



## **A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CLERGY, MONASTICS AND FAITHFUL OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA ON AUTOCEPHALY**

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

*Ephesians 2:19-22*

*The Orthodox Church in America is autocephalous not in order to be self-sufficient and isolated, but in order to be in living communion and close contact with all Orthodox Churches... The Orthodox Church in America received autocephaly not in order to be master of Orthodox unity in America but in order to be a servant of this unity.*

*Bishop DMITRI  
Bishop of Dallas and the South  
Address to Patriarch Pimen on the Occasion of the  
60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Restoration of the Patriarchate  
Holy Trinity- St. Sergius Monastery, 1978*

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America:

Forty years ago, the Orthodox Church in America received its autocephaly from the Russian Orthodox Church and soon after glorified the first North American saint, our Venerable Father Herman of Alaska. The Holy Synod of Bishops gives thanks to Almighty God for the prayerful intercessions of St Herman and of all the saints who shone forth on this continent and likewise celebrates and affirms the gift of autocephaly. By the grace of God, this great gift was the result of a long process of reconciliation between the Metropolia and the Moscow Patriarchate, whose relations had tragically gone astray, a gift which still stands at the heart of our ecclesial life and serves as the basis for understanding ourselves.

At the same time, much has transpired in the past forty years within the life of the Orthodox Church in America. A most significant event took place on May 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> of this year with the convening of the first Episcopal Assembly for the region of North and Central America. All of the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church in America participated in this historic gathering of the canonical Orthodox Bishops of this region. Our Holy Synod is grateful to His All-Holiness,

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who wisely undertook the task of convening the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan Orthodox Conference in Chambésy, Switzerland in June of 2009. This Pre-Conciliar Conference resulted in the establishment, with the blessing of all the Orthodox Patriarchs, of an Episcopal Assembly for our region which has as its goal the “swift healing of every canonical anomaly” [Message of the Patriarchs 3.12] and the working out of a solution to Orthodox administrative unity on this continent.

This event, as well as the recent dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, has provided us with an opportunity to enter more fully into the pan-Orthodox process in North America. As such we have reflected on how we understand our life and work and how these can become a means for greater and deeper interrelationship with the other Orthodox Churches as we move towards authentic unity through the process of the Episcopal Assemblies.

As we reflect upon the past forty years, we affirm the following principles:

1. We understand ourselves to be an indigenous, multi-ethnic, missionary Church, laboring to bring Orthodox Christianity to all citizens of this continent.
2. We affirm that our historical reality derives from the Russian Orthodox Church and that we have humbly received and faithfully maintain the inheritance of the Russian Mission of 1794, the Diocese of Sitka in 1843; the Diocese of San Francisco in 1870, and its relocation to New York in 1907, and the Autocephaly of 1970.
3. As directed by the *Tomos*, we live as other self-governing Churches do: electing our own bishops and Primate, without confirmation by any other Synod, maintaining inter-Church relationships with all other Churches; and consecrating our own chrism.
4. As envisioned in the *Tomos*, we believe that the autocephaly given to us will be fully realized when the promise of Orthodox unity in North America is fulfilled, and the OCA together with all the Orthodox faithful in North America become one united Autocephalous Church of America, recognized by all other Orthodox Churches.
5. We commit ourselves to work within the Episcopal Assembly in order to realize the goal of unity.

We express our gratitude to all the Patriarchs for their care and ask all of the clergy, monastics and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America to be of one mind and one heart to offer thanksgiving to God for the gift of the Church, whose mission in this world is to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all the people of North America. We ask the clergy and faithful to pray that we be worthy of the heritage of the saints who shone forth in North America in building up the Body of Christ, fulfilling these words of Scripture: “*Speaking the truth in love, may [we] grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*” (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Asking God’s blessings on all the flock,

THE HOLY SYNOD of the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

The Most Blessed **JONAH**  
Archbishop of Washington  
Metropolitan of All America and Canada  
*Locum tenens* of the Diocese of the Midwest  
*Locum tenens* of the Diocese of the South

The Most Reverend **NATHANIEL**  
Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate

The Right Reverend **NIKON**  
Bishop of Boston, New England and the Albanian Archdiocese

The Right Reverend **TIKHON**  
Bishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

The Right Reverend **BENJAMIN**  
Bishop of San Francisco and the Diocese of the West  
*Locum tenens* of the Diocese of Alaska

The Right Reverend **ALEJO**  
Bishop of Mexico City and the Exarchate of Mexico

The Right Reverend **MELCHISEDEK**  
Bishop of Pittsburgh and the Diocese of Western Pennsylvania  
*Locum tenens* of the Bulgarian Diocese

The Right Reverend **MICHAEL**  
Bishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

The Right Reverend **IRENEE**  
Bishop of Quebec City and Administrator of the Archdiocese of Canada

Archimandrite **MATTHIAS** (Moriak)  
Bishop-Elect of Chicago and the Diocese of the Midwest

*Nativity Fast, 2010*