



## **Assembly of Bishops issues message at conclusion of sixth annual meeting**

The hierarchs issued a Message to the Faithful, the full text of which appears below, at the conclusion of the three-day gathering. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon was among the message's signatories, together with the 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; His Grace, Bishop Alexander; His Grace, Bishop David; His Grace, Bishop Paul; and His Grace, Bishop Daniel.

In other business, the hierarchs, in response to a five-step plan submitted by the Assembly's Legal Affairs Committee, unanimously authorized commencement of the plan's first three steps, by which relevant legal documents of the Assembly's member jurisdictions will be assessed and analyzed. The hierarchs also approved the Assembly's 2016 budget. Assembly minutes and related documents and reports will be posted in the immediate future at [www.assemblyofbishops.org](http://www.assemblyofbishops.org).

The seventh annual meeting of the Assembly is tentatively slated to convene in October 2016.

### **Message to the Faithful Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA September 17, 2015**

To our beloved Orthodox Christian faithful throughout the United States of America:

“We know that for those who love God everything contributes to the good [Romans 8:28].

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

We, the members of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, gathered in Chicago, Illinois, for our sixth annual meeting on September 15-17, 2015, greet you with paternal love, as we offer glory and thanksgiving to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Forty-five bishops assembled in order to recognize and affirm our unity in the Orthodox faith, to celebrate our communion in the Holy Eucharist, to recall what has been achieved in fraternal collaboration over the past year and reflect on the challenging work that lies ahead of us.

We express our deep gratitude to all those who labored for this year's Assembly meeting. The Greek Orthodox Church of Saint John the Baptist in Des Plaines, Illinois, welcomed us on behalf of His Eminence, Metropolitan Iakovos of Chicago for the opening Divine Liturgy. A special Pan-Orthodox Doxology was also held at the Holy Resurrection Serbian Orthodox Cathedral in Chicago, Illinois, where we were blessed to sponsor a Youth Event hosted by His Grace, Bishop Longin of New Grachanica and Midwestern America in order to communicate with teens and young adults and address their concerns.



We express our gratitude to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for meeting with the Executive Committee of the Assembly earlier this year and for emphasizing our unique responsibility—as a significant and representative segment of the Orthodox Church throughout the world—to provide insights about the work of our Assembly for consideration by our Mother Churches and by the forthcoming Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches, which is scheduled to take place in Constantinople on Pentecost 2016.

In the opening session, our chairman Archbishop Demetrios of America underlined our responsibility as bishops in reflecting the Gospel message of love and unity in our own relationships, in our local communities as well as in the broader, global society. After hearing the executive reports from the officers of the Assembly, we turned our attention and deliberation to matters of canonical regional planning.

The Committee for Canonical Regional Planning, which met over the course of the past year, took into consideration the diverse positions of our Churches in the United States of America and drafted recommendations for discussion and deliberation by all the hierarchs. Moreover, during the visit of the Assembly Executive Committee to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, member hierarchs were reminded by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew that the Mother Churches are still awaiting from our Assembly a “plan to organize all the Orthodox faithful in the region on a canonical basis”, as per the Chambésy Rules of Operation.

Thus, in a spirit of mutual trust and fraternal openness, we had the opportunity to listen to one another and to examine carefully various possibilities and options to assist in resolving the existing canonical anomalies in the United States through the perspective of Orthodox ecclesiology and canon law and with a view to recent immigration trends. In this regard, we confirmed our commitment to working together with greater cooperation and coordination on the future of a more unified Orthodox Church in this nation.

The final sessions were dedicated to pastoral issues and practices related to marriage and divorce in an effort to resolve critical differences that significantly impact the lives of our faithful and their families, as well as to other procedural matters.

Finally, we agreed on the following resolutions:

1. We fervently support the convening of the Holy and Great Council in 2016 and entreat all those responsible for its realization to work in a spirit of unity and harmony in order to reaffirm the conciliarity and collegiality among our Churches.
2. We unequivocally denounce the increasing violence and bloodshed throughout the world. In the Middle East, hostility and brutality are occurring among members of different religions, sometimes supposedly in the name of religion. We pray for peace and justice in the Middle East, for protection of Christian and other minorities in the ancient lands of Syria, Iraq, and Palestine, as well as for the cessation of racial discrimination and religious fanaticism.
3. We strongly implore government and civil leaders in this country and throughout the world to offer refuge to the countless victims of intimidation and displacement; and we express our unconditional solidarity with all those who have been forced to leave their homelands because of military violence, ethnic persecution and deprivation of natural resources in the Middle East, especially in Syria.
4. We continue wholeheartedly to appeal for the release of our brother bishops in Syria, the Greek



Orthodox Metropolitan Paul Yazigi (brother of His Beatitude, Patriarch John X of Antioch), the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop John Ibrahim, as well as all other kidnapped persons.

5. We pray earnestly for peace and stability in Ukraine, where armed conflict persists among our very own brothers and sisters. We appeal for a humanitarian response to the victims of this conflict. We call upon church officials to be instruments of peace and government leaders to act with restraint in a spirit of reconciliation.
6. We reaffirm our disagreement with the US Supreme Court case of June 26, 2015, which held a constitutional right for two members of the same sex to marry. We continue to uphold and proclaim the teaching of our Lord that marriage from its inception is a life-long sacramental union of a man and a woman.
7. We share the deep concern and sadness of all those who in our land grieve over the unspeakable violence that is widespread in our communities, our schools and in our houses of worship. We pray for the victims of violence and their families.

In conclusion, we continue to pray for all of you that, “being rooted and grounded in love, you may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God [Ephesians 3:18-19]. May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Archbishop Demetrios, Chairman

Bishop John, 2nd Vice Chairman

Bishop Basil, Secretary

Metropolitan Antony, Treasurer

Metropolitan Iakovos

Metropolitan Methodios

Metropolitan Athenagoras

Metropolitan Isaiah

Metropolitan Alexios

Metropolitan Nicholas

Bishop Andonios

Bishop Demetrios

Bishop Sevastianos

Bishop Apostolos

Bishop Daniel

Bishop Ilia

Bishop Gregory

Bishop Thomas

Bishop Alexander

Bishop John

Bishop Anthony

Bishop Nicholas

Metropolitan Hilarion

Archbishop Kyrill

Bishop Peter

Bishop Theodosy



Bishop John

Bishop Nicholas

Bishop Longin

Bishop Maxim

Archbishop Nicolae

Metropolitan Joseph

Bishop Daniil

Bishop Saba

Metropolitan Tikhon

Archbishop Nathaniel

Archbishop Nikon

Archbishop Benjamin

Archbishop Melchisedek

Archbishop Mark

Archbishop Michael

Bishop Alexander

Bishop David

Bishop Paul

Bishop Daniel