

# MINUTES OF ASSEMBLY V

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America convened its fifth annual meeting September 16-18, 2014 in Dallas, Texas at the Grand Hyatt Hotel at the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

## **Call to Order and Opening Prayer**

The first session was held at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Dallas after a morning Divine Liturgy. Archbishop Demetrios called the meeting to order and offered a prayer shortly before 12 pm on September 16.

## **Roll Call of Hierarchs in Attendance & Establishment of Quorum**

Bishop Basil, the Secretary of the Assembly, proceeded with the roll call of the Hierarchs in attendance. Out of 53 member bishops, 38 were present. A quorum is 27, therefore a quorum was established.

## **Approval of Agenda & Minutes**

The chairman of the Assembly, Archbishop Demetrios, asked if there were any objections to the proposed agenda. There were no objections; all said “aye” to the proposed agenda.

The minutes from the 2013 meeting of the Assembly were brought up for discussion and approval. Archbishop Nathaniel noted that Archbishop Benjamin is incorrectly referred to as Bishop Benjamin on page six of the minutes. With this amendment, the minutes were accepted.

## **Addresses by the Chairman**

In his address, the chairman gave gratitude to God for being able to meet in this assembly and thanked each of the hierarchs for their presence. He especially acknowledged the clergy and laity of the Secretariat for their work under the leadership of Bishop Basil. He recognized Metropolitan Joseph as the successor to Metropolitan Philip of blessed memory and he welcomed Bishop Saba of Georgia who will be on the executive committee.

The chairman offered two reasons why this meeting is especially important: It is the first meeting of the Assembly as the Assembly of Bishops of the USA (formerly North and Central America), and as part of preparations for the Great and Holy Council of 2016.

His Eminence called on the Assembly to intensify its work in preparation for the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church, which is scheduled to be held in the Spring of 2016 in Constantinople.

Archbishop Demetrios asked the First Vice-Chairman for comments, as is the tradition. Metropolitan Joseph asked for prayers for the oppressed people of the Middle East and peace, healing and consolation.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Metropolitan Antony, treasurer of the Assembly, presented the final budget report for the period since Assembly IV. He called attention to the Assembly's limited funds and requested that the hierarchs assist the Assembly to raise additional funds in 2015. He asked the hierarchs to review the proposed 2015 budget for discussion on Thursday.

The 2013 financial report was accepted. Metropolitan Antony thanked the consultants to the Committee for Financial Affairs. He also reported the good results of the audits for the past two years. Going forward, the Assembly will be audited every two years.

### **Report from the Secretary of the Assembly / Secretariat**

Bishop Basil thanked the members of the Secretariat, which meets monthly by teleconference. He also noted that more than 150 people work behind the scenes in the committees. As his report was submitted in advance in writing, he did not go over it again.

Bishop Maxim took the floor as coordinator of the committees. He thanked all those who serve as liaisons to the committees. He reported on the June 10 meeting of committee chairs in New York. Most committees are working well and are successful, some are struggling and trying to maintain momentum, while others need a push to get started.

A vote was taken to proceed with legally changing the name of the Assembly to "Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America" since Canada and Central America are no longer part of the Assembly. The website and stationary have been updated but a formal motion is needed to enable a legal name change. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Archbishop Demetrios appointed Metropolitan Savas (chair), Bishop Maxim, Bishop Alexander (OCA), Fr Josiah Trenham, and Archdeacon John Chryssavgis to a committee to review the statements to be issued at the end of the meeting.

[Break]

First session resumed at hotel

### **Assembly Committee Reports**

In the afternoon session, the Assembly's committees provided reports on their activities. Church and Society, Ecumenical Relations, Legal, Military Chaplaincy, Monastic Communities, Pastoral Practice, Theological Education, and the Youth Committee reported on their progress since Assembly IV and their plans for the coming year.

Oral reports generally covered the same material as was in the written reports submitted in advance of the meeting, with a few exceptions. A lengthy discussion was had concerning the Committee for Ecumenical Relations. Outcomes of the discussion were decisions to increase the committee's membership to represent more jurisdictions and to renew the pastoral exchange with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In discussing the Committee for Military Chaplaincy's report, it was agreed that further discussion was needed within the committee to achieve consensus around a single endorsing agent for the Department of Defense.

