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# PASTORAL LETTER OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH 2019

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**COMMUNION AND UNITY IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH**

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## PASTORAL LETTER OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH 2019

To the Clergy, Religious and Laity

Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,

Venerable Brothers and Sisters in Monastic and Religious Life,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

## INTRODUCTION

As one of the fruits of a thousand-year history of pursuits, joys, and sufferings of our Ukrainian people, its sons and daughters have dispersed throughout the world. The reasons for such resettlement are many. Some sought a better fate in foreign lands, others were forced to abandon their native land because of unbearable circumstances brought on by bloody wars and devastation. Many were forcibly

expelled, deported, exiled, or imprisoned in faraway lands. The life of our state today is marked by a new powerful wave of emigration due to which millions of sons and daughters of our nation are establishing new communities in countries we may have not even heard of.

In all these complex, and often even tragic circumstances, our Church always travelled together with her children. And her own sons and daughters have extended her presence to all the continents of the globe. In response to appeals from their bishops and with their mission mandate, priests, monks, and female religious followed our faithful around the entire world in order to bring them the Word of God and the grace of the Holy Spirit in the Holy Mysteries, bearing witness to the ministry of charity in action. Our faithful established their existence in new lands, preserving their spiritual patrimony and fostering their Christian culture. It was no accident that the first thing our settlers would do when they found themselves in a new place would be to build their own churches. In this, they bear witness to us today that a church, as the place where one encounters God, was and remains for our people the space where beats the heart of the Ukrainian community. The church is the centre around which the global Ukrainian community is gathered. Indeed, for many centuries the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church was the space of unity for our people, a unity that bonded together Ukrainians in Canada and the USA with their brothers in Latin America and Australia, in Western Europe, Kazakhstan and distant Siberia. It granted them, in the words of Patriarch Josyf, the possibility to "be themselves" far away on foreign soil, creating, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, a mystical and life-giving bond of unity with their roots in their native land and with Christian life flowing from the waters of the Dnipro. For the very reason that we kept our roots and did not become lost among other nations, we piqued their interest, enriching the culture and spirituality of the lands of our new settlement and inviting representatives of other nations to share in them. Thousands of sons and daughters of our Church who have no Ukrainian roots have come to love our Christian heritage and have rooted themselves to the tradition of Kyivan Christianity and the Baptism of Volodymyr. Thus the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church has gone beyond the boundaries of Ukraine, speaking in many languages to many nations, at the same time becoming a mother and teacher for people of different nationalities and cultures.

Today we offer our gratitude to God for "his inexpressible gift" (see 2 Cor 9:15) and we are aware that our Church is no longer a local reality, limited to a particular territory or pastoral context. Today she is at the same time global and particular, Ukrainian and multi-national. But this is what we have become, not because of geographic location, nor community organizations or human institutions, nor the diversity of our experience or the structure of our community. We have become who we are because of the internal unity of our Church. This is a unity that unites into one body "those who have been dispersed," bonding people of different origins, language, and culture. This is a unity that is only possible in the Church which is the Mystery of unity of the human race fulfilled by the power and action of the Holy Spirit.

An awareness of the importance of fostering this unity, a search for the best ways to affirm and strengthen it, was, in fact, the central theme of our Synod of Bishops, held in the Eternal City of Rome, September 1-10, 2019.

#### **THE CHURCH – A COMMUNITY OF PERSONS GATHERED FROM ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD BY OUR LORD HIMSELF**

The word for "Church" in Greek, *ekklesia*, carries the meaning of "calling," that is, "the community of those who are called." In the context of the books of the New Testament, first of all, we are talking about a community of the faithful, a community of those whom our Lord Himself is gathering from all the ends of the world (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 751-752). Thus, by its very nature, the ecclesial community is a unity and a communion of those who "belong to God."

In the community of the Church, the internal bond among her members is, by the power and action of the Holy Spirit, an icon of the unity of the Divine Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. The first community of Christ's disciples in Jerusalem is thus described in the Acts of the Apostles: "Now the full number of those who believed

were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common" (Acts 4:32).

Saint Gregory the Theologian says that the names of the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity are simply the names of relationships that exist between Them (see *Oration 29* or *Third Theological Oration*, 16). Indeed relationship is what unveils and reveals a person. Similarly, in the context of ecclesial communion, each Christian receives a name when through the Sacrament-Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation we enter into the community of the Church and become partakers of the Eucharistic table.

