



Orthodox Church in America  
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

1 October 2019

The Protection of our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary

№. 142

**CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF AUTOCEPHALY**

*Our Humility together with the Sacred Synod and all the venerable Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, who have signified their agreement in writing, having examined the said petition, in sincere love grant autocephaly to the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in America, that is, the right of a fully independent ordering of church life in accordance with the divine and sacred Canons and the ecclesiastical practices and customs of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church inherited from the Fathers ...*

1. *The Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in North America is confirmed and proclaimed an Autocephalous Church and named "The Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America";*
2. *By "autocephaly," which is confirmed in this decision, it is understood that the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America shall:*
  - a. *be independent and self-governing with the right of electing her own Primate and all her bishops, without confirmation or the right of veto over such elections on the part of any other church organization or representative of the Eastern Orthodox or any other confession;*
  - b. *firmly and inalterably preserve the divine dogmas, being guided in her life by the sacred Canons of the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church of Christ and governed in accordance with her own Statute as accepted, augmented or amended from time to time by her own highest legislative and executive organ;*
  - c. *maintain direct relations with all other Churches and confessions, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike;*
  - d. *enjoy all the authority, privileges and rights usually inherent in the term "autocephaly" in the canonical tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church, including the right of preparing and consecrating Holy Chrism.*

*(Excerpt from the Tomos of Autocephaly, April 10, 1970)*

To all Clergy, Monastics, and Laity of the Diocese of the Midwest; Glory to Jesus Christ!  
Glory Forever!

Our journey as an Autocephalous Church began with the above quoted words from the Tomos in April of 1970.

In this letter I want to inform you of a number of events our Diocese is planning to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our Autocephaly that was granted to the Orthodox Church in America.

First a series of monthly reflections from people in our Diocese will be posted on the Diocesan

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Website starting in January of 2020 and will continue to the end of the year. Archpriest Paul Wesche, who is collecting these reflections, has asked the writers to speak on the following themes:

1. Why was the autocephaly a good thing then? Why is it a good thing now?
2. What does the OCA's autocephaly mean for Orthodoxy in America, if not worldwide? How is the simple fact of the OCA's autocephaly a martyrdom of the Gospel to the American people and their cultures? What does it say to those seeking for the Truth in light of all that's happening in the world and in the Orthodox Church nationally, locally, and globally today?
3. How has the OCA changed in the last 50 years?
4. Is/are there any way/s that our stewardship of our autocephaly—in this diocese in particular—can be made more faithful to the original vision of the autocephaly?

I have made it clear that I want the tone of our celebration next year to be joyful yet both sober, and humble, and one of self-reflection. I am not interested in a triumphalist tone to what we do next year. So it is my hope that these monthly submissions will reflect that. In the last twenty years, do people who are new to the OCA even know the history of the autocephaly? Is it important to them? As one priest said as we started discussing our plans, “Does it really matter? Why do we need it?”

The second event is a Diocesan pilgrimage to Alaska from August 19<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The information for that has been published on our Diocesan Facebook and Website pages, as well as distributed to all the rectors, and priests-in-charge of our parishes for distribution. To access information on the trip go to: [http://domoca.org/news\\_190606\\_1.html](http://domoca.org/news_190606_1.html). I will not be traveling on this pilgrimage, as two weeks earlier I (along with Holy Synod), will be traveling to Alaska for the annual St. Herman's pilgrimage from August 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>, which will observe the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his canonization as the first Saint of the Orthodox Church in America. If anyone has any concerns or questions about the Midwest trip please direct them ASAP to Fr. Herman Kincaid at: [frherman.kincaid@gmail.com](mailto:frherman.kincaid@gmail.com).

Finally there will be a series of Deanery celebrations in our Diocese starting February of 2020 through November of 2020. We will begin Friday evening by praying the Akathist to the North American Saints, followed by a speaker to address the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Divine Liturgy will follow on Saturday morning. Refreshments will be served after events on Friday evening, and a meal following the Saturday morning liturgy. Here is a summary of details of these celebrations.

### **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Deanery celebrations of our Autocephaly** *(All dates are Friday/Saturday)*

1. Chicago Deanery: February 7 and 8, 2020 Speaker: Fr. Andrew Harrison at Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL and Ss. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, Burr Ridge, IL

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2. Michigan Deanery: April 24 and 25, 2020 Speaker: Fr. Alexander Garklavs at Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church, Livonia, MI and St. Mark Orthodox Church, Rochester, MI
3. Minneapolis Deanery: May 8 and 9, 2020 Speaker: Alex Liberovsky at St. Mary's Cathedral, Minneapolis, MINN
4. Cleveland Deanery: June 12 and 13, 2020 Speaker: Fr. Alexander Garklavs at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Parma, OH
5. Indianapolis Deanery: October 9 and 10, 2020 Speakers: Fr. Steven Kostoff, Fr. Joel Weir at Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit, Cincinnati, OH
6. Kansas City Deanery: November 6 and 7, 2020 Speaker: Fr. John Erickson at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Overland Park, KS. (*A concert of compositions by the late Fr. John Platko to be sung by the Holy Trinity choir Friday evening.*)

***All Services will begin at 7 pm on Friday, and 9:30 AM, (entrance of hierarch at 9 AM) on Saturday.***

*In speaking with a few deans, the thought emerged about including our youth somehow in the Friday evening agenda. While the speaker is giving his presentation followed by discussion, could there be a separate session involving our youth to focus on the theme of our autocephaly? This is merely a suggestion. So, those deaneries that might be willing to do this, and pull it off, I think it would be great! +Paul*

From my own perspective the autocephaly of the OCA is a gift that I am forever grateful for. I grew up as an infant in the Greek Orthodox Church up to my mid twenties. But longed to hear the services in my own native tongue, which is English and not Greek. I am grateful for the time I was in the Greek Orthodox Church. But I believe that the time had come to seek a Church where the focus was on a witness to those who are not Orthodox, or have no church, or have been estranged for a while from another church. Those people need to know there is a church for them that bears witness to the fullness of the Christian faith. When we define the Orthodox Faith in terms of a national, ethnic identity or boundary, I believe we misrepresent our witness as Orthodox Christians. I dream for the day that our churches in a given local area will gather around one bishop to be commemorated in their liturgies. The dream of the OCA autocephaly was and still is to give a spark that would result in greater things to come. May it be blessed.

Make every effort to participate in these Deanery services or take the trip to Alaska. Let us joyfully celebrate this event that I still believe is crucial to the eventual realization of an Autocephalous Church that involves all of the Orthodox Churches in America.

With love in Christ, the unworthy



**+PAUL**

Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest