

## **Address of His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel to the 77<sup>th</sup> Episcopate Congress, July 2009**

### **WELCOME**

Reverend Fathers and Delegates:

Welcome to the 77<sup>th</sup> Annual Episcopate Congress. For many of you this is your first time as a delegate to a Congress and perhaps it may be your first visit here at the Vatra. We welcome you and ask you to rise to be acknowledged. We welcome those of you who have been here before, clergy and lay delegates.

### **Congress Preparations and Its Work**

The Chancery staff has anticipated your arrival and has worked together to provide you with the reports and other pertinent information. A few days ago, we did not have a host parish for the Congress. Although offers had been made, no parish came forward to accept to host the Congress in the way that we are accustomed to holding it. In your name and that of the staff, we thank the Saints Peter and Paul Parish Council and Ladies Auxiliary, Dearborn Heights, which through the good offices of Father Romey and Preoteasa Mary Ellen Rosco, volunteered, at the very last moment, to host the Congress!

The work of the Congress is described in our By-Laws, Article III. We assume that you may have reviewed this article. The Bylaws also describe the activities of the Episcopate Council, Article IV, and that of the hierarchy, Article I. Each delegate should have before you a copy of the Report to the Church Congress, 2009 in which there are printed reports on activities of the previous year and also the budgets proposed for the year 2010. The Chairmen of these Departments are ready to respond to their reports when they come up on the agenda.

Most of the activities of the Hierarchs and the Episcopate Council were reported in the SOLIA. As you know, we are now printing the SOLIA once every second month and therefore the articles reporting these activities are usually much after the event. The Episcopate Website may carry some of these activities on a more timely basis.

In the month of October, 2008, we remembered the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Falling-asleep of Bishop Policarp Morusca, first hierarch of the Episcopate.

Two new churches were consecrated in 2008. His Grace, Bishop Iustin, Auxiliary to the Diocese of Maramures and Crisana participated at the consecration of Holy Cross, in San Jose, California. His Grace, Bishop Petroniu of Zalau was present at the consecration of Saints Constantine and Helen in Lilburn, Georgia. The two hierarchs were invited guests of the Episcopate.

In November, the delegates to the 15<sup>th</sup> All American Council of the Orthodox Church in America elected Bishop Jonah, Auxiliary Bishop to the Diocese of the South to be the new Metropolitan. Clergy and lay delegates from the Episcopate took part in the election.

The election was covered on the OCA Website, in The Orthodox Church newspaper and in our SOLIA. On the evening prior to the election, we responded to questions from some delegates of the All America Council concerning the Episcopate's dialogue with the Patriarchal Romanian Archdiocese and the Patriarchate. This was an "impromptu" response on our part. We believe that, should anyone be interested in knowing, one can find it somewhere on the web or in print.

The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America elevated the community in Mexico to the status of "Exarchate" giving His Grace, Alejo, the title of Bishop of Mexico City and All Mexico.

We thank the Auxiliaries of the Episcopate for their work among the ladies, the youth and the general membership. We are pleased that these organizations are still able to offer scholarships in addition to the support given to the various programs of the Episcopate, most of which can be read in the reports of these organizations.

The Episcopate is a Church and the Church acts in the name of Christ our Lord. We bring to your attention some of the good works that individual faithful are doing in Christ's name such as the young people of St. George Parish, Regina SK, who served our Lord in the poor people in Mexico by building homes for them; Jessica Precop who volunteered her time in an orphanage in San Salvador as a team member of OCF(Orthodox Christian Fellowship) the university students association; Cristina Semon serving in Romania through the OCMC (Orthodox Christian Mission Center). I am pleased to share with you that Dr. Sanda Constantinidi, former delegate to the Congress who right now, from June 22-July 9 is serving Christ in her second time as a medical missionary with OCMC in Gulu, Uganda. These are a few of our faithful who are offering of the time, talents and finances to help those in need.

## **THE CHURCH AT LARGE.**

### **St Vladimir Summer Institute**

Having given attention to specific activities that have taken place in the Episcopate since our last Congress, I want to share with you some personal observations about the recent Summer Institute at Saint Vladimir Seminary, Crestwood, New York. It was held June 18-20, just two weeks ago. The Summer Institute is an annual event, open to the public. The scope of the sponsors of the Institute is to bring together outstanding scholars **to speaking** on a specific topic. This year, the Institute speakers not only presented information about the history of autocephaly in North America, but it also addressed the issue which the Episcopate, our parishes, you and your loved ones have also been considering for some time: "Visions of Unity- Past and Present" in North America.

