

"To be read from the pulpit [in the Metropolis of New Jersey] on Sunday, October 7, 2018, distributed through your parish email list serv, printed in your parish bulletin and posted on your parish website."

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Sisterhood, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools, Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

For the past seventeen centuries the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has embraced all the Orthodox faithful throughout the oikoumene with faith, love, care, and pastoral sensitivity as it has aimed to ensure peace, unity, and healing throughout the Orthodox world. One of the central roles of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, is safeguarding the unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Holy Orthodox Church with which he has been entrusted by the Grace of the Holy Spirit. This is a responsibility that he accepts willingly and most seriously since this role requires sincere love, unfettered faith, strong leadership and objectiveness in making decisions. The right decision is rarely the easy decision and this holds true for the current ecclesiastical situation in Ukraine.

Since the 10th century, a vibrant Orthodox community in what is known as present day Ukraine existed and the people of this area were known as the Kievan Rus'. The Orthodox Kievan Rus', with their ecclesiastical center being the Metropolis of Kiev, was and remains under the canonical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. This Metropolis had been the ecclesiastical center of the local Ukrainian Church for several centuries and, even with the establishment of the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1589, the Metropolis of Kiev remained under the canonical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Due to exigent historical circumstances, in 1686 the Ecumenical Patriarchate granted the Patriarch of Moscow the ability to ordain the Metropolitan of Kiev providing he had the canonical permission of the Ecumenical Patriarch. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, however, would retain the right to elect the Metropolitan of Kiev who would also serve as Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarch, and who would commemorate the Ecumenical Patriarch as "among the first" at the celebration of every Divine Liturgy and other Sacraments. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has never ceded jurisdictional authority of the Metropolis of Kiev and present day Ukraine to the Patriarchate of Moscow. With geopolitical changes over the last century, distrust and disunity plagued the ranks of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine to the extent that, by the mid 1990's, there were three groups of Orthodox Christians; one group being a part of the Patriarchate of Moscow, headed by Metropolitan Onoufrios, and the other two independents (the Ukrainian schismatic "patriarchate" under Filaret, and the "autocephalous church" under Makarios). This division persists and, whereas the Ecumenical Patriarchate has prayed unceasingly that the ecclesiastical powers in Ukraine would resolve this issue internally, it has become apparent that the intervention of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as both the Mother Church of the Ukrainian Orthodox and as the First Among Equals who safeguards Orthodox unity, is essential. It is crucial to know and comprehend this brief history of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine to understand today's situation especially since many faithful in the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey have been inquiring about the issue at hand, and also since there is an effort by some ecclesiastical presences in this country to misinform the Orthodox faithful concerning history and canonical correctness.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate desire to heal this division within the Church so that the sheep who had been lost can return to the ninety-nine, and so that our Lord may "gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad" (Jn. 11:52). This decision of His All-Holiness and the Holy and Sacred Synod endeavoring to correct the uncanonical situation is not being taken because it is the easy option, but because it is the difficult and necessary solution. We must acknowledge and understand that these decisions are being made in the spirit of healing, love, peace, canonical correctness in order to safeguard the unity of the ecclesial body, a challenge and responsibility entrusted to the Mother Church of Constantinople.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate my beloved faithful will grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. As stated in the words of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "It is her right to receive the status of autocephaly and...it is the right, and indeed the exclusive right of our Ecumenical Patriarchate, to grant the autocephaly just as it was granted to all the newer Orthodox Churches, beginning with Russia in the 16th century, to the Church of Czech and Slovakia in 1998." The Ukrainian people, all children of the Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, those within the fold and those who have over the decades have fallen out of it, have expressed the desire to end this division with their brothers by repeatedly petitioning for the Ecumenical Patriarchate to take the necessary steps, which would end the ecclesiastical colonialism which had been imposed on them. How could we say no to ending this or any division in the Body of Christ and restoring its unity? Our Lord is not the Lord of division, but the God of unity. He is the Lord of love. He is the Prince of peace. He is the God of mercy.

Let us continue to pray for and with our spiritual Leader and Father, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who for the past twenty seven years as our Ecumenical Patriarch, has and continues to do that which is right by seeking and promoting unity and peace throughout the Orthodox world. Let us pray for the Members of the Holy and Sacred Synod, one of whom I am, as we continue deliberating these pastorally sensitive issues with great care and love, and above all, faith in our Triune Lord and God. And let us pray for all the people of Ukraine who seek peace and unity in the faith, so that they all "may be one". Further, let us pray for those who for reasons, known to them and the rest of the world, are being openly defiant. May they too see with the eyes of their soul, come to the knowledge of and acknowledge the truth, by embracing the decisions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and His All Holiness, based of course on the centuries old historic facts and Patriarchal documents which exist. Finally, let us reiterate the prayer heard at the Divine Liturgy, "O Lord, our God...unite them to Your Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church and number them together among your elect flock."

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

† EVANGELOS Metropolitan of New Jersey