

Minutes of the ROCA Council of Bishops Meeting, December 1, 2017

Participants: Archbishop Andronik, Bishop Stefan, Bishop Andrei

The meeting began at 18:10 with the prayer, Heavenly King.

Bp. Stefan: I would propose that we first address secondary questions. Fr. John Trepachko has suggested three questions:

1. What is the official name of our Church?
2. A list of our parishes.
3. How should we commemorate the Hierarchs during services?

Resolved:

- 1. The official name of our Church is:
ROCA – Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, and in parentheses – Diaspora District of the Russian Orthodox Church.**
- 2. Assign Aleksey Klestov and Mark Kotlaroff to compile a list of all of the parishes of our Diaspora District.**
- 3. The following text should be used by clergy and deacons for commemoration during services (during the Great Entrance):**

For the Orthodox episcopate of the Russian Church and our lord the Most Reverend Andronik, Archbishop of Syracuse and St. Nicholas, and our lord the Right Reverend... (local bishop).

Bp. Stefan: Now about the episcopal candidacy of Archimandrite Ilya (Empulev). This is a difficult question as not all of the priests want Fr. Ilya. There may be a schism. They commemorate me but I never took them under my omophorion. I only permitted them to commemorate me. I have the following idea: as none of us have met him, what if we invite him to America for a month to serve here, and if he proves worthy, we can then consecrate him?

Bp. Andrei: If Fr. Ilya is consecrated, of which district will he be a bishop, the Diaspora or the Russian?

Bp. Stefan: They think it should be the Russian district.

Bp. Andrei: From the outset, it has been foundational in all our agreements that the Russian District must be administratively separate and the Diaspora District must be administratively separate. The Provisional Regulations of the Church Abroad were drawn up in accord with this principle and this is how we must function.

When my consecration was discussed, only Abp. Andronik and Bp. Stefan signed the document. Abp. Sofroniy participated in the consecration at our request, but he did not decide on the question of consecration.

I want to say that if we demand administrative independence for ourselves, how then can we deliberate on the consecration of bishops for Russia? We can express our opinion but no more. If we demand autonomy for ourselves, we cannot dictate to others elsewhere. The decision on the consecration must belong with the bishops in Russia, with whom we are in communion, Abp. Sofroniy and Bp. Iriney.

Bp. Stefan: So as a result Abp. Sofroniy and Bp. Iriney will be left to decide this together?

Bp. Andrei: It seems to me, yes. After all, the decision on my consecration was made by two Diaspora hierarchs, Abp. Andronik and Bp. Stefan.

Archbp. Andronik and Bp. Stefan: Yes, that is acceptable.

Bp. Stefan: We can still send them our opinion as a recommendation. But what should our recommendation be? Many are dissatisfied with Archimandrite Ilya.

Bp. Andrei: It seems to me that it is unnecessary for us to give a joint recommendation. Each bishop should offer an independent recommendation. When an episcopal candidacy is discussed, each bishop's opinion is requested. I also want to add that our recommendations will not be binding. We should not be offended if they do not heed our opinion. They are entitled to do as they will because they are autonomous.

Bp. Stefan: So, our decision is that each of us will write and send a separate recommendation? I will write that I have never spoken by telephone nor met Fr. Ilya and thus I cannot give a recommendation.

Bp. Andrei: It seems to me that we agree that the Church cannot exist without a bishop. So, let's assume that there are parishes and priests who want him as a bishop, and there are also those who do not want him. He could be consecrated to minister to those who want him. We do not need to force anyone to be under him. Suppose there is a group of ten priests; those who want Fr. Ilya as their bishop, let them be under him, while those who want to remain under you, Bp. Stefan, to commemorate you, let them keep the status quo.

Bp. Stefan: Well, then each parish will choose to whom they want to be subordinate, is that right?

Bp. Andrei: It should not be as it was under Metropolitan Agafangel, i.e. appoint a bishop whose candidacy is not acceptable to all and, as a result, some priests leave, while other priests are banned for not wanting to commemorate this bishop. This creates a schism and must be avoided. And if some petition for Fr. Ilya, if there are several priests who want to have him as their bishop, well, let him be their bishop. They may be only a few, but we are all very few at the moment. We should not force anyone to join his flock. This is my view.

Bp. Stefan: My question then is can those who commemorate me not remain with the others, but come under our Diaspora District of the Russian Church?

