

10/07/2023

Remarks by Archbishop Elpidophoros to the Chicago Clergy Syndesmos



Your Eminence, Metropolitan Nathanael, beloved brother in the Lord,

Your Grace Bishop Timothy of Hexamilion,

Clergy Syndesmos President, Protopresbyter Rick Andrews,

Dear Brothers in the One Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ,

I would like to thank all of you for coming today, and for the gracious and fraternal welcome by His Eminence. This Syndesmos gathering has one significant purpose: to present to you my thoughts on the process leading to a revised Charter, and for you to ask questions in a free and open forum of dialogue. In the sanctity of our spiritual relationship – as brothers committed to the Church – I am hopeful that our dialogue and discussion can lead us to a sense of solidarity. I will make my introductory remarks from a text, as I wish to be very precise and not misunderstood.

The Charter of our Sacred Archdiocese fulfills two major purposes. First, it is a means of understanding our relationship with the Mother Church of Constantinople, and as such the Charter must reflect the Holy Canons and the canonical tradition of our Holy Orthodox Church.

Second, the Charter is a map for the journey of our Church in America. It defines roles and responsibilities, much as a map reveals locations and distances. But just as reading a map is not making the journey, the same could be said for the Charter. It is a series of definitions that are the basis for our relationships. Let me be clear, however, those definitions are no substitute for our interdependence, our spiritual kinship, and the essential values of love, compassion, and service that are the defining aspects of our shared life in Christ.

Thus, if we compare the Charter to a map, then what is the end point? What is the destination of our long journey? I can summarize this in three general points.

1. To establish a more canonical administrative structure for the Archdiocese
2. To increase transparency, accountability, and financial efficiencies
3. To create more effective, efficient, and consistent ministries

Let me speak about the first point - establishing a more canonical administrative structure for the Archdiocese. The present structure entails a singular Eparchy of the Ecumenical Throne, namely, the Archdiocesan District and eight Metropolises. None of the Metropolises are Eparchies in and of themselves. This is not my opinion, but rather this is plainly stated in the very first paragraph of the first article in the Archdiocesan Regulations. Specifically, it says, "The Archdiocese, the Eparchy of the Ecumenical Throne in the United States of America is one indivisible entity in its entirety." Therefore, if we are one indivisible Eparchy of the Ecumenical Throne, then our internal structure must reflect this canonical reality.

It is canonically inconsistent to have an eparchy within an eparchy precisely because the notion of an eparchy entails its independence and lack of connection to other eparchies. First, the notion of an eparchy within an eparchy has never occurred within the Orthodox Church, Secondly, it generates confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of the hierarchs who shepherd these ecclesiastical entities. It is for this reason that I have proposed we move to a more canonical structure, retaining both our status as an Archdiocese as well as our Eparchial Synod. To accomplish this, I envision a singular Archdiocese with districts. This same structure already exists where within an Archdiocese there are several

districts, administered by both Metropolitans and Bishops, but all under the singular Archdiocese.

So, what is the difference between a Metropolis and a district? A Metropolis has historically been its own eparchy, independent from any other eparchy and tied only to its Mother Church, but since we have identified that this is uncanonical in our situation, we can use the term district and modify the relationship of the hierarchs who shepherd these districts with their flocks. Thus, this revised structure will not only result in a canonically normalized situation, but it will lay the foundation for closer cooperation and efficiency within the Archdiocese.

Some of you may be asking yourselves, even if our administrative structure here in America is technically uncanonical, why do we need to revise it if it has been in use for twenty years? To answer this, we have to turn our attention to my second and third points in order to understand the benefits of normalizing our canonical administrative structure.

Our second point is to increase transparency, accountability, and financial efficiencies. From the *γιαγιάδες* who faithfully give the little of what they have to the Church, to the major benefactors who give millions of dollars, every steward of our Church deserves transparency and financial efficiency.

It is for this reason that we need to reimagine how we conduct our administrative affairs so that we can creatively meet the needs of our ministries and with the efficiencies that our faithful deserve. Moreover, a revised administrative structure will provide for greater accountability as it will be easier to assess if districts are implementing the ministries, programs, and policies that make our Archdiocese more vibrant, more dynamic, and safer.

Allow me to offer an example of accountability. If the Archdiocese were to implement a nation-wide safety program for the protection of our children with which all parishes should be compliant, then according to the present structure, it would have to rely on the Metropolises to ensure that their parishes are compliant.

If a parish were not compliant, then the Archdiocese, which bears legal liability along with the Metropolis, has no recourse to enforce compliance other than asking the Metropolis to enforce this compliance. That is not good enough when it comes to our children. Protection of our children should be consistent throughout the Archdiocese. But, as you can see, there is already a degree of separation when it comes to critically important issues which could just as easily be directed from a national level were the structure to permit it.

Now allow me to offer an example of financial efficiency. There are presently nine Registry offices across the country which process and maintain documents relating to marriages, baptisms, death records, divorces, letters of certification, and any number of other topics that might require the attention of a registrar. By centralizing these offices into a unified registry service, as was done from 1922-1978, we can standardize and more efficiently manage the manner in which these documents are distributed, processed, and kept. Fewer personnel will be required, automatic digitization for the entire country will improve services, and there will be less confusion when our faithful need to locate a copy of their documents.

Finally, let's turn our attention to the third point - creating more effective, efficient, and consistent ministries. With a new structure, we will have the opportunity to renew our vision for our national ministries and create a sense of consistency in pastoral application. As we all know, there is no one exact way to minister to every person. Nevertheless, there are certain principles and guidelines we should all abide by. This consistency is key to our clergy who are often directed to enforce certain matters of pastoral care and it is beneficial to our faithful to be treated and served in a consistent fashion.

As it pertains to ministries, we can have the opportunity to share successful grass-roots ministries and implement them throughout the nation. An example of this is in the Archdiocesan District where I created a ministry specifically reaching out to African-Americans. This ministry has been active for less than a year and already it has seen tremendous success with dozens of African-American families coming to the Orthodox faith.

My dear brothers, I could go on and on about the benefits of a new Charter, but I would rather spend more time discussing your thoughts with you. I can also understand if some of you may have questions or are uncertain. After all, for many of you, you have become comfortable with this present system and for some others, it is the only system you have ever known. Ultimately, however, we must ask ourselves some questions.

As time has progressed over the past twenty years, have we seen more youth involvement or less youth involvement? Have we seen more people in church or fewer people in church? Have we succeeded in bringing our faithful closer to Christ or have many drifted away? If the answers to these questions do not indicate an exponentially growing Church, then we need a change.

Much like if we use an old map that does not identify new roads, then we need to use a new map and reorient ourselves so that we can start going in the right direction.

In conclusion – and I am very happy to hear from all of you for as long as it takes – remembering the following three things:

- 1) We remain firm in our commitment to ongoing discussions with all constituencies, as directed by His All-Holiness.
- 2) We encourage invite open and productive dialogue to shape our new and improved charter.
- 3) And we maintain and underscore the importance of the unity of our Sacred Archdiocese of America and its organic growth in service to the Kingdom of God through its service and ministries to our devout faithful.

Thank you for your kind attention, and now, let's open the floor to some questions.

goarch.org