

Introduction to the 11th General Assembly report

11th General Assembly 'Unity and Mission', Crete, Greece. 14/08-19/08 1983

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The purpose of this account of the XI General Assembly of SYNDESMOS is not to verify, instruct, inform curiosity, or carry report. To those who were present none is needed: to those who were not most of what transpired, by reason of its spontaneous character, will forever remain the privilege of those who were.

The purpose, rather, is to bear witness to a continuing vision - a vision that has informed the life of the Orthodox Church since Her origin and to which the youth of the Orthodox Church gave expression as SYNDESMOS thirty years ago. It is the vision St. Paul left to the Ephesians: a vision of one hope, one faith, one Body, which would be maintained "in the unity of the Spirit in a bond (*syndesmos*) of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Such was, and remains, the vision and task of SYNDESMOS. It is an effort whose fruits stretch across thirty years of prophetic initiatives, creative theological contributions, missionary endeavours, and continuing fellowship among Orthodox "youth" of every age, on every continent. In these pages the reader will discover that the XI General Assembly heard no "new" things: yet we constantly marvelled at how the Spirit shaped each of our lives, those of our local Churches, those of our countries, in differing ways. The XI General Assembly created no "new" things: we sought as the papers here bear witness - only to build up the Body of Christ. The XI General Assembly did no "new" things: yet we imbued our continuing efforts with new urgency and renewed commitment.

What, then, can be said of the XI General Assembly? Only this: that for six days in August, in a small, dusty Greek village, the Church was present. Here were no "jurisdictions", no politics, no cultural chauvinisms, no compulsions, no compromises: here were only young Orthodox Christians called forth and gathered in love, sharing the Eucharist and their common faith. Here the "Babel" of languages, and cultures, of hopes and desires became "Pentecost" in the Church. Here our Hierarchy, first of all Metropolitan Irineos of Kastelli, as well as Metropolitan Irineos of Chania, Bishop Vassilios of Aristi, and Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, assisted by clergy from the Churches of Russia, Serbia, America, Cyprus, France, Greece, Finland, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, surrounded by hundreds of Orthodox young people from more than twenty-five countries lived together, prayed together, rejoiced together, worked together, discussed together, argued, reconciled, and again rejoiced together. In an Assembly on "Unity and Mission" - our theme for the last three years - we experienced unity: and from this unity SYNDESMOS has been sent forth in mission.

This was the XI General Assembly of SYNDESMOS, no more, no less. For those who sought more, or still seek more, they did not find it there, and they will not find it here. SYNDESMOS exists, as a fellowship of young Orthodox Christians to exist in and work for the Church; the Church we experience first and foremost as a Eucharistic Community.

There are certain things, however, that can and must be said in more detail about the XI General Assembly. As Bishop Kallistos points out in his Address, reprinted here: "Sin is monotonous... but there are always new ways of showing love for other people." His Grace's wise words and presence did much to determine the success of the XI General Assembly.

The Committee and Commission Reports reflect the ongoing life of SYNDESMOS. Within them are the ideas, suggestions, and practical proposals that will guide SYNDESMOS and its efforts for the next three years under the theme of "The Church: A Eucharistic Community". Special attention should be given to the Report of the Commission on Orthodox Unity, for this report summarizes in a clear way our goals for the forthcoming triennium.

Appended to this account of the XI General Assembly is the Report from the SYNDESMOS Communications Seminar, held August 10-13, at the Chrysopegi monastery near Athens. Few efforts undertaken by SYNDESMOS have such enormous potential for the building up of the Church as the one envisioned by this Seminar composed of leaders in Orthodox communications from around the world. Their recommendations and suggestions bear close reading.

The vitality of SYNDESMOS can also be seen in the addition of six new member movements, bringing our total number to forty-six Orthodox youth movements and theological schools from Alaska to Cyprus, Finland to Chile. More importantly the presence of over 100 young people in Camp Agape II, SYNDESMOS' annual international youth gathering, held this year together with the XI General Assembly, witnesses the continuing enthusiasm and need among Orthodox youth for international contacts and fellowship.

Following the Assembly most of the participants travelled together from Chania to Athens, where they were hosted at the Chrysopegi monastery by the youth of the Diocese of Pireaus. A smaller group then continued its journey northward as the "II SYNDESMOS Pilgrimage to Constantinople". There, in the Patriarchal Cathedral, following the Divine Liturgy, the SYNDESMOS pilgrims met and received the blessing of His Holiness Dimitrios I, the Ecumenical Patriarch. It was a fitting conclusion for the events of the XI General Assembly.

On behalf of SYNDESMOS, and of all the participants of the XI General Assembly and Camp Agape II, I have the singular pleasure of thanking many of those who helped our celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of SYNDESMOS to be so memorable. The list is long. First to the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Demetrios I, for his support and blessing for our events; and to all Orthodox Hierarchs throughout the world for their continuing support; to the staff of the Orthodox Academy of Crete - especially Dr. Alexander Papaderos, Mr. Alex Spengler and Mr. George Sklouvonas; to the staff of the Orthodox Metropolis of Kastelli who assisted us in every way; to Fr. Rauno Pietarinen, former General Secretary; to the Stewards of the XI General Assembly - Yiannis, Dmitiri, Nassi, Anna, Odette, Melia, Paivi, Maria, Jonathan, Michel, and Irene - without whom it would have been simply impossible; to Metropolitan Irineos of Chanla for his generosity and encouragement;

and last of all to Metropolitan Irineos of Kastelli who invited us, housed us, and shared with us all that he had. To all: Many Years!