

**6  
Pillars  
Of  
EOC Distinctives**

**Married Bishops**

**Bishop in Each City**

**Incarnation of Liturgy**

**Vincentian Hermeneutic**

**Eucharistic Hospitality**

**Succession of Faith**

**REVISED EOC CONCLAVE  
AGREEMENT OF 1985**



We are committed to these six distinctives:

1. To the allowance of a married episcopacy
2. To the Ignatian polity of a bishop in each city where the church is located
3. To a common Eucharistic Liturgy with freedom of local incarnation
4. To the Vincentian canon as our guiding hermeneutic
5. To Eucharistic hospitality beyond our communion of churches
6. To an apostolic succession of Faith

Each of these items is further explained below:

1. *To the allowance of a married episcopacy* – It is not a requirement that a bishop be either celibate or married, but that both be allowed. We believe this is what is seen among the Apostles. Some had wives and some did not. Any historical change to this rule was made primarily to address certain cultural realities of a particular era. We believe, with St. Paul, that a bishop certainly is less distracted and better able to give single-minded devotion to pastoral responsibilities if he is unmarried. And yet, the Apostle is also the one who admonished Timothy that an overseer, a bishop, should be the husband of one wife, obviously acknowledging that a married overseer would likely be the norm.

While celibacy more clearly models Jesus Christ and a celibate bishop is a clear gift to the Church,

we further believe that a married bishop is also a gift that lends other spiritual benefits of grace and should not be forbidden. In fact, the requirement by St. Paul that a bishop be the husband of one wife and able to manage his children and household well suggests that such is also an important model to the Church, one that is more practically relatable to most of the parishioners.

We would acknowledge, however, the wisdom of Orthodox tradition that a man be married before being ordained a priest, or that he should remain celibate after being ordained, so as not to find himself in a conflict of interest and be adjusting to a new marriage while trying to shepherd the parish. Pastoral *economia* might be offered in rare situations, but only with the approval of the regional council of Bishops.

2. To the Ignatian polity of a bishop in each city where the church is – St. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of the Apostle John, certainly favored this model rather than the contemporary diocesan model found in most major liturgical traditions. This means both that it is preferable that there be a bishop in each city and also that there be only one bishop in each city. We would say that the Ignatian model is the goal, but also that the diocesan model is sometimes a needed steppingstone to get to that goal. There are several underlying truths and values that give foundation to the Ignatian polity.

First, that in every Eucharistic assembly of the Church gathered around the presider with his presbyters and laity, there is the fullness of God in Christ, the fullness of grace, the fullness of the Church, and that a bishop as the presider most clearly manifests that reality. That is what it truly means to be catholic – manifesting the whole in the particular.

Secondly, that in cities or close geographical locations where there are multiple churches, having only one bishop, surrounded by the presbyters from each church, is preferable for good order and unity.

And thirdly, the Ignatian polity encourages more personal pastor care and shepherding, as well as the guarding of the faith, when there is a tested and approved local bishop who has the health of his local faithful most clearly in mind.

And finally, St. Ignatius understood the bishop presiding at the Eucharist, surrounded by his presbyters, deacons, and laity, as the clearest continuation and manifestation of Christ surrounded by His Apostles. For a further clarification of the essential relationship of the office of one bishop to one Eucharistic center, St. Ignatius, in his letters to the Ephesians, Magnesians, and Trallians, offers up the fact that the local unity of Christians in Christ is clearly and visibly manifested by unity in the person, or office, of the local bishop.

He says that unity in the bishop is a living image of unity in Christ. *"It is manifest, therefore, that we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself." (Ign. Eph. 6.) "... take heed to do all things in the harmony of God with the bishop presiding in the place of God." (Mag. 6) " For when you are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ you appear to me to live not after the manner of men but according to Jesus Christ... "* (Tral. 2.) *"... let all reverence ... the bishop as Jesus Christ." (Ibid. 3.) "Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."*

3. To a common Eucharistic Liturgy with freedom of local incarnation – While in the earlier years of the apostolic Church there was a lot of liturgical freedom from bishop to bishop, there was a basic shell or form as expressed in the Didache and the 1<sup>st</sup> Apology of Justin the Martyr. However, as time went on and the church grew, it was deemed advantageous to codify 2 or 3 common liturgies for use in all the churches. While these still allowed for some local and cultural incarnations, having common liturgies where Christians everywhere were saying basically the same things in the same order fostered a certain sense of camaraderie and unity. It also made it easier when traveling from one location to another to join with the local saints in worship.

The liturgical development in the EOC has taken a route similar to that: in the early days there was a lot of variation in Sunday liturgy, although the basic shape was similar. As time went on, it became apparent that it would be good order to have a Common Liturgy for the same reasons as noted above. We took the St. John Chrysostom Liturgy as it is used in virtually all Eastern Orthodox churches and edited it back to what it was when the Church was undivided (up to the 8<sup>th</sup> century), and we also made it less cumbersome for non-monastic settings without losing its essential integrity.

We believe, on the one hand, that true Liturgy molds us and not the other way around, but also that the true Liturgy must be celebrated by spirits enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and that is best manifested when the true Liturgy is incarnated into the language and culture of the local people. Ultimately, all liturgies should accurately manifest the Faith, and so each bishop and the whole college of EOC bishops is responsible to make sure this is the case.

