

October 9, 2009

His Holiness KIRILL  
Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

Your Holiness, Beloved Brother in the Lord:

On behalf of the Holy Synod of Bishops, together with the clergy, monastics and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, it is a great joy to offer greetings and congratulations on the occasion of the bicentennial anniversary of the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy, an Orthodox institution of higher learning renowned throughout the world. I recall fondly and with gratitude my visit to the Academy earlier this year.



The Orthodox Church in America has had long-standing ties with the Saint Petersburg Academy. The missionary history of the North American Church was shaped, in part, by some of the Academy's outstanding alumni. Three saints greatly venerated in both Russia and America were educated at the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy and spent their early years of service to the Church as missionaries in America. Saint Patriarch Tikhon, Enlightener of North America, led the American Church as its ruling archpastor from 1898-1907. His vision of ecclesiastical organization and the eventual autocephaly of the Church in North America, expressed in his 1905 Response on Church Reform, continues to shape the missionary direction, governance and structure of the Orthodox Church in America. Saint Tikhon also established the first full-fledged Orthodox seminary in North America, which laid the foundation for the later establishment of the current theological schools of the Orthodox Church in America. In his archpastoral ministry in America, Saint Tikhon was notably assisted by two outstanding priests who were also alumni of the Saint Petersburg Academy. Holy Hieromartyrs Alexander Hotovitzky, who served in America 1896-1914, and John Kochurov, who served in America 1895-1907, were among the leading clergy of the North American Diocese, founding numerous parishes and assisting the ruling bishops of North America in fulfilling the missionary vision. Another graduate of the Saint Petersburg Academy who served as a priest in America under Saint Tikhon and was later an auxiliary bishop and ruling hierarch of the North American Diocese was Archbishop (later Metropolitan) Alexander (Nemolovsky), who spent the first two decades of his ecclesiastical ministry (1901-22) in North America. Undoubtedly, the theological formation of the highest caliber that all of them received during their studies at the Saint Petersburg Academy shaped their fruitful church ministry in America, Russia and elsewhere.

Over the last several decades, since the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America in 1970, close relations have existed between the theological schools of the Orthodox Church in America and the Saint Petersburg Academy. Several students from the Orthodox Church in America have studied at the Academy.

With great admiration, the Orthodox Church in America observed the Academy's work in sustaining theological education during the difficult decades under the Soviet regime. Especially noteworthy during this period was the establishment of new academic initiatives, particularly under the leadership of the ever-memorable Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) and under Your leadership, Your Holiness, as Rector of the Academy. One such initiative was the choir directors training program, now celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

On the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Metropolitan Nikodim, also presently commemorated, we gratefully recall his role in the history of the Orthodox Church in America. His persistent efforts, together with Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann, Dean of Saint Vladimir's Seminary in New York, overcame considerable obstacles to achieve agreement between our churches that resulted in the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1970. Through their joint work, Metropolitan Nikodim and Father Alexander developed great mutual respect that evolved into a personal friendship. It was through their fruitful cooperation, as brothers in Christ, that the vision of Saint Tikhon for the eventual autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America was achieved.

On this occasion, we offer praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for two centuries of fruitful labors to the glory of God by the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy. We greatly rejoice that the life of the Russian Orthodox Church and its theological schools has been reinvigorated and expanded in countless ways since the fall of the communist regime. We hope that by God's great mercy, the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy will continue to bear good fruit, to grow and to expand its important spiritual and academic ministries for many years to come. It is also our hope that cooperative initiatives between the theological schools of the Orthodox Church in America and the Russian Orthodox Church, such as academic exchanges of faculty and students, sharing of resources using computer technology, might increase for the benefit of both Churches and for the benefit of Orthodox witness.

We extend our heartfelt best wishes and congratulations to all those participating in the anniversary celebrations, which we hope will be filled with joy. We extend our brotherly affection to the rector of the Academy and convey our archpastoral blessings to the faculty, staff and students, and fervently pray that the great historical legacy of the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy might continue to flourish for many, many years.

With love in the Lord,  
Your Brother and Concelebrant,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name "Jonah" in a cursive script.

+ JONAH  
Archbishop of Washington  
Metropolitan of All America and Canada