



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE ^{OF} AMERICA

July 13, 2004

Dear Fellow Orthodox Christians:

I hope this letter finds each of you well and as we all look forward to the 37th biennial Clergy Laity Congress. I am writing this letter on behalf of the Archdiocesan Council in order to provide each of you with an update on events since the last clergy-laity congress in Los Angeles.

Recent Events of Importance

Our Archdiocese has experienced some very exciting developments:

- First and foremost, on January 18, 2003 the Ecumenical Patriarchate granted to our Archdiocese the new Charter. We will review the history and process below.
- For the first time in the history, our Archdiocese, as well as the other Eparchies of our Patriarchate around the world, have been asked to participate directly in the governance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate through membership in the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Hereafter six of the twelve members of the Holy and Sacred Synod will be from Eparchies outside of Turkey. It must be remembered that the Holy Synod, along with the Patriarch administers the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Our own Archbishop Demetrios has been elected as a member of this Holy and

Sacred Synod. This means that when the Synod discusses issues affecting Greek Orthodox Christians in the United States, the Archbishop of America will have a direct voice on any issues affecting our Archdiocese. In this sense it can be said that we and the other Eparchies of the Patriarchate taken together are self governing in that we all participate significantly in the governance of the Patriarchate.

- Over the past 18 months, the Administration Committee of the Archdiocesan Council has worked diligently and in a spirit of unity in preparing new Regulations for the Archdiocese in conformity with our new Charter. That committee was comprised of 22 individuals, 14 of whom were laity. The Committee has spent well over 300 hours preparing and meticulously reviewing, and revising these new Regulations line by line to assure conformance with the Holy Canons, Church Tradition and the 2003 Charter, while simultaneously providing a fair and equitable set of rules. In addition the entire Archdiocesan Council spent one regular meeting of two days followed by a special meeting spanning two more days working on the Regulations.

The Regulations are different from the Charter. While there has been much talk about the Charter, the fact is that the Charter does not directly impact the day-to-day activities of each Parish. It is the Uniform Parish Regulations (UPR) which is determinative. Regulations will be voted upon by the Clergy-Laity Congress in July. Once the vote takes place on these Regulations, they will then be submitted to the Patriarchate for approval. The new Regulations will govern the operation of not only all Parishes, but of each Metropolis as well. They have already been sent to each Parish for review prior to the Clergy-Laity Congress.

- One important aspect of the new Regulations is that our laity will have an expanded role and responsibilities in the administration of the Church. For the first time, the Archdiocesan Council (composed of hierarchy, priests, and lay volunteers from across the country) will have a direct input into the selection of the Archbishop, the Metropolitans, and Auxiliary Bishops through a special

consultative process set forth in new regulations passed by Archdiocesan Council on June 10, 2004.

More about the Charter

At this point it is useful to review, as indicated above, some background not only on our new Charter, but on Charters in general. A Charter is an ecclesiastical document which describes the structure and functioning of the Archdiocese and its relationship to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Since the creation of the Archdiocese in 1918, the Patriarchate has granted five successive Charters in 1922, 1927, 1931, 1977, and 2003.

Although it is the Patriarchate which granted the new Charter to the Archdiocese, the working draft of the Charter was not written by the Patriarchate; it was written by the laity and clergy in the United States. Our new charter has a long history of preparation. Archbishop Iakovos appointed a Charter committee (comprised of clergy and laity) about eight years ago. Archbishop Spyridon did likewise. In 1998, the Clergy Laity Congress passed a resolution that the 1977 Charter should be revised. In late 1999 Archbishop Demetrios and our Eparchial Synod decided to resume the interrupted charter revision process. A Charter Committee consisting of three bishops, two priests, a lay canon law professor, and two lay lawyers was appointed. The Committee prepared, discussed and revised a proposed Charter extensively (there have been about 15 drafts over the eight years). At the direction of Archbishop Demetrios, a draft was presented to a Charter commission of clergy and laity from each Diocese (as decided by the 1998 Clergy Laity Congress) which also provided comments and suggested revisions (many of which were incorporated in the draft). The Archdiocese Charter Committee, which was augmented to include the Archbishop and the remaining members of the Synod as well as the Archdiocesan Chancellor, then visited the Patriarchate four times for discussions (two days each) pertaining to the Archdiocesan draft of the Charter. The discussions during these meetings were spirited. The Patriarchate accepted most of our draft, including the very important provision of elevating our Archdiocese to an Archdiocese consisting of Metropolises, and the provision that all our bishops were to be Metropolitans of these Metropolises. It chose to continue the process of electing the bishops (now Metropolitans) upon nomination by our Eparchial Synod. (It should be remembered that

the Patriarchate has always elected the nominee who received the most votes from our Eparchial Synod.) It also chose to continue electing the Archbishop. However it provided for an extensive consultation process with respect to the election of hierarchs which has been elaborated upon in the new Archdiocesan Council regulations discussed above.

The draft was discussed by the Archdiocesan Council. In February 2002, the Archdiocesan Council comments and the draft were circulated to all our parishes in soliciting comments for the Los Angeles Clergy Congress in July 2002.

