



Metropolis of Boston

# SAINT ATHANASIUS THE GREAT

## GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

4 Appleton Street, Arlington, MA 02476

December 20, 2017

My dear brothers and sisters in the family of St. Athanasius Parish,

I am once again writing to you in the form of a pastoral letter to keep you accurately informed of the unfolding events in the life of our parish. Although my tenure as acting pastor of our beloved Saint Athanasius is rapidly coming to an end, I nonetheless feel deeply committed to maintaining our established open dialogue in discussions in the firm belief that knowing the truth is the surest road leading to our reconciliation and the restoration of brotherhood and unity among us.

In the four months that I have served the parish, the request I have heard most often is the need of people to be informed by our Metropolis of the true nature and circumstances which led to the removal of Fr. Kastanas as the pastor of our community. To ensure a correct record of fact and to keep the parish informed, the Metropolis recently released an extremely detailed nine-page report with the most frequently asked questions and answers on these events, as well as a timeline. At my direction, that report was published in its entirety in our parish bulletin so that every member of the parish, including those without access to a computer, could read it.

I think that it is entirely just to say that any fair-minded and reasonably objective person would conclude from this report that the Metropolitan's actions were neither arbitrary nor sudden. Quite the contrary, they were the inevitable result of a three-year effort to resolve questions of very serious improprieties resulting from the failure to faithfully observe fundamental requirements of the Uniform Parish Regulations which govern the entire Archdiocese of America. These regulations establish the necessary transparency and accurate accountability required in the conduct of parish financial and other transactions. The inability of these efforts to resolve the concerns regarding Fr. Kastanas affected the parish of Saint Athanasius in very negative ways. Factions began to form, parish elections became confrontational and a succeeding general assembly attempted to nullify and rescind legally

approved and binding decisions of previous assemblies without any regard for parliamentary procedures or the Uniform Parish Regulations. An atmosphere of growing chaos emerged, making it nearly impossible to properly and coherently administer the affairs of the parish.

Mindful of the warning of our Savior that "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls" (Luke 11:17), and "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Luke 11:23), the Metropolitan had not only the undisputed authority, **but the sacred obligation** to intervene and resolve the growing problems in a definitive manner.

The Church canons explicitly require that every Christian, layman and clergyman alike, offer respect and obedience to those whom the Church has placed in authority over us, and severely sanction those who fail to do so. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul writes of church governance, stating "Everything must be done in a proper and orderly way." (1 Corinthians 14:40) That is precisely why both the church canons and the Uniform Parish Regulations contain explicit and detailed instructions on administering the affairs of the Church.

With respect to the transfer of authority, every priest, when his parish assignment has ended, is required to provide his successor with the official seal of the parish, a detailed inventory of the altar vessels, and all relevant church records -- with particular emphasis on the parish Sacramental registry books.

Instead of conforming to these mandates, Fr. Kastanas, for reasons known only to him, chose to ignore these mandates and openly defied the authority of the Metropolitan. Fr. Kastanas went even further with his disobedience by directly violating church canons that explicitly forbid clergymen from seeking redress in a civil court.

We do not know why Fr. Kastanas purchased a personal computer and immediately transferred onto it church records from the computer that had been purchased for his use by Saint Athanasius, or why he did so without the knowledge, much less the authorization, of the Parish Council.

We do not know why Fr. Kastanas has failed to condemn the ongoing efforts to utilize social media to disseminate distorted information and outright falsehoods.

We do not know why Fr. Kastanas has remained silent as those who claim to support him continue to intimidate and discourage parishioners from attending church.

We do not know why Fr. Kastanas has forsaken the words he spoke during his final sermon – “I want you to please try to calm down and be peacemakers, take it easy, and continue to be brothers and sisters in the Lord, not be nasty with each other and be gracious and hospitable” – as his supporters endlessly seek to foment anger and resistance, all in a futile effort to force the Metropolitan to reverse his decision.

Also it is with a sense of great personal sadness that I share with you that I too, have found myself the frequent target of vicious personal attacks, and explicit threats to my personal safety and that of my family, including my grandchildren.

At the recent vesper service in commemoration of St. Barbara, there was hostile and ugly behavior by individuals who sought to intimidate parishioners who were simply coming to attend church services, including blocking entrances to the church and parking lot to prevent people from entering our church. There was even such behavior directed against our children. Unfortunately some parishioners chose to leave rather than participate in the service. This was perfectly understandable. We were however pleased that, at this important annual commemoration at our Parish, a total of twenty-seven priests of the Metropolis were able to accept the invitation sent by Fr. Aaron to participate in the service. We were also graced by a group of chanters from Holy Cross Seminary who took part in our service. This unprecedented show of solidarity and unstinting support presided over by his Eminence Metropolitan Methodios was an inspiration to all of us.

The appalling tactics and the devious strategies of these particular individuals, will of course not succeed. They are bound to fail not because the Metropolitan or I are more powerful or more persuasive. In the end, it is always the truth which prevails over falsehoods. “Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed up on the housetops.” (Luke 12:2-3)

As part of what I believe has been a concerted effort to deceive you, it was erroneously reported in the Greek media and elsewhere that Fr. Kastanas had won his lawsuit against the

Metropolis of Boston, when in fact the opposite is true. As you may recall, Fr. Kastanas' lawsuit included an injunction he sought to prevent the Metropolis of Boston from retrieving church records on the computer he used at the parish. The judge denied his request for an injunction and instead created a process to grant the Metropolis access to all church records on the computer. As of this writing, I am pleased to report to you that as a result of the lawsuit Fr. Kastanas brought against his Church, the computer he sought to keep shrouded in secrecy has been examined and the Metropolis now has in its possession nearly five thousand church records that it sought to recover. Once all the recovered records are fully examined, and the other findings are revealed, the full dimension of what has and has not transpired will become evident.

Rest assured that you will receive a full and complete report of the documented facts. Those same facts will also be referred to the authority of the Church, which has the sole power to determine what the consequences will be. Thankfully, these determinations are not ours to make, but are entrusted by the Church to procedures, institutions, and authorities that centuries of experience teach us will render a just and fair decision.

My brothers and sisters, I feel compelled to once again remind you that we too, have our own important role to play. We are called upon to actively work to bind up the terrible wounds that have been inflicted on our parish. We are called upon to reignite the love which binds us into one family whose head is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The guide of Holy Scripture is where we encounter Jesus Christ who counsels us that "Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62) Heed also the wise advice of Saint Paul who wrote "The one thing that I do is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead." (Philippians 3:13) Scripture teaches that the first step on the right path in our pilgrimage journey involves leaving behind the disputations of the past. We need to always remember that the past is immutable and unchangeable; we cannot alter it or make it better because it has irrevocably slipped beyond our reach. We must, therefore, focus with intensity on the present. We should do so because in the wise words of the proverb "Today, lived well, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope." I urge you in all earnestness to "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all loneliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing with

one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-2)

But what are we to do about those who reject our invitation to unity and reconciliation? What do we do about those who, despite irrefutable and undeniable proof, refuse to relent and abandon their preconceived notions? Once again we turn to Scripture for guidance, and there we read, "Avoid stupid arguments. They are useless and worthless. Give at least two warnings to the person who causes divisions, and then have nothing more to do with him." (Titus 3:9-10) "I urge you my brethren, watch out for those who raise divisions and upset people's faith and go against the teaching you have received. Keep away from them! For those who do such things are not serving Christ our Lord, but their own appetites." (Romans 16:17-18).

We are not obliged to carry on endless arguments that are futile and unforgiving. Rather, we are called upon to confront the truth, no matter how difficult that might be; we are bound to accept that truth, to defend it, and to share it with those who do not yet possess it. Should people persist in denying the truth we are obliged to move on without them.

In closing I admonish you to hold these words close to your hearts, to strive to once again be of one heart and one mind, and in this way reflect more perfectly the words of our Lord Jesus who told His Apostles, "And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have a love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples." (John 13:34-35) "If you love me you will obey my commandments." (John 14:15)

In order to embody these words, we shall have to abandon the distorted notion of victory and in its place seek peace; we must cease to strive for advantage over one another and establish communion and fellowship in its place. We must banish the desire to prevail in order to hold firm to St. Paul's vision of true Christian community, so eloquently expressed when he wrote to the believers in Ephesus, "I, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you. Always be humble, gentle and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that bind you together." (Ephesians 4:1-3) In our quest to meet that standard, we can be certain that we have undertaken a noble and God pleasing endeavor.

As my own mission to you rapidly draws to a close, I am inevitably reminded of the poignant moment in the Old Testament during which God informs Moses that his death was imminent and his service to God's chosen people was completed. The Lord instructed Moses to teach his successor Aaron a blessing to recite from that day forward over his beloved people. It is that God's blessing that I, in deep reverence, now invoke upon each of you: "Unto God's mercy and protection I commit you. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you His peace, now and forever more." (Numbers 6:22-26)

Extending to each of you my deepest gratitude for offering me the privilege of serving you, as well as my warmest personal regards and prayers for your continued progress in life and in faith, I remain,

The least among all of God's servants,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fr. Andrew Demotses". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Andrew Demotses