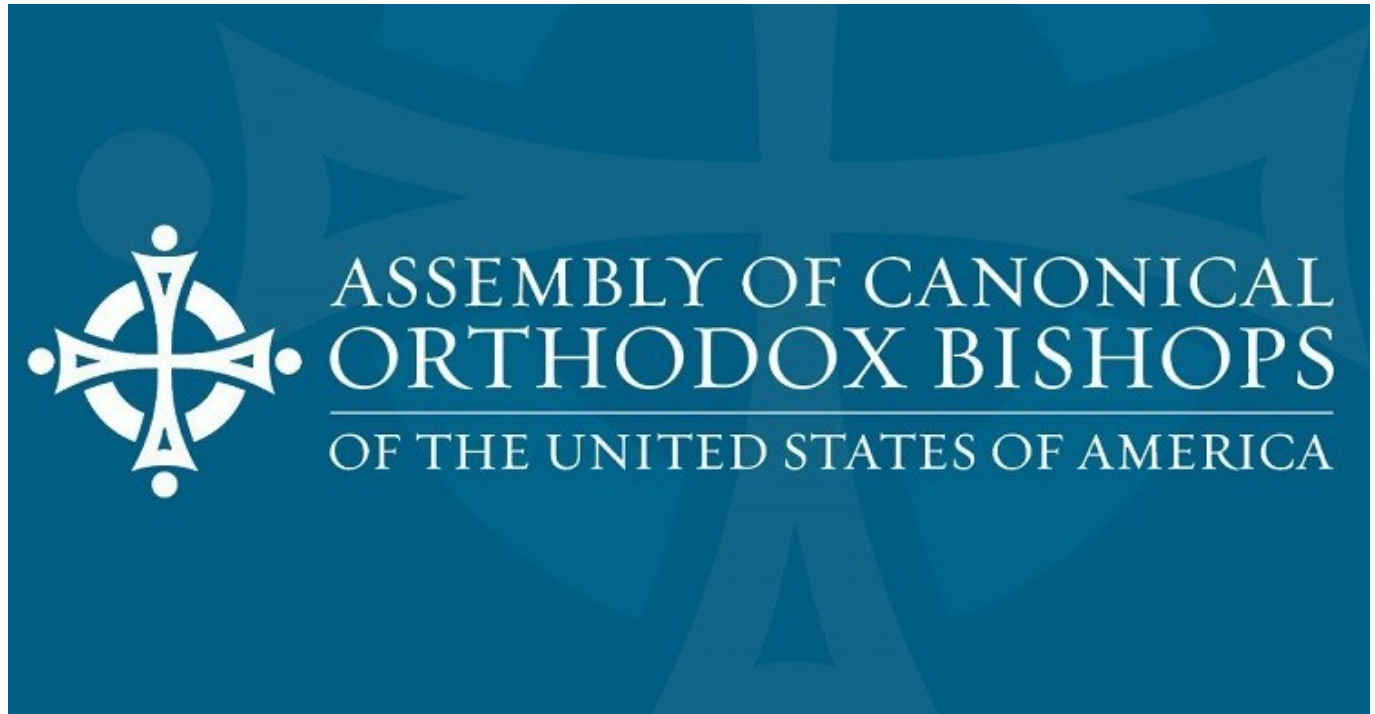


North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation Releases New Agreed Statement on Vocation and Mission of the People of God



The North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation has released a new agreed statement entitled, *The Vocation and Mission of the People of God: "A Chosen Race, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation"*. The document was finalized at the most recent meeting of the Consultation which took place in late May of this year at the Saint Methodios Faith and Heritage Center in Contoocook, New Hampshire. The Consultation is co-chaired by Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, the Catholic Archbishop of Newark, and by Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Methodios of Boston.

More than five years in the making, this new text takes a different approach to ecumenical dialogue: instead of addressing together an issue that has prevented full communion between the churches, here the Catholic and Orthodox theologians examine together challenges that affect both churches, in this case the role of the laity in the two traditions and the problem of clericalism.

The document begins with a summary of earlier statements by the Consultation on these and similar themes. It goes on to recognize an ecclesiology that sees the sacrament of Baptism as the foundation of the vocation and ministry of every

Christian, clergy and laity alike. Thus all the People of God together constitute a single community. Some members have received a special role of leadership within the community, but all of the members have received specific charisms that are to be exercised for the building up of the whole body. Within this context, the ordained clergy are set apart from the body of believers but are not above or separate from that body. All of this is expressed most clearly in the celebration of the Eucharist where the diversity of gifts and roles is made clear in the gathered community's single act of praise.

The document goes on to reflect on the mission of the laity in the Church, and the implications of this ecclesiology for the practice of synodality at all levels of the Church's life. In a final section, the agreed statement considers certain challenges to the People of God, namely clericalism, individualism and ecumenical engagement. The Consultation concludes that "our focus in thinking about the Church, and in celebrating its reality, must be on the unity of the People of God that is grounded in our common baptism and on a corresponding understanding of the diversity of roles and charisms within that radically united people."

Like most dialogue agreed statements, this new text does not speak officially for either Church. However, it has been drafted by a highly competent group of theologians from both traditions and submitted to all the members of both Churches for their prayerful reflection and discussion. The full text of the statement can be found here.

The North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation is sponsored jointly by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the USCCB, and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Since its establishment in 1965, the Consultation has issued some 30 agreed statements on various topics. All these texts are available on the website of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/orthodox/index.cfm> and on the web site of the Orthodox Assembly of Bishops at <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/ministries/orthodox-catholic/>

Another body, the Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops, has been meeting annually since 1981 to discuss pastoral issues between the two churches.