

THE ORTHODOX DIASPORA

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church concerned itself with the matter of the canonical organization of the Orthodox Diaspora. Therefore, the respective documents were discussed concerning the *Orthodox Diaspora* and the *Rules of Operation of Episcopal Assemblies* in the Diaspora, which were submitted by the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (Chambésy, 2009), and by the Synaxis of Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches (January 21-28, 2016), approving them with some minor amendments as follows:

1.

- a. It is affirmed that is the common will of all of the most holy Orthodox Churches that the problem of the Orthodox Diaspora be resolved as quickly as possible, and that it be organized in accordance with Orthodox ecclesiology, and the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church.
- b. Likewise, it is affirmed that during the present phase it is not possible, for historical and pastoral reasons, an immediate transition to the strictly canonical order of the Church on this issue, that is, the existence of only one bishop in the same place. Therefore, it has been decided to keep the Episcopal Assemblies instituted by the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference until the appropriate time arrives when all the conditions exist in order to apply the canonical exactness (*akribeia*).

2.

- a. The Council proposes that, for the transitional period while the canonical solution of the issue will be prepared, "Episcopal Assemblies" of all canonically recognized bishops in each region should be created (or founded) in each of the regions defined below. The bishops will continue to be subject to the same canonical jurisdictions to which they are subject today.
- b. These assemblies will consist of all the bishops in each region who are in canonical communion with all of the most holy Orthodox Churches, and will be chaired by the first among the hierarchs of the Church of Constantinople and, in the absence of thereof, in accordance with the order of the diptychs. These Assemblies will have an Executive Committee composed of the first hierarchs of the different jurisdictions that exist in the region.
- c. The work and the responsibility of these Episcopal Assemblies will be the concern for manifesting the unity of Orthodoxy, the development of common action of all the Orthodox of each region to address the pastoral needs of Orthodox living in the region, a common representation of all Orthodox vis-à-vis other faiths and the wider society in the region, the cultivation of theological scholarship and ecclesiastical education, etc. Decisions on these subjects will be taken by consensus of the Churches who are represented in the particular assembly.

3. The regions in which Episcopal Assemblies will be created in a first stage are defined as follows:

- i. Canada
- ii. United States of America
- iii. Latin America
- iv. Australia, New Zealand and Oceania
- v. Great Britain and Ireland
- vi. France
- vii. Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg
- viii. Austria
- ix. Italy and Malta
- x. Switzerland and Lichtenstein
- xi. Germany
- xii. Scandinavian countries (except Finland)
- xiii. Spain and Portugal

The bishops of the Diaspora, living in the Diaspora and possessing parishes in multiple regions, will be members of the Episcopal Assemblies of those regions.

The Episcopal Assemblies do not deprive the member bishops of their administrative and canonical competencies, nor do they restrict their rights in the Diaspora. The Episcopal Assemblies aim to form a common position of the Orthodox Church on various issues. In no way does this prevent member bishops from remaining responsible to their own Churches and expressing the views of their own Churches to the outside world.

The chairmen of the Episcopal Assemblies convene and preside at all joint meetings of the bishops of their region (liturgical, pastoral, administrative, etc.). As for matters of a more general concern that require, by the decision of the Assembly of Bishops, a pan-Orthodox approach, the Assembly's chairman refers it to the Ecumenical Patriarch for further pan-Orthodox actions in accordance with the established pan-Orthodox procedure.

The Orthodox Churches are bound to avoid actions that could hinder the above process for a canonical resolution of the issue of the Diaspora, such as the conferment of hierarchal titles that

already exist, and to do their utmost to facilitate the work of the Episcopal Assemblies and the restoration of normal canonical order in the Diaspora.

**RULES OF OPERATION
OF EPISCOPAL ASSEMBLIES
IN THE ORTHODOX DIASPORA**

Article 1.

1. All Orthodox Bishops of each region, from those regions defined by the The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, who are in canonical communion with all the local Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, form each Episcopal Assembly.
2. Those Orthodox Bishops who do not reside in the region, but who have pastoral ministry in parishes in the Region, are also members of the Episcopal Assembly.
3. Retired Bishops and Bishops visiting the Region, inasmuch as they meet the requirements of paragraph (1), may be invited to participate in the Assembly, but without voting rights.

Article 2.

The purpose of the Episcopal Assembly is to manifest the unity of the Orthodox Church, to promote collaboration between the churches in all areas of pastoral ministry, and to maintain, preserve and develop the interests of the communities that belong to the canonical Orthodox Bishops of the Region.

Article 3.

The Episcopal Assembly will have an Executive Committee composed of the Primate Bishops of each of the canonical Churches in the Region.

Article 4.

