

From the 19th National Church Assembly (Sabor) of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA and Canada

The triennial National Church Assembly (Sabor) of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the United States and Canada gathered clergy and lay delegates of our many congregations around their diocesan hierarchs at St. Lazarus Cathedral in Detroit, Michigan August 9-11, 2006. The Assembly addressed questions of common concern with the aim of focusing, facilitating and strengthening the life and mission of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North America. We commit ourselves to joyfully witnessing to our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The Assembly sends greetings to His Holiness Serbian Patriarch Pavle and the entire episcopate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and expresses our continued love and devotion to our Mother, the Holy Serbian Orthodox Church, of which we are an integral part.

The Assembly also greets and thanks the Federations of Circles of Serbian Sisters and the local kolos, the Serb National Federation and its local lodges, the Serbian Singing Federation and the parish Singing Societies, and all national, educational and cultural organizations which support the work of our Holy Church and its parishes. May we all continue to work for the glory of God and the upbuilding of His Holy Church!

The Assembly is mindful of the continuing tragic plight of hundreds of thousands of Serbian refugees who have been driven from their homes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Metohija, and Serbian Krajina by various forms of discrimination. The Serbian Orthodox Church in the United States and Canada

pledges to continue to provide aid and assistance to our displaced brothers and sisters, both those remaining in the former Yugoslavia and those who have found a new home here in North America. We call for true protection of the inhabitants on all territories of the former Yugoslavia, particularly for the ghettoized Serbian remnant in Kosovo and Metohija. We call for the peaceful and safe return of refugees to their ancestral homes. As an independent Kosovo would be a reward for ongoing terrorism, we insist that Kosovo and Metohija, the birthplace and cradle of the Serbian nation and culture, must remain an integral part of Serbia.

The Assembly gave careful attention to the continuing need to provide adequate resources for the education and spiritual and cultural development of our youth and adults alike. With this in mind, the Assembly continued its support for the various Standing Committees of the Central Church, which work to aid, coordinate and enhance the ongoing educational and developmental programs of the dioceses and parishes through providing resources, experience and expertise. The Assembly believes that support for this work is fundamental for the ongoing growth of spiritual life and faith in our dioceses and parishes.

The Assembly commends our Hierarchs for exercising their office as teachers and overseers of the Church of Christ by addressing the sin of financially supporting the Church through un-Christian methods rather than the God-pleasing exercise of Christian stewardship in serious and sacrificial giving. The use of gambling in the form of raffles, bingo, and even gaming machines is spiritually destructive and brings shame upon Christ's Church and upon the people of God who are called to support her. Our Hierarchs in Episcopal Council, supported by the Central Church Council, have acted with fatherly concern for the salvation of the flock entrusted to their care in admonishing the parishes of our dioceses to eliminate dependence on

these methods of funding, and we call on all congregations and diocesan faithful to heed their wise teaching as behooves all those who call themselves Orthodox Christians.

We will soon mark the fifteenth anniversary of “sacramental unity” of the Serbian Orthodox Church after nearly thirty years of discord and estrangement. While we thank God for this gift of unity in spirit, we are well aware that this unity remains incomplete until it bears fruit in full administrative unity as well. Brothers and sisters in the faith must follow our Lord Christ in mutual trust and love with true oneness in all things. It is our fervent hope and prayer that the recent approval of the new constitution will swiftly lead to a completion of the reunification of the Serbian Orthodox Church everywhere through the reestablishment of full administrative unity on the basis of Orthodox canonical order.

As we look forward to the complete reunification of the Serbian Orthodox Church, we also acknowledge the importance of greater cooperation and unity with our brother and sister Orthodox Christians of other jurisdictions, with whom we live as friends and neighbors in the oneness of Holy Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Church desperately needs to speak with one voice in the “cultural wars” which continue to be fought in America and throughout the world. We need to speak as one in defense of God’s gift of life in the struggle against the “culture of death” which seeks to champion abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, and the sacrifice of the unborn for the needs of the born as means to a “better quality of life.” We must live out in our own lives and advocate before the culture at large the traditional moral and spiritual values which constitute the “narrow path” of salvation offered to us by our Lord as the Orthodox way. We must work together more effectively in the areas of humanitarian aid and missionary outreach, as exemplified by the fine

inter-Orthodox work of the International Orthodox Christian Charities and the Orthodox Christian Mission Center. While cherishing our respective cultural heritages, we must work and witness together to bring Orthodox Christianity to these nations and these cultures in which we live and work.

The Assembly is keenly aware of the hostilities in the Middle East, which touch not only the inhabitants of that area but other countries with military involvement in the area, including the United States. While being fully cognizant of the need and right of nations to protect themselves from attack, we also know as Christians that peace ultimately comes not from the force of arms but from mutual respect and tolerance. We have been particularly touched by the destruction of several Orthodox churches in the recent fighting. We call on all combatants to respect the principles of national sovereignty and security for all nations, as we have also called for the principle of national sovereignty to be respected in the case of Serbia and its rebellious province of Kosovo and Metohija.

We rejoice in observing the 150th anniversary of the birth of Nikola Tesla, the son of Serbian Orthodox priest, who brought much of the modern world to all humanity.

We rejoice seeing among us the many young graduates of the St. Sava School of Theology in Libertyville, who are faithfully and ably serving so many of our parishes. To date 55 graduates of the school have been ordained to serve as clergy in our Church. We encourage our faithful to support the work of the seminary.