There were hundreds of delegates from all parishes throughout the country at the 2002 Clergy-Laity Congress. After a presentation to and discussion with all of the delegates that lasted for seven hours, a motion passed requesting that the Patriarchate grant the proposed Charter. Separate motions asked for certain modifications.

After the completion of Clergy-Laity Congress, the Archdiocese provided the Patriarchate with the comments received from parishioners among our parishes across the country, and the video and audio transcripts of the seven-hour discussion at the Clergy-Laity Congress. In granting the final version of the Charter the Patriarchate incorporated some of the changes requested by the Clergy-Laity Congress. The Patriarchate made clear that the Charter is to be a living document with other changes to be made in the future. As stated in the official transmittal letter of the Patriarch: “[the Patriarchate] listened to and considered with great love and attention all of the view points presented by all people who wanted to express their opinion on this matter. With equal love and care, the Mother Church has chosen and adopted from the suggested proposals the ones that contain in themselves a prudent, reasonable and gradual transformation of current provisions. A primary aim in this task was the offering of the possibility to the whole body of the Archdiocese of an orderly ascension to new steps, so that when the proper time comes and the adjustment to the new conditions is successfully achieved, the Mother Church will proceed to offer other possible changes, if conditions at that time show that such changes are useful for a desirable further development and progress in Christ of the Holy Archdiocese of America.”

The bottom line on all of these details is that the drafts of the current Charter were the most widely circulated and discussed in the history of the Church in America. More input from clergy and laity was provided on this document than perhaps any other document in the history of the Archdiocese. In contrast, the 1977 Charter, was never really discussed at a Clergy-Laity Congress prior to its granting. Instead, it was handled entirely by a small committee of the Archdiocesan Council.

Disinformation

With this background in mind, I would like to comment on some “disinformation” which has been circulated to our faithful. A few of the key areas of disinformation are as follows:

1. ***Who prepared the Charter?*** It is claimed that the Charter was drafted by the Patriarchate without input from the clergy or the laity of the Archdiocese. As demonstrated above in great detail, nothing could be further from the truth.
2. ***Who has the Right to Issue a Charter?*** The cornerstone of the “disinformation” is that the 1977 Charter mandates that a new Charter must be approved by the Clergy-Laity Congress. First, the Clergy-Laity Congress overwhelmingly recommended to the Patriarchate that it grant the new 2003 Charter. Second, the 1977 Charter does *not* state that the 1977 Charter may only be amended by a Clergy-Laity Congress. In fact, the 1977 Charter confirms that the *only* body that can grant a new Charter is the Patriarchate. Thus, there has been no violation of the 1977 Charter. Finally, and most importantly, every Charter in the history of our Archdiocese has been granted by the Patriarchate. It is simply not true that past Charters have been enacted by the Clergy-Laity Congress. The archives at the Archdiocese clearly confirm this fact.

The above facts should make it abundantly clear that there is no substance to any of the “disinformation”. In the final analysis, however, no amount of distortion can impair the salvific mission of our Church.

Additional Resources

I would remind you that the clearest and best evidence of what the Charter says is the 2003 Charter itself and it is worth reading. The full text of the 2003 Charter is available in Greek and English on the Archdiocese website: www.goarch.org. Moreover, in the same web site you will find additional excellent explanatory materials which will provide you with an accurate and direct understanding of the issues. Such materials include: a) a letter from the Ecumenical Patriarch, which accompanied the new Charter; b) a letter from Archbishop Demetrios. The Archbishop points out that the Charter enhances our participation in the process of the election of the Archbishop and the Metropolitans and affirms the cooperation between the clergy and laity within the Church; c) a document entitled “Questions and Answers on the New Charter” which provides answers to many of the same issues now raised by the disinformation which has been circulated ; d) several other documents about the Charter that have been written by members of the hierarchy, priests, laity and clergy.

The Broad Horizons of the Archdiocese

Discussions about the charter and regulations are but a small part of the ongoing life of the Church. The preponderant efforts of our Archdiocese are aimed at offering a broad range of ministries. We want you to be well informed about the exciting developments that are taking place within our Church. Our website www.goarch.org which has received high praises for its content, look, and ease of use, is a major source of information on nearly every aspect of the work and life of our Archdiocese. Over 64,000 users per week visit our website from all over the world, many of whom are people wanting to learn more about our faith and our Church. We have dedicated links for religious education, interfaith marriages, missions and evangelism, chat rooms for young and old, information on Church history, an on line chapel which includes real time services, and news about Church activities. It should be no surprised that our web site was voted the “most spiritual” of all denominational web sites. We also have an e-mail service (which is free) to which each of you can subscribe and receive weekly information on what is occurring at the Archdiocese. I encourage each of you to register for this terrific service. It should be clear that the Archdiocese website plays a very broad role in building connections to

the faithful, in helping everyone expand their horizons, in assisting all of us “build communities of faith and love”. However there is a much more and exciting ministry in the real life and function of our Church, a reality that no website would ever be able to fully report.

We look forward to seeing many of you at the Clergy Laity Congress where we can all join hands in this God ordained task. Thank you in advance for your continued support of your local Parish, your Metropolis and your Archdiocese. Your support is a critical component of our collective effort to safeguard our timeless faith in this country for our children and all of those non-Orthodox individuals searching for the true faith of the apostles.

Yours in Christ,



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