Bp. Andrei: Vladyka Stefan, here's the issue, you sent around an anonymous letter, whose author does not welcome Fr. Ilya's candidacy. What is his main argument? That Fr. Ilya is prepared to be in communion with Abp. Sofroniy and Bp. Iriney. But, forgive me, this is not an obstacle, this is the main condition for an episcopal candidate! How can we accept the candidacy of a person who is opposed to bishops with whom we are already in communion? This means creating a schism. Since we already have Bishops Sofroniy and Iriney with whom we are in communion, we can like or dislike them, that is our affair, but we are in communion with them and this we cannot renounce. Therefore, if we examine the candidacy of someone in Russia, the first condition must be that he is in communion and is ready to work with these hierarchs, Sofroniy and Iriney.

Because otherwise how will it be? We will have two districts which will not be in communion with each other?

Bp. Stefan: Well, that's also not permissible... Both will quarrel, one bishop with another, and then with the third. This is not permissible. I simply do not know what answer to give.

Bp. Andrei: They can remain in the same situation as they are in now. They commemorate you, so let them continue to do so.

Bp. Stefan: All right. That is how we will answer. We cannot meddle in their affairs. I will not either. Well, time will tell, maybe a new candidate will emerge.

Bp. Andrei: I would also like to add something about the candidacy of Fr. Ilya. In the documents that were sent around, there were many charges against Fr. Ilya, such as that he reveres Rasputin as a saint, that he said the war in Ukraine is a righteous war, and so on. We require of a candidate for bishop the confession of the Orthodox faith. That's clear. But it is necessary to distinguish between the doctrine of the Church and the realm of opinions. In the realm of opinions there must be freedom. We have no right to impose our opinions on others. One thinks Rasputin is a saint, another thinks he was a villain. This is entirely a matter of opinion. This cannot be a criterion for considering a candidate for bishop.

Bp. Stefan: We can say that it would be useful to postpone this for now. Each of us can send our opinion separately, while collectively we do not make a recommendation. In this way, there will be no schism.

Bp. Andrei: It seems to me that we still need to make it clear that the decision to consecrate should not be made by us, but by those in Russia.

Bp. Stefan: Well, yes.

Abp. Andronik: Just as they should not interfere in the affairs of our District, we should not interfere in their affairs.

Bp. Stefan: It seems that in this case we have no right to be either positive or negative towards him. It is just not our matter. We must be neutral.

Bp. Andrei: Yes. That is, we decline to give any sort of recommendation. I think that's better, it is more logical.

Bp. Stefan: Correct, I agree with that.

- 4. Resolved: On the question of candidacy for bishop of Fr. Ilya Empulev: Since the Diaspora District and the Russian District should be administratively independent of each other, the decision on consecrations in Russia must be made by our Russian hierarchs, Archbishop Sofroniy and Bishop Iriney.**

Abp. Andronik: Next year marks the centenary of the murder of the Royal Family. It would be appropriate to observe this date. We need to prepare in advance and perhaps we could hold a commemoration in Mountain View at the monastery. This is the monastery's patronal feast. We can prepare some lectures, a concert. And the following Sunday we could continue the commemoration at the Tolstoy Farm, in the St. Sergius church.

Bp. Andrei: On the day of the commemoration of the New Martyrs in 2018, we will celebrate the centenary of the persecution of the Russian Church.

- 5. Resolved: To solemnly commemorate the 100th anniversary of the slaying of the Royal Martyrs on July 4/17, 2018.**

Bp. Andrei: At our last meeting I raised a question about the parish in Brisbane. They left Archbishop Tikhon and are now under the omophorion of Bp. Stefan. I commemorate Bp. Stefan when I serve in the parish. We now have two parishes in Australia that are in communion. I believe that for the spiritual benefit of all, it would be better if our two parishes in Australia, in Melbourne and Brisbane, both belonged to the Australian Diocese. We did not make a decision on this issue at our last meeting.

Abp. Andronik: We were not previously in communion with Bp. Stefan. It is clear that now our bishop in Australia is Bp. Andrei. Bp. Stefan will be unable to visit Australia in any event. Naturally, this parish should be under Bp. Andrei. I am inclined that there should be one diocese under one bishop. The person must be

local, otherwise we will be doing that for which we have reproached Metropolitan Agafangel, i.e. administering a diocese across an ocean.

Bp. Stefan: We can inform the parish of this, who will do it?

Bp. Andrei: This should be a decree of the Council of Bishops.

Bp. Stefan: Well, yes.

6. Resolved: The parish in Brisbane is to be included in the Australian Diocese.

7. Resolved: The next Council of Bishops meeting will be held sometime after Easter 2018.

The council meeting ended at 19:15 with the chanting of the prayer: Meet it is.