

THE DIALOGUE WITH THE ROMANIAN PATRIARCHATE

To the Beloved Clergy and Faithful of our holy Episcopate:

As announced at the 2007 Congress, in our letter of February 12, 2008 to the clergy and parishes, and via the Press Release posted at www.roea.org, the Episcopate engaged in dialogue with the Church of Romania.

These discussions were initiated at the recommendation of our Joint Dialogue Commission, and approved by the Episcopate Council and Congress, in order to clarify and seek mutual understanding of certain historical issues in the relationship between our Episcopate and the Church of Romania, the sufferings of Bishop Policarp and Archbishop Valerian, etc. Such direct talks with the Church of Romania had long been considered necessary; and, if met with a positive result, it was felt that they would favorably impact future talks between the Joint Dialogue Commissions of the two North American eparchies that have continued since 1993. Also to be discussed was the recent action of a few disgruntled and misguided clergy to create a third Romanian jurisdiction in America. We do not bless this unwarranted activity, nor has Archbishop Nicolae of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Two Americas.

Our delegation was led by His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel and included Very Reverend Fathers Laurence Lazar (Chair), Remus Grama, Catalin Mitescu, Ian Pac-Urar, Romey Rosco.

Before meetings began, the group took part in the Divine Liturgy celebrated on the feast of St. Policarp at the city's Antim Monastery, and visited nearby Pasarea and Cernica Monasteries. On Sunday, February 24, the Archbishop celebrated the Divine Liturgy in a packed Patriarchal Cathedral, assisted by the Cathedral clergy and the Episcopate delegation. At the end of the service, which was broadcast live by the Church's "Trinitas" national TV station, His Eminence spoke of how our Episcopate has maintained its Romanian identity despite the passage of time and distance, and that its heart had been with the people of Romania through all their historical trials. The next day, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel cordially greeted the delegation at his residence, and subsequently hosted several private meals. He was kept abreast of the ensuing formal discussions and personally offered daily input.

The dialogue took place at the Patriarchal Palace Monday-Wednesday, February 25-27, with the commission named by the Church of Romania. It was headed by His Eminence Archbishop (now Metropolitan) Nifon of Târgoviște, with His Eminence Archbishop Nicolae (Wednesday), His Grace Bishop Ciprian

Câmpineanul, Patriarchal Vicar, Councilors Frs. Mircea Uță and Ioan Armași. The frank discussions were held in a spirit of Christian respect. Thankfully, following several readings, a mutually agreed upon statement was produced regarding the matters of concern to both sides, and we were notified after returning home that it was received with appreciation by the Holy Synod of the Church of Romania. (*The Agreed Statement is printed below.*)

To avoid speculation, we also share with you that the representatives of the Patriarchate raised the issue and offered their view of a possible union of the two North American eparchies. We reiterated the specific reasons for our visit, and explained that we had assured Archbishop Nicolae and his Dialogue Commission that we would not discuss such a matter without their knowledge. In the end, the two North American commissions agreed to study further a possible course of action, since any potential union is a matter that can only be decided by our people locally, in Congress.

Referring to the content of the Agreed Statement of February 27, the Romanian Holy Synod, in its meeting the following week, specifically noted that: (a) the hierarchs and faithful in both Romania and North America endured much during the unprecedented years of communist persecution, and that the communist government caused much suffering for the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, Bishop Policarp and Archbishop Valerian, Confessors of the Faith who were persecuted and marginalized; (b) mutual forgiveness had been asked for any politically-motivated actions that had caused division in the United States and Canada; and (c) a union of the two Romanian Orthodox eparchies in North America was desirable.

We consider the result of the meetings with the Patriarchal Commission in Bucharest as positive and encouraging for the mission and life of our Episcopate in the United States and Canada, the healing of the estrangement of the two Romanian Orthodox eparchies in North America, and the movement toward the unity of all Orthodox in North America – which the Church of Romania agrees is needed and inevitable. Therefore, in keeping with its mandate, our Joint Dialogue Commission is pursuing renewed discussions with the Archdiocese. We trust in the goodwill of the commission members, we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their work, and we repeat that any viable proposal for union will be presented for consideration by Congress.

