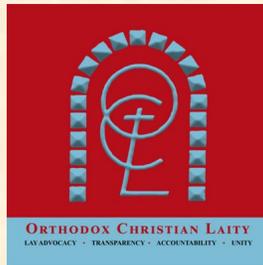


**Papers in Support of
A Declaration for
Orthodox Christian Unity
in America**



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Occasional Papers Series • No. 12 • 2022
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Our 35th Anniversary

Dear Orthodox Faithful,

In celebration of the 35th Anniversary of the founding of Orthodox Christian Laity (1987-2022), it is a privilege to publish our 12th Occasional Paper which includes: "A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity in America;" the letter sent by OCL to Patriarchs throughout the world; and four Papers in Support of the Declaration. The Panel Discussion at OCL's 35th Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, focused on the Declaration and the importance of soliciting signatures and support of all Orthodox Christians everywhere to inform the bishops here and worldwide of the necessity for a united, autocephalous (self-governing) American Orthodox Church. Sign the Declaration. Ask family members, your parish priest and fellow parishioner to sign. Your individual action really does count and adds to the ground swell for unity! Finally, we extend sincere appreciation to the OCL Board of Directors and Advisors whose unconditional love and commitment for their Church during these past thirty-five years exemplify the important historical role of the laity in the life of the Holy Orthodox Church.

Peter Zarras
President, Orthodox Christian Laity
Winter 2022

Publication of "A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity in America in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL Tuesday, July 5, 2022 | A6A

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity in America

We believe that we are the most fortunate of people, blessed by God to be Orthodox Christians and to be free Americans. We accept the responsibility to "make disciples of all nations" on these shores, as Christ required of us at His Ascension.

We take inspiration from the statement in 1922 of Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios, who said: "I have seen and understood how exalted the name of Orthodoxy could be...if more than two million Orthodox people were united into one church organization, an American Orthodox Church."

We see that Orthodox Christian witness in America is weakened by our fragmentation into more than a dozen ethnic enclaves. We believe that Christ weeps at this disunity.

We call all Orthodox Christian people of America – clergy and laity – to come together in a single, unified Orthodox Church of America, under the historic rules and traditions of Orthodoxy.

We look to our hierarchs in the Assembly of Bishops – which was founded in 2009 for this very purpose – to lead us in this quest. We enjoin them – like Joseph of Arimathea – to take courage, and like us, be seen openly to be willing to make sacrifices for the sake of preserving and growing the Church of Christ for our children and for seekers of divine truth.

We understand the apprehension that comes with the prospect of change. We believe that a unified, revitalized Orthodox Church of America would be a formidable spiritual and moral dynamo that would be a powerful force for good in the world, providing more support and vitality to the ancient Patriarchates and Mother Churches than divided, declining ethnic jurisdictions are providing.

We particularly envision a united Orthodox Christian Church of America to be a strengthened bulwark of support for the ancient Patriarchates that no longer have the internal governmental protection that the national Orthodox Churches have. We believe that this united American Church, wielding the potent voice of committed American citizens, will marshal an unprecedented level of material, moral, and political support for world Orthodoxy. A united, growing fellowship of Pan-Orthodox Archons and Guardians of the Faith of other jurisdictions, pledged to support and protect the ancient Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, will cement the special relationship that binds children to their parents.

We believe that concerns over loss of traditions, customs, and languages are also misplaced, for we strongly attribute to

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL TUESDAY, JULY 5, 2022 A5

ADVERTISEMENT



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PHOTO BY JAMES HAMILTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES
The president benefits the U.S.

A DECLARATION FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN UNITY IN AMERICA

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openly to be willing to make sacrifices for the sake of preserving and growing the Church of Christ for our children and for seekers of divine truth.

We declare ourselves to be Americans of proud descent from ancient shores, but no longer part of a church diaspora that puts ethnicity before Orthodox Christianity, lest our Church fades away as ethnic ties diminish over time.

We believe that the administration of our parishes and dioceses from Mother Churches on distant shores is uncanonical and unworkable. We are guided in this by clear Church canons and traditions: that there be only one Orthodox Christian bishop in any location; that foreign bishops have no authority outside their own territory; and that under the established Orthodox tradition of a great majority of places, when an Orthodox Christian national community is developed in a new territory, a single local church be established, uniting every believer in Orthodox doctrine.

