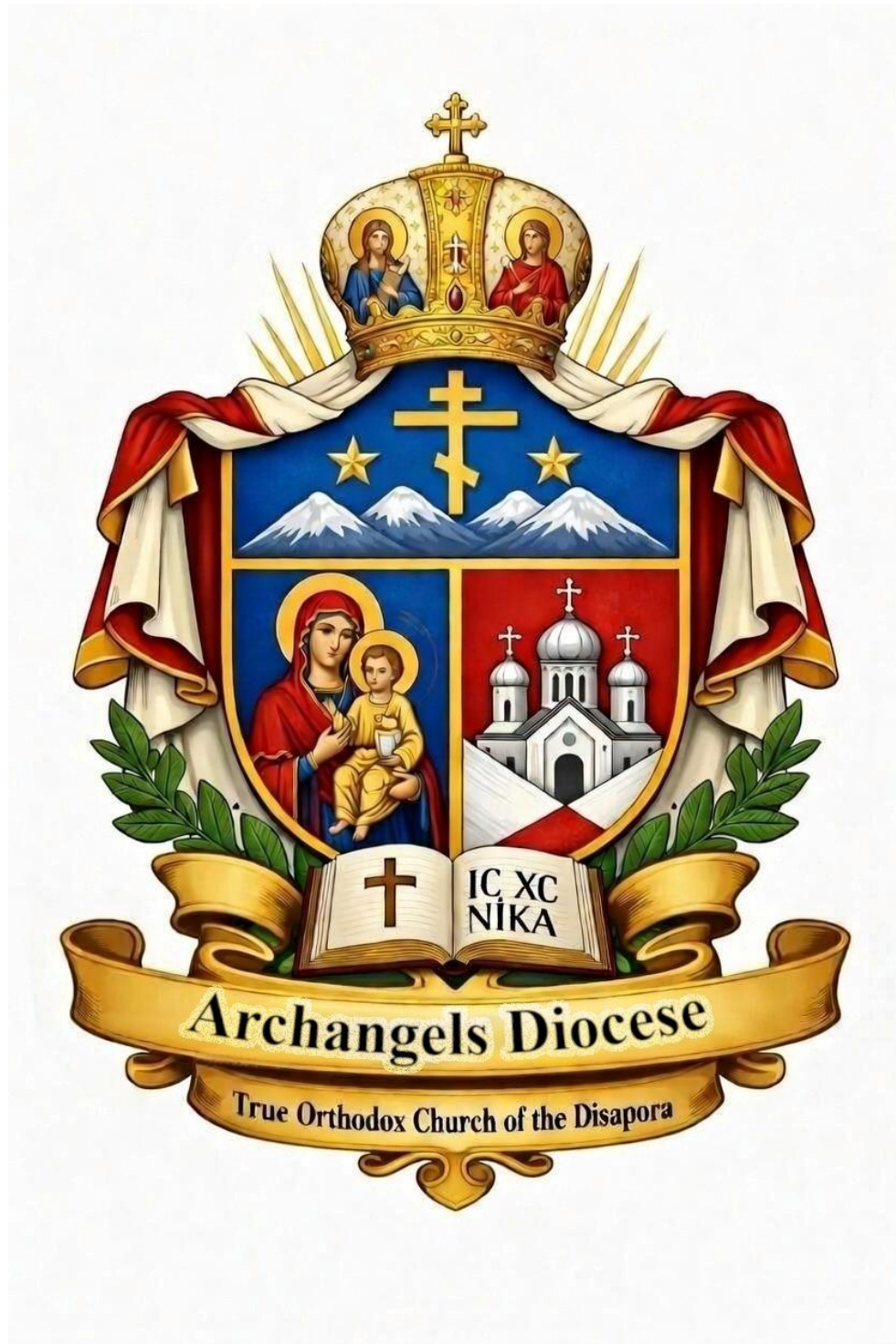




✠ THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF THE FAITHFUL IN THE SELECTION OF CLERGY

A Doctrinal and Ecclesiological Article for the Archangel Diocese

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I. Introduction

The Orthodox Church has always understood the clergy to be chosen, ordained, and appointed within the living communion of the Body of Christ. While the bishop possesses the apostolic authority to ordain and assign clergy, the historical witness of the Church reveals that the faithful themselves have long participated in the discernment and recognition of those called to pastoral service. This synergy between bishop, clergy, and laity is not a modern innovation but a deeply rooted ecclesial practice extending back to the Apostolic age.

This article presents the doctrinal and historical foundations for the participation of the faithful in the selection of their priests, demonstrating that such involvement is consistent with Orthodox Tradition, canonical history, and the lived experience of the ancient Church.

II. The Apostolic and Early Christian Foundations

1. Scriptural Witness

The Acts of the Apostles records that the early Church did not separate hierarchical authority from communal discernment. When the Seven Deacons were chosen, the Apostles instructed:

“Brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report...” (Acts 6:3)

The Apostles ordained, but the faithful identified and presented the candidates. This pattern became normative in the early Church.

2. Patristic Testimony

The Fathers speak with remarkable clarity on the role of the faithful:

- **St. Cyprian of Carthage (3rd century)**

“The people themselves have the power to choose worthy priests and reject unworthy ones.”

- **St. John Chrysostom** affirms that clergy must be “approved by the people” before ordination.
- **St. Ambrose of Milan** was elected bishop by popular acclamation, demonstrating the active role of the faithful in episcopal and presbyteral selection.

The early Church understood that the bishop’s apostolic authority and the people’s spiritual discernment were not competing forces but complementary expressions of the one Body of Christ.

III. Canonical Tradition and Ecclesial Practice

1. The Cry of ‘Axios’

The proclamation *Axios!* (“He is worthy!”) at ordination is not a mere ceremonial flourish. It is the vestige of an ancient ecclesial reality: the faithful confirmed the suitability of the candidate. Historically, this acclamation was not symbolic but decisive.

2. Byzantine Canonists

The canonical commentators of the Byzantine era—Balsamon, Zonaras, and Aristenos—affirm that:

- The faithful must not be forced to accept a priest they reject.
- The conscience of the parish community is a legitimate ecclesial voice.
- The bishop’s authority is exercised in synergy with the local Church.

3. Local Election and Petition

Throughout the Greek, Syrian, and Slavic lands, the faithful frequently:

- Petitioned the bishop for a specific candidate
- Presented respected readers, chanters, or deacons for ordination

- Requested pastoral leadership suited to their community
- Appealed when a priest proved negligent or unfit

The bishop ordained; the people recognized. This synergy preserved the Church from clericalism, favoritism, and political manipulation.

IV. The Archdiocesan Model: Synergy, Not Separation

The historical model of the Orthodox Church is neither clericalist nor democratic. It is **synodal**:

- **The bishop** exercises apostolic oversight.
- **The clergy** serve as pastoral shepherds.
- **The faithful** participate through discernment, witness, and confirmation.

This synergy reflects the very nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, where each member contributes according to grace and order.

The Archangel Diocese, rooted in the Tradition of the True Orthodox Church of the Diaspora, affirms this ancient ecclesiology. The participation of the faithful—through petition, consultation, and communal discernment—is not merely permitted but historically normative.

V. Contemporary Application

In the modern era, many Orthodox jurisdictions have adopted administrative structures that minimize the role of the laity in clergy selection. While such systems may arise from practical considerations, they do not reflect the fullness of historical Orthodox practice.

The Archangel Diocese seeks to restore the ancient balance:

- Clergy assignments made with pastoral transparency
- Parish communities consulted and respected
- The conscience of the faithful honored
- The bishop's apostolic authority exercised in communion, not isolation

This approach strengthens unity, fosters trust, and preserves the apostolic character of the Church.

VI. Conclusion

Historically and doctrinally, the faithful have always had a meaningful role in the selection of their clergy. Their participation is not a concession but a Tradition. The bishop ordains, but the people recognize. The clergy serve, but the faithful confirm. The Church lives, teaches, and grows through this synergy.

The Archangel Diocese, standing firmly within the Orthodox Tradition, affirms this ancient practice as part of its ecclesial identity and pastoral mission.

+Archbishop Alexios