

**RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA**

**THE DIOCESE OF EASTERN
AMERICA AND NEW YORK**



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November 28, 2007

Dear Fr Wsewolod and Members of the Astoria Parish Council, beloved in Christ!

His Eminence, Metropolitan Laurus, and I are very concerned and saddened by the actions of a faction within the membership of Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church in Astoria, NY, which is seeking to separate themselves and the parish from the bosom of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. This especially grieves us because your Parish has been an integral part of ROCOR and its Diocese of Eastern America & New York for many decades. Your Parish has never previously sought to secede from ROCOR, even during the most difficult periods, such as, for example, the 1930s. The Astoria Parish has been an important spiritual center for thousands of members of our Church over the years, nourishing them spiritually and leading them on the path towards salvation. And as such, the Church hierarchy has consistently assigned priests and deacons to the Parish, thereby providing the spiritual care so essential to the life of an Orthodox Christian.

The recent actions you have taken following the restoration of canonical ecclesiastical unity between ROCOR and the Orthodox Church in Russia represent serious violations of the sacred Canons of the Orthodox Church, and the rules, customs and regulations of ROCOR. If you look for legal justification of your actions in the Holy Canons, you will look in vain. Nor will you find any justification for your position regarding the above-mentioned re-establishment of Church unity in past official decisions and resolutions of ROCOR.

We have repeatedly sought to persuade you to reconsider the path you have chosen - a path of disobedience, a path which ignores the Christian virtues of humility and obedience, of love, forgiveness and peace. I myself have visited you, Fr Wsewolod, as have others, including the local Dean, Mitred Protopriest Alexey Ohotin, in the hope that you might be

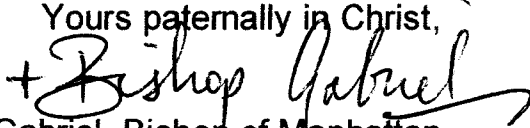
persuaded to reconsider.

Hitherto, we have employed ecclesiastical leniency (*oikonomia*), in the fervent hope that you will repent of your actions. However, your stubborn refusal to do so will eventually leave us no alternative but to take any and all actions we deem necessary, against you and those who have chosen the path of rebellion.

It is the law of this country that, given the freedom of religion guaranteed by its Bill of Rights, every individual or group of individuals has the right to affiliate with the religious denomination or jurisdictions of his or its choice, or even to organize one's own jurisdiction, as you have opted to do. However, no such individual or group has any legal right to lay claim to the title and property of an existing Orthodox parish, which legally and canonically still belong to the hierarchal Church of which it has historically been a part. In the case of the Astoria parish, we firmly believe that the parish and its property belong to and must remain within ROCOR. You and your followers must not delude yourselves into thinking that we will acquiesce in your taking it outside our Church. If you persist in trying to do so, be aware that the legal precedents in the State of New York all favor our hierarchal Church, and you will inevitably find yourselves legally excluded from the parish. We are determined to do all that is necessary to prevent the Astoria church from being alienated from our Church.

I pray that you will take this warning to heart, not as a threat, but as the sincere and heartfelt appeal of an archpastor whose love for you and your people you cannot honestly deny. I beg you to look into your own heart and examine it dispassionately. If you detect in it pride and arrogance masquerading as zeal, or a lack of Christian love and pity for your brethren, both here in ROCOR and in the Church in Russia, or any sentiment or opinion that our merciful Savior would not hold, then you must acknowledge that your actions are fundamentally wrong and sinful, and repent, lest you incur the guilt which causing schism and division within the Church of Christ incurs. When the lamentable question will inevitably be asked "Who hath rent Thy seamless robe, O Lord?", pray that you will not hear Christ answer, "Wsewolod and his followers have!".

Imploring you to reconsider, and with the sincere desire that I will hear from you soon, I remain, as ever,

Yours paternally in Christ,
+ 
Gabriel, Bishop of Manhattan

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