4. *To the Vincentian canon as our guiding hermeneutic* – St. Vincent of Lerins, in his work *Commonitory*, stated that we should hold to that which has been believed everywhere and always and by all; in other words, that universality, antiquity, and consent across the whole church through the ages should guide our hermeneutics.

We believe that this means we should look for the most common and agreed upon thread of thought, that which has been most consistently and most widely held by the whole church throughout the history of the Church, and that to discern this we must look for that thread in all the sources of dogma, in the writings of Saints and leaders of the Church, in Liturgies, in icons, in ecumenical councils, and in all footprints of the Spirit's work through the ages that witness to the Holy Scriptures. If something is true and universally held in antiquity, it should find witness and agreement with the Scriptures throughout all the sources of dogma and expressions of the Faith.

5. *To Eucharistic hospitality beyond our communion of churches* – We believe that there is only one Christ, and that He is not divided. While we acknowledge that many traditions who claim His name have departed from the Faith altogether, we also believe that there are many who hold at least the core of the Faith as essential for salvation, who have been baptized into Christ in the name of the Trinity, who are faithful in their various Christian traditions, and who are brothers and sisters in Christ and fellow members of His body, even if, as a casualty of history, they are lacking in their understanding of the fullness of the Faith. A human being with only one arm and one leg is no less a human being.

Likewise, we believe that a baptized and faithful Christian, even if missing some of the tenets of the fullness of orthodoxy, is still a brother and sister in Christ and welcome at the Table of the Lord. We further believe that it is from this eucharistic love and hospitality that healing in our church divisions will most likely occur. Waiting until we agree on everything, other than that which is essential for salvation, before we take communion together, is inconsistent with early orthodox ecclesiology. That would be like suggesting married couples refrain from intimacy until they agree on everything. Of course, it must be clarified what is essential for salvation and what is essential for the fullness of faith, a distinction that many Orthodox churches have difficulty making; but that discussion is for another time.

It seems inconsistent in many churches with a closed communion policy that they will commune newly baptized infants who understand nothing of the Faith, baptizing them into the faith of their parents, and yet they refuse to commune Christians of other traditions who have at least a basic understanding of the Faith, who have also been baptized into Christ in the name of the Trinity, and who are godly and faithful to the Lord. Can such believers not be covered by the faith of the local parish of orthodox believers as an infant is by the faith of its parents?

Such non-Orthodox believers, even though lacking in the fulness of understanding, might actually approach the Mysteries with greater awe and faith than many of the Orthodox parishioners do. Using the same sort of argument that St. Paul uses in Romans 2:28-29, would it not be true to say: "For he is not an orthodox who is one outwardly, nor is orthodoxy that which is outward in the flesh; but he is an orthodox who is one inwardly; and orthodoxy is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God." If these believers belong to Christ the same as we do, shall we refuse to them a participation in Christ through His Body and Blood? Rather than custodians of the Eucharist, have we become managers over Christ? "Suffer not the little children to come unto me," would seem to apply to others as well.

6. *To an apostolic succession of Faith* – It is almost surprising that such an emphasis is placed on tactile or hands-on succession in other church traditions, as if there is some holy pedigree that is passed on by that practice. Neither Jesus nor the disciples advocated for this or modeled it. Jesus said, "*You will know them by their fruit,*" (not by their apostolic succession). The writer of Hebrews states in chapter 7 that Jesus became a priest, "*not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.*"

Succession is a matter of faith and of fruit, and it is primarily brought about by the Spirit of God who eschatologically connects us to the apostolic train, whether that is through a historically traced lineage or as one born outside of that. The Apostle Paul is the premier example of this, and many passages from his letters could be offered to substantiate that his teaching was consistent with how he himself was regarded. He was given the right hand of fellowship by the other Apostles, but nothing was added to Him. The fruit in his life and ministry were affirmed; that was enough.

The question is not whether we have the right pedigree or spiritual genealogy, but whether we hold the right Faith and show forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Our responsibility to others and theirs to us is simply to bear witness to this faith and fruit as being consistent with that which has been held consistently through the ages, to offer concord rather than seek conquest by using apostolic succession as a weapon of conformity beyond faith and fruit. The latter understanding and use of apostolic succession is not found in Scripture or early Tradition.

We do not in any way disparage those who can display their apostolic lineage, nor are we opposed to being connected into that if the occasion presented itself with integrity. We simply believe that a succession of faith and fruit is the one needful thing when it comes to validity.

## Conclusion

This short explanation of these six pillars of our Conclave agreement is offered for clarification. While more could be said, hopefully this will suffice to describe why we hold to these things.

We have taken heat over some of these matters throughout the years and have made some necessary adjustments and edits to the original document. However, we firmly believe that these statements, while not at all replacing the primary theological pillars of the ancient orthodox catholic Faith, help to clarify and press out the spirit of that Faith in a way that is consistent with Tradition and with changes in contemporary society. Biblical Truth and Tradition are living. As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann once said, "The Church must always be changing in order to remain the same." Just as Scripture witnesses that God changes His mind in order to manifest His unchanging essence and character, so the Church must make changes and clarifications from time to time to remain true to her essence and character in Christ. These statements are simply offered to that end.

May the Lord have mercy upon us all and guide us into the fullness of His will and ways.

***This revision of the original Conclave Agreement of 1985 was approved and adopted by the Bishop's Synod held in December, 2022 in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.***