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## **His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Keynote Address, The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the USA**



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October 6, 2020

Your Eminences and Graces,

Beloved Brothers in Christ,

Dear Co-celebrants in the Holy Spirit,

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice!

I greet all of you, Holy Brothers, with these encouraging words of the Apostle, for we have so very much to be joyful for. I am particularly happy to be with all of you

- my brothers in the ministry to the Lord and His Holy Church. This is my First Assembly with the Chief Shepherds of the American Churches. We have nearly a full complement of the Hierarchs of the Assembly, missing only our Russian Brethren for whom we long in the Spirit, and with whom we hope to have restored relations in the not too distant future.

This year has been perhaps the most challenging of our collective arch-pastorates, and our Merciful God has strengthened our resolve to stand with our respective flocks and shepherd them through these difficult days.

This pandemic, which is still with us and has even afflicted the President and First Lady of our Nation, is the worst global outbreak in a century. Across all fifty States, the Church has faced restrictions, prohibitions, and challenges which very few of us would have ever expected to face. And yet, despite the difficulties, we have persevered for the sake of the People of God, even when our Holy Week and the Holy Pascha were severely disrupted and indeed curbed by the pandemic.

But this is why I say, "Rejoice!" Because in the midst of these troubles, as Bishops, as Shepherds of the rational Flock of Christ, we have learned new ways to come together in solidarity of purpose, and in being useful to one another, and to our Faithful.

Here, I would highlight a real "silver lining" within the COVID cloud. As a result of our many challenges, early on in the pandemic, the Executive Committee of our Assembly committed to weekly meetings - every Friday, and we have stuck to this schedule for most of this year. We met to find solutions. Whether through the COVID-19 Task Force, which was convened to give the most up-to-date health and legal news, or through the newly established position of Director of Operations, or through the interactions and dialogues with the various Committees of the Assembly and their Episcopal leadership, the weekly exchanges have infused your Executive Committee with renewed purpose and expectation.

In these next two days, you will see for yourselves that this Assembly is working, and working together. We have a mission to our American flocks. Perhaps not like before, when there was an expectation of forging a model of unity in time for the Great and Holy Council in 2016. Now, we are in a different mode, a mode of finding the most creative synergies to better the spiritual life of all our people.

Allow me to stress that all of us, the Bishops of the Church – we are the substance of the Assembly, and our success as a body will be determined by the commitment of each and every one of us.

Working with the Executive Committee, I have found an inspired and devoted “band of brothers” who bring out the best in me. These close collaborations – even in this time of being physically distanced – is truly a cause for rejoicing!

For example, we will be hearing from our Secretary, Metropolitan Gregory, an exciting new proposal for combining our energies, resources, and talent to reach our youth. Our young people need us to collaborate on their behalf, and I am grateful for the work being done to expedite and innovate new ministries.

I am especially grateful to my beloved and esteemed brother, His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph, our Assembly Vice-Chairman, for his leadership in advocating the motion that we name 2021 the “Year of the Youth!” His vision, which I and all the members of the Executive Committee share, is to go beyond words and platitudes and really do something special for our youth, something that hearkens back to the fifties and sixties when CEYOLA was a reality, and something that looks to the future with realism and faith in our increasingly complex and complicated world.

The creation of a new Youth Agency will be a motion – along with other motions – that comes from the Executive Committee, and there will be other motions for which the various Committees have labored. Your kind attention to these motions will be very much appreciated by your brothers in Christ, who have worked diligently to bring these initiatives to fruition.

My Dear Brothers and Concelebrants:

We have all faced tremendous trials and tribulations, but we do so in the joy of the Holy Spirit, Who is the root of our authority and the fruit of our labors on behalf of the People of God. I am proud and happy to be with you through all these afflictions, for as the Apostle again says:

... we even boast through afflictions, knowing that affliction brings about patience; and patience produces character; and character brings forth hope; a hope that can never be put to shame. For the love of God joyously wells up and streams through our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us.

We have been so very blessed, my brothers – blessed to share in the Great High

Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and blessed with each other.

We are the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the USA, Hierarchs who represent disparate communities, but One People of God. Our oneness is a gift, a blessing that is not ours to refuse. There is so much that we can do together for the sake of all our faithful.

My prayer is that through these next two days, our hearts will open to the possibilities. I have seen them already on our Executive Committee, and I know that we only have to open our imaginations to these possibilities.

I thank each and every one of you for your love of Christ, and your service to His Holy Orthodox Church.

May the Lord bless our deliberations, our initiatives, and indeed, all the works of our hands.

Amen.

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