A person can only learn to love God and neighbour and create a unity with those whom they love, if they are led by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Only through such a bond of love (*vinculum caritatis*), as St. Augustine describes (*Tractatus in Ioannem*, VI, n. 13), can one comprehend his or her own identity, his or her belonging to or involvement in one or another church community, become capable of feeling the hurts and needs of their neighbour, be able to experience God's presence together with others and share a religious experience in common with others.

We often say that being a member of an Eastern Catholic Church is a *particular way of being a Christian*. The particular way of the Kyivan Church and her Christian spirit has specific expressions and levels, for example, her local autonomy, synodality, global character in unity-communion with the Successor to Peter the Apostle. The Holy Father and Pope of Rome is the prime servant and living heart of the unity and communion of the Universal Church. Because of this universal unity, because of the care of the Universal Pontiff for our Church, she is able to successfully develop her global character.

The culmination and most profound expression of the unity of the Church of Christ and of her nature is the Most Holy Eucharist. The Eucharistic bread is the visible sign and symbol of ecclesial unity. Already the holy apostle Paul wrote: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). We find similar words in the famous Eucharistic prayer from one of the earliest examples of ancient Christian writing, known as the *Didache*: "As this broken bread was once scattered on the mountains, and after it had been brought together became one, so may thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth unto thy kingdom; for thine is the glory, and the power, through Jesus Christ, for ever" (9,4).

The communion-unity of Christ's Church, which constitutes her very substance, finds expression in her pastoral ministry. Our witness to the Church is authentic when the priority of our ministry is to save souls, that is, to unite a person with God in the unity of the community of the children of God. Every action and deed of a member of the Church, which runs contrary to this goal, for example, seeking to separate oneself from the community, to focus solely on personal needs, the needs of our own parish, eparchy or country, any attempt to emphasize the superiority of one member over another—these will always be seen as something unchurchly, against her nature and incompatible with the life of the Church. The holy Apostle Paul emphasizes this: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many... The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you...' If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:13-27).

If the Apostle of the Nations were here today among us, he would ask us the same questions, although perhaps worded slightly differently. Reiterating his teaching that when one member suffers the entire body suffers, and when one member rejoices all members rejoice with it, he would probably ask us: "Can the Edmonton Eparchy say to the Donetsk Exarchate: 'I have no need of you!?' Can the Chernivtsi Eparchy say to the Curitiba Metropolia: 'Your problems don't concern me!?' Can the Melbourne Eparchy say to the Crimean Exarchate: 'I don't know you!?' We could ask ourselves many such questions, each according to their own conscience. However, the response to each of them should be the same—an emphatic "No!"

Today we can attest that when Ukraine is flowing in blood, when our best sons and daughters are offering up their lives for her, when millions of people are forced to abandon their own homes, when a great number of Ukrainians are held captive

and, as prisoners of conscience, suffer enemy imprisonment, when there are thousands of dead and tens of thousands of wounded, when virtually all of Ukrainian society is wounded by the war, our Church throughout the world also suffers with us. When our priority is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, the salvation and sanctification of human souls, and when, in the name of Divine Truth, we see the need to defend human dignity, the rights of Ukrainian labourers in countries across the globe, then our entire Mother Church, our bishops, clergy and laity are called to be a voice for those who are deprived of it. When called to meet the pastoral needs of our faithful in Australia or Great Britain, Poland or Canada, Argentina or Kazakhstan—our clergy and religious embark on an apostolic journey to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth.

### **CIRCLES OF COMMUNION IN THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH**

The basic and most important circle of communion, one that touches the life of every member of our Church, is experienced in one's own parish. All of the elements of a vibrant parish, as a community of communities, help each person see oneself as a member of God's family. Here each faithful member identifies himself or herself with our Church.

The *pastor* who builds up the parish community is a key servant-minister of church communion, assisted in this by all the faithful. We know well how much effort is needed on the part of all members of a parish community to build up its unity, and how easy it is to ruin it.

No parish can be a self-sufficient entity, closed off in its own comfort zone. The parish is the basic unit of the eparchial community, built up by and personally led by the local bishop. In the eparchy, the servant-minister of communion-unity is the ruling hierarch who, in turn, abides in full unity with the Head of his particular *sui iuris* Church, with the Supreme Pontiff, and with the entire college of Catholic bishops, who fulfil their apostolic ministry in all corners of the world. If an eparchy is divided and there is no relationship between the bishops and the clergy, such an eparchy must be viewed as deeply wounded. Therefore, the immediate and most important efforts of a bishop should be directed towards bringing together the eparchial community in all aspects of her life, that is: in deepening her spiritual life following the example of the Communion in Love in which the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity abide, and by following the example of the first Christian community of Christ's disciples in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:46-47; 4:32); by creating a common vision regarding the mission of the eparchy, by coordinating human, spiritual and material resources for this mission, and then by bringing it to life through the common efforts of clergy and lay faithful, together with their Pastor.

