

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES

Saturdays: Confession 5:00 PM,

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sundays: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.



February 28, 2016 – Sunday of the Prodigal Son

On this Sunday by means of a Gospel parable, from which it received its name and the very Sunday, the Holy Church, for the rousing of repentance for those who are bound by sinful habits, those who cannot and do not want to be freed from it, represents a disastrous condition of man, who is withdrawn from God; and for the consolation and encouragement of those who, being depressed by the consciousness of the weight of their sins, fall into hopelessness and despair, presents an image of repentance of the depraved son and the inexhaustible mercy of the Heavenly Father, Who accepts all sinners who repent. The deeply edifying Gospel Parable of the Prodigal Son with special clarity shows to what an awful degree the flesh prevails over the spirit, and to what sensuality the soul can reach over the highest aspirations, and to what an unfathomable abyss of sin a man may be thrown into, who submits to self-will, who takes a great interest in carnal desires, who overthrows in himself the good yoke of the law of God, and who submits to an unrestrained will in sensual pleasures. The true joy of life consists only in the beneficial union with God. The distance from this union serves as the source of all possible troubles and humiliations.

However these troubles are not continual for that sinner, who has not yet completely deadened his conscience, who has not reached complete despair in the persistence and hardness in his sins, and finally has not fallen under the authority of the devil. The love of the Heavenly Father does not leave him and then, when

he wanders on the path of vice, not thinking about returning under his father's roof, when he slumbers in the embrace of vanity vanity and of earthly sweetness, not noticing the abysses under him, which his passions attract. The grace of God does not cease to call upon him: that voice of love and mercy, that by fear of foreboding and threats, through the mouths of the holy prophets and apostles, touching and softening the heart by its many diverse benefactions, that by striking with tribulations and calamities, that awaking his conscience by especially significant events and meetings, that shaking all his being by such occurrences in life which involuntarily awakens his conscience, that sobers his mind, that strikes his heart with the fear of God, fear of judgment and of torture. The Lord Jesus Christ, according to his own promise, stands before the doors of his heart and knocks, that he opens the door to Him and receives Him into the room of his soul. And here the sinner wakes up from his spiritual slumber and from there comes to the idea that his unique rest is in God.

To strengthen us all in this saving idea in order to wake all of us from the spiritual drowsiness in which all of us are more or less immersed during the usual course of our life, our habitual pleasures and entertainments, our many anxious cares of everyday life, thoughtlessly breaking the commandments of God and carelessly continuing in our sinful ways, not suspecting that this path can result in our death, the Holy Church also changes the chants for this day into one continuous repentant prayer of our souls crying out to the Lord. With the human soul orally enslaved by sin the Holy Church appeals to the Lord: "let us not look outside of ourselves," "subjected by corrupting thoughts," "I impiously worshipped the pleasures of the body, and I attached myself to the inventors of passions," "having departed from your commandments," "I have become enslaved to every evil," "now I repent and I cry out in humility: I have sinned against You, accept me, O King of all," "Open to me now your fatherly compassions as I return from evil deeds," "See, O Christ, the affliction of my heart, see my conversion, see my tears, O Savior, and do not despise me. But embrace me once again through your compassion and number me with the multitude of the saved, that with thanksgiving I may sing the praise of your mercies."

The depth and power of this repentant prayerful cry to awaken everyone from the condition of spiritual drowsiness and to force the entry of the strict investigation into the depth of the heart, to place the conscience in the sight of the law of God, before the dreadful throne and impartial judgment of God, in order to see that our heart lives and moves, that consists of the main subject of its attachments and aspirations, its desires and hopes, in order to enter into itself, to see its impiety, to know its guilt before the Heavenly Father and to fall down before the throne of His mercy with tears of prayer for the remission of sins and for the sending down of

grace for correction. The one who has this spiritual awakening, this feeling of discontent with oneself and the desire to improve, this consciousness of danger of one's sinful condition and heavy guilt before God, this premonition of a menacing death and one's lack of an answer before the judgment of God will stir up a sincere disgust at the life of sin, the firm decision to convert to God with one's whole heart, the fervent desire to bring a sincere, heart-felt repentance, and a holy decision not to again return to sin and turning with fervent prayer to God for the remission of sins and for the sending down of grace for correction, all this is, really, that grace alone proceeds from the meeting of the Lord and the reconciliation with Him triumphs, as if one were not a sinner.

