

**A STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS
OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

*Issued at the 2026 Spring Session of the Holy Synod of Bishops
April 30, 2026*

To the clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. GIVING THANKS TO GOD FOR THIS LAND

As the United States of America marks the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its founding, we, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, raise our hearts and voices in gratitude to God, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, Who in His inscrutable providence has planted His Holy Church in this land and caused her to take root, grow, and flourish.

We give thanks to Almighty God for the United States of America—a nation that has, by the grace of God, afforded its people the freedom to worship, to follow the way of Jesus Christ, and to bear witness to the Gospel without fear or compulsion. We do not take these gifts for granted. They are blessings of divine providence, entrusted to us as a sacred responsibility. The freedom to gather in our churches, to catechize our children in the Faith, to proclaim the Resurrection of Christ openly and without hindrance—these are gifts for which every generation must give thanks to God and remain worthy stewards.

While this statement is offered on the occasion of the United States’ particular milestone, we note with gratitude that the Orthodox Church in America spans the breadth of this continent. Our dioceses in Canada and Mexico share with us in this moment of thanksgiving, giving glory to God for the freedom to worship and to serve the peoples of North America in all their diversity. The blessing we celebrate belongs, in different measure and manner, to the whole Church on this continent.

We call upon the faithful of the Orthodox Church in America to celebrate this historic milestone with prayers of thanksgiving, offered in your parishes, your homes, and in the quiet of your hearts, for this land and for all who dwell in it.

II. THE CHURCH PLANTED, GROWN, AND ESTABLISHED IN THIS LAND

The history of Orthodoxy in America is itself a testament to divine providence. From the earliest missionaries who brought the light of the Gospel to the shores of Alaska, to the generations of faithful who built parishes and communities across this vast continent, the Orthodox Church has been woven into the fabric of American life. She has welcomed the immigrant and the native-born, the seeker and the inheritor of the Faith, the learned and the simple—all those whom Christ Himself has called.

The granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America in 1970 was not merely an administrative act. It was an ecclesiological affirmation that this land has a Church of its own—a local Church, fully Orthodox, fully catholic, fully apostolic. The Orthodox Church in America is the Church for this land and for the people of this land. We are at home here, rooted in this soil, and the people of America—of every background, every heritage, every walk of life—are those whom Christ has entrusted to our pastoral care.

We embrace with joy the richness of our diversity. The Orthodox Church in America gathers faithful whose ancestors came from Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania—nations whose ancient Orthodox heritage now finds a new home on this continent—as well as from Eastern Europe more broadly, Greece, the Arab world, Africa, Asia, and the Americas themselves. This diversity is not an obstacle to unity but an icon of the Kingdom of God, where there is “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free” (Galatians 3:28), but all are one in Christ Jesus. We treasure every thread even as we weave them together into a single garment: the local Orthodox Church in America.

III. THE GREAT COMMISSION AND OUR PARTICULAR CALLING

As our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He entrusted to His disciples—and to His Church in every age and every land—a mission that admits of no exception and no delay: “Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). This is not a mission given to us in the abstract. It is a mission given to us here, in this place, among these people, at this moment in history.

The early Christians understood this calling with a simplicity that still instructs us. As an anonymous disciple wrote in the second century, in the Epistle to Diognetus:

“They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.”

We find in these ancient words a description of our own vocation. The Orthodox Church in America is at home in this land, fully engaged in its common life—and yet her

citizenship is ultimately in heaven, her culture the culture of the Kingdom. It is precisely from this position that she can offer something to American society that no merely political or ideological force can provide—the presence of the living God.

The Orthodox Church in America accepts this calling with humility and with urgency. We are called to be the presence of Jesus Christ in American society—in its cities and its rural communities, in its universities and its prisons, in its hospitals and its institutions, among its poor and its prosperous. We are called not to retreat from the complexity of our times, but to illumine it with the light of the Gospel. We are called to be, as our Lord taught, salt and light—preserving what is good and true, and shining in the darkness without being overcome by it.

IV. OUR COMMITMENT TO THIS NATION AND ITS PEOPLE

We, the Holy Synod of Bishops, reaffirm the commitment of the Orthodox Church in America to the well-being of this nation and all its people. We are committed to the cultivation of peace, the promotion of human dignity, the practice of charity, and the witness of reconciliation in a society that stands in great need of all these gifts.

In this regard, we recall with appreciation the aspiration expressed at the very founding of this republic. President George Washington, writing in 1790, articulated a vision of civic life that went beyond the mere tolerance of religious difference to something more generous:

“All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights.”

This aspiration—that religious liberty is not a concession granted by the powerful to the weak, but an inherent right belonging to all persons equally—has made it possible for the Orthodox Church to take root and flourish in this soil. We receive this gift with gratitude, even as we acknowledge with honesty that the distance between founding aspiration and faithful fulfillment has often been great, and that this very tension is itself a summons to continued repentance and renewal. The Church does not exist at the pleasure of the state, nor does she seek dominion over it. Rather, she stands within society as a witness to a Kingdom that exceeds all earthly kingdoms, illumining the civil order with the wisdom of the Gospel and the witness of holy lives.

In a moment of rapid and, at times, unsettling change, we offer the unchanging Christ—the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Our parishes are to be places of genuine welcome, of profound worship, and of selfless love where our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ is always manifested. Our contribution to America is not power, not politics, but the presence of the living God among His people.

V. A CALL TO REPENTANCE AND HUMILITY

Gratitude, however, is not the Church's only word on this occasion. The prophets of ancient Israel—those whom God raised up precisely because they loved their people—never ceased calling rulers and people alike to repentance and humility before God. It is a mark of genuine love for this nation that the Church, too, must speak this word.

Two hundred and fifty years is a span of time sufficient to accumulate both great achievements and grave failures. This nation—like all nations under God—has known the heights of generosity and the depths of injustice; the nobility of aspiration and the tragedy of betrayal. The Church does not pretend otherwise, nor would it serve this nation's good for her to do so. We bear witness to a God before Whom no nation and no person stands without need of mercy.

The promise spoken to Solomon rings out across the centuries with undiminished urgency:

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

It is in this spirit that we call the faithful of the Orthodox Church in America—and, through their witness, this nation—to repentance: repentance for injustices past and present; for the idols of wealth, comfort, and power that seduce every generation; for the divisions and enmities that tear at the fabric of common life; and for the ways in which we have failed to love our neighbors as ourselves. A true commemoration of a nation's founding is not mere self-congratulation; it is a moment of sober examination, of honest confession, and of renewed dependence upon God.

The Church does not speak this word from a posture of superiority. We acknowledge our own failures—in charity, in unity, and in the fullness of our witness to the Gospel. We, too, stand in need of God's mercy. But it is precisely because the Church has known the healing power of repentance that she cannot withhold this word from the world she is called to serve.

VI. A CALL TO THE DIOCESES

We encourage all dioceses, parishes, monasteries, and institutions of the Orthodox Church in America to mark the 250th anniversary of the United States of America in a manner befitting the occasion. Special services of thanksgiving, educational programs, civic engagement, and acts of charity are all fitting expressions of our gratitude to God and our love for this country and this continent.

VII. CONCLUSION

We close with a prayer offered in both gratitude and penitence—that this nation, conceived in aspiration toward freedom and formed through the struggles and sacrifices of many generations, may yet heed the ancient call to humility before God, and so continue to be a place where the Church of Christ flourishes, where the Gospel is proclaimed, and where all people are able to seek the face of God without fear.

To Him Who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen.

Issued by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America at its 2026 Spring Session, in the two hundred and fiftieth year of the independence of the United States of America, and in the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-six.