1. The Episcopal Assembly and its Executive Committee will have a Chairman, one or two Vice-Chairmen, a Secretary and a Treasurer, and any other positions of responsibility that the Assembly may designate.
2. The Chairman is ex officio the first among the Bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and, in the absence thereof, in the order of Diptychs. The Chairman of the Episcopal Assembly convenes the meetings thereof, directs its work and presides over its colleagues. Regarding issues that were discussed during the meeting of the Episcopal Assembly, and on which a unanimous decision was reached, the President (or another member of the Episcopal Assembly charged by him), presents the common position of the Orthodox Church in the Region to government, society and to other religious organizations.

3. The Vice-Chairmen are appointed ex officio from the Member Bishops of the Assemblies, from the next ranking Churches, in accordance with the order of the Diptychs of the Orthodox Churches. The Secretary, Treasurer and other positions of responsibility are chosen by the Assembly, and have the possibility not to originate from the ranks of the bishops.

Article 5.

1. The competencies of the Episcopal Assembly are:
 - a. to safeguard and contribute to the unity of the Orthodox Church of the Region in its theological, ecclesiological, canonical, spiritual, philanthropic, educational and missionary obligations.
 - b. The coordination and leadership of activities of common interest in areas of pastoral care, catechesis, liturgical life, religious publishing, mass media, religious education, etc.
 - c. Relations with the non-Orthodox Christians and members of other religions.
 - d. Anything that entails obligations of the Orthodox Church in Her relations with society and government.
 - e. The preparation of a plan to organize the Orthodox of the Region on a canonical basis.
2. The definition of the scope of these competencies should in no way interfere with the responsibility of each Bishop for his eparchial jurisdiction, or restrict the rights of his Church, including its relations with international agencies, governments, civil society, mass media, other legal undertakings, national and treaty organizations, as well as other religions.

For specific linguistic, educational and pastoral issues of a particular Church, the Episcopal Assembly may also collaborate with the ecclesiastical authority of the Church in question, so that the diversity of national traditions may secure the unity of Orthodoxy in the communion of faith and in the bond of love.

Article 6.

1. The Episcopal Assembly receives and records the election of Bishops of the Region, and their reference to the most holy autocephalous Orthodox Churches.
2. It examines and determines the canonical status of local communities in the Region that have no reference to the most holy autocephalous Orthodox Churches.
3. It must record every decision relating to clerics promulgated by their bishops, in order that this decision is applied among all the Orthodox Churches in the Region.

Article 7.

1. The Episcopal Assembly meets once a year, at the invitation of the Chairman. It may meet as often as it is deemed necessary by the Executive Committee, or at the written request that shows cause of one third of the members of the Assembly.
2. The Executive Committee meets once every three months and whenever necessary at the invitation of the Chairman or at the written request that shows cause of one third of its members.
3. The invitations to the Assembly, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, are to be sent two months in advance; and for the Executive Committee, one week in advance. They are to be accompanied by the agenda items and related documents.
4. The agenda must be approved at the first session of the Assembly, and should only be amended by a decision of the members present, by means of an absolute majority of the votes.

Article 8.

The quorum for the Executive Committee is two thirds of its members and for the Assembly, an absolute majority of members, including the Chairman.

Article 9.

The work of the Episcopal Assembly is conducted in accordance with the principles of the Orthodox conciliar tradition and is directed by its Chairman, who has the responsibility for supervising the implementation of its decisions.

Article 10.

1. The decisions of the Episcopal Assembly are taken by consensus.
2. In matters of more general concern which require, by the decision of the Assembly of Bishops, a Pan-Orthodox approach, the Assembly's chairman refers it to the Ecumenical Patriarch for further Pan-Orthodox actions.

Article 11.

1. Upon the decision of the Episcopal Assembly, it is possible to form from its members Committees for Mission as well as for Liturgical, Pastoral, Financial, Educational, Ecumenical and other issues, chaired by one of the Bishop-Members of the Assembly.
2. The members of these Committees, clergy or laity, are appointed by the Executive Committee. In addition, advisers and experts may be invited to participate in the Assembly or in the Executive Committee, without voting rights.

Article 12.

1. The Episcopal Assembly may establish its own Internal Regulations in order to supplement and adjust the above provisions, in accordance with the needs of the Region and in respect to the canon law of the Orthodox Church.
2. All legal and financial issues relating to the functioning of the Assembly are to be decided in the light of the civil laws of the countries of the Region, in which members of the Assembly exercise their jurisdiction.

Article 13.

The formation of a new Episcopal Assembly, the partition or abolition of an existing Episcopal Assembly, or the merger of two or more of these Assemblies, occurs following the decision of the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, at the request of a particular Church, or the request of the Chairman of a particular Episcopal Assembly to the Ecumenical Patriarch.