

Romania and, for a time, even Greece. Since the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has supported the restoration of Orthodox Churches that had been suppressed, for example, the Orthodox Church of Albania.



## THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE TODAY

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is actively engaged in diverse ecclesiastical activities and ministries. On a day-to-day basis, it oversees the pastoral life of the Orthodox community in Turkey and those communities under its jurisdiction globally. It also maintains communication with the leadership of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches. For example, since the 1960's the Ecumenical Patriarchate has chaired a series of pan-Orthodox meetings to address contemporary challenges facing all Orthodox Churches.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is a dynamic leader in ecumenical dialogue and the reconciliation of Christians. Since the 1960's, it has been in dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, etc.), working to heal the divisions of the oldest Christian division, which dates from 451. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has fully participated in the work of the World Council of Churches from its inception, as well as in local ecumenical bodies instituting and chairing bilateral theological dialogues with non-Orthodox Christians and also with other monotheistic faiths.



The Patriarchal Cathedral of Saint George at the Phanar

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has visited Muslim nations, previously never visited by Christian heads of Churches, advocating religious tolerance, freedom, and peace among all religions. Moreover, his pioneering initiatives for the preservation of the natural environment have earned him the title "Green Patriarch." He organized five environmental seminars in co-sponsorship with His Royal Highness Prince Philip (1994-1998). He also established the Religious and Scientific Committee, which has organized seven international, interfaith and interdisciplinary seaborne symposia to date: Patmos and the Mediterranean (1995), the Black Sea (1997), the Danube River (1999), the Adriatic Sea (2002), the Baltic Sea (2003), the Amazon River (2006), and the Mississippi River and Gulf Coast (2009).



His All Holiness Bartholomew  
Archbishop of Constantinople and  
Ecumenical Patriarch

## THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

For more information and resources visit:

The official website of The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople: [www.ec-patr.org](http://www.ec-patr.org)

Additional articles on the website of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese: [www.goarch.org/ourfaith](http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith)

Website for the 2009 Patriarchal Visit to the United States: [www.usvisit2009.org](http://www.usvisit2009.org)

Website for the Religion, Science, and Environment Symposium *Restoring the Balance: The Great Mississippi River*: [www.rsesymposia.org](http://www.rsesymposia.org)

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GREEK ORTHODOX  
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

8 East 79th Street, New York, NY 10075

Tel: (212) 570-3500 • Fax: (212) 570-3569  
E-mail: [archdiocese@goarch.org](mailto:archdiocese@goarch.org) • Web: [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org)

# The Ecumenical Patriarchate



*Faith & Life*  
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## The Ecumenical Patriarchate



The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul, Turkey) is the highest See and holiest center of the Orthodox Christian Church. Its history spans seventeen centuries, from the earliest days of Christianity, through the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, down to our present day. The Ecumenical Patriarchate constitutes the center of all the local Orthodox Churches, heading these not by administration but by virtue of its primacy in the ministry of Orthodox Christian unity and the coordination of the activity of the whole of the Orthodox Church.

The function of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as center par excellence of the entire Orthodox world emanates from its centuries-old ministry in the witness, protection, and outreach of the Orthodox Christian faith. The Ecumenical Patriarchate therefore possesses a trans-national and supra-regional character. From this lofty consciousness and responsibility for the people of Christ, regardless of race and language, were born the new regional Churches of the East, from the Caspian to the Baltic, and from the Balkans to Central Europe. This activity today extends to the Far East, the Americas, and Australia.

Orthodox Christians on all continents, which do not fall under the jurisdiction of the autocephalous (independent) or autonomous (semi-independent) Orthodox Churches, fall under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The autocephalous Churches are the ancient Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem (together with the Archdiocese of Mt. Sinai), the Patriarchates of Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Georgia, as well as the Churches of Cyprus,

Greece, Poland, Albania, and the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia. The Autonomous Churches include those of Finland and of Estonia. Consequently, the Orthodox Churches in Europe, North and South America, Australia, Asia, and Britain, which are not under the jurisdiction of the aforementioned autocephalous Churches, are within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It is a true sense of unity in diversity.



The Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople was the Cathedral of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for over one thousand years.

## HISTORY

The Church of Constantinople is traditionally regarded as being founded by St. Andrew, the “first-called” of the Apostles, who preached in the city of Byzantium in the first century of Christianity. Following the establishment of Constantinople (built on the site of Byzantium) as the new capital of the Roman Empire in AD 330, a series of ecclesiastical events elevated the status of the Bishop of New Rome (as Constantinople was also called) to its current position and privilege. The 3rd canon of the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople (381) conferred upon the bishop of this city second rank after the Bishop

of Rome. The 28th canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council held in Chalcedon (451) granted Constantinople equal ranking to Rome and special responsibilities throughout the rest of the world and expanded its jurisdiction to territories hitherto unclaimed. The Great Schism of 1054—in fact the culmination of a gradual estrangement over many centuries—resulted in formal separation between the Churches of the East and the West, leaving Constantinople first in honor and jurisdiction in the Orthodox world.

As a title, the phrase “Ecumenical Patriarch” dates from the sixth century and belongs exclusively to the Archbishop of Constantinople. The Ecumenical Patriarchate holds an honorary primacy among the autocephalous, or ecclesiastically independent, Churches. It enjoys the privilege of serving as “first among equals.” It is also known as the “Roman” Patriarchate (hence the Turkish phrase: Rum Patrikhanesi), recalling its historical source as the Church of New Rome.

When Constantinople became the capital of the Ottoman Empire in 1453, the Ecumenical Patriarch (at the time, Gennadius II) was recognized as Ethnarch of the Orthodox peoples, with increased religious and civil authority over the Eastern Patriarchates and the Balkan Churches, as well as farther afield.

From that time, the Ecumenical Patriarchate became a symbol of unity, rendering service and solidarity to the Eastern Churches. The Ecumenical Patriarchate was consulted for the resolution of disputes between the Churches. Frequently, patriarchs of other Churches would reside in Constantinople, which was the venue for meetings of the Holy Synod that was chaired by the Ecumenical Patriarch. With the rise of nation-states in the Balkans and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Patriarchate has overseen the development of the Orthodox Churches in those lands.



Synaxis of the Heads of the Orthodox Churches at the Phanar in October 2008

The Ecumenical Patriarchate also sponsored missionary growth through the centuries, the most notable of which was the conversion of the Kievan Rus in the tenth century and the most recent of which was the missionary work in Southeast Asia in the last century. This pastoral role and responsibility has earned the characterization of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as “the golden beacon of Orthodoxy, preserving the unwaning brilliance of Christianity.”

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is the voice for the long-suffering Orthodox Christian Church, which has survived some of the most severe religious persecutions the world has witnessed during the last century. Beginning with the twentieth century's first decades, entire Orthodox Christian populations throughout Southeastern Europe, Asia Minor, and Crete were extinguished. In addition, World War II brought the genocide of 700,000 Serbian Orthodox by the Nazis and their surrogates. Thousands of Orthodox Christians wearing blue armbands marked with a “P” (for “Pravoslavni” or “Orthodox”) were marched to death camps side by side with their Jewish neighbors. From the days of the Bolshevik revolution and after World War II, the Iron Curtain descended upon the Orthodox Church, which continued to be the target of a systematic campaign of repression, destruction and death that encompassed Russia, Albania, Bulgaria,