



# RUSSIAN ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF ALASKA

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

His Grace the Right Reverend NIKOLAI  
Bishop of Sitka, Anchorage and Alaska

March 10, 2008

## An Open Letter to the Clergy and Faithful of the God-Protected Diocese of Alaska

Dearly Beloved in the Lord,

You have received instructions (albeit through Internet postings and newspaper reports) from His Beatitude Metropolitan Herman to cease the commemoration of your Bishop in the Divine Liturgy. All of this has been done without a meeting of the synod, with *no* formal charges addressed to me, and without the canons of the Church being observed. Nevertheless, I have been ordered to take a “mandatory leave of absence” and to summarily vacate the Diocese. This – have no illusions about this – is an ecclesiastical punishment without trial... and that is nothing less than the rejection of Church discipline for some cause other than the integrity of our Lord’s Church. If you comply with the innovations presented to you by Metropolitan Herman, you will severely wound the very Church which you so highly prize.

At the core of this controversy is whether methods invented by the Holy Synod of The Orthodox Church in America within recent days will decide issues of Church discipline or if the methods spelled out in Church Canons established in the 4<sup>th</sup> century during the First Ecumenical Council will decide those issues. A “mandatory leave of absence” is an innovation that is foreign to Orthodox Canon law. The use of such a compulsory innovation is not canonical or acceptable, whether applied to a Bishop, Priest, Deacon, Sub-deacon, or Reader. Therefore, because I am submissive to the Holy Canons and because that has not been, and is not, the criterion by which this issue is being appraised, I have not vacated my office... and I will, by our Lord’s grace, continue to persevere.

The Church protects the voice of all Orthodox persons who are accused. The Church has determined the voice of the accused will be heard *before* judgment is passed. The means by which The Church has protected the voice of accused persons are The Holy Scriptures and Canon Law... *not by public opinion or by the “investigations” of committees.*

What is at stake here is *not* my episcopacy. What is at stake here is this: *will we continue as an Orthodox Church or will we become a congregational church or a church body which follows a corporate model?* If we follow Holy Scripture (esp. Mt. 18:15-17 and 1 Tim. 5:19-21) and the Canons of The Church, then we will continue as an Orthodox Church...and this will be so whether or not I am your bishop. But if we elevate public opinion, convenience, “investigations” and “leaves of absence” to the role of judge and thereby relegate our Church Canons to irrelevance, then we will have become a congregational church. May it never be!

Do not be drawn into endless, fruitless debates concerning whether or not I should be your bishop or whether Archpriest Vansuch or Archpriest Garklavs, or someone else should be your Administrator. Instead, ask this question: *“Of the paths before us, which most clearly is based on Holy Scripture and Church Canon?”*

Let me be clear: all clergy of the Diocese should continue the current practice, maintain the commemoration of their Diocesan Bishop in the celebration of the Divine Services of our Church, and not accept as canonical or biblical recent innovations announced by Metropolitan Herman. Finally, I continue to invite you to follow the directives of Scripture and the Canons of the Church and, therefore, to confront me directly and personally with your view of my shortcomings and offenses.

May Christ our God bless you all in every good work within the Vineyard of the Lord!

+ Bishop Nikolai

Nikolai  
Bishop of Sitka, Anchorage and Alaska