), and the Social and Moral Issues Commissions. Together with representatives of other Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Churches, The Orthodox Church in America representatives also take an active role in the preparation of the annual Orthodox UN prayer service. In 2003, Metropolitan Herman hosted the 3rd annual service, which was held at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral in New York City.

Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky is a member of the Central and Executive Committees of the World Council of Churches and the governing bodies of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. He has also been active in the creation of a new ecumenical forum in the United States: Christian Churches Together in the USA. He is involved in leadership roles in interfaith bodies, serving as vice-moderator of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and moderator of Religions for Peace USA.

The Orthodox Church in America takes part in bilateral theological dialogues and ecumenical conferences through clergy and laity appointed by the Primate of the Church. It also maintains active representation on the Canadian Council of Churches.

Plans for the Future

The Orthodox Church in America is fully aware that to live in isolation would be to deny the very calling of the Church. In relations with Orthodox Churches, it is our responsibility to build and maintain cooperation in witness and mission. In relations with other Christian bodies and with ecumenical organizations, it is our vocation to achieve cooperation when possible, and to strive for Christian unity. In relations with other faith communities, it is our calling to strive for peace and to seek mutual respect among all people. In relations with governments and non-governmental organizations, it is our purpose to make a good witness for the Orthodox Christian faith.