

**Consultation on the Orthodox Diaspora:
an agreed statement**

SYNDESMOS OFFICIAL DOCUMENT

Consultation on the Orthodox Diaspora, Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical
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At the invitation of the Executive Committee of SYNDESMOS, the World Organization of Orthodox Youth Movements, a three-day consultation was held at the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Geneva, with the blessing of His All-Holiness Patriarch Athenagoras I. The participants in the consultation came from various jurisdictions, but had the same concern for divisions, the problems now existing in the "Orthodox diaspora", and especially with their relation to the new generation of Orthodox youth.

The meeting was held in an atmosphere of Christian love, mutual frankness and conducted with a spirit of common dedication to common Mother, the Holy Orthodox Church. We, the participants, were conscious that only this spirit could allow us to suggest possible solutions and we thank Almighty God for having enabled this spirit to prevail in our deliberations. We were able to agree on the following:

One of the most significant events in the history of the Orthodox Church in the 19th and 20th centuries has been the dispersion of vast numbers of Orthodox Christians in various parts of the world, where no organized Orthodox Church existed previously. The effect of this dispersion was twofold:

1. Orthodox Christians were confronted with a civilization, essentially different from their traditional backgrounds, that challenged the ways in which they were used to living and confessing their faith.
2. The Christian West was confronted with Orthodoxy in a new and direct way. Thus the Orthodox Church was placed in a new situation and faced with a new responsibility. Her children were in need of a new type of pastoral guidance, so that their Orthodox faith would not succumb to the powerful social and intellectual pressures of the new environment. At the same time, the Christian West, which finds itself, especially in the last years, in the midst of change and self-examination, was and is in need of an articulate and living Orthodox witness.

Meanwhile, the history of the diaspora, especially in the last fifty years, has offered the sad picture of nationalistic divisions, political struggles, and canonical disorder. The norms of Orthodox Church structure have been ignored in many ways through the creation of parallel jurisdictions on the same territory, through divisions stimulated by political stands adopted by various groups and also by the impossibility, created by historical circumstances, of working relationships between Churches in

various countries. We confess that the divine presence of the Holy Spirit, a continuous miracle expressing God's faithfulness to His Church, has alone been able to preserve Orthodoxy from disintegration in these difficult years.

However, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church requires our obedience and cooperation with the designs of God. We, therefore, considered together the ways in which the life of the Orthodox Church in the diaspora can be in full conformity with the Orthodox understanding and theology of the Church.

Thus, we respectfully suggest to the Mother Churches that they consider the situation of the Orthodox diaspora in the light of the new problems involved. We are happy to know that this important question is on the agenda of a future Pan-Orthodox Conference, according to the decision taken in Rhodes in 1961. The examination of the diaspora problem by such a conference should perhaps be preceded by special study at a consultation convoked for this purpose. Obviously, the examination of the issue by any consultation, or conference, would demand that representatives of the various ecclesiastical groups of the diaspora be represented and heard, according to modalities defined by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the other concerned Mother Churches or by a Pan-Orthodox Conference.

The ultimate goal of these consultations would be the elaboration of canonical structures, which would reflect on the one hand the fundamental demands of organic unity, realized locally, and on the other hand the unavoidable plurality of languages and traditions which do not contradict this fundamental unity. Such elaboration would certainly require a deep understanding of the Spirit and the theology of Canon Law and an awareness of the existence of the Catholic and Protestant Churches in the Western Hemisphere.

It is certain that all possible contacts between the Mother Churches concerned and the groups of the diaspora could be encouraged in as much as they would contribute to the final solution of the existing problems and will lead to good understanding of the issues involved. A real dialogue should be promoted.

In the meanwhile, the fundamental unity of the Orthodox communities should be affirmed, a unity reflecting recognition of both the existence and the Orthodoxy of the faith of the other.

Wherever and whenever it is canonically possible, common participation in the Sacraments should be cherished, and restored wherever it is broken. Wherever interjurisdictional episcopal conferences do exist, they should be supported and considered as a pattern to be followed in areas where such cooperation does not yet exist, and also as a step leading towards the establishment of canonical structures for the local Churches. Theological schools should be organized on a Pan-Orthodox basis and instruction adapted to the needs and common problems of all Orthodox in the diaspora.

The basic principle, in this respect, should be that in a given country or area, the various Orthodox jurisdictions should do in common all things except those which, for reasons of conscience, they have to do individually.

We also dare to make an earnest call to all pastors and faithful of Orthodox congregations, that everyone should realize his moral duty to refrain from any word and behaviour uncharitable towards those who are of different persuasions and to admit into their hearts only those thoughts that are inspired by unlimited love.

Special attention was devoted during the Consultation to problems of the laity and of youth. We noted with deep satisfaction that the laity of all jurisdictions is in fact accepted by all. We appeal to the hierarchy, the clergy and the laity itself to cherish this essential mystical, unbroken unity of the Orthodox people of God.

It was sorrowfully recognized that many young Orthodox are deeply frustrated by internal conflicts which divide the Church of the diaspora. Sometimes the youth lost interest in the life of the Church and leave the Orthodox community. Too often, those who want to join the Orthodox Church find an obstacle in these conflicts and divisions.

Bearing the above facts in mind, the importance of the work already performed by SYNDESMOS was recognized, and its intensification and extension was recommended. Being recognized by all Orthodox Churches as an organization of service to all Orthodox Youth, SYNDESMOS does have a particular responsibility for the Orthodox "diaspora". It should ascribe special attention to:

- i. inviting the young people of countries where organized Christian Youth Groups do not exist, to participate in its activities;
- ii. contacting those young people of the "diaspora", who were not yet approached by Orthodox Youth activities, and permitting them to share in the Pan-Orthodox experience;
- iii. creating, wherever possible, Orthodox international youth centers and, on local and regional levels, interjurisdictional centers as places of discussion and retreat;
- iv. organizing local or world youth conferences with participation of a wide representation of Orthodox youth, from various jurisdictions and countries;
- v. sponsoring special meetings of young leaders, where opportunity will be given to understand the common problems and responsibilities of the Orthodox in the diaspora, to find the best solutions and to devise common action;
- vi. using the Orthodox Foundation of Chambésy, graciously offered by the Ecumenical Patriarchate for such youth meetings and activities sponsored by SYNDESMOS, as a center for the coordination of Orthodox Youth work.

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