



Questions and Answers on the New Charter

With the granting of the new Charter to the Archdiocese by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the distribution of the official text in English, as well as in Greek, it is important to review some of the questions that have been raised and discussed during the process. The questions and answers below highlight many of the key issues related to the Charter and its process of preparation. These are provided for information and explanation along with the text of the Charter and the letters from the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Archbishop.

What is the Charter of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America?

The Charter of the Archdiocese is an ecclesiastical document that in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, Sacred Tradition, and the Canons of the Church outlines the mission and function of the Archdiocese and defines the relationship between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Archdiocese. It includes the rights and privileges granted to the Archdiocese by the Patriarchate.

Why was there a need for a new Charter?

The previous Charter of the Archdiocese was granted by the Patriarchate in 1977. Since that time changes and developments in the life of the Church in America have occurred necessitating a new Charter that would provide a proper foundation for continued growth and ministry at all levels of the Church. The need was for a new document that would accommodate these changes with a structure and a language appropriate to the nature and function of our Church in its contemporary setting.

What was the process of preparing the new Charter?

The new Charter was prepared over an extensive period of time by a Joint Archdiocesan/Patriarchal Committee, a process that included the participation of our Synod, our Clergy-Laity Congress, our Archdiocesan Council, our Parishes, and our people throughout the Church in America. The text was distributed in advance of and reviewed at the 2002 Congress in Los Angeles. All opinions, ideas, suggestions, and comments were reviewed in the process, carefully documented, and forwarded to the Patriarchate for consideration prior to the granting of the Charter. In addition, the complete transcript of the seven hours of charter discussions of the 2002 Congress was also sent to the Patriarchate. All in all, the process of preparing the Charter has been a remarkable spiritual achievement for which as Orthodox Christians we are deeply thankful to God.

Is the unity of the Archdiocese diminished by the elevation of the Dioceses to Metropolises?

No! It is not! The new Charter clearly states that the Archdiocese is "one indivisible entity" and that the various geographical regions, previously called Dioceses, are now called Metropolises of the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese still has as its administrative and pastoral head the Archbishop, who is the Archbishop of America, the Exarch of the Patriarchate, and the President of the Eparchial Synod. The Synod now consists of the Metropolitans of the Archdiocese, who are identified in title by their respective Metropolises. In fact, the new Charter provides for the unity and uniformity of the Archdiocese in that we no longer have Metropolitans of the Patriarchal Throne and Bishops as the heads of the eight Dioceses, but we now have only Metropolitans of the Archdiocese for the eight Metropolises of the Archdiocese.

How does the new Charter promote the participation of the Laity in the governance of the Church?

The Charter enhances the vital role of the laity in several ways. First, through the Clergy-Laity Congress and the Archdiocesan and Local Councils the laity are directly involved in the administration of the Archdiocese and the Metropolises. Second, in the election of the Archbishop, the Metropolitans, and Bishops, the Archdiocesan Council has an advisory role in selecting the hierarchs for the Church in America. Third, the task of revising the Regulations of the Archdiocese related to the Metropolises, the parishes, and institutions is a process that includes review and comment from the laity. This process has already begun with a productive and harmonious cooperation between our clergy and laity.

How is the Charter related to my local parish?

First and foremost the Charter provides the overall structure and organization for the proper function of the Archdiocese. As far as the local parish is concerned, no changes are mandated by the new Charter. The Charter contains no articles relating to the control of parish property by the Patriarchate.

Why does the Charter refer to the Archdiocese as hierarchical?

The description of the Archdiocese as hierarchical is a clear recognition of the identity of our Orthodox Church as "Church" in the full sense of the word. This is rooted in our uninterrupted history of 2000 years and our ecclesiology. It is also an affirmation of our identity in the contemporary world as a Church and not a corporation, a business, or a secular organization.

How does the Charter relate to our relationship as an Archdiocese with the other Orthodox jurisdictions in America?

The Charter does not diminish in any way the progress that has and will continue to be made in the cooperation among the Orthodox jurisdictions in America. In fact, the proper organization and function of the Archdiocese will further our significant contributions to Orthodox work in missions, philanthropy, education, campus ministry, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, etc. and will ensure that more cooperation will strengthen the bonds of unity among all Orthodox in America.

How does the Charter affect the National Ministries of the Archdiocese?

The Charter affirms the work of National Ministries through the departments, ministries, organizations, and institutions of the Archdiocese that address the needs of our youth and our families, and that meet the needs for education, missions, and philanthropy. As a unified Church in America, we work on a national level to provide programs and resources that will assist the work at the parish and Metropolis levels. According to the Charter, it is a "one" and "indivisible" Archdiocese that "proclaims the Gospel of Christ", "cultivates and guides the life of the Church in the United States", "sanctifies the faithful through Divine Worship", and "builds the spiritual and ethical life of the faithful in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, Sacred Tradition and the Canons".

How does the Charter affirm the relationship of the Archdiocese and the Patriarchate?

The Charter makes clear that the Archdiocese and the Patriarchate are organically related, not only as an affirmation of the unity of the Church, but also in the mission to offer our Orthodox faith throughout the world. As a strong and growing Archdiocese, we contribute to the vital work of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which has been for centuries a bearer of the Cross of Christ and, which in spite of limitations of freedom, is leading Orthodox Christians around the world in addressing global issues and offering the truth and love of Christ. In fact, our Ecumenical Patriarchate is today a universally acknowledged leader, beyond Orthodoxy and even Christianity, in issues of religious freedom, human rights, peace, reconciliation, and the environment. The new Charter upholds this relationship by affirming the true nature of the Church as united in work, mission, and witness as we, the Archdiocese of America and Orthodox faithful, actively participate in and support the sacred work of the Patriarchate.

Does the Charter allow for the growth of the Archdiocese?

The Charter indicates the process for revision or amendment so that the good order and proper function of the Church can be maintained in the future. It is clear from the process for this Charter that this work can be done in an open and edifying way that strengthens the vitality and vision of the Church in America. Further, with the proper organization provided by the new Charter, growth is expected. This growth could lead to future changes as indicated by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who states in his letter, "This new Charter...will serve the administrative needs of your Holy Archdiocese up until such time when emerging needs will demonstrate the benefits of its change for the progress in Jesus Christ of the Christ-loving whole body of the Archdiocese." This affirmation and the existence and work of the Holy Archdiocese of America move beyond the text of the Charter to the reality that we as Orthodox Christians are called to grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and to share His love with all. With this as our mission, our new Charter will assist us in bringing honor and glory to God through our work as His Church in America.