



“For the Edification of the Church”

- Annals • Pastoral Activities • Presentations •
- Gatherings • Homilies • Sermons • Feasts •
- Pilgrimages • Social Ministry • Publications •

■ The Progress and Prospects of the Missionary Field in the North

Second Pastoral Visit to the Newly Established Diocese of Stockholm September 18-23, 2014 (Old Calendar)

Glory to God for all things! O Holy Trinity, glory to Thee!

When, following our first pastoral visit to the Holy Diocese of Stockholm (in May of 2014), we gave a great deal of thought to arranging a second visit in the very near future, we

had no idea what the Divine Founder of the Church, Christ our Savior, had in store for us, which would far exceed our godly expectations.

■ So it was that, after the Feast of the Elevation of the Precious Cross, with the permission and blessing of the Holy Synod, and prompted by sincere and deep interest in the progress of our mission in Sweden, as *Locum Tenens* of the newly-established Diocese, we once came again into contact, in a spirit of love and joy in the Holy Spirit, with our small flock in this country, where the predominant religion, Lutheranism, exists in perhaps its most lamentable and secularized form.

Accompanying us this time were the Reverend Father Jiří





Ján (a Czech convert to Orthodoxy and Rector of the Church of the Ascension in Patras, Greece) and Subdeacon Antonios Hagiokyprianites.

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On Wednesday, September 18 (Old Style),

a small group of the faithful, together with our clergy—Father Anders (Episcopal Representative), Father Stefanos, and Hierodeacon Theochares—welcomed us at the Episcopal residence in Vårberg (a suburb of Stockholm), where, following the chanting of the Doxology, we briefly described the purpose of our present visit:

- better organization of the Diocese at every level; coöperation with everyone in a spirit of love, humility, patience, and—above all—self-sacrifice; prospects for the mission (“the future of Sweden belongs to us..”); prayer that a suitable person might be found to serve as the first Bishop of the Diocese of Stockholm (Church of the True Orthodox Christians of Greece).

- We then visited the retired Bishop Johannes of Makarioupolis, who is gravely ill and confined to his bed. We embraced him with great respect and especial emotion, seeing in his person the founder (1984) of the True Orthodox Mission in Sweden.

A light agape meal followed, where, in a warm and cordial atmosphere, as befits a *family of God*, we were given an initial report on the progress of the work that had been done in accordance with the instructions provided during our previous visit.

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On Thursday, September 19 (Old Style), we went to the Convent of St. Philothei of Athens, where we were welcomed



by Mother Magdalene and Sister Lydia. Fathers Anders and Jiří celebrated the Divine Liturgy, with a few faithful in prayerful attendance.

■ After the noon meal, we offered some guidance to a married couple who are members of our Church, and who have built an attractive Chapel dedicated to St. Joseph the Betrothed on their property. This was followed by several hours of work with the nuns on various matters, including our missionary activity and witness in Sweden, concluding, in the late evening, with confession and Holy Communion.



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On Friday, September 20 (Old Style), we had a weighty meeting at the convent with two of our Priests in Sweden: Father Anders and Father Spyridon (an Arab Priest who lives and works in Götene, a town in western Sweden some 200 kilometers from the Norwegian border).

• We discussed pastoral matters pertaining to our parishes and the mission: the peculiarities of contemporary parish life in the prevailing conditions of our day; the need for Shepherds to find ways to cultivate a spirit of collaboration; what constitutes a genuine ecclesiastical mind-set; the various ways in which the Shepherd can help the faithful progress in their spiritual lives, e.g. by correct confession and the publication of catechetical material; the





need to make use of opportunities for philanthropic activities and pilgrimages; the organization of parish gatherings for the discussion of spiritual matters; understanding the Mystery of Repentance more profoundly as a collective event: “the entire Church repents together”; the awareness that the center and starting point of all parish activities is the Bishop, without whose knowledge and blessing ecclesiastical and parochial work

does not bear fruit; it was strongly emphasized that the Diocese of Stockholm in particular is a preëminently missionary Diocese.

This was followed by a lengthy discussion of the legal status of our parishes in Sweden and, related thereto, the identity of our Holy Diocese in this country, with a view to the creation of new parishes.

