

Ukrainian crisis in the diaspora: Serbian Church, ROCOR to celebrate Sunday of Orthodoxy separate from Greek Metropolis



The current Ukrainian crisis has a far-reaching impact, well beyond the borders of Ukraine. Of course, the hierarchs, clergy, and faithful in Ukraine are the first affected and are experiencing increasing pressure and violence, but the issue also touches every Local Orthodox Church.

Each Orthodox Church must now decide if they will recognize the so-called “Orthodox Church of Ukraine” created by Constantinople—will they cease recognizing the greatly-respected Metropolitan Onuphry of Kiev and All Ukraine as the canonical primate of the Ukrainian Church and instead confess “Metropolitan” Epiphany Dumenko to hold this position?

The terrible situation facing the Orthodox Church today also has a direct impact on

the faithful in the parishes, and especially in the diaspora where there are multiple overlapping jurisdictions. As Constantinople's canonical invasion of the territory of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church compelled the Russian Church to break communion with it, the clergy and faithful of Moscow Patriarchate and Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) parishes, in America for example, cannot concelebrate and participate in Sacraments in parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the U.S.A., and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, all of which are under the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

One concrete example is that there will be separate Sunday of Orthodoxy celebrations in Chicago this year on March 17, as OrthoChristian was informed, with the Serbian Church and ROCOR celebrating together separately from the Greek Metropolis. While the Serbian Church has not broken communion with Constantinople, it has, together with the Polish Orthodox Church, taken the strongest stance in support of the canonical Ukrainian Church among any of the Local Churches.

Every jurisdiction in America is represented in Chicago, with more than 90 parishes in the general area, and Sunday of Orthodox celebrations there typically have a high pan-Orthodox representation. In 2010, the celebration was held at the Holy Resurrection Serbian Orthodox Cathedral in Chicago with the participation of hierarchs from the Greek, Romanian, Ukrainian, and ROCOR dioceses, about 60 priests and ten deacons, and hundreds of faithful from all jurisdictions.

Last year, the service was held at Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Palos Hills, Illinois and was presided over by His Grace Sava (Jurić), a retired Serbian bishop, and His Grace Bishop Paul of the OCA, with the homily given by Fr. Patrick Reardon of the Antiochian Church, and the participation of faithful from various jurisdictions.

Fr. Nikolaj Kostur, the personal secretary for His Grace Bishop Longin of the Serbian Diocese of New Gracanica and Midwest America, responded to an inquiry from OrthoChristian noting that Bp. Longin and his entire diocese "were shocked by the uncanonical actions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Ukraine over the last several months, culminating with the illegal granting of a 'tomos of autocephaly to schismatics and serving with them on January 6, 2019 in Istanbul."

He continued: "Because this directly affects our Orthodox unity in this country, a decision was rendered to not hold the Pan-Orthodox Vespers for the Sunday of Orthodoxy at our Cathedral, but rather to have our typical Lenten Sunday Vespers

at our Chicago Cathedral for our two Serbian Orthodox Deaneries in Chicagoland, comprised of 19 parishes and 3 monasteries. We did not want to get into the situation of choosing who can and cannot serve together, so we felt it best to remove ourselves from the equation.”

Further, Archpriest Gregory Joyce, the secretary for the ROCOR Diocese of Chicago and Mid-America, confirmed that ROCOR would be joining them: “I can confirm that the Serbs and Russians will serve Sunday of Orthodoxy separately from the Greeks in Chicago. Others may join as well.”

He also noted that the same thing may happen in Detroit as well.

Fr. Nikolaj also added that, “Bishop Longin has appealed to all of our clergy to pray for the crisis facing the Orthodox Church and asks the merciful God to enlighten those who are in schism and those who have attempted to legalize it.”