

THE SOLEMN ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Forty days after Christ's victorious resurrection from the dead, He led the disciples to the Mount of Olives. It was to be a farewell. Jesus spoke to His faithful followers for the last time on earth, then He blessed them, and was "parted from them, and carried up into heaven," as St. Luke writes.



Usually farewells are sad and solemn experiences. Perhaps even this one began with such feelings by the disciples. But before long their sadness was to turn into gladness. Luke speaks of the apostles returning to Jerusalem "with great joy" after they had worshipped Christ and witnessed the Ascension.

What was the cause of the disciples' joy at this farewell? The troparian hymn of the feast provides the answer. It speaks of Christ making "glad the disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit." They understood the meaning of this promise. The Lord would not leave them orphans; He, in fact, would be with them all days, even unto the end of the world. He would be with them in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

They were told to remain in Jerusalem until the Spirit would come. Thus, after the Ascension of the Lord, they returned there to await in anticipation of the coming of the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, the Giver of Life, the One Who would abide with them always.

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The Holy and Great Council PENTECOST 2016

"He called all to unity"

History of the Holy and Great Council

By Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis, Archdeacon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

The Orthodox Church is the church of the apostles, the church of the martyrs, the church of the fathers, the church of the councils. Through the centuries, the Orthodox Church convened local and regional, great and greater, as well as universal or ecumenical councils. Just as every celebration of the holy Eucharist is a confirmation of the communion between each person with his or her community, and that local community with the universal Church,



His All-Holiness Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch. Photo: Nikolaos Manginas

so too, every council is a reaffirmation of the unity between each local and self-governing Orthodox church with the universal Church. In fact, St. John Chrysostom – the renowned fourth-century archbishop of Constantinople – boldly states that “council” is another name for “church.”

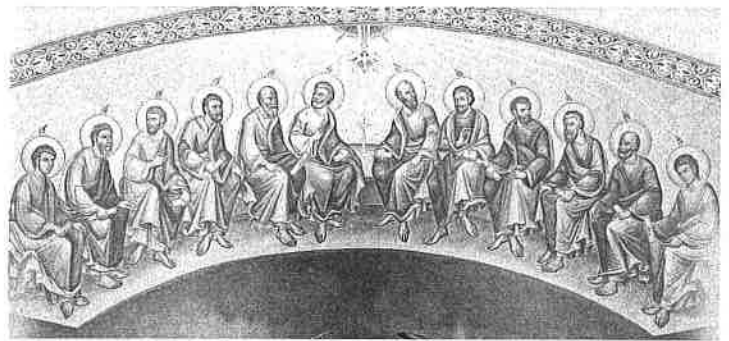
In this spirit and from its responsibility and privilege to ensure inter-Orthodox unity and facilitate inter-Orthodox cooperation, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has tirelessly labored to convene a Pan-Orthodox Council since the early 1900s.

Preparations for this council began in earnest in 1961 and continued through the 1960s, while pre-conciliar conferences, tasked with forming the council's agenda and its rules of operation, met in 1976 through 1986. After a long hiatus created by immense political and ideological changes, as well as the unprecedented social and religious challenges resulting from the collapse of the Iron Curtain, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew revived the process in 2008.



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So, after almost a century, the agenda was finalized, the documents were edited, and the process was completed in January 2016.



The Holy and Great Council is assembling on the feast of Pentecost.

Never before in the history of the Orthodox Church have so many Orthodox churches – fourteen from around the world – assembled in one and the same place.

Yet, despite hesitation and apprehension, despite reservation and even resistance, the Holy and Great Council is being convened at the Orthodox Academy of Crete—steps from a ninth-century Monastery of the Virgin Mary—from June 16 to June 27, 2016.

He called all to unity. May we respond with charity and generosity.

We fervently ask the plenitude of the Church – clergy and laity, men and women, old and young – to pray for this unique and historical event. We especially ask that you implore God to strengthen and inspire the leaders of the Church to manifest their unity in a world afflicted by conflict and division.

May God bless the Holy and Great Council. And May His abundant grace be with all of you.

– His All-Holiness Bartholomew,
Ecumenical Patriarch





TOWARDS THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL: A Comprehensive Timeline

For the first time in 1200 years, the fourteen autocephalous Orthodox Churches will meet, with a common desire to reinforce their relations and address contemporary spiritual and social challenges in the world.

1961 Sept. 24 - Oct.1

First Pan-Orthodox Conference, Rhodes

1962 Sept 26-29

Second Pan-Orthodox Conference, Rhodes

1963 Nov 1-15

Third Pan-Orthodox Conference, Rhodes

1968 June 8-15

Fourth Pan-Orthodox Conference, Chambésy

1971 July 15-28

Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, Chambésy



1976 Nov. 21-28

First Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, Chambésy

- Methodology and themes for the Holy and Great Council
- The Orthodox Church's relations with other Christian churches
- Discussion on the common celebration of Easter by all Christians

1977 June 28 - July 3

Congress on the Common Celebration of the Easter by all Christians on a Fixed Sunday

1982 Sept 3-12

Second Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, Chambésy

- Impediments to marriage
- Adaptation of the ordinances regarding fasting

1986 Feb 15-23

Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, Chambésy



1986 Oct 28 - Nov 6

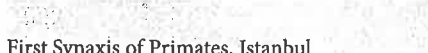
Third Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, Chambésy

- Adaptation of ordinances for fasting
- The mission of the Orthodox Church in the world

1990 Nov 10-17

Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, Chambésy

- Orthodox Diaspora



First Synaxis of Primates, Istanbul



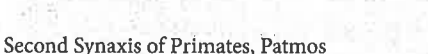
1993 Nov 7-13

Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, Chambésy

- Autocephaly

1995 April 10-13

Canon Law Congress on Regulation for Episcopal Assemblies, Chambésy



Second Synaxis of Primates, Patmos

Third Synaxis of Primates, Jerusalem/Bethlehem and Istanbul/Nicaea

Fourth Synaxis of Primates, Istanbul

2009 June 8-12

Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, Chambésy

- Episcopal Assemblies

2009 Dec. 10-17

Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, Chambésy

- Autocephaly and Autonomy
- Diptychs

Fifth Synaxis of Primates, Istanbul

2015 Oct. 10-17

Fifth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, Chambésy

Sixth Synaxis of Primates, Chambésy

2016 June 16-27

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, Crete



FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 1200 YEARS...



Photos courtesy Archon Dimitrios Panagos and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.



Official channels of communications

The Holy and Great Council will be held June 16-27 in Crete. For the first time in 1200 years, the primates of all 14 Orthodox autocephalous (or self-governed) Churches, along with more than 300 bishops and others, will meet to pray and discuss issues of common concern. Keep up-to-date by visiting www.orthodoxcouncil.org for daily briefings, and by using the communication channels of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

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