



Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA
Church Assembly—*Sabor*
800 Years of Autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church:
“Endowed by God, Treasured by the People”

August 1, 2019

Holy Despot Stephen the Tall and Venerable Eugenia (Lazarevich)
LIBERTYVILLE

**STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENTS OF THE CHURCH ASSEMBLY-SABOR
REGARDING THE CONSTITUTION AND RELATED GOVERNING DOCUMENTS**

To the Very Reverend and Reverend Priests and Deacons, Venerable Monastics, the Members and Parishioners of the Church-School Congregations and Mission Parishes of the Serbian Orthodox Dioceses in the United States of America

Beloved Clerics, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we have received numerous questions and concerns regarding the updated combined version of the current *Constitution, General Rules and Regulations and Uniform Rules and Regulations for Parishes and Church School Congregations of the Serbian Orthodox Dioceses in the United States of America*, that was published and distributed to all attendees and received by such on July 16, 2019 during the 22nd Church Assembly-*Sabor*, we deemed it necessary and appropriate to provide answers to our broader community regarding what was updated and why.

The newly printed white bound edition is a compilation of all three prior documents, inclusive of past amendments and updated decisions rendered by previous Church Assemblies and the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

This was done in accordance with the May 7/24, 2018, HAB No. 45/MIN.171 decision of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of our Mother Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, to whom we are and shall forever remain faithful.

In terms of updates, there are two main categories: 1) the name change (i.e. boundary change), and 2) a small number of minor non-material updates. The following are the specific updates and the reasons for them:

- 1) Our name has changed from the *Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America* to *Serbian Orthodox Dioceses in the United States of America* for the following reasons:
 - a. First and foremost, we updated our name to accurately reflect our geographical reach, and to make it unequivocal, that we are an integral part of the Serbian Orthodox Church-Patriarchate with its See in Belgrade, as we are Dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and not a separate “Church”;
 - b. St. Mardarije established our administrative center in Libertyville, Illinois and therefore we are subject to the laws of the United States of America, where the legal, tax, and insurance realms have become more and more hostile to religious entities. Continuing to operate with a name that references North and South America opens the U.S. Dioceses to legal obligations for all of the activities of our Dioceses in Canada, South and Central America. Similarly, the Canadian, South and Central American Dioceses could be held legally responsible for the activities in our U.S. Dioceses;

- c. The name *Serbian Orthodox Church in the United States of America and Canada* ceased to exist in 2007, when it was succeeded by the name *Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America*. More importantly, in 1995, the Canadian Diocese enacted its own governing document, called a *Statute*, required by Canadian law and approved by the Holy Assembly of Bishops. Since then, the Canadian Diocese has only sporadically participated in our Church Assemblies, and has minimally participated in the Central Church Council. Since 1995, the Canadian Diocese has been forbidden by Canadian law to pay its Diocesan assessments to the Central Treasury here in the United States;
- d. The Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Buenos Aires and South and Central America is now legally registered in Argentina, pursuant to Argentinian law, and will thereby, be operating under its own *Statute*.

Therefore, while considering the number of national/international legal systems involved, the Holy Assembly of Bishops recognized the above noted facts and approved the name change to accurately reflect the current state of our U.S.A. Dioceses, and to properly comply and protect ourselves under U.S. law – nothing more.

- 2) The following is a list of the exact, minor non-material updates that were made for accuracy and to accordingly update the documents:
 - a. The name change from *Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America* to *Serbian Orthodox Dioceses in the United States of America* is done throughout the document, based on decision of the Holy Assembly of Bishops made in May 2018 to adjust the territory of Constitution to the U.S.A.;
 - b. Hierarchical changes directly made by Holy Assembly of Bishops:
 - i. Page 40: replacing Holy Synod with the Supreme Ecclesiastical Court (i.e. Appellate Court); and
 - ii. Page 16: adding Supreme Ecclesiastical Court as a governing authority;
 - c. Hierarchical changes made by the Episcopal Council and approved by Holy Assembly of Bishops:
 - i. Page 48: Church Assembly-*Sabor* summoned every five years, instead of every three years; and
 - ii. Page 60: Each Bishop is allowed to summon their Diocesan Assembly every year, or second year or third year instead of annually;
 - d. Historic updates:
 - i. Pages 88-90: History of Constitution updated to reflect everything that has occurred since the Constitution (brown book) was printed in 2008;
 - ii. Pages 104-106: History of Gen RR updated to reflect everything that has occurred since the Uniform RR and GR (yellow book) was printed; and
 - iii. Pages 166-168: History of Uniform RR updated to reflect everything that has occurred since yellow book was printed;
 - e. In the Uniform RR, letters a,b,c,d, etc. replaced with numbers to directly match the Serbian text (due to alphabetic order being different); and

- f. Added color pictures of the Serbian Orthodox Church's crest and flag.

In the future, additional updates must be made. For example, our *Constitution, General Rules and Regulations and Uniform Rules and Regulations* do not make any mention about electronic forms of communication or holding board meetings over conference calls, etc. We will aim to be as inclusive as possible with our Diocesan Councils, Church-School Congregations and Mission Parishes, as the expert Legislative Committee of the Central Church Council works through proposed updates in order to give you the opportunity to provide feedback prior to its adoption at the following Church Assembly-*Sabor*.

Importantly, and outside of the *Constitution per se*, due to geographical definitions, the Episcopal Council for the Dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South America remains fully intact as the cohesive and unifying spiritual and ecclesial factor in the Americas.

Brothers and sisters, we hope that the above explains the exact changes, why they were taken, and their necessity. We are Dioceses of our Mother Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church-Patriarchate, and we are loyal to and under the canonical and hierarchical authority of the Holy Assembly of Bishops, whose President is the Orthodox Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and Serbian Patriarch.

Your prayerful intercessors before the Lord,

LONGIN, Bishop of New Gracanica-Midwestern America

MAXIM, Bishop of Western America

IRINEJ, Bishop of Eastern America

PRESIDENTS OF THE 22nd CHURCH ASSEMBLY-SABOR