



THE COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

125th Anniversary of Orthodox Christianity in Chicago

Remarks of the Rev. Dr. Stanley L. Davis, Executive Director, and Bishop Wayne N. Miller, President

September 30, 2017—I am pleased to greet you on behalf of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago which has been privileged to have Orthodox Christian participation from its founding in 1984. Chicago is a city marked by its diversity. Few people realize that today Northeastern Illinois is the most religiously diverse part of America. That diversity is the result in large measure to the fact that Chicago has been an immigrant city. Where America is sometimes called a melting pot Chicago would best be described as a rich stew where each component retains its own special quality but adds flavor to the whole.

Both religious and ethnic diversity are part of Orthodox Christianity's history these past 125 years. Beginning with immigrants from Sparta in Corfu and in Greece, Montenegro and Herzegovina in Serbia, and the Carpathian Russians and Galicians from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, immigrants from the Orthodox lands took their place here in this metropolis. As a fellow Christian, I can also see in this migration a profound witness to the universality of the gospel, and to Christ's commands to us to make disciples of all the nations.

Today, I also bring a statement from Bishop Wayne Miller, Bishop of the Northern Illinois Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the President of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, which I will now read to you:

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We write to you today to congratulate you on this 125 Anniversary Celebration of the coming of Orthodox Christianity to Chicago. We also write because your presence among us reminds us of the troubling situation which your churches are facing throughout the world. We are therefore compelled to use this occasion to declare our concerns for you and your entire communion.

We are concerned by statistics which report a dramatic rise in both governmental and non-governmental actions designed to limit the free exercise of religion or to persecute minority religious groups openly.

Religious liberty is a natural right, which no government has the authority to grant or to limit. As part of this natural right, individual believers possess freedom of conscience, freedom to worship and associate as they see fit, and freedom to invite others to embrace their faith, so long as this is done without deception or coercion. Religious communities have the right to establish institutions and to serve their members and others through education and charitable works. These religious communities should be granted full legal status in the societies where they live and work.

While these assertions apply to all religions, we are especially aware of the difficulties being experienced by the Orthodox Churches in the Middle East, the region in which Christianity was born. We affirm that the well-being of the Middle East demands the presence of a vital and living Christian community, able to contribute its unique gifts to the future of the region. Policies or conditions that drive involuntary emigration undermine this future. We call upon religious people everywhere to uphold the right to religious freedom, especially the freedom of minority religions.

We thank you for the faithful witness you and your co-religionists have given in recent years in the face of persecution, even to the point of martyrdom. We are inspired by your fidelity to your faith, and we pray for people everywhere who are experiencing the lack of religious freedom.

With prayers for God's blessings on this celebration, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Bishop Wayne Miller

President, Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago