

# WE ARE LIVING IN HISTORIC TIMES!

*A Christian Renaissance Has Begun, Church History is Being Made, and You Can Have a Part In It*

## SYNAXIS OF THE PRIMATES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

This has been an important week in the history of Christianity. From January 21 to January 28, 2016, a Synaxis (Assembly) of the Primates of the Orthodox Church took place at the the Orthodox Center of the Oecumenical Patriarchate in Chambesy, Switzerland.

Attending the Synaxis were His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria and All Africa, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem and All Palestine, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Iliya II of All Georgia, His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania, His Holiness Patriarch Neofit of Bulgaria, His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus, His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania, and His Beatitude Metropolitan Rastislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, His Beatitude Metropolitan Sava of Warsaw and All Poland, and His Beatitude Archbishop Ienonymos II of Athens and All Greece were represented by official delegations of their Churches. His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople hailed the presence of His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufy of Kiev and Ukraine (Moscow Patriarchate), whom, as His Holiness noted, all Orthodox Churches recognize as the only canonical First Hierarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

## HOLY AND GREAT SYNOD OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Primates confirmed their decision to convene a Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church this year, and resolved to hold it in Greece at the Orthodox Academy of Crete in Chania, Greece, from June 16 to 27, 2016.

An official Communique issued by the Secretariat of the Sacred Synaxis of the Primates reported:

“The Primates of the Orthodox Churches convened to finalize the texts for the Holy and Great Council. In the framework of the Synaxis, on Sunday, 24th January, a Divine Liturgy was held at the Holy Stavropegic Church of St. Paul. Along with the Ecumenical Patriarch, who presided, Their Beatitudes and Heads of the delegations of the Orthodox Churches concelebrated the Liturgy, with the exception of the Head of the delegation of the Patriarchate of Antioch.

“During the Synaxis, whose sessions were held in the apostolic spirit of ‘speaking the truth in love’ (Eph. 4.15), in concord and understanding, the Primates affirmed their decision to convene the Holy and Great Council. The Council will be held at the Orthodox Academy of Crete from June 16th to 27th, 2016. To this end, the Primates humbly invoke the grace and blessing of the Holy Trinity and fervently invite the prayers of the fullness of the Church, clergy and laity, for the period leading to and the sessions of the Holy and Great Council.

“The items officially approved for referral to and adoption by the Holy and Great Council are: *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World, The Orthodox Diaspora, Autonomy and its Manner of Proclamation, The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments, The Significance of Fasting and its Application Today, and Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World.* By decision of the Primates, all approved documents will be published.

“The Primates also discussed and determined the establishment of a Pan-Orthodox Secretariat, the by-laws of the Council, the participation of non-Orthodox observers in the opening and closing sessions, and the budgetary costs related the Council.

“Moreover, the Primates expressed their support for the persecuted Christians of the Middle East and their ongoing concern for the abduction of the two Metropolitan, Paul Yazigi of the Patriarchate of Antioch and Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim of the Syriac Archdiocese.

“The proceedings of the Synaxis concluded on Wednesday evening, January 27th, 2016, with the closing address by its President, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.”

The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church scheduled to meet from June 16 to June 27, 2016 will be an historic meeting. A Pan-Orthodox Council has not been convened in over 1,000 years and preparations have been underway for over half a century now. The last Pan-Orthodox Council to meet was the Seventh Oecumenical Council in the year 787. In 2014, Orthodox Church leaders called for a Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church to convene in 2016, but with a reservation “unless impeded by unforeseen circumstances.”

The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church will take place at the Orthodox Academy of Crete in Kolympari of Chania. The Synod will be presided over by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with the Primates and their delegations participating from all the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches. On the Sunday of Pentecost, June 19th, a Panegyric Divine Liturgy will be celebrated by the Ecumenical Patriarch and concelebrated with the various Primates at the Cathedral Church of Saint Menas in Herakleion.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN RESURGENCE

Since the fall of communism and the end of atheist oppression a great revival and resurgence has taken place in the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church is growing rapidly throughout the world with some 300 million members worldwide. Because the Orthodox Church was shackled for more than 70 years under Soviet Communism, some people believe that the Orthodox Church does not evangelize, but nothing could be farther from the truth. With the shackles of oppression removed, the Orthodox Church is growing rapidly.

The Orthodox Church is experiencing explosive growth all around the world. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Orthodox Church has opened more than 26,000 churches; that is more than three churches a day, each and every day, for a quarter of a century, and there is no slowdown in sight. In addition, since 1991, the Russian Orthodox Church has established more than 800 new monastic communities.

The Russian Orthodox Church has gone from a marginalized and persecuted body of believers with only around 7,000 open churches in 1988, when it celebrated the Millennium of the Baptism of Russia, to a resurgent Church with more than 160,000,000 members world-wide in 2007, of whom 55,000,000 are outside of Russia.

This tremendous revival is happening throughout all of Eastern Europe, and evangelism is taking place on every continent on earth. All of this in about a quarter of a century. This is a miracle, and can only be the work of God.

## THE UNITED STATES

The percentage of growth of Orthodox Christianity in America was higher than any other major classification of Christianity mentioned by the Encyclopedia Britannica in 1995. According to a formal study by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America in 2010, membership in the Orthodox Church in the United States grew in the 75 years between 1936 and 2010 by 131%. For a shorter window of time, during the decade of 2000 to 2010, the total number of Orthodox communities in the United States grew by 15%.

