



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS

OF NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

MESSAGE

To our beloved Orthodox Christian faithful throughout North and Central America:

You are the light of the world. (Matt. 5.14)

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

We, the members of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America, gathered in Chicago for our third annual meeting of September 10-12, 2012, greet you with paternal love, as we offer glory and thanks to our Triune God.

Forty-three Hierarchs convened in the unity of our holy Orthodox faith, mindful of our responsibility to each other and to the Church as the Body of Christ. Some of our brother Hierarchs were absent due to personal illness or family loss. We recognize our calling to *rightly teach the word of God's truth* as our foremost duty towards the Lord Jesus Christ and His holy Church.

We remember in prayer the recent falling asleep in the Lord of our brother and concelebrant, Metropolitan Constantine of Irinoupolis, First Bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA. May his memory be eternal!

We acknowledge the challenges that lie before us and understand our accountability to one another so that our common ministry and witness may be blessed by God.

We reaffirm our commitment to the decisions and expectations of the Primates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches and the Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conferences in an effort to safeguard and deepen Orthodox unity, to promote common pastoral action, to offer common witness in our region, and to overcome canonical anomalies.

Our unity was manifested in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and the sharing of the Holy Eucharist on the occasion of the Feast of St. John the Forerunner (Old Style) as well as in joining our fellow Americans as we mourned the loss of thousands of innocent citizens 11 years ago on September 11, 2001, and prayed for the repose of their souls.

Among the items on the agenda was the work of the Assembly's Secretariat, its 13 committees, and 14 agencies and endorsed organizations. We praise God for the positive spirit of cooperation that prevailed during the sessions of the Assembly and celebrate the considerable progress already achieved on many levels through the expanding activities of its committees.

In particular, discussion focused on the Assembly by-laws and the progress of the work by the Committee for Canonical Regional Planning. The last of these discussions constitutes the primary concern of the Assembly in its effort to enhance Orthodox cooperation, advance a common Orthodox witness and promote canonical normalization in this region. The Hierarchs spent the better part of the second session focusing – through presentations, deliberations and reports – on this paramount issue.

As we assemble in Chicago, we also take this opportunity to encourage all of you, the People of God, in a world exploited and polarized by greed, godlessness, and immorality. We call upon all Orthodox Christians to be faithful to their calling to be *the light of the world*.

We recognize the tremendous social pressures to conform to secular standards, but we exhort you to *stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught* (2 Thess. 2.15) so that your *light is not hidden under a bushel but placed on a stand* (Matt. 5.15) in order for all to see. Let our Orthopraxy attend our Orthodoxy. In this respect:

- We must safeguard the sacrament of marriage in accordance with God's will for the sacred union between man and woman and the sanctity of family as the fundamental nucleus of a healthy society. In this regard, we emphasize regular family worship, particularly at Sunday liturgy.
- We must strive to eliminate the violence proliferated against innocents of every kind, particularly of women and the unborn. We call for responsibility by individuals, institutions and governments to ensure the welfare of every citizen.
- We must resist the wastefulness and greed that dominate our consumer society, confessing that our spiritual *citizenship is in heaven* (Phil. 3.20) in order that our witness be characterized by the compassion and mercy as well as the generosity and philanthropy that distinguishes our God who loves humankind.

Finally, we pray for our oppressed and suffering brothers and sisters variously facing oppression or persecution in the ancient Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, as well as in the Balkans and throughout the world. We grieve the loss of US Ambassador

Christopher Stevens and his staff in Libya. We condemn all forms of violence perpetrated in the name of religion and denounce all expressions of religious intolerance.

Now may the Lord of peace Himself grant you peace at all times in all ways. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. (2 Thess. 3.16,18)

Archbishop Demetrios, Chairman
 Archbishop Justinian, 2nd Vice
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 Bishop Basil, Secretary
 Metropolitan Iakovos
 Metropolitan Methodios
 Metropolitan Athenagoras
 Metropolitan Isaiah
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 Bishop Ioan Casian
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