

Report of the Clergy Synaxis of June 30-July 1, held at Mountain View Russian Orthodox Center, in Richmondville, NY

Metropolitan Demetrius of America opened the meeting on Thursday, June 30, with a prayer and a diocesan report, emphasizing the recent founding of the new monastery of St. John of San Francisco in Cobleskill, NY, located only 10 minutes away from Mountain View, where the conference was taking place. He gave thanks to God for His many benefactions to the brotherhood and emphasized that St. John is the patron not only of the monastery, but of the Church as a whole in America.

Archbishop Andronik of Syracuse then spoke about how thankful he is for the founding of St. John's Monastery and encouraged all to visit it and be profited spiritually. He invoked the prayers of St. John in these difficult times leading up to the coming of the Antichrist. He gave a frank and heartfelt explanation of certain problems in the Russian Church Abroad. He asks for prayers and is glad to be following the path of St. John Maximovitch in his own trials.

Metropolitan Photios of Demetrias, the representative from Greece, then spoke about two recent events in Greece. The first was a general conference of the Churches of Greece, Russian, and Romania which was convened to address to so-called "Holy and great Synod" of the Ecumenists. Together, the three local Churches wrote and signed documents condemning this false council with one accord. The second event was the glorification of St. Chrysostom of Florina, which was attended by over 80 priests and thousands of faithful. All felt the grace of God and some smelled a beautiful fragrance during the service.

Metropolitan Moses of Toronto then spoke about various modern problems the Church faces, such as atheism, homosexuality, gender fluidity, and brainwashing in the public schools, all under the false cover of "diversity" and "tolerance." He reminded us that we are fighting a cultural war and that we are lights in the world.

Fr. Agathangelos, the chancellor of the Metropolis of America, read a report from Bishop Auxentius of Etna and Portland, who could not attend due to his work on the new Seminary. The report emphasized the importance of the Seminary (called St. Photios Orthodox Theological School) for the future of the Church and noted that it has become the main work of the Monastery of St. Gregory Palamas. It will open September 22.

Metropolitan Demetrius gave a short report about the diocese of Boston, of which he is locum tenens, noting that the parishes are doing well and are growing.

Fr. Agathangelos read a report on the newly-founded monastery of St. John of San Francisco, describing how the fathers had left Boston, gone to Holy Ascension Monastery, made repairs to that monastery but left when conditions proved impractical. Prayers were made to St. John Maximovitch and St. Xenia of St. Petersburg, and a new property was found. When the brotherhood moved, all the important dates in the transaction occurred miraculously on the feastdays of St. John. Many relics of St. John were donated to the monastery, including a full set of his vestments. A church, trapeza, kitchen, candleshop, and woodshop are nearly finished; and St. John has worked many miracles.

Fr. Maximus gave a report on Holy Ascension Monastery, where he resides part of the year with one other monk, and on the new Hermitage of St. Ignatius in Guatemala, where he spends the other part of the year and where a new church has been built and a number of catechumens made.

Fr. Barsanouphius gave a report on the hermitage of St. Clement in Georgia, where despite the very Baptist culture of the locals, five converts have been baptized in the past year.

Fr. Agathangelos read a report from St. Gregory of Sinai Monastery in California, which mentioned that the fathers specialize in iconography and serve a number of parishes in the diocese. He then read a report from St. Gregory Palamas Monastery, also in California, where the fathers are mostly engaged in establishing the seminary and are remodeling the campus buildings. The Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies continues its translation and publication work, but work in the woodshop and icon studio has been paused until the completion of the seminary project.

After a break, Metropolitan Demetrius gave a talk on “Sacred Order” in the Church. He emphasized that order and discipline help us to take sacred things seriously and that when we are in the Liturgy we must pay attention and not talk. Order during the services helps us to be sanctified; and on a larger scale, proper order in the Synod has led to peace in our Church after several decades of division and confusion. He quoted St. Dionysios the Areopagite to the effect that “hierarchy is a sacred order... its goal is to lead people to God.”

A discussion followed, during which Fr. Thomas Marretta asked if it is permissible to kneel on Sundays in one’s private prayers at home; the Metropolitan answered affirmatively. Fr. Christopher Catanzano asked about the correct balance between strictness and condescension; the Metropolitan answered that we should aspire to the highest things and we will achieve more, and that when a pastor is lenient, he ought not to let himself get dragged down. Fr. Nicodemus Gale asked how to deal with children; the Metropolitan answered that the family must be a little church and that they need good company. Fr. Christos Patitsas asked where clergy can buy clothing; the Metropolitan answered that Orthodox robes can be ordered from St. Elizabeth Convent in Etna, perhaps from the future convent in New York, and from Romania.

After a break, Fr. Steven Allen and Fr. Thomas Marretta gave a talk on the “Legacy of the Russian Church Abroad in America.” Fr. Thomas began by praising ROCA for being a second mother to us after God and teaching us true piety, as well as consecrating bishops for our Synod in Greece and America. Its capitulation to Moscow Patriarchate was a tragedy, since it was the only local Church which rejected Ecumenism and Modernism in its entirety: it was not a reaction, but simply the free voice of the Russian Church. Fr. Stephen then spoke about four aspects of ROCA which made it singular in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: 1.) its prophetic ministry; 2.) its eschatological vision; 3.) its martyric witness; and 4.) its message of repentance. These are all connected to an understanding of the Russian Revolution as not merely an isolated event, but as part of a satanic plan to corrupt or overthrow all traditional culture and religion in the world; a process which is occurring actively in America today. Fr. Thomas concluded by mentioning the strong ethos of the married clergy of ROCA, which was devout, educated, produced a large body of spiritual literature, and serves as an inspiration for us.

After Vespers and dinner, the clergy gave a brief introduction of themselves and their parishes. It was agreed that we need to produce standardized baptismal and marriage certificates with high-quality printing. Metropolitan Demetrius explained about his new pastoral duties in Uganda, where several parishes have joined us. Fr. Iakov Tselin expressed his thought that ROCA had fulfilled its mission of existence and no longer had canonical meaning as an independent body in a post-Soviet world. A discussion followed about ROCA's practice of baptism and various ways of receiving people into the Church. Fr. Christos Patitsas asked if one can perform a funeral service even if the body is not present. Metropolitan Photios replied affirmatively, and Metropolitan Demetrius added that it can even be done years after the death if there was no opportunity to do it earlier. Fr. Alexander Buterbaugh asked about a rumor he had heard that St. Chrysostom of Florina would not consecrate new bishops because he wanted to return to the New Calendar. Fr. Maximus answered that this is a false rumor spread by the New Calendarists to discredit a great luminary of the Church, but it is true that at the end of his life he did not do any more consecrations because he was disappointed that several bishops he had ordained earlier had gone into schism. A discussion followed about several topics: chairs in churches, the use of life support on the clinically dead, and wedding practices.

On Friday, June 1, Fr. Maximus gave a talk on "Local Churches and Intercommunion." He described the structure of the Church from Apostolic times, which is geographical rather than national; how each local church contains the totality of God's grace; how over the centuries the local churches have been identified with national cultures; how this has had the positive effect of making cultures Orthodox, but the negative effect of making some people valuing the Orthodox Church more for its connection to their culture than for the faith itself. This results in the heresy of Ethnophyletism. He underscored that we must promote awareness of the unity of the Orthodox Church through conferences and concelebrations such as the present one; that ideally there should only be one jurisdiction in each location, but that the pastors of the Church need to be sensitive to people's cultural attachments. A discussion followed which dealt mostly with the separation of some Serbian clergy from the GOC for nationalistic reasons.

After lunch, Vladimir Mihailoff gave a presentation on St. Xenia's Camp, based on a pamphlet he passed out. He emphasized the no-cellphone policy. A discussion followed in which it was mentioned that nearly all the children who attend the camp attend the Youth Conference as well. This was followed by a discussion as to the location of the next Youth Conference, in which most clergy seemed unwilling to volunteer their parishes given the large expense and time investment involved. Finally, Metropolitan Demetrius appointed Fr. Andrew Snogren of Concord, New Hampshire to organize the conference. Fr. John Knox of Ipswich, Massachusetts, and Fr. George Kamberides of Boston volunteered to assist in the preparations. A vote was held as to how often there should be clergy conferences like this one, which was decided in favor of annual meetings. Metropolitan Demetrius suggested that it be held each year together with the feastday of St. John and be connected with St. John's Monastery and the Russian Orthodox Center in Mountain View; this was accepted by all. The meeting was adjourned with a prayer and a brief overview by Fr. Agathangelos of the order of clergy for the upcoming All-night Vigil and Liturgy the following morning at St. John's Monastery. The Clergy Synaxis as a whole concluded with the celebration of the feast of St. John of San Francisco, which was attended by over 45 clergy and 400 laity,

all of whom felt great joy at honoring the saint and inaugurating the new monastery dedicated to his memory.