We reassert the proper role of the laity in the governance of the Church. We understand this to mean that the laity defers to the clergy in respect and matters of doctrine. In return, we believe that Orthodox Christian tradition and historic practice require that the clergy respects the laity's call for accountability, transparency, collegiality, adherence to process and the Canons of the Church, and ultimately then, unity.

In making this declaration, we remind ourselves of the historic courage and leadership of lay people in establishing and growing the single Christian Church, in defending the true belief of Orthodoxy during centuries of dispute, and in building new parishes around the world as immigration flourished.

We believe that foreign administration and indifference, and local ethnic fragmentation and disunity, have led, too often, to bad governance. This has contributed significantly to the decline of American parishes and dioceses, as succeeding generations see ethnic churches that are indifferent and unresponsive to their needs in a multicultural America. We believe we are a distinct and mature American Orthodox Christian community, that is ready to become a single, unified Orthodox Church of America.

We understand the apprehension that comes with the prospect of change. We believe that a unified, revitalized Orthodox Church of America would be a formidable spiritual and moral dynamo that would be a powerful force for good in the world, providing more support and vitality to the ancient Patriarchates and Mother Churches than divided, declining ethnic jurisdictions are providing.

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We believe that concerns over loss of traditions, customs, and language are also misplaced, for we strongly ascribe to the American ideal of “e pluribus, unum...out of many, one,” for the keeping of local practices, parish by parish. We believe that language and customs should and must be maintained as parishes choose. In this, the American multicultural experiment will continue, just as it has from its beginning. Early Pan-Orthodox efforts such as International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) will see their good work thrive in a united Church.

We also believe that the American model of the new United States, which needed over a decade from declaring independence to agreeing upon a governing constitution, is a useful model for our new Church governance. This new Church would neither obliterate our Orthodox identity nor ignore our

traditions and precedents, but will instead adjust these God-inspired and time-honored tenets within the reality of a unified Orthodox Church of America. We believe we can take our time, grow in Christ, and get it right.

We therefore believe that our Assembly of Bishops should – as in historic practice – come together as a synod, elect its own presiding hierarchy, proclaim the Church in North America to be an autocephalous, canonical church, and seek recognition of this autocephaly from the fifteen Autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

In this, we call upon the Holy Spirit, Who bathes the world in wisdom and good order, and Who knows no national, ethnic, or any other boundaries, to help make clear to all the earth our prayer: to help our Church prosper, thus to keep and bring Christ into the lives of all people. We pray that the Lord will guide these efforts, that they be imbued always with heartfelt humility, and that the new united Church for which we pray and which we work to create would be, at all times and in all ways, for the greater glory of God.

Add your signature to the Declaration by scanning the QR Code to the right or visit: bit.ly/DeclarationUnity.



**Text of Letter Translated into Each Respective
Language and mailed/emailed along with a
Translation of the Declaration for Unity in America to
Patriarchs with Jurisdictions in America and within the
Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA**



Orthodox Christian Laity

The Elevation of the Venerable and Life-Giving Cross 2022

Your Holiness (Your Beatitude),

Asking for your blessing.

We, the undersigned, are representatives of a rapidly growing number of American Orthodox believers who have signed the Declaration of Unity that is attached to this letter. We are laity and clergy together, and we come from all American Orthodox Christian jurisdictions.

It is our honor to write to you, one of our esteemed Hierarchs of the historic Orthodox churches from which our ancestors came to American shores. We thank you and all the past leaders of your venerable Church for your support and leadership that have helped to establish the Orthodox Christian presence in America and overcome many challenges; so that today, Orthodox Christianity is an esteemed part of the American religious landscape.

After much prayer and thought, a group of Orthodox Christian laypeople and clergy composed the Declaration document. We believe that the Declaration speaks for itself. In it, we call upon

the American Assembly of Orthodox Bishops to declare itself a Synod, elect its own leaders and articulate its governing procedures, thereby establishing an autocephalous Orthodox Christian Church for America to serve the local church in this land. We recognize that this is an historic step in the life our Orthodox Christian Church, but one that is necessary for the Church's stability, growth and impact in the hearts, minds and souls of the faithful in America.

One point that the Declaration raises, which we would like to especially emphasize, is the positive role that an administratively united Orthodox Christian Church in America will have in the practical application of the beliefs that unite all people of our Faith worldwide. Rather than weakening the Mother Churches from whence we came, a single canonical American Orthodox Church will speak with a united voice and display a strength that is not possible in the current, overlapping administrative structures. This strength will join that of your own Church to help define a new era for World Orthodox Christianity.

We ask you then to read and consider this Declaration with love and understanding. It presents the vision of a brighter and more vibrant Church of Christ in America that will support and benefit the Orthodox Church in every other part of the world. We look forward to your response.

With love in Christ, with great respect, and asking your holy prayers,



Peter Zarras, President



George Karcazes, Secretary

PATRIARCHATES WITH JURISDICTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Ecumenical Patriarchate – Patriarch Bartholomew I

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of America
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
Albanian Orthodox Diocese

Patriarchate of Antioch – Patriarch John X

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North
America

Patriarchate of Moscow – Patriarch Kirill

Moscow Patriarchal Parishes in the USA
Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

Patriarchate of Serbia – Patriarch Porfirije

Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South
America

Patriarchate of Romania – Patriarch Daniel

Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas

Patriarchate of Bulgaria – Patriarch Neofit

Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese of the USA, Canada,
and Australia

Patriarchate of Georgia – Patriarch Ilia II

Georgian Apostolic Orthodox Church in North America

The Following Series of Papers (No. 1-4) Respond to Concerns and Expand on the Reasons to Support the Declaration and the Action it Promotes

To the Orthodox Christian Faithful in America:

On July 5, 2022, "A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity in America" (bit.ly/DeclarationUnity) was published and has since been widely distributed. The Declaration is addressed to the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (ACOB). It solicits the signatures and support of all Orthodox Christians everywhere to inform the bishops here and in the Old World of the rectitude of the call for a united, autocephalous (self-governing) American Orthodox Church.

[Note: The publication of the "Declaration" on July 5, the four papers and the signature at the end of each paper (PUBLIUS), parallel the issuance of the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America that was ratified on July 4, 1776, followed by the publication of the Federalist Papers in 1788 (a collection of 85 articles and essays written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay under the collective pseudonym "Publius" to promote the ratification of the Constitution of the United States].

In Support of "A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity in America," No. 1

The first concern addressed is that the establishment of a united, Autocephalous "sister" Church in America alongside the fourteen existing Autocephalous Churches[*] **will weaken** the "Mother Churches." Those Churches and the dates they were founded or attained autocephaly are as follows:

[*] 1- **Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople** (AD 37). 2- **Alexandria** (AD 62). 3- **Antioch** (AD 34). 4- **Jerusalem** (AD 55). 5- **Russia** (AD 988/ Patriarchate 1448 AD). 6- **Serbia** (Founded AD 867-88, Patriarchate, 1920). 7- **Romania** (1925). 8- **Bulgaria** (1945 - 3rd Patriarchate, 1961). 9 - **Georgia** (1917). 10- **Cyprus** (AD 431). 11- **Greece** (1850). 12- **Poland** (1924). 13- **Albania** (1937). 14- **Czech Lands and Slovakia** (1998).

How valid is the concern that an administratively united, autocephalous American Orthodox Church will weaken any of her 14 sister autocephalous Churches? No argument can reasonably be made that the State-supported (or State-privileged) Churches in Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, and Greece would be weakened by a united, autocephalous American Orthodox Church. The same applies to the Constitutionally protected Orthodox Churches in Poland, Albania, and the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

The four ancient Patriarchates of Constantinople (EP), Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria are in areas that are either hostile or lacking in local support. No concerns have been expressed that a united, growing, autocephalous American Orthodox Church will weaken the Churches of Antioch, Jerusalem, or Alexandria.

This paper will address concerns that the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (EP) will be weakened if the 14 divided, overlapping, ethnic "jurisdictions" in America are united under a single synod of canonical bishops and the Church in America is recognized as autocephalous.

- An autocephalous American Orthodox Church will not cause the EP to lose the financial support it receives from the Church of Greece and the Greek Government, the principal sources of its funding.

- An autocephalous American Orthodox Church will not cause the EP to lose the financial support of Orthodox Christians in America. The support it receives from the Greek Archdiocese annually can be continued under a united, growing American Orthodox Church. A new Foundation explicitly to support the EP was recently established. That effort can only be strengthened by a united, growing American Orthodox Church.
- An autocephalous American Orthodox Church will not cause the EP to lose the diplomatic/political support it receives from the US government, UN Agencies, European Countries, the Order of St. Andrew-Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other Non-Governmental Organizations, in its relationship with Turkey or its relationship with Russia. Support will be enhanced by a united, growing American Orthodox Church.

An autocephalous American Orthodox Church will not cause the EP to lose its titular status as “the first among equals” in world Orthodoxy. Since the collapse of the atheist Soviet Union, Russia under Vladimir Putin has used the Russian Patriarchate as a tool of the State to supplant the EP as the leader of world Orthodoxy; e.g. Moscow as the “Third Rome” and the heresy of the “Russian World” - *Russkii Mir* - Teaching. The unprovoked war against Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill's support of the war, and the US and West's support of Ukraine prove that a united, strong American Orthodox Church will be more effective in supporting the EP in its relationship with Moscow than the current fragmented ethnic jurisdictions acting alone.

PUBLIUS

[*] Note: For the purposes of this paper, we do not list the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) which was granted a *Tomos* of Autocephaly by Moscow in 1970, or the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, whose *Tomos* was granted by Constantinople on January 5, 2019, because they are not among the 14 Autocephalous Orthodox Churches universally recognized as autocephalous by all the others. We further note that the OCA is included in the Assembly of Canonical Bishops of the USA, and its *de facto* autocephaly is unquestioned.

In Support of "A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity in America," No. 2

"I saw the largest and best of the Orthodox Church in the diaspora (that is, in regions where Orthodox Christians live dispersed from their native lands), and I understood how exalted the name of Orthodoxy could be, especially in the great country of the United States of America, if more than two million Orthodox people there were united into one church organization, an American Orthodox Church."

Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios IV (*Enthronement Speech, February 1922*)

During the late 19th Century and until the Russian Revolution, the unity of the multicultural ethnic presence of Orthodox Christianity in America was guided by the Russian Patriarchate working in a conciliar manner with other ethnic hierarchs. These pioneer leaders, including Saints Tikhon and Raphael (Hawaweeny), realized that the unique situation in the vast geographic area of the North American Continent and the pluralistic social order of the New World required a unified Orthodox Christian Church. This thrust for unity was interrupted by events outside of the boundaries of North America. The Russian Revolution had consequences which affected the development and expansion of Orthodoxy in the United States. This historic event contributed to the fragmentation of New World Orthodoxy into ethnic jurisdictions. The Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops of America (SCOBA) attempted to address this fragmentation at Ligonier in 1994 to no avail, because the foreign overseers did not support this effort.

SCOBA Bishops in 1994 understood that a new era should begin, because the Church in America under its leadership had developed reputable theological seminaries and educated clergy to meet the unique needs of the faithful in North America. The Church created Orthodox Christian education programs and built and maintained parishes, to cite a few of the major accomplishments. The Church developed stewardship programs that not only finance its infrastructure but also generously provide financial support to the Mother Churches. Despite the heroic accomplishments of the early immigrant generations, the continued fragmented administrative structure of this mature Church in North America impedes efforts

to fulfill its mission. Instead of growing the Church, we are seeing increasing declines in membership and participation across jurisdictions.

Recognizing this uncanonical situation, bishops representing all of the universally-recognized autocephalous Orthodox churches established the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States in 2009, to address the issue of fragmentation and disunity characterized by more than one bishop in one city. Still, little progress has been made on the issues that fragment and disunite Orthodoxy in the United States. This lack of progress is the result of the fact that all the Orthodox bishops, except for the synod of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), are appointed and directly responsible to the foreign patriarchs and bishops from abroad who appointed them.

Even in this 21st century, external forces are responsible for the canonical disorder of the Church in America. This fragmentation keeps the Church in America from developing and fulfilling its Apostolic mission to bring the Good News of the Gospel to the people of the Americas. Autocephaly will empower the Bishops of the Assembly to unite and grow the Church.

Unity of the Orthodox Christians in the USA brings together the resources of the 12 jurisdictions (i.e., financial, human, intellectual, spiritual, liturgical, musical) of the diverse Orthodox faithful. This would make Orthodoxy in America a more viable, diverse, religious group in North America. Our unity outreach would be enormous.

Presently, we often have little presence in the public square of our home communities. We have fragmented philanthropy, education, care for our children, seniors and families. Few institutions exist to serve the wider community.

The Assembly of Bishops needs to transform itself into the synod of bishops in North America and elect its own head according to Orthodox doctrine and tradition. This relevant transformation of administration will also have consequences and ripple effects that will spread beyond Orthodox Christianity and affect the schismatics and iconoclasts. Transforming the administrative life

of the Orthodox Church in North America will rekindle outreach, commitment and renewal of our 2,000-year-old Apostolic Church.

Orthodox faithful of all ages want to be part of a church community that shares its gifts with its neighbors and builds community. They want the Light of Orthodoxy to shine and not hide under a bushel. Let the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, present everywhere and filling all creation, guide us.

Support for the *Declaration for Orthodox Unity in America* is critical, because it signals that clergy and laity understand the importance of working together in the process of renewal of Orthodoxy in the United States. The increasing trend of apathy and nominalism is the result of ignoring our history and practices. We must stem the tide of decline to avoid the result we do not want: a no-growth "remnant" Church in the United States.

Let us be guided by Patriarch Bartholomew's charge to the Assembly of Bishops meeting in Dallas, Texas, in 2014. He said in part: "... the time has surely come to move beyond words to actions. We know much better than what we actually do. We are called to put our theory and theology into practice. We are called to move beyond what is 'mine' and what is 'yours' to what is 'ours'. From now on, this is how we should conceive and conduct all of our ministries and resources, all of our departments and initiatives. Otherwise, we do not practice what we preach. It is really up to us to accept the challenge or refuse the call." His message supports "A Declaration for Orthodox Unity in America." You can participate by adding your name to the Declaration.

PUBLIUS

In Support of "A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity in America," No. 3

Concern: I am uncomfortable signing my name on a Declaration addressed to Hierarchs, who might view this as disrespectful.

In America, the opportunity to inform and petition is part of our national character and identity. A close reading of the Declaration reveals that it is respectful in tone and content. The call for its endorsement by the entire body of the clergy and laity is intended to assure the Hierarchs that the faithful in America support unity and autocephaly.

Concern: I am afraid that an autocephalous American Orthodox Church could fall under the influence of Putin/Russia.

The Declaration addresses the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the U.S., which is composed of 55 bishops from twelve jurisdictions:

1. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
2. Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
3. Orthodox Church in America (OCA)
4. Moscow Patriarchal Parishes in the USA
5. Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central, and South America
6. Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas
7. Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese of the USA, Canada, and Australia
8. Georgian Apostolic Orthodox Church in North America
9. Albanian Orthodox Diocese
10. Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
11. American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese
12. Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

As of September 14, 2018, the Moscow Patriarchate and the churches under its jurisdiction interrupted their participation in the Assembly due to the 2018 Moscow-Constantinople schism. While the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) and the Moscow Patriarchate have some bishops and parishes in America, their ability to influence the direction of Orthodoxy in America, represented by the twelve jurisdictions that comprise the Assembly, is minimal. Moreover, because the Moscow Patriarchate supports the Russian Army's invasion of brother Orthodox Christians in Ukraine and due to other actions in Europe and America, Russian influence in American Orthodoxy is steadily diminishing.

Concern: An autocephalous American Orthodox Church uniting the currently divided jurisdictions would be susceptible to becoming either more fundamentalist or more liberal, affecting its response to present-day social and cultural issues that the Church must address.

The Orthodox Church is Synodal and Conciliar. Through its Synods and Councils, it seeks not only to preserve the doctrines and teachings of the Church but also to discern the mind (*phronema*) of the whole Church regarding issues that require attention, discussion and response. Unifying the diverse jurisdictions represented in the Assembly into a single Synod is the proper canonical response to the present situation in America. It is the most practical and effective way to prevent the ongoing decline and possible defection of some segments into the Fundamentalist or Liberal extremes that will further fracture the American Orthodox Church. We trust that the 55 canonical bishops in the Assembly, together with theologians, scholars, and informed and engaged laity guided by the Holy Spirit, will have the collective wisdom to navigate the issues confronting the Church in America.

Concern: A united, autocephalous Orthodox Church in America must include, at the very least, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese

(GOA), the Antiochian Archdiocese, and the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). The Antiochian Archdiocese claims that it is autonomous. The OCA is already de facto autocephalous. Therefore, doesn't it make sense for the GOA to seek to become autonomous as a first step to autocephaly?

The long history of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church in America, through the succession of charters from 1922 to date and more recent events, renders any autonomy in a new charter from the Ecumenical Patriarchate meaningless. Examples of those actions include the unilateral imposition, amendment, suspension, and reinstatement of GOA charters and the forced retirement and removal of hierarchs.

A universally-recognized self-governance is necessary for the proper organization, administration, and functioning of the Church in America. The leadership of the Mother Churches often argues that the Church in America is not mature enough to be self-governing. However, it is the reluctance and/or refusal of the Mother Churches to allow their offspring in America to cooperate freely and work together that prevents the local Church from displaying this maturity and fulfilling the mandates of the Gospel. Without autocephaly, the bishops cannot act freely within their local Church. Instead, they remain subject to the foreign Synods that appoint and can remove them for any or no reason.

By endorsing the Declaration for Unity, the faithful in America declare that: they accept the call and responsibility to be the local Church; and, they will continue to honor and support the ancient Patriarchates and the Mother Churches. The Mother Churches, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate that created the Assembly and exhorted it to do its work, must understand and accept the fact that they have nothing to lose and everything to gain by giving the Church in America the blessing to self-govern and join the ranks of autocephalous Orthodox Churches worldwide.

PUBLIUS

In Support of "A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity in America," No. 4

As baptized, chrismated participants in the sacramental life of the Orthodox Christian Church, it is our responsibility to be concerned about the good order of the Church. This long-established concern is a fundamental role and obligation as participating members of the Royal Priesthood of all Church members (1 Peter 2:9). We do not need to be appointed or elected by anyone to fulfill this obligation. Historical examples abound by faithful laity and clergy, bringing their gifts and efforts to bear on matters of governance and doctrine as part of the 2000-year-old history of the Orthodox Church.

In the early Church and throughout church history, the Church addressed difficulties by meeting in councils and seeking a consensus of believers and their appointed leaders, the bishops, presbyters and elders. The decisions of these councils had to pass the test of universal acceptance by the entire Church. For this reason, the conclusions reached by some councils were rejected or overturned by subsequent councils. This is how the Orthodox synodical approach to governance works. The hierarchy, clergy and laity work in synergy to discern the conciliar process in Orthodox governance.

The good order of the Church is in a precarious state and out of balance. The Church has become primarily hierarchical and clerical. Lay leadership is appointed to reinforce this structure which is a questionable way of claiming that there is structured and systematic lay participation and outreach. Our duty as members of the Royal Priesthood is to help restore balance within the body of the Church by urging for balance and transparency in governance among the hierarchy, clergy and laity.

By affixing our names to "A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity," we call for restoring that traditional and essential balance and trust. We encourage the hierarchs in the Assembly of Bishops

to actively work together to bring about the canonical order that the representatives from all the universally-recognized autocephalous Orthodox churches called for in 2009, when they established the Assembly of Bishops in the United States. **Their charge was to "...heal, as quickly as possible...the substantial canonical "anomalies" in the organization and life of the Church."** The organizational disorder is maintained because the Old-World Synods that appoint all the bishops residing in the United States (except for OCA bishops) maintain their control over the hierarchy shepherding the faithful here. The Old-World Synods see themselves as preservers of Orthodoxy and their ethnic cultures and state churches where they preside. They perpetuate this territorial fragmentation by not allowing and encouraging the presiding bishops who live here to unite and grow the Church in the United States.