### **Future of Orthodoxy in North America**

You may be wondering, "Of what concern is this program of this Institute to the annual Episcopate Congress, **to** my parish, to me, to my loved ones?" Of course, the Institute itself is the vehicle that brings speakers together; the presentations of the speakers are what are important to us. The speakers, specialists in their own fields, helped the audience to understand some major events in the history of Orthodoxy on this continent. Because we are citizens of North America, Canada and The United

States, it is good for us to better know the history of our own Church so that we, as members, will best know the direction in which we should be moving. This direction, of course, must be in harmony with a direction which is beneficial to our entire Orthodox communion in North America.

## **How will our Church be shaped**

We encourage you to see the entire Institute program on Ancient Faith Radio, [www.ancientfaithradio.com](http://www.ancientfaithradio.com). Some of the key topics in the program had to do with the 1917–18 Church Council in Russia which was planned years before (it took place at the beginning of the Bolshevik revolution and was cancelled during its sessions by the new government); the meaning of “Autocephaly” as it is generally understood; the Tomos of Autocephaly of the Russian Metropolia in North America (that is the present Orthodox Church in America); an interpretation of a church canon or rule and how it may affect our Orthodoxy in North America (I’m speaking here of Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon, 451 AD).

## **Administrative Unity Taking Shape**

You may still be wondering, “Of what concern are these topics to the annual Episcopate Congress, to my parish, to me and my loved ones?” They are extremely important because they are indications of what will be shaping the Church Administrative Unity of all Orthodox in North America and thus the future administration of our Episcopate and therefore, of our parishes. One theme prevalent throughout the presentations is “What is the role of the laity in the Church?” This topic is certainly of importance to us all. Whatever the experience of our clergy and laity has been concerning the role of the laity in the Church in Romania, we think that the role of the laity in the administration of the Episcopate and its parishes, as well as in the entire Orthodoxy in North America is unique. This is a topic which the entire Church in North America is reviewing, but not the only one.

What is also in discussion is how could all the various Orthodox jurisdictions in North America come together in one administration while respecting the specific traditions of all those people? How to reach out to our fellow citizens who might be looking for salvation? How will the bishops work together? His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah, addressed this issue in his presentation in the Institute: “A Vision for Now, on the Basis of History” which you can hear on the Ancient Faith website.

## **Chambésy**

Preceding the St. Vladimir Institute was the meeting in Chambésy, Switzerland June 6–13 of the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar committee which, as its name suggests, is preparing the work for the proposed Holy and Great Council (the date of which has not yet been revealed).

Another meeting is planned for later in the year. In general, the committee is proposing for consideration that Orthodox bishops serving the Church in nations where there is no autocephalous or autonomous Church form local conferences of bishops to work together. In some places, these committees already exist. In North America there is the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops (SCOBA).

## **Structure of the Conferences**

Who will be members of these conferences has not been determined. The members of the US SCOBA conference are the heads of each jurisdiction identified as "ethnic." The OCA also participates in the SCOBA. Archbishop Nicolae Condrea is a member and represents the Romanian Patriarchate. What relationship these conferences will have with the patriarchates has not been stated nor has the determination as to who will head each local conference been decided. It is thought that the conferences may have some oversight by the Ecumenical Patriarch. What the relation between the local conference and each bishop and his diocese will be is also not yet clear.

## **Great Councils and Local Councils**

One must remember that the last Great Council was held over one thousand years ago.

Since then there have been numerous local councils whose decisions have often been accepted by all the Churches. The Church has not been without gatherings of the bishops (who are obligated by the canons to meet at least twice a year). This great Council would include almost all bishops. It may be that there will be lay participation in this Great Council. North American Orthodox Christians have been represented in Pan-Orthodox conferences and other events by the various patriarchates which have faithful living on this continent.

## **Various Issues**

Among the many issues on the agenda for the winter meeting which will affect all Orthodox Christians wherever they are living are: rules for recognizing the autocephaly or autonomy of Churches; establishment of a single calendar; marriage regulations; fasting in today's society; relations with Christian bodies; the ecumenical movement; Orthodox contributions to asserting the Christian ideals of peace, brotherhood and liberty.

## **THE EPISCOPATE**

### **Joint Dialogue Commission**

These two recent events do have an impact on the Episcopate, its parishes, faithful and our place in North American societies. As you might know from attending the Congresses and should know from articles in the SOLIA, the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America (ROEA/Episcopate) and the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of the Two Americas (ROAA) established a Joint Dialogue Commission. In the letter sent to you earlier in June, the role of the JDC was briefly stated. In the formal "Report to the Church Congress" there is also a report about the ongoing work of the JDC. The 76<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2008, decided that the work of the Commission regarding a joint Proposal to the Romanian Patriarchate was an acceptable basis for continuing work. It also urged the Episcopate Office to establish commissions to implement due diligence in the areas of law, finance and statutes. This has been done and the commissions are working.

