



**THE BISHOP OF WASHINGTON-NEW YORK AND EASTERN AMERICA**  
**DIOCESE OF EASTERN AMERICA • THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

**ЕПИСКОП ВАШИНГТОНСКО-ЊУЈОРШКИ И ИСТОЧНОАМЕРИЧКИ**  
**ЕПАРХИЈА ИСТОЧНОАМЕРИЧКА • СРПСКЕ ПРАВОСЛАВНЕ ЦРКВЕ**

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**TO THE BELOVED AND FAITHFUL PARISHIONERS**  
**OF THE SAINT SAVA SERBIAN ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL**  
**CLEVELAND**

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven . . .  
I have seen the burden God has laid on people.  
He has made everything beautiful in its time.  
He has also set eternity in the hearts of people;  
yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end . . .  
I know that everything God does will endure forever;  
nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it.  
God does it so that people will revere Him.*  
(Ecclesiastes 3:1, 10-11, 14)

Every change and any change in life, most beloved, is always difficult to accept, regardless of the nature of that change. Yet, if we are true believers, we understand that it is our Lord and Savior alone, who secures our path in life. As such, we come to understand, both individually and collectively, that it is precisely “...*He who sat upon the Throne said, ‘Behold, **I make all things new.**’ Also, He said, “Write this, for **these words are trustworthy and true**”* (Rev. 21:5).

As your Archpastor and Spiritual Father responsible for you before the Throne of God, it is now I, personally, who write to you concerning the recent clerical and administrative changes at the St. Sava Cathedral in Cleveland. Most unfortunately, others, many of whom are neither members of the local church, nor even parishioners, have chosen to misrepresent the truth of the matter, by protesting, attempting to stop the celebration of the Holy and Divine Liturgy, destroying locks and disturbing the general peace and order of your parish. By issuing abrupt and disruptive announcements without adequate context, they have intended to cause dismay and confusion. Still others, seizing upon not only this lack of information, but also disinformation, have chosen to write petitions and letters in a manner alien to the tradition and practice of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and have hastened to post such, on social media – succumbing to one of the burdens of our day and thereby participating in its sin. The result has been to hold up your parish, and by extension the Serbian Orthodox Church and faithful, to scandal and ridicule. All of this is so deeply regrettable.

As it is written, Christ “*desires all persons to be saved and to come to **the knowledge of the truth**”* (1 Tim. 2:4). Therefore, “*you will know the **truth**, and the **truth** will make you **free**”* (Jn. 8:32). The truth? After prolonged months, indeed years of agony, deliberation, consideration and above all prayer, as your Archpastor, equally responsible for all our God-given parishes, faithful and clergy alike, a careful decision was reached intended to serve equally, the best interests of the parish, its church-school congregation, the members of St. Sava Cathedral, and the very priest himself. Most importantly, this decision was not made in a void, but in consultation with those who have been entrusted with serving in our

Diocesan administrative bodies, commissions and clergy. **The final decision was painfully rendered only after having carefully taken into consideration** and achieving the concurrence of these consultative bodies regarding, among all else, the following indisputable facts:

- More often than not, including major holidays such as Christmas, the St. Sava Cathedral is near empty...
- By contrast, the neighboring Serbian and other Orthodox parishes are filled with faithful, who have left the Cathedral...
- Faithful in mixed marriages have left as they felt unwelcome...
- A prominent former past president of CSS Sveta Petka, American Serbian Women's Club, Principal of the Church School, Church board member and Njegosh Choir festal sponsor, requested to be buried by another Orthodox priest...
- The church school has been rendered dysfunctional to the point of non-existence...
- The renown Njegosh Church Choir being dejected has left the Cathedral...
- The director of the Junior Choir was dismissed, and the Junior Choir is no more...
- Cantors have been consistently ignored and demeaned, leaving the Cathedral...
- Persons were elected to the Executive Board, who are not church members...
- Shouting down the Dean of the Cleveland Deanery in the church, following the celebration of a Divine Liturgy, as he attempted to administer the Oath of Office to the newly elected Executive Board, etc.

At present, the protesters are intent on stopping the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. That is, as such, not only to block the faithful from attending Liturgy, but also **an attempt to stop Christ Himself from being distributed to the faithful through Holy Communion**. This is a reprehensible sin, one that can only be compared to schism. According to St. John Chrysostom, whose Liturgy we celebrate in the Orthodox Church: *"Causing divisions in the Church is no lesser evil than falling into heresies... the sin of schism isn't washed away even by blood of martyrdom"* (Exegesis of the Epistle to Ephesians). This, in and of itself, is confirmation of the fact that change was necessary. For all of those who have fallen away from the Church, I invite you to return in repentance to the light and love of Christ and the embrace of your Holy Church.

Now, most beloved Faithful, it is time for all of us, without exception, to pray earnestly and to accept the will of God and thank Protopresbyter Dragoslav Kotic, together with his family, for his service at the St. Sava Cathedral in Cleveland. We are certain that this will help the faithful, who are yearning to experience the renewal of parish life and ministry, to move forward in their life in Christ. In like manner, with the joy of anticipation, I invite you to pray fervently for your new pastor and spiritual father, Presbyter Dragan Vukovic, and his family. Welcome him into your homes and your hearts, as he, too, will receive you in equal measure.

For all of us, most especially those who have given themselves unto the Service of the Lord, ours is to follow the prophetic example of Old, as emulated by the Theotokos and Mother of God, when summoned to His Service, to say simply and earnestly: ***Here I am, Lord!***

Therefore, Beloved, *"Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"* (I Thess. 5:16-19). May this season of the Nativity Fast renew and enliven our trust and faith in God, and may God's Peace, which comes to us with the Birth of the King of Peace, reign in all our hearts forever.

With Archpastoral blessings and Paternal love,

+IRINEJ

Bishop of Washington-New York and Eastern America  
The Serbian Orthodox Church