Thus, having shown on the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee the true beginning of repentance, the Holy Church now in the Gospel parable opens it to him with full power: under the condition of true humility and sincere repentance for the mercy of God the remission of the heaviest sins from God is possible. And consequently the sinner, in view of the approach of the time for repentance, must not despair for the beneficial help and mercies. (*from Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., by S. V. Bulgakov (Trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris)*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 6:12-20

Brethren, all things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 15:11-32

The Lord said this parable, "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to *his* father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls *to me*.' So he divided to them *his* livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that

land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything*. But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’’ And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’’ And they began to be merry. Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to *his* father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’’

A Word From the Holy Fathers

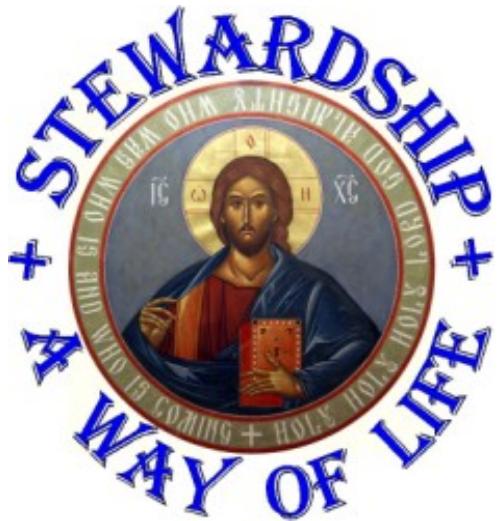
All our attention must be centered on the parable of the Prodigal Son. We all see ourselves in it as in a mirror. In a few words the Lord, the knower of hearts, has shown in the person of one man how the deceptive sweetness of sin separates us from the truly sweet life according to God. He knows how the burden of sin on the soul and body, experienced by us, impels us by the action of divine grace to return, and how it actually does turn many again to God, to a virtuous life.

– St. John of Kronstadt



On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 57:

God-given Talent



“And his gifts were ... for building up the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-12 RSV)

These days we often hear a description of a sports or entertainment personality as having a “God-given talent.” Perhaps such a description is given when a commentator cannot explain the special ability shown. “God-given talent” covers a multitude of mysteries. It is perhaps like the use of the phrase “act of God” for insurance companies to define things that happen that are beyond human control or explanation.

St. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, finds no mystery in what each one of us is given as talent, and for what it is that the talent is to be used. God gives people gifts *“for building up the body of Christ.”* By virtue of Baptism and the seal of the Holy Spirit in the Holy Mystery of Chrismation, all Orthodox Christians are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit that all other gifts are given *“for building up the body of Christ.”* Why is it then that we so often hear around our parishes: “I have to do everything around here!” or “Why don’t others pitch in and help?” One reason may be that entertainment has made us into spectators. We only want to watch others do things for our own enjoyment. Another reason, and this is far more serious, is that too many see the church or the parish as existing for its members. Many see that the church is there simply to meet their personal needs. The questions asked by them are: “What’s in this for me and my family?” or “How can I use God to protect what I think is important?”

The Church does not exist for the sake of its members. The members exist for the sake of the Church. That is the very reason that God has given to each of the members of the Church special and individual gifts for only one reason: *“for building up the body of Christ.”* Good stewards of their gifts ask these questions: “What can I do for God and for His people?” or “How can God best use the gifts He has given to me?” St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians describes the many gifts and talents that were abundant in the church found in the city of Ephesus. That church managed its gifts of *“apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.”* How did they do it? They understood that all had to use their gifts for one reason: *“... to equip the saints for the work of ministry”* (Ephesians 4:11-12 RSV). That is true stewardship of any God-given talent. (*from acrod.org*)

CAMP NAZARETH SUMMER CAMP 2016

The time for Summer Camp is Rapidly Approaching!!! The clock is ticking!!

Dates for the Summer Camping Program

Week 1 -- July 17 - 23, 2016

Pittsburgh, Mid-Atlantic, Tri-State and Washington D.C. Deaneries

Week 2 -- July 24 - July 30, 2016

New England, NY, NJ, Florida and Canada Deaneries

Week 3 -- July 31 - August 6, 2016

Johnstown, Pocono, Southern Tier, Youngstown and Chicago Deaneries

Register Online Starting Feb. 22, 2016

Register at – campnazareth.org

From the Home Page, From the 2016 Summer Camp Icon, or From the Diocesan Summer Camp Tab found under the Program & Events Tab and look for Camper Registration.

If you are Clergy or a Volunteer go to the 2016 Summer Camp Icon on the Home Page or the Summer Camp Tab found under the Program & Events Tab and look for the paper forms under Clergy/Volunteers.

\$20 Early Bird Discount Per Child!!!!

(one-time only, not per week)

Register & pay by May 15, 2016!!!!

Online Registration MUST be complete AND payment must be submitted by May 15 in order to qualify for the Early Bird Discount.

Registrations after June 14 will incur an additional \$20 late fee.

- When you register online please note that **you will still need to submit a paper copy of the Medical Examination Form (i.e. Camper Physical)** which must be filled out and signed by a licensed medical professional (licensed physician or physician's assistant). This form will be emailed to you after you complete the online registration process.

Payment by check, money order, or credit card is accepted. Checks and Money Orders are to be made payable to *Camp Nazareth* and sent to *Camp Nazareth at 339 Pew Road, Mercer, PA 16137*.

DIOCESAN LENTEN RETREATS



For All Orthodox Christians, Family & Friends

EASTERN REGION

LOCATION: The Conference Center
at Valley Forge
Phoenixville, PA **DATE:** Sat April 16, 2016 **TIME:** 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

TOPIC:

PRESENTER:

Adults	<i>The Synergy of Faith and Works for Living and Sharing Our Orthodox Faith</i>	Fr. Michael Chendorain
Ages 12-18	<i>The Spiritual Life: Prayer in Action</i>	Fr. William Bennett
Ages 6-11	<i>We Are The Church: How Am I A Part Of God's Family?</i>	Fr. William George

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: 4/2/16

Come Escape From the
World For A Day and Be
Spiritually Renewed!



Sponsored By The
National
A.C.R.Y.

Also Commemorated Today: Venerable Basil the Confessor

Saint Basil the Confessor was a monk and suffered during the reign of the iconoclast emperor Leo the Isaurian (717-741). When a persecution started against those who venerated holy icons, St Basil and his companion St Procopius of Decapolis (February 27) were subjected to much torture and locked up in prison. Here both martyrs languished for a long while, until the death of the impious emperor. When the holy Confessors Basil and Procopius were set free along with other venerators of holy icons, they continued in their monastic struggles, instructing many in the Orthodox Faith and the virtuous life. St Basil died peacefully in the year 750. (*from oca.org*)

JR ACRY Prepares for their Lenten Project

Our Jr. ACRY will again be supporting the Safe Night Program by collecting non-perishable foods to be used in making up bagged lunches that will be given to the homeless throughout the year. Last year, with your help, we were able to donate (80) bagged lunches to be given out, which is (20) more than the previous year. We're hoping to up the ante and beat last year's total with your help this year.

The project is being done in cooperation with LifeStyles of MD (LaPlata) (<http://www.lifestylesofmd.org>) and the Good Shepherd United Methodist Church (Waldorf), who will be hosting the dinner for the homeless Sunday, April 10, 2016.

We are soliciting the following items that are needed to create the lunch bags:

- ❖ Tuna/Ham/Turkey/Chicken/Hummus Kits (meat/cracker combo found by the canned Tuna)
- ❖ Fruit Cups/Fruit Snacks
- ❖ Cheese/Crackers
- ❖ Granola/Cereal Bars
- ❖ Bottled Water

All items should be of single-serving size, suitable for repackaging into single lunches and can be placed in the Cry Room in the back of the church.

