

Orthodox Witness

1. Not-for-Profit Corporation

Orthodox Witness was incorporated in the State of Illinois as a not-for-profit corporation on May 30, 2001, and received its tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service under section 501 (c) (3), DLN: 17053221049011 as of the same date. The first Board of Directors is comprised of Fr. Emmanuel Hatzidakis, President; Ms. Kathrine Sharos, Secretary; and Steve Lekich, Treasurer. The initial address of its registered offices is 42 Waterford Lane, Glen Carbon, IL 62034 and its mailing address is P.O. Box 143, Maryville, IL 62062. Its telephone number is (618) 288-6523, its web site address is www.orthodoxwitness.org and its e-mail address is seek@orthodoxwitness.org

2. Need

Orthodox Witness was formed in order to fill a perceived specific need in our area and, we believe, in other areas of our country. We felt that we Orthodox did very little in the area of evangelism and that we did not take very seriously the charge of the Lord to His disciples, and to their disciples, down to us, “Go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19-20). We felt that we Orthodox kept the light of truth hidden in our parishes. We wanted to do something about it, right here, at “home”, where the Lord has planted us, and to let the light of truth, shining ever-brightly in our Church, illumine the world around us.

3. Inspiration

Our initiative was inspired and is in line with the SCOBA Millennium Pastoral Letter, *And the Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us*, which states, “**Our intention is to make the Gospel of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ known and embraced by more and more people in this land to which God has called us.**” This is precisely the purpose for which *Orthodox Witness* was formed. The work of our group aims at sharing the good news of Orthodox Christianity

and the Gospel of Jesus Christ with everyone around us in our contemporary society.

4. Scope

Our aim is not to send missionaries to other countries or to help establish new Orthodox parishes in this country—we understand that this is the responsibility of organizations like O.C.M.C., operating under the aegis of SCOBA. Rather the scope of our organization is to spread the truth of Orthodoxy, its mindset and way of life among the non-Orthodox in this country, especially, at the local level, in our neighborhoods and cities.

5. Use of Modern Media

We have at heart to reach out to the world around us by using the means of our culture, such as DVDs, videos, the Internet, etc. to transform the world around us. We intend to convey to our society the truths of our faith in relevant and meaningful ways. If the apostles used the dusty roads of the vast Roman Empire, we can use the vaster network of modern superhighways, called Internet. Where they used the Greek language, we can use the .com language, shared by untold millions. Non-Orthodox Christians have used the media successfully for many years. We have stayed behind. We must, however, awaken to the new reality.

6. Mission Statement

Orthodox Witness is an Orthodox Christian organization dedicated to Orthodox evangelism. Its goal is to bring together Orthodox clergy and laity from all Orthodox jurisdictions into a unified and coordinated effort to spread the truth of Orthodoxy, its mindset and way of life to all people in their locality through the use of modern means of communication, for the glory of the triune God and the exaltation of His Holy Orthodox Church.

7. Action Plan

Our aim is to establish a WEB site, a weekly Orthodox Christian Radio Hour, and a weekly TV program; to develop and/or disseminate appropriate literature (books, magazines, pamphlets) and other media (CD's, DVDs, video and audio tapes, icons, etc.) for use by Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike; to organize regional and national conferences; and to witness to non-Orthodox around us through other means of outreach.

8. Our First Year

In its first year the organization has conducted the following activities: It has launched the web page indicated above, hosted by the Internet Ministries Department of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America; it has published a booklet, *Preaching Another Christ: An Orthodox view of Evangelicalism*, by Saint Theophan the Recluse; and it has conducted its first annual conference, “Come and See”, with the theme, “Proclaiming God’s Eternal Gospel”, in St. Louis, MO, on March 2-3, 2002, with keynote speaker Frank Schaeffer.

9. Our Current Plans

Presently we are organizing our second Orthodox Evangelism Conference, “Come and See”, with the theme, “Orthodoxy: A Faith for All People”, in St. Louis, MO, on Feb. 23-23, 2003. Our keynote speaker is Fr. Peter Gillquist. We will be honored by the presence of His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America (OCA). We are also developing bylaws and preparing for election of officers. We are expanding our Internet page and are working for the publication of a new book.

10. Vision

The organization’s base and the physical place where most of its current members live is the Greater St. Louis Metropolitan area. Presently its activities concentrate mainly in this region, including the areas of Southern Illinois and Southwestern Missouri. The broader vision and intention is that the organization will serve as a model, or will set a paradigm for the establishment of similar Orthodox Evangelism Committees in other—hopefully all!—Orthodox communities and parishes around the country.

Such committees would be composed of the priest, the parish council president (or another PC member) and a number of lay members (depending upon the size of the church) who share this vision. Thus every Evangelism Committee would operate within the structure of the Church and evangelism would be “officially” incorporated among its other national ministries (Benevolent Sisterhood Associations, Religious School, etc.). Such local committees could in turn form regional committees at higher levels for more efficient coordination of their activities and the formulation of broader synergistic plans of action at the regional and national level.

The advantages of having an Orthodox Evangelism Committee in all of our parishes are many. To enumerate just a few: evangelism would be incorporated into the life of the parish, it would be budgeted annually, fund-raising activities would be planned, and the focus of the parish would be drawn to this vital ministry of the Church.

Also the Committee, led by the pastor, would encourage all the parishioners to participate in the services of the church, particularly vespers and other week-day services, religious education, Bible study classes and reading clubs on Orthodox spiritual life; to participate frequently in the sacraments, particularly confession and holy communion; to have a prayer life and to be under spiritual direction.

Our hope is that evangelism will become a viable and vibrant ministry in every Orthodox parish and that every Orthodox community will be turned into a center of evangelism.

11. Precondition of Evangelism

It is our conviction that before we reach out to evangelize the world, we must engage ourselves in a serious effort to reach inward and evangelize our own Orthodox people, by teaching them the faith and by leading them to the fullness of the life of the Church and to sanctification (cf. 1 Thes. 4:3). After all, as it is stated in the Pastoral Letter quoted above, “The primary witness we can offer to one another is the holiness of our life.” All of us should give ourselves completely to the Lord’s service, without any reservations (cf. 1 Cor. 7:35).

12. Motivating Others

We feel that we must motivate others and get them excited about bringing out the truth of our Orthodox faith. Of course, in order to do it, we must first get ‘hot’ ourselves. We should strive to increase the awareness of our communities in the evangelization of the world around us. We feel that we need to address Orthodox evangelism as a mandate, as a personal mission and a personal fulfillment. The words of the Apostle to the Nations ring in our ears and burn within our hearts: “Woe to me, if I don’t evangelize!” (1 Cor. 9:16)

13. Membership

Membership in *Orthodox Witness* is open to every Orthodox Christian, clergy or laity, belonging to any jurisdiction which is in communion with a canonical Bishop. Actual members are those who attend the meetings and help the organization under any capacity. At the present time there are no membership dues, no By-laws and no officers, other than the Board of Directors specified above.

Orthodox Witness is run entirely by volunteers. None of its directors or officers is compensated in any way by the organization.

14. Financing

Production and distribution of material require large funds. As a Not-for-Profit organization, *Orthodox Witness* gratefully accepts donations small and large, from anonymous or eponymous sponsors, which are tax-deductible. The organization also generates income through sale of material (tapes, books, icons, etc.) and through conferences it organizes. All its transactions are audited by independent agents.

15. The Joy of Sharing the Good News

A substantial section of the Pastoral Letter quoted above was devoted to what it called, "The Joy of Our Witness." The sharing of the Good News was described as "the fundamental impulse of the Church." We feel this impulse within our hearts and the joy of our witness. It is precisely for this reason that we named our organization *Orthodox Witness*.

16. Blessings

We are grateful for the blessings we have received to date by our Hierarchs. His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel, head of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America (OCA), writes among other things:

Thank you for the invitation to be one of the hierarchs who bestows a blessing on the Orthodox Witness. I accept with sincere recognition that this is the work of the Church... I am humbled by the great goals you have set and moved deeply by the Lord's own movement of those who love Him and His beautiful Bride. I am pleased to do whatever is of use

to the fulfillment of the goals of the organization which is, in fact, the fulfillment of the Great Command of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom be all honor and glory.

We have also received the blessings of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in a letter written on behalf of Archbishop Demetrios by His Grace Bishop Dimitrios of Xanthos, which states in part:

Many thanks to you and your colleagues in **Orthodox Witness** for seeking to implement at the local level the thoughts and desires expressed by the SCOBA hierarchs in their Millennium Pastoral Letter. Such efforts are essential for the growth of our Holy Church in this land.

17. Final Goal

Orthodox Witness wants to strive to turn our parishes into missionary centers, to help bring “all peoples, nations and languages”, that is the entire world, to the bosom of the Church, to make the entire cosmos Ecclesia, and to bring everyone and everything to the unity of Christ.

The task is enormous, but with God’s help, the assistance of Orthodox clergy and laity everywhere, and the encouragement and guidance of our hierarchs we will strive to accomplish it, for the glory of the triune God and the exaltation of His holy Church. Amen.