



*Orthodox Church in America*  
**DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST**

August 4, 2015  
Holy Seven Youths of Ephesus  
No. 131

**MY FIRST ALL AMERICAN COUNCIL AS A BISHOP**

Lots of information has already been shared on the positive nature of the most recent 18<sup>th</sup> All-American Council in Atlanta, to which I add my “Amen!” The Council was a unifying experience at which those gathered seemed to be of one mind. This is evidenced by the overwhelming votes in favor of the two major proposals: the proposal to approve the revised Statute of the OCA and the proportional giving proposal to support the work of the Central Administration. This unity was also manifested in the unanimous resolution to support those in Syria who have become refugees in the war there and who are now living in appalling conditions. After that resolution passed, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon gave his blessing to take a collection to help International Orthodox Christian Charities in its efforts to provide ongoing relief in the region. Almost \$12,000 was raised from the floor. I recently learned that total is now over \$13,000!

I think there are several reasons that the AAC proceeded as it did.

First, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon set the tone for the council with an address that was honest, and humble, challenging us to be faithful to our Apostolic Tradition in our desire to “expand the mission” here in America. He acknowledged that this journey is not always easy, and that we need to persevere when things are not working as we think they should. It affirmed for me the reality that God’s strength is revealed in the paradox of seeing our weaknesses and rejoicing in them, as Saint Paul states in 2 Corinthians 12. The overall tone of his message spread much good will.

**Many years! Your Beatitude**

The Council went as it did because of the faithful and hard work of the Statute Revision Commission. This group had been working on the revision since late 2013. The Commission’s last report, which summarized the rationale for the changes and cited examples, was excellent. I had planned to vote for the revised Statute before that report had been released. But after reading it, I was

convinced all the more that I was on solid ground in supporting it. Thank you, Your Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel, and the entire Commission, for your work that will better enable us to “expand the mission.”

The Council also went as it did because of our treasurer Melanie Ringa. She has done a wonderful job as our church treasurer since accepting this responsibility several years ago. In the limited time I have come to know Melanie, she has impressed me as an honest, ethical woman of integrity. She has labored hard to be honest, patient, and transparent in her financial reporting. The financial scandal in the first decade of this century is no longer an issue today. I believe the Central Administration is exercising good stewardship in managing its daily life. Melanie has been instrumental in helping to build up the trust that had been lost as a result of the previous financial scandal. The fruit of this renewed trust was seen in the outpouring of generosity at the collection for Syrian relief.

Finally, I would also like to say word about the Holy Synod of Bishops. I am still new and in the process of getting used to my new life as a bishop. This also means getting used to serving as a member of the Holy Synod. I now need to view my fellow brothers on the Synod from a different perspective than I had when I was a layperson, or priest. As His Grace, Bishop Alexander said on the day of my nomination to the episcopacy, “You (meaning me) are now one of them!” I see my fellow brothers as men who are intent on doing the right thing and who love the Church. Sometimes it is not clear as to how that should be done. I am still trying to figure out where I fit in. I sometimes speak more than I should. I still need to listen more than I speak for the next year, so that when I do speak, I can do so wisely, based on what I know and understand to be true. I would ask you to pray for the Holy Synod as we deal with the many challenging issues our OCA faces in the years to come. Pray for us to be faithful to our Tradition, but to do so ever mindful of the fact that we “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

In Christ’s love,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul  
Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest