

Speech before the 18th All-American Council

Archpriest Eric George Tosi

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann wrote, “It is impossible to speak about our situation in America unless we refer it to our normal and essential term of reference, the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church –has always been both the heart and the form of an Orthodox world. Only here in the West, and for the first time in the history of Orthodoxy, do we think of the Church in terms only of a religious institution such as diocese, parish, and so on. No one in organically Orthodox countries has ever thought of the Church as being distinct from the totality of life.” The Church is not thought of as distinct from the totality of life

So the work that we do at the Chancery, in fact the work we do as individuals, parishes, deaneries, dioceses, regardless of the level, the intensity, the focus, or the level of required expertise is the work of the whole Church. The Church, on a functional or organizational level cannot be thought of as separate entities but rather all being parts of the Body of Christ...in its totality. As such in this very short time I have before you, I will succinctly relate some of the work in the part of the Body of Christ that has been entrusted to me and over which I exercise stewardship. You can read a more full report in the Officers reports that was posted online and in the reports that are posted after each Metropolitan Council/Holy Synod meetings. I really do encourage everyone to read these as they do present a very accurate record of the varied work of the Church.

I would be remiss if I did not state outright that the last four years have been most interesting if not downright challenging. It has been a time of turmoil, transition and ultimately some stabilization. We have come together through one of the most difficult times in the short history of the Orthodox Church in America in which we, as a Church, experienced upheavals, mistrust,

misinformation, and a swirling round of intense work to address these issues. Yet we, as a Church, confronted them, one by one, patiently and responsibly and in as timely a manner as was possible due to the circumstances and the issues. The result was a level of stability and a growing peace in the Church. Not everything is perfect and certainly there is much to be done but one can sense a level of peace and stability settling into the work. Whatever the issues and whatever the decisions (some of which people agreed with and some of which people did not), they were our issues and our decisions as the Orthodox Church in America. We worked through and resolved our own issues and perhaps this is the critical sign of the maturing of our very young Church. These are our issues and we will resolve them.

Perhaps the reasons there may be some skepticism is that often there is little public insight into the background of these matters. It is difficult to impart sensitive material, discussions and even the circumstances of the events themselves. This is exacerbated by the ever growing world of communications in which some of what is reported is accurate and some is clearly not. What we as a Church must bring to this world is prayer, discernment and a healthy dose of skepticism that not everything that is reported is actually true and helpful. What we must do is to communicate with one another, talk to the clergy, talk to the hierarchs, talk with those who will be of a sober mind and clean heart. As Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) stated, “As Christians we are here to affirm the supreme value of direct sharing, of immediate encounter -not machine to machine, but person to person, face to face.” Our stability as a Church rests on that simple paradigm of “person to person, face to face.”

With that being said there are a host of persons that deserve the gratitude of the entire Church. They range, first and foremost, from the many volunteers from the clergy and laity who give of themselves and their time. In a period of reduced budgets, decreased personnel and increased responsibilities for a shrinking few, it is these people that the Church relies upon daily. Many of these persons' names will never be known but to a few but these volunteers all have the love of the Orthodox Church in their hearts. Likewise we need to thank the hierarchs, clergy, staff and administration who labor in the vineyard in various ways, all bringing to the Church their love and dedication to Her vision and mission. Our Church is not built on edifices of stone and mortar but on the faithful people to whom God has entrusted the Church, whether as pastors, rectors, teachers, laity and, yes, even the administrators who work on the behalf of all. We are humbled by them and the Church could not do what it does without them.

Among the first, deep gratitude must go to His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon whose wisdom, patient leadership, deep faith and inexorable good humor allows all of us who work with him to truly feel we are cared for, listened to and led. I have watched him over the past two years respond to some difficult situations, navigate challenging problems, and address some of the most critical areas of Church life that OCA has ever faced. He has done so with the highest integrity and humility. He is seen worldwide as a true leader and, what is perhaps most important to him, a true monk. I am extremely thankful to be working for and with him.

I also must thank my fellow Officers and co-workers, Archpriest John Jillions, Protopresbyter Leonid Kishkovsky, Melanie Ringa, the Chancery staff and the many, many people I come into contact with on a daily basis. The members of the Holy Synod with whom I speak to on almost a

daily basis, the Metropolitan Council with whom I work closely with, and all those who work for the Church. Much gratitude is extended to those whom I closely work with on a daily, if not hourly basis, Fr. John Matusiak, And. Joseph Matusiak, Barry Migyanko, Roman Ostash, Svetlana Raducevna, Jessica Fuhrman, Alex Liberovsky, Andrew Boyd and Ryan Platte who offer their time, their talent and their love for the Church. We all owe them far more than we can pay them. I must thank my ever-loving wife and children who patiently endure the missing hours I am away from them. I thank all of them for their patience, their friendship and their support. They are family and they are our family in the Church.

We should also remember the longtime workers in the vineyard who have reposed in the Lord since the last time we gathered. These included the ever memorable Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko who was for many of us, our teacher, our mentor, our cheerleader and our conscience. Many people will never know the invaluable assistance he gave to us during some of the most difficult times over the past years. I miss his encouragement as he always somehow knew when to call when I needed someone to talk to. We must also remember our long time employees Helen Detke and Greg Sulich who were our brother and sister in Christ in the Chancery. It is hard to not have them with us and it is hard not have them with us at an All-American Council. We still hear the echoes of their voice in the hallways of the Chancery. May their memory be eternal!