Thank you for your support in helping us help others.



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS ALL-HOLINESS ECUMENICAL
Patriarch Bartholomew To the Synaxis of the Primates of
the Orthodox Churches (Geneva, January 22, 2016)**

Your Beatitudes and beloved Brothers in the Lord, Primates of the local most holy Orthodox Churches and venerable representatives of brother Primates precluded from participating in this Synaxis, together with Your honorable entourages.

Welcome to this sacred place of our most holy Church of Constantinople, this Center dedicated to the service of Pan-Orthodox unity, which has for decades hosted and continues to host numerous Inter-Orthodox and Pan-Orthodox encounters hammering out and advancing the unity of the most holy Orthodox Church. We wholeheartedly pray that Your sojourn here may prove for each of You satisfactory and pleasing in every way, while our work may be guided by the breath of the Paraclete in order to bear abundant fruit for the love and edification of the body of the Church to the glory of God.

As we know, this Synaxis of ours was to be held at our see, but extraordinary objective circumstances that prevented some of our brothers from traveling there imposed the relocation of our meeting here. We thank all of You for understanding the necessity of this change and for agreeing to come here in order to realize the sacred purpose of the present Synaxis.

Indeed, every Synaxis that gathers us together, as entrusted with by God's grace and mercy with the leadership of His most holy Church, is sacred. However, this particular Synaxis has a very special character because it is bound to the fundamental ecclesiological principle of the Church's conciliarity inasmuch as its primary objective is to prepare the forthcoming convocation, God willing, of the Holy and Great Council of our most holy Orthodox Church. Therefore, we have assembled here to perform a truly sacred obligation, which is precisely why we have an entirely particular need for the support and illumination of the Paraclete as well as of the favorable goodwill of each of us, beyond any other kind of interests, in order that our decisions may contribute to the realization of the Holy and Great Council, which we have already announced. For it is unto us that Divine Providence has assigned the great duty and privilege to give flesh and bones to the visions of our blessed predecessors, who more than fifty years ago conceived the notion of convening this Council. To us, then, belongs the great responsibility to reduce the time, which is already much detained, in order without further delay to transform the vision into reality. After all, this is expected of us not only by our late predecessors, but also by the faithful people of God, as well as even by Christians outside the canonical barriers of our Church. This is why every further postponement in realizing the Council will only satisfy the enemies of our Church and the Enemy that rejoices in evil.

Our Synaxis has a particularly special significance because it is called to settle matters and aspects that remain from the preparation and relate to the overall operation of the Holy and Great Council. In this regard, we wish to remind Your love of certain basic principles, which we have already accepted and established through formal decisions, and which we are naturally obliged to respect and maintain to the end.

1. On the Agenda

As known, the agenda of the Council was determined by Pan-Orthodox decision of the First Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Consultation (1976) and includes the following ten items according to the order in the Acts of the Consultation:

a) Orthodox Diaspora; b) Autocephaly and its manner of proclamation; c) Autonomy and its manner of proclamation; d) The Diptychs; e) The matter of a common calendar; f) Impediments of marriage; g) Adaptation of church regulations on fasting; h) Relations of the Orthodox Churches with the rest of the Christian world; i) Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement; and j) Contribution of the local Orthodox Churches to the prevalence of the Christian ideals of peace, liberty, brotherhood and love among peoples, and the lifting of racial and other discrimination.

According the prevailing By-Laws, each of the above items should pass through the stage of preparation in order to be examined by an Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee, which would repeatedly convene until it achieves unanimous formulation of the text in question, which should consequently be approved by a Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Consultation in order finally to be referred *without further ado* to the Holy and Great Council.

Of the above items, eight have already passed through the stage of preparation and approval by Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Consultations, while two of them – pertaining to Autocephaly and the Diptychs – have not received unanimous acceptance in the recurrent meetings of the Preconciliar Committee in order to receive final approval by a Preconciliar Consultation and comprise items for discussion at the Holy and Great Council. In light of the situation that has developed in this way, we were faced with the dilemma of either postponing the realization of the Holy and Great Council until agreement is also reached on these two items or else proceeding with its convocation contented with the eight items.

On this question, there was a Pan-Orthodox decision to proceed with the convocation of the Council contented with the eight items, which received unanimous approval by Preconciliar Consultations. Subsequently, our Synaxis in March 2014 unanimously decided to convene the Holy and Great Council in 2016 after a Special Inter-Orthodox Committee has previously undertaken the following actions by Pascha 2015:

- a) the *revision* of the texts agreed by the Third Preconciliar Consultation on the items: *Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement; Relations of the Orthodox Churches with the rest of the Christian world; and, Contribution of the Orthodox Churches to the prevalence of peace, etc.*
- b) the *editing* of texts from the Second Preconciliar Consultation regarding: *Adaptation of church regulations on fasting; Impediments of marriage; and, A common calendar.*
- c) If possible (“*it is desirable*”), the discussion of the items of *Autocephaly* and the *Diptychs* by the Preparatory Committee in order to achieve unanimity.

This Special Committee completed its task within the prescribed timeframe with regard to points (a) and (b), working until the eve of Holy and Great Week 2015, but was unable due to lack of time to fulfill the expressed wish of the Synaxis on point (c). Accordingly, the items that remained for the Holy and Great Council were the eight originally agreed, which received the approval of a Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Consultation as foreseen by the By-Laws.

In the meantime and despite what was unanimously agreed, certain Churches expressed their desire and even demand that the Holy and Great Council be postponed until there is discussion and unanimous acceptance both on the items of *Autocephaly* and the *Diptychs* as well as on the texts of the Second Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Consultation (1982) on *Impediments of marriage* and *A common calendar*, which were not unanimously edited by the above-mentioned Special Committee. As far as the last two items, we cannot but express our surprise from such a demand, given that the decision of our Synaxis in 2014 did not at all foresee any radical revision of these texts, but simply their editing by the Special Committee; which is why the presiding chairman correctly forbade any radical revision since this would constitute transgression or transcendence of the mandate given to the Committee by our Synaxis. The demand on the part of certain Churches to revise these texts would clearly require *a new unanimous decision* of the Synaxis of Primates, different to the one taken in 2014 about a simple editing of the texts, which editing by its very nature could not affect the core contents of the same texts.

Therefore, brethren, we find ourselves before the dilemma, presented to us by certain Churches, either to persist with the decision taken jointly in 2014 to convene the Holy and Great Council with the eight agenda items, which have already acquired unanimous Pan-Orthodox approval, or to delay the convocation of the Council until we achieve Pan-Orthodox agreement also on the items of *Autocephaly* and the *Diptychs* as well as the texts on *Marriage* and the *Calendar*. If we choose the latter, we shall require a whole series of meetings by the Preparatory Committee, which in accordance with the prevailing By-Laws for

preparation of the council must conclude with unanimous approval of the relevant texts that must then be submitted for final approval by a new Preconciliar Consultation. Given these procedures, whether and when the Holy and Great Council is to convene would remain unknown and its ultimate cancellation would not be excluded. Our responsibility is indeed immense for whatever might transpire and we are obliged to take this into consideration before preferring what is better over what is good and what is greater over what is necessary if we go back on our original joint decision. Our most holy Church declares that it cannot assume the historical responsibility of delaying the convocation of the Holy and Great Council or the danger resulting from its cancellation.

2. Remaining Matters

a) The Draft of By-Laws for the operation of the Holy and Great Council: As known, the Special Committee that recently met in Athens to compose a draft for the procedural By-Laws of the Holy and Great Council did not manage to complete its task, finally approving only four of the sixteen proposed articles, which means that we must discover a way to conclude this work, if possible during the present Synaxis, by means of a special committee composed from our very own members, with the clear directive to complete its task during these days in order to submit it here to our plenary for approval so that there is no need of another Synaxis of Primates for the approval of the by-Laws.

b) The matter of inviting observers to the Holy and Great Council: This matter is before us for purposes of deciding at this Synaxis in two forms: namely, regarding the invitation of observers (clergy, monastics and laity) both from within the Orthodox Church as well as from other Christian Churches and Confessions, especially from those with whom we are in theological dialogue. In our opinion, both of these categories should be invited to attend the sessions of the Council, without of course the right to speak or vote, given that the Holy and Great Council is of immediate and vital interest both to Orthodox laity, clergy and monastics, but also to the rest of the Christian world. It should be noted that, during the sessions of the Second Vatican Council, our Church was invited to and did send observers. If there is agreement on the principle of inviting such observers, then we must proceed to the determination of the manner in which they are represented, their number as well as their seating on the Council floor and every other question related to this matter.

c) The matter of the Council's authenticity must also concern this Synaxis. The Holy and Great Council will take place at a time when institutions are generally undergoing a crisis of authenticity, being disputed by contemporary people, something that unfortunately also tends to influence the domain of the Church. Conciliar decisions, which at other times enjoyed the respect of the clergy and the

people as the voice of God (“it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” [Acts 15.28]), are today challenged by a group of our faithful, sometimes even before they are formally taken and announced. We know that even the Holy and Great Council that we have decided to convene is questioned by some “defenders of Orthodoxy,” who label it as a “robber council” before it has actually convened. What canonical validity will the decisions of the Holy and Great Council have, and what canonical repercussions will any disobedience toward these involve? We believe that this matter must be clarified by us in order to avoid confusion among the people of God and other unfortunate ramifications in the body of the Church.

d) Finally, it is necessary that we clarify a matter that emerged – unexpectedly, in our opinion – namely, the question of the precise meaning of the term *consensus*, which we accepted as a way of reaching decisions both during the preparation as well as during the proceedings of the Holy and Great Council. On this matter, we should clarify the following issues:

First, the concept of consensus, and not unanimity, internationally signifies that if one or more delegations disagree with a specific proposal and choose to formulate their own, an effort must be made to accept the opinion or proposal of these delegations; however, in the case where consensus is not achieved on the counter-proposal, then this disagreement – should those disagreeing persist – is recorded but does not invalidate the original position that resulted in the disagreement, while those disagreeing sign the original text and, should they so wish, record their disagreement. If someone declines to sign the text, this would imply veto, which would lead to an impasse.

A second matter that requires clarification is whether consensus refers to those present during the deliberations “of a body or requires the physical presence of all members of the body.” If we accept the latter, then any absence or else voluntary and deliberate absenteeism of some members would lead to dissolution of the body on the premise of lack of consensus.

The first of these matters emerged during the sessions of the Fifth Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Consultation, where two delegations declined to sign the joint text for the reason that the position of their Churches were not accepted by all members of the Consultation; thus, we find ourselves before an impasse with regard to preparations for the Council because one of its basic texts remains unsigned by certain delegations. The second matter emerged during the recent meeting of the Special Committee for preparing the draft of the Council’s procedural By-Laws in Athens. At that meeting, certain delegations persistently sought to include a provision in the By-Laws, according to which if one Church for any reason withdraws from the sessions of the Council, then the Chairman is obliged to secure that Church’s presence, otherwise the Council cannot continue its deliberations

(i.e., is dissolved) since there is no consensus. That is our predicament if we regard consensus as applying not only to those present but also to those absent.

We wish to state forthrightly that our most holy Church and we personally cannot conceive or accept the realization of a Council that would operate under the Damocleian sword of dissolution should one or more Churches decide to withdraw. It would be preferable for such a Council, operating under the threat of dissolution, not to be held at all.

The tradition of the Church knows numerous examples where conciliarity is applied in Councils, indeed even Ecumenical Councils, when certain Churches were absent – sometimes voluntarily, at other times involuntarily – from the sessions of the Council, without this at all preventing their operation. Many Council decisions were recognized retroactively by those who did not participate in them. So far as we know, dependence of consensus on physical attendance has no historical precedent.

We are, therefore, also called to deliberate on this matter fraternally and with love. We propose these issues to Your love, brethren, as outstanding for our deliberation and decision so that we might arrive at the Holy and Great Council in unanimity. Apart from these issues, there are some other matters of a practical nature, which we are called to resolve in light of the Council. By way of example, we mention some of these here:

- a) *The duration of the Council.* We do not know what you think about this, but in our opinion the number, scope and importance of the items for discussion will necessitate the duration of the Council to be at least two weeks, if we also bear in mind the liturgical and other events, which would be added to the sessions.
- b) The procedure and placement of the Chairman and Primates decided at our last Synaxis will create a *spatial distance between them and the members of their delegations*, which will complicate the communication between the Primates and their delegations. This practical matter needs to be resolved.
- c) We must promptly create a common *Inter-Orthodox Secretariat of the Council*, which will work alongside the existing Secretariat for the Preparation of the Council, assuming the difficult, albeit extremely important task of promoting the Council to the plenitude of the Orthodox Church but also to the world beyond, publishing and circulating the agreed texts, so that the Council may discern the reactions of the faithful and the world in order to bear these in mind in its work as far as this is possible.
- d) Finally, it will soon be necessary to confront the practical matter of *the financial cost* of the Council, which due to its magnitude exceeds the capacity of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. As you already know, throughout the preparation over

decades for the Holy and Great Council, the Ecumenical Patriarchate bore the burden of the financial expense for many and repeated meetings of the Preparatory Committees and Preconciliar Consultations, as well as the Synaxis gatherings of the Primates. It did so and continues to do so gladly, from its deficiency.

Nevertheless, we now require the contribution of each Church, according to its ability, toward *a common fund* controlled on an Inter-Orthodox level in order to respond to the large expenses demanded by such an undertaking as the forthcoming, with God's grace, Holy and Great Council. We are certain that all of the sister Churches appreciate this and will contribute, each according to their ability.

Dearly beloved and most esteemed brothers in Christ, we have briefly outlined the issues that, in our opinion, remain outstanding and await our resolution as Primates of the sister Churches. You will deem whether and which of these require immediate priority or if there are also other issues that should concern our present Synaxis. We look forward to Your observations in this regard. Behind our proposals lies the conviction that all of us yearn with the same zeal for the convocation of the Holy and Great Council of our most holy Church without further delay, as we have stated, given that "the appointed time is short" (1 Cor. 7.29) since over fifty years of deferment and postponement have seriously exposed our Church in the eyes of adversaries and friends, not to speak also of God and History. Let us, therefore, advance swiftly with the task that lies before us, "looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12.2), who through the intercessions of His All-Pure Mother and all the Saints "will not leave us as orphans" (cf. John 14.18), but through the Paraclete will unite us in the same place at the Council, just as He unites us in His body and blood. "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." (Luke 18.27) "Therefore, brethren, rejoice in the Lord, and may the God of love and peace be with you." (Cf. 2 Cor. 13.11) Amen!

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The annual Parish meeting and Potluck will be held following Liturgy on 06 March. Information to review will be distributed in advance so you can discuss topics with the officers or clergy prior to the meeting. We will review the past year, our financial status, and look ahead at goals for 2016 and beyond. Importantly, we will also adopt a 2016 budget, elect delegates to the Diocesan Sobor to be held in October, and elect officers. Anyone who is interested in a great volunteer/leadership opportunity, consider serving your Parish as an officer. See any current officer (Kari David, Dana Dewey, Olga Dewey, and Phyllis Thomidis) or Father Joseph if interested.

AMAZONSMILE

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March Anniversaries and Birthdays



Anniversaries:

None.

Birthdays:

Ciaran Richardson 1st

Kristen McNeil 10th

Heather Wright 16th

Nicole Nicolaus 16th

Alexander Wright 19th

Nancy Hall 21st

Adam Roberts 25th

Tyler Vallandingham 25th

Jared Karbowsky 26th

Lynn Hampton 27th

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Millie Borys, Jeffrey Carey, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, Alex Holthus, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Alex & Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Daria Virvan, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)