



## 19<sup>th</sup> All-American Council Forums

*“The words of our Lord Jesus Christ are found throughout the Scriptures and are familiar to all Orthodox Christians who dwell within the bosom of the Church. And yet, such familiarity often breeds, if not contempt, then perhaps a certain indifference which prevents our hearts from grasping the deep meaning of these words or recognizing the transformative impact they might have in our life.”*

*His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon, Introduction “Of What Life Do We Speak?”*

The Holy Synod has directed the Preconciliar Commission to have six forums at the 19<sup>th</sup> All American Council. These forums are based off of the document *Of What Life Do We Speak?: Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the Apostolic Work of the Church* authored by His Beatitude. This document will be the study guide for the 19<sup>th</sup> AAC and will be sent out to all parishes and institutions prior to the AAC. Parishes and Institutions can utilize this in preparation for the forums and the actual structures of the forums will be based on this document.

The forums will be on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons from 1:30 PM to 4:30 PM. The specifics of the forum are as follows:

The six forums are as follows:

- Forum 1: Spiritual Life – How Can We Improve Our Personal Relationship With Christ?
- Forum 2: Spiritual Life: - How Can We Better Care for Our Clergy?
- Forum 3: Stewardship – How Do We Properly Steward What God Has Entrusted to Us?
- Forum 4: Relations With Others- Our Relations With Other Orthodox Churches, Non-Orthodox and Non-Christians, and the Civic and Secular Community.
- Forum 5: Evangelization – How Can We More Effectively Establish Missions And Revitalize Our Churches?
- Forum 6: Evangelization – How Can We More Effectively Reach Our Parishioners?

### **Forum 1 : Spiritual Life – How Can We Improve Our Personal Relationship to Christ ?**

*“To help us along our path toward healing, the Church has given us many tools to use and examples to guide us. Chief among these are the ascetical and liturgical traditions within which we participate in the Holy Mysteries. The liturgical cycles and hymns of the Church are*

*rich and complex. Yet, there are simple movements that flow within this complexity: ascent, descent, joy and sorrow, praise and repentance. These movements are not dependent on extremes of our external existence, but are provided to bring our hearts closer to Christ in the midst of those extremes.”*

*Metropolitan Tikhon on Pillar 1: The Spiritual Life*

**Guidance:** Metropolitan Tikhon exhorts, *“I would like to see every parish in the Orthodox Church in America make the spiritual life a priority, not only in their personal life with Jesus Christ, but in the life of their community, by developing their outreach through services to the community, addressing our current crisis in choral and liturgical singing and growing in the bond of love.”*

**Activity:** This forum will focus on the applying the guidance on developing a stronger spiritual life to the practical application in the personal and communal life of the parish. These applications can include such areas as developing a stronger personal spiritual life but also how can the Church encourage the monastic vocation, better theological education on all levels including the parish and seminaries and providing a consistent liturgical witness. The forums should focus on specific ways in which the Church provides the developing these and more effective applications for the future.

## **Forum 2: Spiritual Life – How Can We Better Care For Our Clergy?**

*“If the center of our lives as Christians is the holy Altar of the Church, then the center of our responsibility as members of the Church should be to care for the health of those who stand and serve before that altar and impart to us the Holy Mysteries.”*

*Metropolitan Tikhon on Pillar 1: The Spiritual Life*

**Guidance:** Metropolitan Tikhon exhorts, *“It is important to renew our efforts at fostering clergy health – physical, spiritual, emotional – so that our parishes and institutions may be guided by pastors and lay leaders who have a deep understanding of the therapeutic and pastoral aspects of the Patristic tradition so that the broken people of the world might find healing.”*

**Activity:** This forum will focus on how we can better take care of the clergy who serve the faithful. This includes a discussion on how to foster vocations, ensure that there are properly educated clergy with the necessary skills to lead the parish and to provide for their continuing education and development while they are clergy. Such topics to be discussed are clergy compensation and benefits, programs to support spiritual and emotional renewal, as well as development and implementation of necessary pastoral skills in a parish.

## **Forum 3: Stewardship – How Do We Properly Steward What God Has Entrusted to Us?**

*“If our Church attendance is simply a routine that we follow, if our receiving of the mysteries is simply an act, if our prayer does not lead to a change in our hearts, then we are failing to give value to our very life and existence and to become authentic human beings; if our life of prayer does not flow into care for God’s creation and the recognition that it is a window to the Creator, then we fail to give proper honor to God Himself; and if we do not guard the patrimony of the Church as reflected in her saints, their experience and their writings, her teachings and her holy mysteries, then we have failed in our sacramental stewardship of that which has been given to us.”*

*Metropolitan Tikhon on Pillar 2: Stewardship*

**Guidance:** Metropolitan Tikhon exhorts, *“It has been frequently emphasized that stewardship is not about money, but about our responsibility to care for and nurture the gifts that have been given to us by God. My hope is that the clergy and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America might continue to build an understanding of stewardship as the sacrificial giving back of the first fruits of the many blessings that God has given each of us and that we might ensure that the talents of the clergy and the faithful are utilized in the most effective manner.”*

**Activity:** This forum will focus on how we, as stewards of the world and the Church, can better care of that which has been entrusted to us. While this topic needs to discuss such practical aspects such as finances and caring for a parish and institution, it must be contextualized into a larger examination into the care of the person and related modern issues, Creation and the environment and the patrimony of the Church as a whole. The forum should focus on these practical issues but in the perspective of how, as an Orthodox Christian, we are stewards of the Church and the world.