As stated in the job description, the Secretary of the Orthodox Church in America serves as the primary administrative manager of the OCA. His functions include maintaining the legal status of the OCA, supporting the Church's Councils and Synods and serving as team leader for

planning and logistics of All-American Councils. This also includes collecting, analyzing, summarizing, preserving, and serving as repository for the OCA's official records and materials, including its Archives, and providing reports and other information to the Holy Synod, Metropolitan Council, Legal, and the host of Boards, Commissions and Departments and Institutions of the Church. The Secretary also serves as the officer of the Church responsible for assuring regular ongoing communication between the Metropolitan and his staff and for communication among the members of the staff. The Secretary serves as a member of the Metropolitan Council.

Among his other duties are directing the administrative, housekeeping, estate management, and personal service functions of the OCA Central Administrative Offices. This comprises human resource management, including benefits administration and personnel investigations; correspondence and records management; support to boards and councils; information technology; travel arrangements; and facilities maintenance. The Secretary also establishes policies and procedures, supervises staff, and assures compliance with legal, regulatory and established best practice guidelines.

In addition, the Secretary's position has evolved to include managing all communications efforts of the Orthodox Church in America including the OCA website, official publications, official statements and serving as spokesman for the Church when directed. Included in this work, the Secretary is a primary member of the Crisis Management Team which addresses specific issues that arise when related to Church work that may involve public relations or responses on specific situations and incidents which affect the entire Church. This also includes coordination of efforts

between the Central Church and the Diocese on specific communication matters. There are a host of other additional duties which arise when delegated such as representing the OCA or the Metropolitan at events and meetings which have critical importance to the life of the OCA. Most of the details of this multifaceted and varied work can be found in the Secretary's report...but I must again reiterate, all of this is accomplished because I have teams of people around me.

This Council is focused on the theme of on expanding the mission. This must always be foremost in the mind and actions of all levels of the Church, including the position of Secretary. Without such focus, the Church loses its breath and dies. With it, the very lifeblood of the Church goes out into all the world. We must maintain our focus and do everything with that goal....how are we expanding the mission? At my recent doctoral defense, I made the case about how evangelism and mission may involve individual actions but they are really community activities. The questions posed back to me was that if everything is evangelism and mission then is nothing mission and evangelism? The answer is quite simple, everything is mission and evangelism in the Church. PERIOD. Everything we do must be that. Whether it is pastoring a parish, working in a hospital, worshipping in the Church, scrubbing the floors, cooking dinner...and even administering the Church. It is all mission and evangelism. Our challenge is to see that and work as such together as a Church, despite our difference and perhaps because of our differences. St. Tikhon commented in his first sermon to his flock in North America, "I ask for assistance and cooperation not only from the pastors, but also from my entire beloved flock. The Church of Christ is likened by the Holy Apostle Paul to a body, while a body has not one member, but many (1 Cor. 12:14). These have not one and the same function (Rom 12:4), but each its own: the eye its own, and the arm its own. Each member is necessary and cannot be without the other,

they all have concerns for each other, and there is no division in the body (1 Cor. 12:25-26). So you also, my brethren, are the body of Christ, and members in particular (v. 27). And unto every one of you is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Eph. 4:7), unto the perfecting of the saints, for a work of ministration, for the building up of the body of Christ (v. 12). And for this purpose continue with true love to grow into Him Whom belongs the whole body, which is built up of and joined through the supply of every joint, according to the working in the measure of each single part, receiving increase for the building up of itself in love (v. 15-16).” The work we do at the Chancery is precisely a reflection of what St. Tikhon charged the flock in North America.

The Chancery work is not just bureaucratic work but must be seen as a real pastoral calling. It involves people and issues that go beyond simple administrative oversight. It requires a real and true connection between the work of the central administration and the dioceses, parishes and the people. Otherwise, it would be empty work. Instead it connects the whole together. But it is much deeper than that, it is an evangelistic endeavor. Our dearly beloved and lately reposed Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko wrote, “In many Orthodox Church and church institutions, Christ and his gospel serve merely as a pretext for a variety of religious, ecclesiastical, social, and political ideas and activities that have little, if anything to do with the Lord’s mission in the world. These ideas and activities may be old-fashioned or modern, spiritualistic or secular, relativistic or sectarian, political or pietistic. They may be sophisticated or simplistic, intellectual or popular, refined or vulgar. But whatever or however they are not rooted in Jesus Christ. Nor are they guided and guarded by the gospel image and teaching of and about Jesus and God the Father; nor are they informed by the Holy Spirit who is always and everywhere the Spirit of God.” May we never fall into that trap but rather ensure that all our labors are done in the light of

Christ. Fr Hopko continues, “The Church, as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann has said, is not an organization with a gospel; it is a gospel with organizations; it is not an institution with mysteries; it is mystery with institutions, Church unity, in this perspective, is unity in the gospel of God and the mystery of Christ as revealed, known, proclaimed, celebrated, and witnessed in the formal ecclesiastical doctrines, sacramental structures, and liturgical rites of the Christian churches. In this perspective, Church unity has virtually nothing to do with theological systems, church politics, popular pieties, or holy people. It has only to do with the formal faith, order, and worship of the Christian churches *qua churches*. It is about what the churches of Christ, Christ’s one holy Church, believe, teach, pray and do.” May we always believe, teach, pray and do.