



Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America EPISCOPAL COUNCIL

September 1/14, 2017
LIBERTYVILLE

At the Beginning of the Ecclesiastical New Year

*Glory to You for calling me into being! Glory to You, showing me the beauty of the universe!
Glory to You, spreading out before me heaven and earth, like the pages in a book of eternal wisdom!
Glory to You for every step of my life's journey, for every moment of glory!
Glory to You, God, from age to age!
(From the Akathist Hymns, Glory to God for all things)*

To the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Executive Boards and Members of the Church-School Congregations of the Serbian Orthodox Communities in North and South America, the Circles of Serbian Sisters of our Parishes and Dioceses, the beloved Children and Youth and the entire Serbian Orthodox Family in North and South America:

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We greet you in the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, following the inspiring glorification of Saint Mardarije of Libertyville and All-America, and wish everyone a blessed beginning of the New Ecclesiastical Year!

By the grace of God, we have been made worthy to begin yet another ecclesiastical year, another festive cycle, within whose blessed opportunities we are called to struggle spiritually, in order to be good and faithful stewards of the Church and of all that God has given to us, in order to grow 'in the likeness' of God so that we also might become His saints.

The new ecclesiastical year always begins with a certain excitement, anticipation, and special joy, as soon we will celebrate the first of many great feast days of the year, the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, who is our fervent intercessor, helping us to advance the life of our Church and do the work of God in the world. However, the New Year is also met with its challenges, within each parish and diocese, but also in the world around us. There are many difficult and tragic events unfolding in various places, each calling us to increased prayer and the good use of our knowledge, charity and intercession, which should always be our response to every situation and circumstance. Let us remember that without God, we cannot do much, for *unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it (Psalm 127:1)*. And, Christ, our Lord also promises us that *with God all things are possible (Mark 10:27)*.

The examples of such faith accompanied by good works are abundant and include the newest saint on the calendar of the Church, Saint Mardarije of Libertyville and All-America! The love he consistently

demonstrated for God and His Church, the relentless sacrifices he made, and the profound faith he possessed within, are a living witness to the true calling of God's people. Let us imitate him!

Like Saint Mardarije, as the people of God, we do not limit our expectations simply to this world. Instead, we recognize that the way that leads to the Kingdom of God goes through the keeping of the divine commandments during our temporary sojourn in this world. It goes through the path of the Church which is Christ's Body given to us to nurture our faith and love for him, and our love for one another and for the entire creation, which he made so *good and beautiful* and which he gifted and entrusted to our care.

Therefore, we must strive to carefully keep the original commandment to preserve creation from all harm, both for our sake and for the sake of others around us. We are called to respect the material and natural creation of God, and therefore should regard ourselves as being responsible before God for all of it, especially for His Church. Let us always treat everyone and everything with love and care. Only in this way shall we prevent the threatening influences on our Church, on our families, as well as on the physical environment around us.

Let us during this New Ecclesiastic Year increase our commitment to the Church through good and proper stewardship of our time, talents and treasures, and with even greater zeal, work together not just for ourselves and our children, but also for the coming generations, who, with the help of God and because of our efforts, will be spiritually healthy and joyful members of the Holy Serbian Orthodox Church.

This is achieved first and foremost through the liturgy, the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, as well as the various parish programs and events that bring us together as the family of God. It is achieved when we are good stewards of our parishes, who continuously seek to help people grow in holiness and to live their faith and witness to it in their marriages, families, workplaces, and communities. It is achieved when we can joyfully and with fervent conviction say, *Glory to You, God, from age to age!*

Finally, we ask the Lord for all good things for the entire Church and for the world entrusted to our care, and we bestow upon each of you, those near and far, our wholehearted Archpastoral and paternal blessings.

LONGIN

Bishop of New Gracanica-Midwestern America

PRESIDENT OF THE EPISCOPAL COUNCIL

SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA

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Locum Tenens of South and Central America

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MAXIM, Bishop of Western America

IRINEJ, Bishop of Eastern America

KIRILO, Bishop of Dioclea, Vicar Bishop in South and Central America