The Synodal structure of our Church is a unique space for building up the global unity of our particular Church. The Holy Father Pope Francis emphasized that "it is not enough to *have* a Synod, one must *be* a Synod!" A Synod implies churchwide action, which in our case has a global character. By participating in the Synod, each bishop represents not himself or his private opinions. He is the voice of his eparchial community. And returning from a session of the Synod each member is to convey the spirit of synodal decisions so that through his daily ministry each eparchy and every one of its members can become living participants of synodal action. The participation of the bishops in the work of the Synod is not limited to their presence. Acting synodally means embracing responsibility for the life of our Church in each eparchy and every exarchate, as well as for the life and spiritual care of those of our faithful who live in countries where we do not yet have established structures. Acting synodally means embracing the wounds and joys of our entire Church as a whole. *Being Synod* means "walking a common path" and remaining as one even when the bishops return home. It is a great gift from God that we have this possibility to travel together with our clergy, religious and laity, together in unity, in spite of the fact that we live in different parts of the world.

The Patriarchal Assembly-Sobor, which we call into session every five years, is another important churchwide space of communion for the entire church body. This is a particular moment of global listening, when eparchial communities can participate directly in the gathering together of our entire Church through duly elected delegates, who together with their pastors in a unique way and on their particular level fulfill their responsibility for the life of their Church in various corners

of the world. Although the resolutions of the Patriarchal Assembly have a consultative character, they represent a precious voice of the entire body of our Church.

The Head and Father of our particular Church is both symbol and servant of her global unity, communion, and development. We see this illustrated magnificently in the examples of service given by the Venerable Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky and Confessor of Faith Josyf Slippyj. The Head of the Church presides over the Synod of Bishop and its activity. It is he who convokes the Synod and Patriarchal Assemblies-Sobors. He watches over the development of each eparchy and serves to ensure that its needs are met. He proclaims synodal decisions and church laws, which thus acquire canonical force. At the same time he also is guarantor of the full and visible communion of our Church with the successor of St. Peter, and has the right to speak fully on her behalf. He is, in fact, a servant-minister of this unity-in-love of all parts of our Church. The Head of our Church is given the particular task of pastoral care over all the faithful of our Church, especially over those who reside outside its pastoral structures. In order that this care be provided in an adequate and timely fashion, he is called to promote the creation of suitable pastoral centers, and further, the creation of new ecclesial structures should this be required by the good of our faithful. He has particular care over the liturgical life of our Church and ensures uniformity in the celebration of Divine worship worldwide. But above all, he is called to be a faithful and sincere brother to his fellow bishops and a good spiritual father for the entire church community.

Beloved in Christ! Church unity is a living relationship of love with God and neighbour. It must constantly be guarded, built up. We must forever grow in it. Only by growing in the communion and unity of our Church can we come to know fully her identity, that particular *way of being Christian*. Each member of our Church, as well as each parish, eparchy, metropolia, will be able to "be ourselves," not assimilate in this globalized world, preserve our identity, be able to hand it down to a new generation and share it with other nations, when we will value, build and guard the internal unity of the global community of the UGCC.

The internal unity of the UGCC is synonymous with her strength and development, a necessary condition for her life and the fulfillment of her mission. In one of our popular hymns, we pray: "In unity is the strength of a people. God grant unity to us."

The crown of development and maturity of a particular Eastern Church is her patriarchal structure and dignity. Our Patriarchate is thus built on a foundation of development and assured strengthening of the internal unity of our Church at all levels. The lay patriarchal movement expressed this eloquently: "For the unity of Church and people!" A weakening of this unity, especially with the mother-Church in Ukraine, will inevitably bring on a weakening and fragmentation of our ecclesial community, the demise of her structures, the loss of her identity and her global character.

The Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ, is by its very nature "a mystery of unity," to which all humankind is called. With our particular gifts and our common ministry, all of us—clergy, religious and laity, are called to foster the development and strengthening of the communion-unity of our Church at all levels: from the local to the global, from the particular to the universal.

May our Lord help all of us, each in accordance with their vocation or gift of service in our Church, to be bearers and builders of her internal unity.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

On behalf of the Synod of  
Bishops of the Ukrainian  
Greek-Catholic Church

**+SVIATOSLAV**

Given in Rome,

At the Cathedral of Saint Sophia—Divine Wisdom,

On the day of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

And the Synaxis of the Venerable Fathers of the Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv,

The 10th of September in the Year of our Lord 2019

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