■ Our clergy (three Priests and one Deacon) and nuns have been asked to declare in writing their agreement with the “The Unitive Ecclesiological Statement” (March 2014), since this text will henceforth be the confession of faith of the anti-ecumenists following the Old Calendar.

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Saturday, September 21 (Old Style), was an extremely productive day, in that during successive meetings, both joint and private, at the Episcopal residence, we dealt with many and divers problems of a pastoral and parochial nature, to which, by the Grace of God, solutions and instructions were offered.

• A number of people confessed and were consoled; we discussed ways to improve and expand the organiza-





tion of opportunities for worship; a special work group was created to deal with long-standing matters of a practical nature at the Episcopal residence; and, finally, we had a short but edifying discussion centered on humility and the miracles resulting

from obedience to the Divine Commandments, by which obedience the forces of evil are expelled.

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On Sunday, September 22 (Old Style), we celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, with the participation of four Priests (Fathers Anders, Jiří, Stefanos, and Spyridon), one Deacon (Father Theochares), and several Subdeacons.

The chanting was according to the Slavic *Typikon*, in three languages (Swedish, Greek, and Church Slavonic), and the Church was filled with Orthodox of different colors and nationalities, many of whom communed. Bishop Johannes was in prayerful attendance.

• In our sermon, we spoke about that which, at first glance, seems paradoxical in our life in Christ: We beseech the Holy Spirit to “come and abide in us,” but when He has done so we are overcome with such humility that we say, like the Apostle Peter in the Gospel reading of the day: “Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man” (St. Luke 5:8). We also spoke about humility and compassion, and that we should refrain from judging and condemning others based on externals, rather striving to understand our brother’s true qualities.





After the Liturgy, lunch was provided for the entire congregation in the refectory, where the “parish family” gathered in an atmosphere of warm fellowship—it was truly a miracle!

■ We then spoke with Father Anders for about two hours (2 to 4 p.m.), at which point we stressed once again, with some emphasis, the main course his pastoral work must follow in the new period following our Union [with the Synod of Archbishop Kallinikos], and gave solutions to matters of a canonical nature with which he must deal in the midst of a multi-ethnic and multicultural social environment and flock.

■ Over the next two hours (4 to 6 p.m.), we worked together with the workgroup of the Bishop’s residence, making detailed notes, on the spot, of all the work that needs to be done for the good ordering of the building and its surrounding areas.

■ At 6:30 p.m., we began our pre-announced parish *synaxis*, which lasted until 8:30 p.m. Our clergy, quite a few of the faithful, and several non-Orthodox were in attendance, with Mother Magdalene serving as translator. The gathering was held in the form of an interactive discussion.

• Our main theme was secularization, as the greatest threat to the Church: what secularization is and how it is defined; why Christianity has been influenced and distorted by secularism to such an extent in Sweden; why secularization in the Czech Republic appears in a different form than it does in Sweden (the effects of socialism and communism); two indicators of secularization (the abolition of Sunday as a day of rest and “religiosity and ritualism”); the rejection by Europe of the three pillars of its civilization (Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome), among other things.

This was truly a marvelous pastoral experience, which concluded with our participation in the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist after midnight.

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On Monday, September 23 (Old Style), at 10:10 a.m., we departed by air for Greece, via Frankfurt, in order to be back in our homeland in time to take part in the celebration of the Feast of the *Panagia Myrtydiotissa* the next day, despite our natural fatigue and the various sentiments by which we were inundated after such a wondrous (and – why not? – *soul-stirring*) pastoral experience.

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In the missionary field of the North, True Orthodoxy is indeed making progress and does have prospects.

Just think: We have two primary parishes (a third is being founded), one convent, three Priests, one Deacon, and a Bishop, at a time when the Metropolis of Sweden under the Patriarchate of Constantinople has just one Bishop and one Priest for all of Scandinavia.

■ In the Truth of the Faith, there is a tangible dynamism. When Orthodoxy is unhealthy, on the other hand, one can perceive a clear decay, in the midst of palpable syncretism and a minimalism that runs counter to the spirit of the Gospel.

September 23, 2014 (Old Calendar)
Conception of St. John the Baptist
† Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle

