



The HOLY SYNOD
of the
ORTHODOX CHURCH in AMERICA

March 7, 2008

The Right Reverend NIKOLAI
Bishop of Sitka, Anchorage and Alaska
PO Box 210569
Anchorage, AK 99521-0569

Your Grace and concelebrant in the Lord:

I read with sadness your letter of March 5. I am most disappointed that you are insisting on casting this process in an adversarial light when that is not our intention. Your Grace, we are not adversaries, we are brothers and it is with that spirit that you have asked for our help and that we have given our guidance. We ask that you reconsider your defiance of the specific directive of the Holy Synod as stated in Archbishop Seraphim's letter of March 4.

I think that you know very well that the complaints about your conduct within the diocese are not about your leadership style, bad press or anything that may be published on the internet. The letters of complaint have been brought by reputable priests and laity alike and at this point, as I have stated numerous times, we are only interested in determining whether those complaining about you are credible and truthful. There are no formal charges and our preliminary investigation into the character of the complainants should not be viewed as taking the place of any statutory or canonical procedures, should they even be required.

You have raised two points in your letter with which I agree. First, your point is well taken that the constitution of the group who will be commissioned to look into the complaints should all be members of the Holy Synod – the composition of the group will only be Holy Synod members. Second, I agree that how we respond to these complaints will send a clear message to all. We must ensure that the message sent to the Church at large is that all Christians, no matter what their position in the Church, are subject to the authority of the Scriptures, our Traditions, and the Holy Canons.

It was the decision of a duly constituted Lesser Synod, together with the unanimous consent of the Holy Synod, that you be placed on a leave of absence effective, 4 pm Eastern Standard Time, 5 March 2008. This leave of absence is mandatory. You are required to leave the diocese immediately. Should you not leave the diocese, your failure to comply with the Holy Synod's directive will be considered willful disobedience and will immediately be dealt with by the Holy Synod in an appropriate and canonical manner.

Finally, I note that you copied His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, His Holiness Patriarch Alexei, as well as the entire Episcopate of the Orthodox Church in America with your letter. I must remind you that this action is extraordinary and highly irregular. As a diocesan bishop, you have no authority to communicate with other primates of local autocephalous churches. In this regard, consider the words of the second canon of Second Ecumenical Council, "Diocesan bishops are not to intrude in churches beyond their own boundaries nor are they to confuse the churches... [u]nless invited, bishops are not to go outside their diocese to perform an ordination or any other ecclesiastical business."

With brotherly love in Christ and assuring you of my prayerful remembrance, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by the name "Herman" in a cursive script.

+ HERMAN

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

cc: Holy Synod of Bishops