

To the Clergy and the Faithful of the Holy Orthodox Church in North America

*June 6/19, 2011
Sunday of All Saints*

Beloved Orthodox Christians,

Over the past 14 years, ever since the Orthodox Church in Georgia was given shelter under the omophorion of the hierarchs of the Holy Orthodox Church in North America, we have never found it necessary to address our fellow Christians in America with a letter. However, the sad developments that have occurred in our Church during the last months, have compelled us to do so now.

Recently, two hierarchs and several priests at the head of their parishes have left our Church. We, the clergy and the faithful of the Church in Georgia, wish to state publicly that we condemn this action and consider it to be nothing less than a schism.

It is clear to us that this lamentable separation was motivated neither by zeal for the Faith nor by fervour for the Holy Canons. Rather, the reasons for the departure betray a human element: personal disaffection and ambition, as well as a real lack of theological maturity and ecclesiastical responsibility. We have yet to hear from those who have left us (either from the hierarchs that contest the canonical status of our Church or from the presbyters that imagine some non-existent "heresies") valid arguments that would give credibility to their accusations. Since, however, their claims cannot be substantiated, there is nothing that can justify their departure from the unity with their concelebrants. Furthermore, we grieve that by their separation, the aforementioned clergy have added yet another division to the catalogue of schisms that have plagued the Traditionalist Orthodox Churches around the world. This unacceptable practice of drifting from one jurisdiction to another (perpetuated yet again by this latest schism) deepens the existing pitiable divisions among the True Orthodox Christians, which in its turn is a scandal to our faithful and an obstacle to those who wish to join us.

Let no one entertain any doubts – our bishops in North America stand firmly on the Faith of the Fathers, without leaning either to the left or to the right. Their Confession is irreproachable and that is precisely why our Church has been, and remains, the beacon of Orthodoxy in the New World. Furthermore, our hierarchs derive their Episcopal ordinations from the Synod of Archbishop Auxentius of blessed memory, having been consecrated as

bishops for the Orthodox faithful in North America. Consequently, both the ordinations and the canonical status of our bishops are unquestionable and require neither sanction nor validation from anyone. The Faith and canonicity of our hierarchs being intact, what excuse, then, can anyone have for separating from them?

Therefore, we the clergy and the parishioners of the Church in Georgia wish to state publicly, that we remain faithful to our beloved hierarchs: Metropolitan Ephraim, Metropolitan Makarios and Bishop Demetrius who are rightly dividing the word of truth. We would like to call upon our brothers and sisters in North America to stand unwaveringly by our pastors in this time of need, just as our hierarchs have stood unwaveringly as our guides and guardians during all these years.

With love in our Saviour,

Presbyter Gelasi, Presbyter Zurab, Presbyter David, and the faithful of the parishes of the Dormition of the Theotokos in Tbilisi, St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in Kutaisi and St. George the Great-Martyr in Guria.