### **Presentation: Committee for Agencies and Endorsed Organizations**

The Committee for Agencies and Endorsed Organizations gave its first report to the Assembly, having only been established at Assembly IV. In addition to highlighting the information provided in his written report, Bishop Gregory, chairman of the committee, called attention to a few items, in particular the need to establish a process for endorsing new agencies and organizations and requirements to be expected of endorsed agencies and organizations. Bishop Gregory reminded the hierarchs that the following day they would be addressed by representatives of the Assembly's seven agencies. The agencies were given five questions and asked to answer them in their presentations.

### **Presentation: Committee for Canonical Affairs**

Fr Nathanael Symeonides, liaison to the Committee for Canonical Affairs, and Mr Jamil Samara, who in his capacity as Director of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese's Department of Internet Ministries provides technical support to the Assembly, presented to the hierarchs the status and progress of the creation of a clergy database, which falls under the purview of the Committee for Canonical Affairs. The process for creating a parish database was begun under SCOBA and mandated at Chambésy. The presenters began by explaining how information is collected from the jurisdictions for the Assembly's parish database. The same process will be used to maintain an accurate clergy database. The process relies on every jurisdiction providing automated information to the Assembly; a few jurisdictions are not currently compliant.

Mr. Samara also gave a presentation on Bulletin Builder, a tool created by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese to increase the quality and content of parish bulletins and enhance communications. Bulletin Builder is available to all parishes within the Assembly.

## **Second Session**

Wednesday, September 17

Bishop Saba, attending his first Assembly meeting, read a statement. He explained how the Georgian Church came to establish churches and monasteries in the United States since 2009. He called attention to the plight of displaced Christians in Georgia. He also addressed the Russian hierarchs, saying that the situation between the two countries endangered the friendship of these two nations and there is a need to begin talks in order to restore friendship and Christian love between these two countries.

The Assembly was shown a videotaped message by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in which His All-Holiness addressed the members of the Assembly. "All of the Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches look to your Assembly with hope and optimism, recognizing with spiritual joy and pride that you comprise the largest in number and broadest in representation of our Churches," His All-Holiness remarked. "As you gather in Dallas over the next days, remember that ... you are visibly and tangibly expressing both the unity and the diversity of our Church."

### **Evangelism & Outreach: Reports from Assembly of Bishops Agencies**

Representatives of the Assembly's seven agencies gave presentations on the work of their agencies, and the relationship between their agencies' missions and the life of the Church and the Assembly of Bishops.

The agencies and their representatives were, in order of their presentations: International Orthodox Christian Charities, represented by Constantine Triantafilou; Orthodox Christian Mission Center, represented by Fr Martin Ritsi; Orthodox Christian Fellowship, represented by Deacon Paul Zaharas; Orthodox Christian Network, represented by Fr Chris Metropulos; Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, represented by Fr Stephen Powley; Orthodox Christian Education Commission, represented by Dr Tony Vrame; and Eastern Orthodox Committee on Scouting, represented by George Boulukos.

[Lunch]

### **Presentation: Canonical Regional Planning**

Archbishop Nicolae, chairman of the Committee for Canonical Regional Planning, presented on behalf of the committee. He stated that the main goal of the session was to have a real discussion among the hierarchs as brothers and to come to a decision at the end of the day. He reviewed what the committee is charged with and the committee's efforts to date. He also reviewed the highlights of the two proposals that were submitted in advance of the meeting.

Archbishop Demetrios said that either a plan or a process should be submitted in advance of the Great and Holy Council.

A lengthy discussion ensued about approaches for establishing administrative unity. In particular, participants offered differing perspectives on (1) whether it is necessary to agree to a final vision of a

united structure and administration and then work toward that, or (2) whether to focus on intermediate steps to increase inter-jurisdictional cooperation and resolve divergent pastoral practices first before deciding on what administrative unity would look like.

It was agreed that the jurisdictions would offer continued feedback to the Committee for Canonical Regional Planning within six months toward the further refinement of a road map.

[Break]

Metropolitan Savas read the draft of the Statement on the Middle East and a lengthy discussion followed with comments and revisions noted.

### **Third Session**

Thursday, September 18

The hierarchs began the first session by discussing the revised draft Statement on the Middle East. Metropolitan Savas then read the Message to the Faithful and discussion ensued.

After a discussion, the adoption of the 2015 Assembly Budget was approved in the amount of \$310,000. Metropolitan Antony asked each hierarch to attempt to raise \$5,300, in addition to the jurisdictional contributions, to cover the Assembly's 2015 budget.

The hierarchs discussed the dates and location for Assembly VI. It was tentatively agreed to hold the meeting September 15-17, 2015 in a location to be determined.