The 2008 US Religious Landscape Survey showed that 23% of all Orthodox Christians in America today are converts. About one in four Orthodox Christians in America are converts, along with 30% of all clergy and 41% of all seminarians. In the city where I pastor there are nine Orthodox priests and six parishes. Of the nine priests, six are converts, and five of the six are former Anglicans.

## RESTORATION OF WESTERN ORTHODOXY

Another sign that we are living in historic times is the restoration of the Western Rite of the Orthodox Church in recent years. There are now Western Rite Orthodox communities within the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, and in Europe within the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox Patriarchates. Two of the great supporters of the

restoration of Western Orthodoxy were St. Tikhon of Moscow, the close friend of Anglican Bishop Charles Grafton of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and St. John the Wonderworker of San Francisco. St. John of San Francisco said, "Never, never, never let anyone tell you that, in order to be Orthodox, you must be Eastern. The West was fully Orthodox for a thousand years."

Today there are dozens of Western Rite congregations and nine monastic communities in the United States within the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and the Antiochian Archdiocese, and their numbers are growing. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia also has Western Rite congregations and monastic communities in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Italy, India, and by now probably elsewhere. Church history is certainly being made!

In recent years Anglicans made up the second largest group of converts to the Orthodox Church, but today they are the largest. The Orthodox Church is the natural home for orthodox Anglicans. At the time of the Great Schism in 1054, the Church in the British Isles remained Orthodox. The Norman Conquest of 1066, was a papal crusade to bring the English (Latin: Anglican) Church under the Roman See. The goal of the English Reformation was to restore the Faith and Order of what is commonly called the Undivided Church. When Anglicans enter the Orthodox Church they are not joining a new Church. They are simply completing the English Reformation, fulfilling the Vision Glorious of the Oxford Movement, and returning home to the Church from which their forefathers in the Faith were torn away by force of arms.

In his 2015 book, *Rock and Sand, An Orthodox Appraisal of the Protestant Reformers and Their Teachings*, Archpriest Josiah Trenham - a former minister of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and later of the Reformed Episcopal Church (REC) - writes, "It is my estimate that there is no heterodox body in America from which more Orthodox clergy have come than the Anglican Communion. The number of Orthodox priests in this country that were previously Episcopal clergy is certainly in the hundreds" (p. 193).

At Holy Cross parish we have just celebrated our third Christmas in the Orthodox Church. We were received into the Western Rite of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) from the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) more than two and a half years ago in June of 2013. As a former Anglican priest I continue to be pleasantly surprised at all of the former Anglicans within the Orthodox Church. They are found everywhere, both in the Eastern and Western Rites. When I am asked by a continuing Anglican, "Where have all of the orthodox Anglicans gone?" My answer is always, "Home to the Orthodox Church!" As I have already mentioned, in the city where I pastor there are nine Orthodox priests, and five of them are former Anglicans.

In our own jurisdiction, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, we have three bishops who are converts: two from Anglicanism and one from Roman Catholicism. The Dean of our Western Rite Communities is Fr. Mark Rowe, a former Anglican Canon. There are many former Anglicans in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in

both the Eastern and Western Rites, and the same can be said of the other Orthodox jurisdictions.

There are at least two orthodox Anglican bishops who have entered the Western Rite of the Orthodox Church with their congregations, and I have served with both of them in the past. Former Anglican Province of Christ the King (APCK) bishop, Robert Waggener, and his parish in Lynchburg, Virginia were received into the Western Rite of the Orthodox Church from the Diocese of the Holy Cross; and, most recently, Bishop Sam Seamans and his parish in Mountain Home, Arkansas were received into the Western Rite of the Orthodox Church from the Diocese of Mid-America of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). Fr. Sam has written me with the good news of his reception, and in a written statement from his parish of St. Thomas in Mountain Home, Arkansas he said, "I am no longer a bishop or priest in the Anglican Church in North America or the Reformed Episcopal Church. My parish voted unanimously today to 'terminate our membership, effective immediately, in the Anglican Church in North America and the Reformed Episcopal Church, and to join the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America', and we will be a part of the Western Rite."

For more information on the Western Rite of the Orthodox Church please visit our new and outstanding website: <http://rocor-wr.org/>

For more information on Holy Cross parish in Omaha, Nebraska please visit our website at [www.holycrossomaha.net](http://www.holycrossomaha.net) .

You will also want to visit the Holy Cross Parish Facebook page. Check back often as our Facebook site is regularly updated:  
<https://www.facebook.com/Holy-Cross-Parish-362370402748/>

I can be reached by phone at the church office at (402) 573-6558, or by email at: [venovak@hughes.net](mailto:venovak@hughes.net)

## AN INVITATION

In the 20th century the Orthodox Church had more martyrs than in the first three centuries of Christianity combined, yet the Church would not abandon or even compromise the Faith. Today, communism has gone the way of the dinosaur, while the Orthodox Church is experiencing an unimaginable revival and resurgence. Orthodox Christians in the Middle East are now being martyred in large numbers, but their faithful witness will one day lead to a revival and resurgence there as well. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

The Orthodox Church is the oldest Church in the world. It is the original Church. There can be no dispute about that. It is a fact of history. Our Lord has promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church that He built. We can take Him at His word on that, and we can see that history has confirmed His promise. The Orthodox Church

is not a mere denomination or a branch, it is the “One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church” of the Creeds.

We are living in historic times. A Christian Renaissance has begun. The Great Commission is being advanced around the globe and Western Orthodoxy is being restored. Church history is being made, and you can have a part in this tremendous move of the Holy Spirit. Everyone is invited. Come and see. The Orthodox Church welcomes you!