#### **Forum 4: Relations With Others- Our Relations With Other Orthodox Churches, Non-Orthodox and Non-Christians, and the Civic and Secular Community.**

*“The Church has always had an ambiguous relationship with the surrounding culture and the society within which she sojourns. Much has been written and recommended about the proper balance for this relationship, and much more will be written and recommended in the future. But we ought to consider the experience of St. Mary of Egypt, who, though she left the world and, in fact, did not encounter any humans or even animals for 47 years, yet is compelled to ask Zosima about that very world and its inhabitants and leaders.”*

*Metropolitan Tikhon on Pillar 3: Relations with Others*

**Guidance:** Metropolitan Tikhon exhorts, *“‘Why can’t we all just get along?’ This is a refrain we hear repeatedly in our age of utopian longing for peace, love and understanding. Certainly, there is a human desire for unity, which is reflected in the past decades through songs, movies and in the general culture. And yet, those same decades have not seen a decrease in global violence and division. What is the approach of the Orthodox Church to this universal quest for love and peace in the world and what part can we play as Orthodox Christians and as parishes and communities?”*

**Activity:** Certainly this area is a very broad topic which involves elements on an international, national and local level. There are a number of Pan-Orthodox, ecumenical and other bodies that the Church participates in on each of these levels. This topic not only needs to discuss the Church's involvement in these different bodies but also the how the involvement of the Church advances the mission of the Orthodox Church in America. On a practical basis there should be discussion as to how the local parish can and should be involved and to what degree is that involvement. The discussion should also revolve around what are the basic principles of the Orthodox Church and how can the Church boldly and humbly champion those principles and causes.

### **Forum 5: Evangelization – How Can We More Effectively Establish Missions and Revitalize Our Churches**

*“With realistic statistics, there are about 1,000,000 Orthodox in the United States, which is a very small fraction of the 325,000,000 people in that country. In North America, the population is 500,000,000. It is time for us, as the Orthodox Church in America, to develop a strategy that will enable us to expand the mission of the Church, so increase our spiritual life and to share the healing that we have received in Christ. All of the pillars are interrelated and interdependent. But there is one in particular, this one, which is impossible to implement or act upon without some effort in the other three pillars. There can be no missionary outreach, no way to reach those who are broken, without our having first entered into the arena to become a genuine person in the image of Christ, without exercising good stewardship and without serving as a good witness to the world. It is here that we fulfill most clearly our Apostolic ministry.”*

*Metropolitan Tikhon on Pillar 4: Outreach and Evangelism*

**Guidance:** Metropolitan Tikhon exhorts, *“Our goal is not simply one of recruitment and expansion, but one of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth will not take place without our efforts on every level of the Church. The third pillar is outreach and evangelism and this concerns the most central goal of the Church, which is to be Apostles to the nations and bearers of Christ's healing and salvation to a broken and hurting world.”*

**Activity:** This particular forum is dedicated to examining and reflecting on the task of mission and evangelism. There are certainly a number of programs on a variety of levels in the Church and some have been quite successful. Not only should this forum discuss what does the Church mean by outreach, mission and evangelism but how they are to be practically put into practice on a parish, diocesan and Church-wide level. The creativity and success in both establishing new missions as well as revitalizing established parishes will be examined as models of what can be implemented throughout the Church.

### **Forum 6: Evangelization – How Can We More Effectively Reach Our Parishioners?**

*“The unfortunate reality is that we have too often abandoned our young people and failed to provide them with the nourishment – intellectual, emotional, and spiritual – to help them face*

*the world, let alone find life within the world. The more we ask ourselves: ‘why have our children left the Church?’, the more we confirm that we have failed, not merely to keep them in the Church, but to have meaningfully engaged with them as human persons in the image of Christ. I would suggest that this is because we have simultaneously failed to understand ourselves what it means to be a person in the image and likeness of Christ, what it means to be a Christian, and how to find healing and salvation in Christ.”*

*Metropolitan Tikhon on Pillar 4” Outreach and Evangelism*

**Guidance:** Metropolitan Tikhon exhorts, *“It involves communication, but not simply the external modes of communication that modern technology places at our disposal, but rather the prayerful Christian manner in which we shine the eternal truth of Christ through the living and preaching of the Gospel, the sharing of the Orthodox patristic and ascetical experience and the Christian care and love we extend to our neighbors, to strangers and to our enemies. It is about preaching the Resurrection.”*

**Activity:** This forum mainly deals with what may be termed “internal evangelism” or how to more effectively reach our own Orthodox faithful. This involves not just growing spiritually and liturgically in the Church but asking some difficult questions about why some faithful have left the Church. This involves an examination on how to reach the Church’s youth, the person in the pew and those Orthodox who are on the perimeter of Church life. There are a number of examples of how this has worked effectively in parishes but the focus of this forum should be a discussion on what are the challenges the Church faces and how can it more effectively respond to those challenges to spiritually grow the faithful but attract the wandering Orthodox back into the Church. A special emphasis should be on what tools are needed by the faithful on all levels to confront the challenges in today’s world.

**Bishops: Metropolitan Tikhon, Archbishop Nathaniel, Archbishop Alejo**

**Panel:**

### **Conclusion**

*“The Four Pillars I have outlined present us with some enduring goals for which we might strive as a Church so as to further strengthen the young tree that is the Orthodox Church in America. At the same time, they provide us with a guide to meaningfully incorporate and incarnate the experience of our beloved saints into our own context and our own lives. I invite you to join me in setting off upon the path of life which, though it may seem uncertain or even treacherous to us at times, nevertheless has been traveled already by those who went before us.”*

*His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon, Conclusion “Of What Life Do We Speak?”*

These forums for the 19<sup>th</sup> All American Council will be the beginning of that discussion within the Church for the Holy Synod to examine and chart the future of the Church. They are invaluable

as they will allow for an open discussion on a Church-wide level and give the tools to begin the planning for the future.