

## **Assembly of Bishops releases message at conclusion of eighth annual meeting**

The eighth annual meeting of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America drew to a close on Thursday, October 5, 2017.

On Tuesday, October 10, the Assembly released the text of the gathering's concluding Message to the Faithful, the text of which appears below. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon was among the message's 32 signatories, together with other US members of the Orthodox Church in America's Holy Synod of Bishops: His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel; His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon; His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin; His Eminence, Archbishop Melchisedek; His Eminence, Archbishop Mark; His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, who also serves as the Assembly's Treasurer; His Grace, Bishop David; and His Grace, Bishop Paul.

The text of the opening address of His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Assembly Chair, also has been released.

### **Message of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America Thursday, October 5, 2017 Garfield, New Jersey**

To our beloved Orthodox Christian faithful and all people of good will throughout the United States of America:

*"Let the children come to me, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 14.14).*

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

We, the Hierarchs of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, who have gathered in Garfield, New Jersey on October 3-5, 2017 for our eighth annual meeting, greet you with love in Christ as we offer glory and thanks to Him.

Having been welcomed by our host, His Eminence, Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey, thirty-two hierarchs, gathered in the unity of our Orthodox faith, began our Assembly with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy at Saint George's Greek Orthodox Church in Clifton, New Jersey, calling to mind in our prayers our suffering neighbors throughout the world. Once again, our thoughts and prayers were with the kidnapped hierarchs in Syria: Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Paul Yazigi (brother of His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch) and Syriac Archbishop John Ibrahim. We prayed also for the repose of our brothers, Metropolitan Iakovos of Chicago, Metropolitan Philotheos of Meloa, and Bishop Antoun, formerly of Miami, who fell asleep in the Lord after long and blessed hierarchal

ministries, which were notable for their strong support for the work of our Assembly.

Having thus begun with prayer, we proceeded upon three days of convocations and meetings in which we set about our various works. In the opening session, new officers were welcomed to the Executive Committee: His Grace, Bishop Gregory as Secretary and His Eminence, Archbishop Michael as Treasurer. His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios, our Chairman, noted in his opening address three main reasons for our meeting. "Our work together," the Archbishop noted, "is a methodical and intense spiritual exercise in building love and fortifying the bond of our unity in Christ." He also pointed out that our task as Orthodox Hierarchs is to "organize and function according to the canonical norms and tradition that our Church Fathers wisely established throughout the centuries." Lastly, Archbishop Demetrios urged the Hierarchs to work together on forging an authentic and common witness of Orthodoxy to the younger generation.

Among the many themes addressed during our Assembly, one of the central [themes] this year was that of youth ministry: the place of children and young adults in the Church. We affirmed the need to enhance our ministry to those for whom the Church is their hope, their glory, and their salvation. We listened to presentations by Dr. Richard Flory, Senior Director of Research and Evaluation at the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California, and by Dr. Ann Bezzerides, Director of the Office of Vocation and Ministry at Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. They highlighted the importance of ministry directed to all ages and stages of youth and identified various challenges and opportunities to the care of youth and emerging leaders. We remain mindful of the beauty and sanctity of childhood, which our Lord Himself experienced, sanctifying its vulnerability and integrity, its dependency and its development into Godliness. Jesus Christ welcomed and blessed the young children, and we are thus reminded that "for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 14.14). We remain steadfast in our commitment to guard "their lives according to God's word" (Psalm 110.9), so that they may "set an example for all believers in speech and conduct, in love, faith and purity" (1 Timothy 4.12).

Saint John Chrysostom's love and compassion for children moves us to urge the clergy, the faithful, and all people of good will, to "let everything take second place to our care of our children..." (Homily 21, Homilies on Ephesians). In this spirit, and in common cause for the benefit of all our children, we voice our fervent prayers and unyielding support for the children and youth of our Church and assure all our faithful of the tireless commitment of the Hierarchy to the welfare of its youngest and most vulnerable flock.

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We encourage all our youth, in unity of mind and heart, to grow in wisdom and the understanding of the treasures of the Church, which are the firm foundation of their future and the ground that may support their labors in and for the world.

In a connected way, we denounce all social, political and cultural travesties which threaten the physical safety and moral security of God's children. The plight of hundreds of thousands of unaccompanied migrant and refugee children, as well as the millions of women, men, and children exploited in modern slavery across the globe touches our hearts. We beseech the faithful to see in them Christ Himself, Who also fled to foreign lands in infancy, and to assist them whenever possible. Similarly, we unequivocally denounce the continuation of violence and bloodshed throughout the world, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, where ongoing brutality—too often in the name of religion—threatens children and adults alike. We pray for the protection of Christians and all other vulnerable communities throughout the world; for the cessation of terrorism and persecution wherever they occur; and for lasting peace and justice to reign throughout God's world. We also express our profound concern over the recent attack in Las Vegas, which left nearly sixty dead and hundreds injured. Yet again, we witness one more egregious act of hatred and terror. Unfortunately, such sights have become all too familiar in our society; they are the antithesis of love and the worst example for our children of what mankind can be. We are called to rise up in witness of a love that conquers fear and hatred, and to bear witness before society and all civil authorities of the need to eliminate violence.

Furthermore, we reflected on recent disasters affecting our communities, namely the devastating hurricanes and earthquakes. We pray fervently for those who lost their lives and their livelihoods and for all those impacted. We urge the faithful to continue to support humanitarian relief efforts through International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), an agency of the Assembly.

Our work also included a presentation by the Committee for Canonical Regional Planning, which reviewed the findings of its study "Places of 'Greater Orthodox Unity' in America: Local Inter-Parish Cooperation." The hierarchs commended Metropolitan Nicolae, Chairman of the committee, for his efforts, endorsed the work of the committee, and authorized the committee to continue its work. We also heard reports by Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) and IOCC, which led to fruitful and open discussion. We especially offered thanksgiving to God for the humanitarian service offered by IOCC, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. We also considered

110 E Main Street, Marblehead, OH 43440  
[www.holyassumptionmarblehead.org](http://www.holyassumptionmarblehead.org)

ideas that might help further express our common faith through common works of charity.

Recognizing the blessing that it is to gather in peace in order prayerfully to reflect upon the life of the Church, we express our deep gratitude to all those who planned and prepared for this year's Assembly. It is our common conviction that, in coming together in fraternity to address common issues of pastoral concern, welfare and mission, we are strengthened in our witness and work in this God-preserved land.

We offer our paternal prayers for all the children of the Church, our beloved flocks. May the abundant blessings of the All-Merciful Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—be with you all!

### **Galatians 1:11-19 (Epistle)**

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

### **2017 OTTAWA COUNTY HOLIDAY BUREAU**

2017 Giving Sundays: November 12, 19 and 26.

Needed: Soap, hygiene products, toiletry items, paper products, cleaning items, non-perishable foods, money.

The Holiday Bureau volunteers wish to thank everyone who helped brighten Christmas mornings for the past 55 years and for years to come. MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Ways you've helped in the past: canned goods collected by Scout groups; Toys or gifts for children; You had mitten trees; You were check writers; Food bringers; Volunteers; Sorters; pickup and delivery people.

Christmas comes but once a year, And we ask of you to spread the cheer. For without your kindness and good will a family's wish we could not fill. Our pledge to help all those in need is the Holiday Bureau creed!

Rectory 419-798-4591 / Cell 570-212-8747  
[padrebartek@gmail.com](mailto:padrebartek@gmail.com)