03/02/2023

Communique of the 12th Convening of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America convened in Los Angeles, California from January 28-31st for its 12th Meeting. Thirty Hierarchs participated in the meeting chaired by Archbishop Elpidophoros.

On January 28th the Executive Committee met to confirm the meeting agenda and to conduct their regular business, including approving new board members for Orthodox Volunteer Corps and Orthodox Youth Ministries. Later that evening, all the Hierarchs gathered at Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles for Great Vespers, presided over by Archbishop Elpidophoros, Chairman of the Assembly. A reception and networking charity event hosted by the parish followed. The participants assembled 200 food and hygiene kits to be distributed by FOCUS North America to those in need.

On Sunday, January 29th, member Hierarchs – including Archbishop Elpidophoros (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America “GOA”), Bishop John (Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America “AOCA”), Bishop Maxim (Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South America “SOC”), Metropolitan Nicolae (Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas “ROC”), Bishop Saba (Georgian Apostolic Orthodox Church in North America “GOC”), Metropolitan Tikhon (Orthodox Church in America “OCA”), Metropolitan Alexios (GOA), Metropolitan Gregory (American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America “ACROD”), Archbishop Michael (OCA), Bishop Demetrios (GOA), Bishop Sevastianos (GOA), Bishop Apostolos (GOA), Bishop Joachim (GOA), Bishop Andrei (OCA), Bishop Ioannis (GOA), Bishop Athenagoras (GOA), Bishop Constantine (GOA) – concelebrated the Divine Liturgy at Saint Sava Serbian Orthodox Church in San Gabriel, CA. Also present during the service were Archbishop Nathaniel (OCA), Bishop Spyridon (GOA), and Bishop Timothy (GOA). This historic event was the first time all the members of the Assembly were invited to concelebrate, furthering the bond of love and communion. The sermon was offered by Bishop Maxim, and the Assembly of Bishops’ Director of Operations, Nicholas Anton, was ordained to the

diaconate during the liturgy. After the liturgy, the Hierarchs celebrated with the faithful during a reception hosted by the parish for the Feast of Saint Sava the Enlightener of the Serbian People.

The meetings officially opened following a liturgy celebrating the Feast of the Three Hierarchs, Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom. In his opening remarks on Monday, January 30th, Archbishop Elpidophoros, Chairman of the Assembly, stated, “first and foremost among lofty intentions for our Assembly and all the Assemblies is the manifestation of our unity as the Orthodox Church in this region, the United States of America. Our light of unity cannot be hidden under the proverbial bushel – it belongs on the lampstand for all to see to help illuminate their own path.”

His Eminence continued, “and yet, we know that there are differences, even fault lines, in our worldwide Orthodox Church; perhaps none so bitter and distressing as those that have emerged around the war against Ukraine.”

The Assembly also reviewed the extensive work its Committees, Working Groups, Task Forces, and Ministries have undertaken over the past year and considered proposals. The Hierarchs resolved to work more closely together to achieve the goals of the Assembly, especially in the areas of Military and Institutional Chaplaincy, a common clergy database, parish engagement, research, and pastoral matters.

Following general discussions, the Assembly heard the application from Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve “FOCUS” North America’s Executive Director, Kenny Kidd, to become a ministry affiliated with the Assembly of Bishops. After considering the development and maturing of the organization, the Hierarchs voted to approve and welcome FOCUS North America as the newest Affiliate Ministry.

The final session of day one included a presentation from the two pilot cities – Atlanta and Akron – for the Assembly’s Inter-Parish Association program. Both pilot regions expressed their gratitude to the Hierarchs for their support and the value of the program. Inter-Parish Associations bring together the clergy and laity from all the local, jurisdictional parishes. Their purpose is to get to know each other better and collaborate on both home and outreach projects which enhance their local communities. In turn, the ultimate goal is growth of the Orthodox Christian Church. The Assembly has resolved to launch the program nationally.

The meetings on day two began by addressing matters of common concern

followed by presentations from the six agencies of the Assembly (International Orthodox Christian Charities “IOCC,” Orthodox Christian Mission Center “OCMC,” Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry “OCPM,” Orthodox Christian Fellowship “OCF,” Orthodox Youth Ministries “OYM,” and Orthodox Volunteer Corps “OVC”). The two newest agencies showed great progress over their first year, with OVC launching its first cohort in September 2022 and OYM hiring an Executive Director in January 2023.

The meeting concluded with a productive discussion about the rite of the reception of converts. Following the mandate from the 2021 meeting, the Assembly of Bishops appointed a cross-jurisdictional working group, chaired by Protopresbyter Dr. Patrick Viscuso, that produced an in-depth white paper on the topic. The Hierarchs discussed the white paper and asked the working group, as a next step, to formulate recommended agreements and rubrics to be presented at the next Assembly meeting.

The Hierarchs present regretted the absence of their Brother Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church and reiterated their invitation to participate in future Assemblies.

Finally, an expression of appreciation was extended to Saint Sava Serbian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco, and the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Saint Sophia for their Abrahamic hospitality.

goarch.org