



RUSSIAN ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF ALASKA

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

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

March 4, 2008

To the beloved Clergy and Faithful of this God-Protected Diocese:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

All of us have been troubled by the allegations, opinions, and gossip expressed on the Internet, newspapers, and (in some cases) in conversations among Orthodox people in Alaska concerning the decisions and conduct of some members of the clergy in The Diocese of Alaska. My infrequent and brief responses reflect the commitment of The Diocese of Alaska to treat well-founded allegations, as well as slander and gossip, according to the guidance of Holy Scripture. Specifically:

First, we obey the instructions of Saint Matthew. Specifically, we do not accuse others based on opinion, nor do we accuse indirectly. The Bible tells us to confront those whom we think have committed an offense in-person and privately. If that fails to result in repentance, then we are under obligation to take two or three witnesses to the same allegation; if we lack those witnesses, we end the effort. If we have this and repentance is not forthcoming, then we take the issue to the whole Church (Matthew 18:15-17).

Second, we obey the instructions of Saint Paul. Specifically, we do not even listen to an allegation against an Elder apart from two or three witnesses to the same allegation (1 Timothy 5:19-21).

Third, when wrongly accused and when slandered we again follow the instruction of Saint Matthew by praying for those who persecute us rather than to retaliate (Matthew 5:8-12; 18:21-22).

Fourth, we again obey the instruction of Saint Paul by not taking matters of The Church into secular courts for resolution (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). We will, per Canon Law, engage the secular courts when we have been truly and factually wronged and when the issue is not addressed by normal Church discipline as described above.

I hasten to add that The Diocese of Alaska and I in particular have followed these four principles imperfectly. Specifically, I have not sufficiently inspired all of the clergy to lead according to these four principles and I have not always responded quickly enough when members of this diocese have engaged in gossip, indirect and unsubstantiated accusations, and slander. I deeply regret these failures and ask you to forgive me. Please continue to pray for me and for your priests, deacons and your fellow Christians that we sin less frequently and seek forgiveness more quickly.

We Orthodox Christians in The Diocese of Alaska will lead the way in North America today, just as we did in the first days of Orthodoxy in Alaska. We will lead the way in reliance on the grace of God, and we will do so with personal humility and courage. I invite you and challenge you to be an essential part of this history-in-the-making by doing the following:

1. Don't gossip, pass on hearsay, or even listen to allegations that have not first been made directly to the accused person by two or three witnesses.

2. When you do speak about controversial issues, speak only in terms of facts... not opinions or speculations.

3. Pray for those who gossip and slander and who fail to follow the guidance of Saint Matthew and Saint Paul (see above).

I am offering you a written listing of actual events that are associated with recent controversies in our diocese [see Timeline]. Each event is substantiated by an unimpeachable source document. I urge you to use these facts as the basis for your understanding of recent events. I strongly urge you to reject speculations and accusations and debates and idle conversations... instead of these, pray and directly and privately and respectfully confront any who have offended you, including me. Remember, in this diocese Orthodox people obey the directives of Saint Matthew and Saint Paul (Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Timothy 5:19-21, Matthew 5:8-12 and 18:21-22).

In closing, please be encouraged. The outcome of all our troubles is certain: we will suffer in various ways this side of paradise (1 Peter 2:11-25), and God will continue to build His Church and nothing will stand in the way of that (Matthew 16:18)!

With love in the Lord Jesus Christ,

+ *Bishop Nikolai*

NIKOLAI
Bishop of Sitka, Anchorage and Alaska