

UKRAINIAN HIERARCHS ENCOUNTER 2011!



The annual Encounter of Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox Hierarchs of North America met in Clearwater, FL on 27-28 January 2011. The hierarchs have been gathering since 2001 to discuss the issues relevant to their respective dioceses and eparchies and to consider the steps that might be taken to draw the Churches closer together, setting an example for ecclesiastical life in Ukraine. Participating in this close knit brotherhood of Ukrainian hierarchs this year were: Metropolitan **Constantine** – Primate and Central Eparch UOC of USA, Metropolitan **Stefan** – Primate and Archbishop of Philadelphia Eparchy UCC in USA, Metropolitan **Lawrence** – Primate and Archbishop of Winnipeg UCC of Canada, Metropolitan **Yurij** – Primate of Winnipeg and All-Canada UOC of Canada, Archbishop **Antony** – Eastern Eparch UOC of USA, Bishop **Richard** – Bishop of Chicago Eparchy UCC in USA, **Stephen** – Bishop of Toronto Eparchy UCC in Canada, **Paul** – Bishop of Stamford Eparchy UCC in USA, **David** – Bishop of Edmonton Eparchy, UCC in Canada, **John** – Bishop of Parma Eparchy UCC in USA, **Kenneth** – Bishop of New Westminster Eparchy UCC in Canada, **Andriy** – Bishop of Saskatoon UOC of Canada, **Daniel** – Western Eparch UOC of USA and **Bryan** – Bishop of Saskatoon Eparchy UCC in Canada. Bishop **Ilarion** – Bishop of Edmonton UOC of Canada was unable to be present this year. Bishop Basil, Emeritus of Stamford Eparchy UCC in USA was a guest at the meetings.

The theme for this year's encounter was: "Possibilities on the Path to Unity – What We Hold in Common and Where We Differ". To broaden discussion on this topic, the hierarchs invited one priest from each Church to make presentations reflecting on this theme. Rev. Fr. Stephen Wojcichowsky, Director of the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies at the University of St. Paul in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada presented from the Ukrainian Catholic perspective. V. Rev. Dr. Jaroslav Buciora, Pastor of the Protection of the Mother of God Cathedral (Sobor) and Professor of Theology at St. Andrew College/Seminary, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada presented from the Ukrainian Orthodox perspective.

Fr. Stephen summarized some of the existing dialogues that have taken place between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches on a broader horizon – The North American Orthodox-Catholic Consultation, founded in 1965 and the Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops, founded in 1981 – both of which have issued numerous “agreed statements” concerning the many elements of faith that the two sides have in common, concerning the Sacraments, Theology, Dogma, etc. They have also discussed the most vexing problems about which agreement is difficult to establish and Fr. Stephen presented the thoughts of various modern Eastern Catholic theologians about these problems. Fr. Stephen expressed his joy at being asked to participate in the Encounter and proposed a Theological Consultation, which would be able to produce more in-depth and specific documents for dialogue.

Fr. Jaroslav offered his reflection “Towards the Future Dialogue of the Churches” suggesting that the participants in any such dialogue must be prepared to answer in depth questions about themselves and their own ecclesiology prior to the initiation of a serious dialogue and must be prepared to abandon any prejudice held toward theologians from the “other” side. Further, Ukrainian theologians must be included in the broader dialogues rather than permit others to speak in their behalf. The present “Encounters” and other discussions between the Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox Churches could become “the catalyst for the resurgence of our own religious identity, imperative at the present time”. The participants “must be consistent and theologically mature in their quest for unity...must listen to one another...be patient about what has taken place in history...and not afraid to look into each other’s eyes with love, where they will see each other as brothers...in Christ”.

In their discussion on the theme, the hierarchs at the Encounter pointed to the development of their relationship, which has not gone unnoticed by the various ecclesiastical bodies throughout the world. When the Encounters began a decade ago, the intent was to create an opportunity for the bishops to become more familiar with one another and to counter the incomprehensible conflicts that were deeply damaging Christ’s Church in newly independent Ukraine. The bishops, in 2011, have seen the need to move toward the creation of a permanent Ukrainian Orthodox – Catholic Theological Consultation, which will consist of both hierarchs and theologians from both Churches to prepare in-depth analyses for consideration at future Encounters. Each of the four jurisdictions – two in the USA and two in Canada – will soon make their appointments to this Consultation.

The hierarchs decided to continue this year with their effort to speak with a common voice to the faithful of the Churches through Epistles on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster, Ukrainian Independence and the Holodomor. They will also address in the very near future a common letter to the Canadian and USA Ambassadors to Ukraine and to the State Departments of the two nations expressing their concerns about the extreme danger the nation of Ukraine faces if the actions of the present government continue to align the nation with Russia and turn away from the Western orientation of previous governments. Great concern will also be

expressed about the interference of the present government in ecclesiastical life – in particular the unmasked favoritism shown for the Moscow Patriarchal Church of Ukraine.

Plans are now being developed for a Symposium to be sponsored by the Encounter in 2013 at the 1025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Ukraine. Decisions about the location and extent of the Symposium and events surrounding it, will be concluded by the next Encounter. In preparation for this Symposium there is a desire on the part of the bishops to travel to both Constantinople and Rome to visit with both Pope Benedict XVI and Patriarch Bartholomew I to inform them about the Encounters and to express the deep desire to resolve the issues that divide the Body of Christ, as well as to seek their support for united ecclesiastical life in Ukraine.

The next Encounter is tentatively scheduled to be held in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada in the Spring of 2012.

PHOTO CAPTION:

The hierarchs of Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholic Churches of North America:

Sitting: Metropolitan **Lawrence**, Metropolitan **Constantine**, Metropolitan **Stefan**, Metropolitan **Yurij**.

From left to right: Bishop David, Bishop Daniel, Bishop Bryan, Bishop-emeritus Basil, Archbishop Antony, Bishop Richard, Bishop Kenneth, Bishop Andriy, Bishop John, Bishop Stephen, Bishop Paul.