



## The HOLY SYNOD of the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*

*Colossians 1:16-18*

August 16, 2017

To the Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

Recent tragic events in Charlottesville, Virginia, have highlighted the presence of un-Christian rhetoric and violent actions within our communities. At the same time, the response to these events by our civil leadership has unleashed a nationwide debate which has created a certain moral ambiguity, which in turn is fostering further division. Such a climate requires a clear response from the Church.

The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America joins people of faith and good will across the United States, Canada and Mexico in unequivocally, unreservedly and unambiguously rejecting words and actions which perpetrate, support or encourage hatred, violence, racism, white supremacy, white nationalism or neo-Nazism. As Orthodox Christians, we believe that every human being is a child of God, created in His image and likeness, and therefore we are all brothers and sisters whatever our race, nationality or creed.

At the same time, we also reject the climate of condemnation of the individuals carrying out these heinous activities. Indeed, Jesus rebuked his disciples when they suggested that he violently retaliate against his enemies. “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” (Luke 9:55-56). The Church offers to all—without exception—not condemnation but a path to forgiveness and peace in Christ.

As the Orthodox prayer of confession says: “O Lord God, the Salvation of Thy servants, gracious, bountiful and long-suffering, who forgives us concerning our evil deeds, and desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his way and live: Show Thy mercy upon Thy servants and grant unto them an image of repentance, forgiveness of sins, and deliverance, pardoning their every transgression, whether voluntary or involuntary...”

We reject hatred and violence, and as Orthodox Christians we are also committed to the ministry of reconciliation. We encourage our clergy and faithful to hold fast to the Christian message of healing, salvation and love offered by Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. At the same time, we exhort our clergy and faithful to reject any attempts by individuals or groups to claim for themselves the name of “Orthodox Christian” in order to promote racism, hatred, white supremacy, white nationalism or neo-Nazism. This is in keeping with the Holy Gospels, the decisions of the Holy Councils and the experience of the Saints.

We remind the faithful that the Orthodox Church in America does not restrict membership to those of a particular race or nationality and has historically welcomed all, going back to the Alaskan Mission which embraced the indigenous peoples of that land and continuing to this day in the multicultural and multi-ethnic context of North America.

Brothers and sisters, Saint Justin Martyr, writing at a time when Christians were persecuted in the second century, said, "We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for our enemies." May that same spirit be ours today as well.

With our paternal love and blessings,

The Most Blessed **TIKHON**, Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada

The Most Reverend **NATHANIEL**, Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate

The Most Reverend **NIKON**, Archbishop of Boston, New England and the Albanian Archdiocese

The Most Reverend **BENJAMIN**, Archbishop of San Francisco, and the Diocese of the West

The Most Reverend **ALEJO**, Archbishop of Mexico City and the Diocese of Mexico

The Most Reverend **MELCHISEDEK**, Archbishop of Pittsburgh and the Diocese of Western Pennsylvania

The Most Reverend **MARK**, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

The Most Reverend **IRÉNÉE**, Archbishop of Ottawa and the Archdiocese of Canada

The Most Reverend **MICHAEL**, Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

The Most Reverend **ALEXANDER**, Archbishop of Toledo, Dallas, the South and the Bulgarian Diocese

The Right Reverend **DAVID**, Bishop of Sitka and Alaska

The Right Reverend **PAUL**, Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest