



# The Holy and Great Council PENTECOST 2016 "He CALLED ALL TO UNITY"

## How does the Holy and Great Council impact the parish?

By Rev. Dr. Nicholas G. Louh, Parish Priest: St. John the Divine Greek Orthodox Parish, Jacksonville, FL

After decades of preparation and discussion, and now with the leadership of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the Holy and Great Council will at last take place on the island of Crete on the feast of Pentecost.

The Council is certainly an important global ecclesial event; however, many of us might be wondering how it will affect the lives of our local parishes. How will the council's decisions and statements be relevant to the everyday Orthodox believer?

As the hierarchs discuss various ecclesiastical matters, they will also address their impact on the lives of all Orthodox Christians. For example, the Council will not only promote fasting as a religious discipline, but as a means by which Orthodox Christians can show their love and care for their neighbor as they resist the selfish ways of the world.



His All-Holiness Bartholomew greets children. The Holy and Great Council will address how Orthodox Christians can be "a message of hope and love to a world that longs for the joy and life of the Gospel of Christ."

Photo: Nikolaos Manginas

Every day of our lives each of us is confronted with pressing social and moral issues such as marriage and family; war, discrimination and inequality; as well as bioethics and the environment. Think about how many of our families include members who are Roman Catholics and Protestants. Many of our loved ones are married to non-Orthodox Christians, which means that the discussion related to the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and other Christian Churches directly impacts our lives.

Finally, let us commit ourselves to prayer, to pray for our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and all the patriarchs and archbishops of the autocephalous Churches; let us pray for the hierarch-delegates, the advisors, and stewards, who will attend the Holy and Great Council. The voice of the Holy and Great Council will be heard throughout the world. I encourage each of you to follow closely via the web and social media.

We fervently ask the plenitude of the Church – clergy and laity, men and women, old and young – to pray for this unique and historical event. We especially ask that you implore God to strengthen and inspire the leaders of the Church to manifest their unity in a world afflicted by conflict and division.

May God bless the Holy and Great Council. And may His abundant grace be with all of you.

- His All-Holiness Bartholomew,  
Ecumenical Patriarch



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# The agenda of the Holy and Great Council

By Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis, Archdeacon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

Councils are a natural process of the Church. That means they are an ordinary (neither extraordinary nor exceptional) expression of the Church. Although some councils – especially the ecumenical councils – formulated and defined theological doctrine, most councils did not focus on theological disputes. Instead, they settled matters



The agenda of the Holy and Great Council has been set by a series of meetings, including the First Synaxis of Primates in 1992 in Istanbul. Photo: Archon Dimitrius Panagos

of internal governance and administration. This is why one of the most important results of a church council is always a set of rules and regulations – what are known as the canons – and not necessarily any doctrines that it defined.

Contrary to popular perception, bishops did not assemble in council primarily to define church doctrine or defend against heresy. They gathered together – “in one and the same place” – because councils are among the most essential and vital obligations of a bishop:

- for the governance of the church
- for the peace of the church
- and for the unity of the church.

The formulation of doctrine does not determine the importance of a council. In fact, many councils proposed dogmas and were rejected by the church.

While it may be seductive, even compulsive to look for heretics in today’s world, perhaps, instead, consideration should be given to “iconoclasts” and “idolaters” in areas of church life where Orthodox Christians ignore the gospel message of compassion toward other human beings created in the image of God, or where we place nationalistic,

imperialistic and sectarian interests above the way of the gospel.

Thus, in broad terms the agenda for this council includes: “The mission of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world,” “the Orthodox diaspora,” “autonomy,” “the sacrament of marriage,” “the significance of fasting,” and “relations with the rest of the Christian world.” To some, these topics may seem prosaic, even esoteric. However, they in fact deal with matters pertaining: 1) to the internal life of the church, 2) relations among the Orthodox Churches themselves, as well as 3) their role and responsibility of Orthodox Christianity in the contemporary world.

So the significance of the Holy and Great Council cannot be overstated. The fact that all the autocephalous Churches have agreed to meet and dialogue is itself an accomplishment of historic proportions. As long as the local, autocephalous Churches remain isolated from one another and the world, their mission and ministry are inevitably limited and limiting. Their bishops must be in dialogue with one another in order to perceive the world from other perspectives and respond to the needs of their faithful in a meaningful way, visibly demonstrating that the Holy Spirit lives and breathes today.

**As such, the agenda too provides a means for Orthodox Christians to respond with charity and generosity to God’s call for unity.**

## AGENDA

- The mission of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world
- Orthodox diaspora
- Autonomy
- Sacrament of marriage
- Significance of fasting
- Relations with the rest of the Christian world



Photo: Nikolaos Manginas



## Official channels of communications

The Holy and Great Council will be held June 16-27 in Crete. For the first time in 1200 years, the primates of all 14 Orthodox autocephalous (or self-governed) Churches, along with more than 300 bishops and others, will meet to pray and discuss issues of common concern. Keep up-to-date by visiting [www.orthodoxcouncil.org](http://www.orthodoxcouncil.org) for daily briefings, and by using the communication channels of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

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