## Various Opinions and Concerns

In the beginning of the work of the JDC there was little opinion expressed about its goal. Most opinions then were expressed about the fact the work was not completed. More recently, there have been other opinions that criticize the proposal even though it is still incomplete. There is speculated concern as to the defensibility of an accepted proposal or Tomos of Maximal Autonomy of a Romanian Metropolitanate of North America. One can suppose that this also was a concern for members of the Russian Orthodox Metropolia, now the OCA, when it received its Tomos of Autocephaly from the Russian Orthodox Church which was still to endure twenty years under the Russian Communist state.

There are also concerns about leaving the OCA as the autocephalous Church in North America. Both when we were part of the Russian Metropolia (1960) and the OCA (1970) we have enjoyed fraternal support and respect. Saint Innocent and Saint Tikhon, who both labored in Alaska, fostered the ideal of respect for all traditions. They understood that North America, when it comes to the variety of Orthodox traditions, is not necessarily a melting pot. This is evident in the fact that there was great respect for the early Syro-Arab and Serbian communities, even to establishing unique administrations for them. That order was shattered in 1921 with the establishment of multiple ethnic dioceses, which continue to this day.

Observations made in a Christian way can be beneficial. Concerns should also be made known. **What is reprehensible are attacks made directly on ecclesiastical personages and on those clergy who were appointed by us and confirmed by the Episcopate Congress.** Some of us have lived through virulent attacks made on His Eminence, Archbishop Valerian of thrice-blessed memory. Some may still be among us who also witnessed verbal attacks against Bishop Policarp of thrice-blessed memory. Orthodox Christians, member of the Episcopate, have a responsibility to this generation and those to come, to show dignity and good order in expressing observations and concerns.

## The Episcopate and the Orthodox Church in America

It is my obligation, as a member of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America, to keep its members aware of the Episcopate's dialogue with the Church of Romania and the Romanian Archdiocese. Metropolitans Theodosius, Herman and now, His Beatitude, Jonah, have been updated since the inception of the ROEA/ROAA joint dialogue. The Holy Synod has pondered our reports, respectful of our endeavors. We have not concluded the work of the Proposal nor that of the due diligences, and therefore we cannot present a request to the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America to consider a possible administrative unity between the two Romanian communities in North America.

## The Episcopate and Holy Archangels Parish, Paris, France

In short, this parish, once part of the Romanian Church, left her during the communist takeover in Romania. The parish had canonical coverage for many years under the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia until 1998, when it was released "at large" In 2000, the Holy Archangels Romanian Parish, Paris asked to be temporarily accepted under the canonical coverage of our Episcopate. Their request

was honored. In this way, the parish carried on its spiritual and social life and also began to consider the possibility of reconciliation with the Church of Romania. On May 10, 2009, the parish voted to be accepted, with special conditions, into the Metropolitanate of Western and Southern Europe. Metropolitan Iosif (Pop) accepted their proposal. On July 9 and 12, His Beatitude, Patriarch Daniel will visit the parish.

## **The Episcopate and her Future**

Perhaps some of us think the Episcopate has an existence totally separate from other Orthodox Christians in North America, as though we could live in isolation. We know that in the American and Canadian societies, as citizens, we are integral members, using our talents both for our individual and family welfare and for the good of our societies. Just as it is impossible for Orthodox Churches to live in isolation from each other, so it is not possible that we consider that we can live our Christian lives in isolation from our brethren of various jurisdictions in North America. The Church that we confess is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic; abroad, or here, we are one body, the Body of Christ. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit unified the Apostles to strengthen them for their mission to bring salvation to the world. He appeared in visible tongues of fire over their heads so that they could each and all see that there was an outpouring of his grace on them. Today, as through the centuries, this visible sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit is seen in our unity and good order in the Church.

## **CONCLUSION**

The authors of the Tomos of Autocephaly (1970) understood, first of all, that the respect for existing Orthodox traditions in North America must continue and second, that the unification of all these traditions into one Autocephalous Church would take time (see SOLIA Calendar 1990).

His Beatitude, Jonah, boldly **but** humbly reiterates this in his presentation, *A Vision for Now, on the Basis of History* (St. Vladimir Institute). The Episcopate has been respected in the OCA as one of those different Orthodox traditions. Perhaps it is now our part, as another step on the way to a totally unified Autocephalous Church in North America, to promote the unification of the Romanian community on this continent.