Beloved, during our Lenten pilgrimage, let us pray for one another, for peace in Christ's holy Church,

and that we will do only what pleases him.

With archpastoral blessings,

+ *NATHANIEL, Archbishop*

Very Reverend Laurence Lazar

Episcopate Council Secretary

Joint Dialogue Commission, Chair

March 14, 2008

AGREED STATEMENT

After 60 years of separation from the Patriarchate of Romania, representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America – His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel, Very Rev. Frs. Laurence Lazar, Remus Grama, Catalin Mitescu, Ian Pac-Urar, and Romey Rosco – met at the Patriarchal Palace in Bucharest, on February 25-27, 2008, with representatives of the Patriarchate of Romania – His Eminence Archbishop Nifon, His Eminence Archbishop Nicolae, His Grace Bishop Ciprian Câmpineanul, Very Rev. Frs. Mircea Uță and Ioan Armași – with the intent of seeking a historical reconciliation, and have jointly agreed to acknowledge the following realities:

1) The break between the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America – the historical diocese of Bishop Policarp (Morușca) – and the Patriarchate of Romania was the result of the instauration of the communist regime in Romania, and expressed the will of its faithful and of the 1947 Episcopate Congress, whom that Congress officially represented. Given its unrestricted freedom in the free world, the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America acted in accordance with its duty to denounce, to reject with the utmost clarity, and to disassociate itself from the evils of atheistic communism, which had separated the diocese both from its Mother Church and from Bishop Policarp, of thrice-blessed memory, whom the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America continued to acknowledge as its ruling hierarchy up to the time of his falling asleep in the Lord (1958).

2) The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, rejecting communism, found itself compelled to sever its canonical ties to the Patriarchate of Romania, conscious of the fact that, by doing so, it was defending the faith and identity of the Romanian Orthodox community on the North American continent, particularly in those days when the interference of the communist government of Romania in the life of the Church was blatantly evident.

3) Under the critical and dramatic circumstances of those times, when Bishop Policarp was held against his will in Romania, Vicar Bishop Valerian (Trifa) dutifully sought a solution that preserved the canonicity of the Episcopate, taking the best possible course of action available in those particularly difficult times.

4) The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America never rejected or denied the Patriarchate of Romania as its Mother Church but, given the reality of the “Iron

Curtain”, the only remaining means for her canonical survival was to affiliate canonically with the “Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North and South America” (known as the “Metropolia”, which eventually became the Orthodox Church in America). Within the OCA, the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America always maintained the status of an administratively autonomous diocese.

5) The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America recognizes that the hierarchs and faithful of the Church of Romania suffered and struggled greatly through the terrible, unprecedented circumstances of the communist oppression. But the actions of the communist government of those times also imposed great suffering on the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, as well as upon her hierarchs of thrice-blessed memory: Bishop Policarp and Archbishop Valerian, Confessors of the Faith, who were persecuted, slandered and marginalized.

6) We happily note that, after the fall of the communist regime, the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Romania recognized, in 1991, the canonicity of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, and the apostolic succession of her hierarchs. Since that time, our relationship has been marked by fraternal dialogue and liturgical concelebration with the Patriarchate of Romania as well as with the hierarchs and clergy of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of the two Americas, by exchanges of hierarchal visits, and by very significant aid provided to Romania through the efforts of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America.

7) On the basis of the above acknowledgements, we ask each other for mutual forgiveness, in the name of our predecessors, for any ways in which we may have offended one another, and we ask Almighty God to bless us, and to guide us on the path toward a common vision of the Romanian Orthodox presence in America, and toward the strengthening of the unity of all Orthodox people on the North American continent.

8) Having recognized the errors of the past, and having asked each other for mutual forgiveness, the representatives of the Patriarchate of Romania and those of the ROEA express their sincere desire for the realization of the unity of all Romanian Orthodox on the American continent, in a canonical relationship with the Church of Romania.

PARISH REGISTER STATISTICS

	2006	2007
BAPTISMS	616	549
CONVERSIONS	45	29
MARRIAGES	144	126
DEATHS	119	165