Due to historical events, the separation of the Church into twelve ethnic jurisdictions subject to foreign synods has truncated the development of the Church in the United States. Moreover, this disunity continues to waste the stewardship resources offered to the Church by the faithful here. After 200 years of development in the United States, the Orthodox Church has proven that it is mature and can educate and support clergy, build and maintain churches and schools, and engage in impactful community outreach activities.

The "Declaration" emphasizes that advocating for Orthodox Christian unity is the canonical solution. This adaptive solution empowers the fifty-three bishops living here to become an independent synod that elects its presiding (head) hierarch and focuses on the spiritual and distinct needs of the faithful in the United States. The faithful will continue to provide and strengthen the support to the Mother Churches that were part of the immigration movement to this country and nurtured their development.

The present fragmentation of the Orthodox Church in the United States is not only related to the governance of the body of faithful, but it also diminishes the sacramental life and prevents the Church from being a mission to the people who live and seek God in this geographic area of the world. We do not want to become a "remnant" church.

It is time for the mature Orthodox Christian Church in the United States to unite as a single, autocephalous, local church in this territory. Local parish communities, clergy and laity working together, are responsible for developing this reality by urging our bishops to support Orthodox Christian unity and renewal. Furthermore, by adding our names to the "Declaration," we encourage our bishops to bring the Church in the United States into canonical order as soon as possible.

PUBLIUS

REVISITING...

A Possible Scenario – “The Celebration of the First Anniversary of the Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of the United States of America”

[Text of a presentation delivered by His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel at the Orthodox Christian Laity Conference, October 20, 2001]

Access the text at: bit.ly/possiblescenario or



VIDEOS

A Vision of A Unified Church In North America - Archbishop Nathaniel of Detroit (2007)

Part 1— <https://bit.ly/nathaniel1>

Part 2 — <https://bit.ly/nathaniel2>

**EXCERPTS FROM THE PAPERS IN SUPPORT OF
A DECLARATION FOR
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN UNITY IN AMERICA**

...We believe we are a distinct and mature American Orthodox Christian community, that is ready to become a single, unified Orthodox Church of America.

...Rather than weakening the Mother Churches...a single canonical American Orthodox Church will speak with a united voice and display a strength that is not possible in the current overlapping administrative structures.

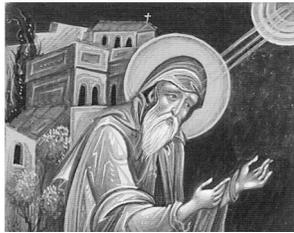
...An autocephalous American Orthodox Church will not cause the Ecumenical Patriarch (EP) to lose its titular status as “the first among equals” in world Orthodoxy.

(continued on page 24)

...throughout church history, the Church addressed difficulties by meeting in councils and seeking a consensus...This is how the Orthodox synodical approach to governance works. The hierarchy, clergy and laity work in synergy to discern the conciliar process.

...The “Declaration” emphasizes that advocating for Orthodox Church unity is the canonical solution...strengthen the support to the Mother Churches.

...Local parish communities, clergy and laity working together, are responsible for developing this reality by urging our bishops to support...unity and renewal.



St. Symeon the New Theologian and St. Phofini, Patron Saints of OCL

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COMMENTS BY SIGNERS OF "A DECLARATION FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN UNITY IN AMERICA"

- *I pray for a unified Orthodox Church in America.*
- *May it be blessed!*
- *An entirely reasonable way forward...long overdue.*
- *Needed to address the increasing apathy toward religion in the United States.*
- *There is always strength in numbers!*
- *This would also make the Eastern Orthodox Church more significant in the U.S.*
- *I would love to see all Orthodox jurisdictions here in the US be united into a single, unified American Orthodox Church.*
- *This is timely. Thank God, thank God. And thank you.*
- *74 years of praying for this to happen.*
- *Our fragmentation continues to be a source of confusion for those outside the Church, and difficulty to those within. When will our hierarchs be willing to make this happen? How long will our Church be divided in various jurisdictions?*
- *Like all loving children there comes a time when we must stand on our own lest we never grow up and stay incapable of fulfilling the role God has given us.*
- *The time has come for Orthodox Christians in America to have a unified front from which we can evangelize, consolidating our resources: spiritual, human, and material, to best serve our communities and spread the true Apostolic Faith!*