

A General Assembly of Love and Unity

... A prophetic voice is more likely to be heard from someone who dares to speak, to dream, who believes in ideals ...

I asked five people who know Syndesmos well (former Syndesmos Board members or project organisers) to name three adjectives that would describe for them the ideal General Assembly 2003. They answered willingly, and I will make comments on their answers, knowing well that five people is not enough for an opinion poll, or a sociological survey. I also have to admit that the answers I was given are very close to those I gave myself.

The adjectives can be sorted into three categories, and the categories summed up by a single title:

1. refreshing, creative, daring, inspiring, inspired, engaged, provocative
2. pentecostal, joyful, happy, together
3. authentic, sincere, honest, genuine

Prophetic voice

I would like to comment on these words and my classification. List number one is the longest, and might therefore be prioritised. It defines what the Assembly should do and in what spirit it should do it: namely, it should speak in a clear voice remembering the warning from Revelations: ‘So then because thou art luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.’ (Rev 3,16). What can we do so that the Assembly is not a diplomatic event or a mere formality, but speaks with a prophetic voice?

Unity of the church

List number two tells us what the General Assembly should be: all its words express our cry for unity, yearning to experience it in our own church, our longing to avoid conflicts—be they jurisdictional, political, territorial, within the Orthodox Church or outside of it. The need for joy and unity is expressed; does this mean that somehow it is felt to be lacking? But then, one cannot be joyful and united on command. What can we do to achieve a joyful event?

Purity of intentions

The third list expresses our need for a new beginning in Syndesmos. Each of these words are the antithesis of such extremely negative ideas as hypocritical, false, insincere, fake. It suggests the fear we have of double language, of making a mistake on whom and what we serve in Syndesmos—our desire to focus on the service of our church and to keep as far away as possible from wordly consideration and personal, regional or jurisdictional interest. Can we be sure to keep in mind the reason why we gather in a General Assembly, the reason why Syndesmos exists—because of our need to serve the Church as a whole, and nothing more, nothing else?

Some things, I notice, are not prioritised in the answers. No one mentioned, for instance, efficiency as an essential quality for the Assembly. Of course it does not mean that the Assembly should not discuss the technical side of Syndesmos work. Elections for a new Board have to be held and will be held and some decisions will most probably be carried out. But from the conversations that I had with the people whom I asked, it was clear that these practicalities, though extremely important for the life of the Fellowship, become a real danger for the spirit of the event when too much stress is put on them. Too many practical discussions would not allow us to share our joy in being together, would not leave us sufficient time or energy to talk about more important, but less practical matters.

Many people dream of an Assembly where everyone trusts each other so much that it would be absolutely unimportant to know who exactly will be the next President or Vice President. An Assembly where we know that whatever happens, it will be a good decision, because we all are together in order to be together, we all consider the whole Orthodox Church as our own Church, we do not find it so extremely important that our particular local church is represented in the Syndesmos Board by a particular person coming geographically from our region or institutionally recognised as belonging to a particular jurisdiction. We do not find it important because even if we do not have a representative according to our worldly criteria, we know that we are taken care of by our Orthodox brothers whoever they are and wherever they are from, and this is enough.

A lot more could be said, but let us have a look at how these guidelines could be followed, how those dreams could be fulfilled.

A prophetic voice is easier found and voiced by a person who is not tied down by obligations, responsibilities and practical considerations. A prophetic voice is more likely to be heard from someone who dares to speak, to dream, who believes in ideals and has not been disillusioned by day-to-day reality. A prophetic voice will come more easily from the youth.

The unity of the Church is experienced directly and with no second thought by those who have no knowledge of the places and crises that tend to threaten this unity. It is easier to be strongly united in Christ within the Orthodox Church if you see in the person you talk to a brother in Christ, not a representative of a particular local church, the interests of which interfere with the interests of another local church. If the General Assembly is a gathering of young people, they will be happy to be together, and make new friends, to pray together, celebrate together their unity.

Work for Syndesmos as a service of the Church—the Church as a whole only—is also easier for a young person. Young people may be less experienced, but often more sincere than adults. They still believe in ideals that are much beyond their own interests. For this reason Syndesmos was founded as a youth organisation, knowing that it is easier for youth to keep away from double language, to forget about (church) politics, and to put friendship above all other considerations. Young people would not be interested for a second in political debates at the General Assembly, they would simply not listen to them. If the assembly were made of young people, there would be no political debate.

A good way to grant ourselves a General Assembly that would be the result of love, respect, and trust, and that therefore would bear fruit, and give Syndesmos a good Board of Administration, for the following term of office, we desperately need the General Assembly 2003 to be an assembly of YOUNG Orthodox people.

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