

# **The 2024-2025 Mid-Year Commencement and 42nd Schmemann Lecture Opening Remarks**

Interim President and Academic Dean, Dr Ionuț-Alexandru Tudorie

Good evening, esteemed guests, faculty, staff, students, and friends!

Welcome to St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, and welcome to the 42nd Annual Schmemann Lecture, a joyous tribute to our beloved former dean on this great feast of the Three Hierarchs. This lecture honors his remarkable legacy. It provides a platform for theological learning that exemplifies both academic excellence and spiritual richness. And, thanks to all of you, it brings together our vibrant community, both here in person and joining us virtually (with a wonderful turnout online in the hundreds).

We are especially honored to welcome His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, His Grace Bishop Irenej, Bishop of Washington-New York and Eastern America, representatives from St Nersess Seminary, and all the other special guests here with us tonight.

We extend a warm welcome to those joining us virtually, including Fr Jeremy Davis, Executive Chair of the Board, Mr Jeffrey Hoff, Chair of the Transition Committee, our dedicated trustees, and our esteemed Emeriti Trustees. Thank you for your continued service, dedication, and investment in our Seminary. Your commitment to theological education and the spiritual formation of future clergy, lay leaders, and scholars is essential to fulfilling our vital mission to the Church.

A special welcome also to the newest members of our seminary team who joined just weeks ago: Fr Alexander Rentel, our full-time Faculty member as Assistant Professor of Canon Law, who also serves as Rector of the Three Hierarchs Chapel and Chief Operations Officer, and Mr Peter Kopcha, our new Chief Financial Officer. The presence of these new senior spiritual and operational leaders represents a milestone building on the noteworthy successes we have seen recently: namely, renewing our campus culture and strengthening the operational and financial foundation of our beloved institution.

With a renewed commitment to financial transparency, I am delighted to share some pivotal recent achievements. When I stepped into serving this institution as Interim President following Fr Chad Hatfield's retirement, we were woefully struggling with an annual deficit exceeding \$2M. St Vladimir's Seminary had to creatively transform the ways we serve our students and our mission while also transforming our finances dramatically

and demonstrating financial strength and stability. I am pleased to say that at the end of the calendar year, we swung the pendulum the other way, and had a cash surplus of \$100,000! This remarkable turnaround, achieved in such a short time, is a testament to the power of the collaborative spirit of our team of colleagues, working together to further our mission. Our accreditors, the Association of Theological Schools, who visited us recently, were *very* impressed and commended us for our progress, current situation, and prospects for the future. This represents an unprecedented milestone for us, a testament to the strength and resilience of our community, especially after a period of intense challenges. It is a privilege for me to share news of this transformative progress and renewed beginnings with you—our students, alumni, donors, hierarchs, supporters, and friends—and to celebrate the opportunities that lie ahead.

St Vladimir's now stands on a fresh, newly laid foundation, built on the bedrock of Christ's Church and our rich legacy and tradition on our historic Crestwood campus.

Fr Schmemmann's visionary leadership shaped Orthodox Christianity in America. As Dean, he cultivated a vibrant intellectual community, inspiring generations of seminarians. We are eager to focus vigilantly on the student experience, and I and my colleagues humbly serve the Church following in his footsteps. We carry this beautiful torch forward as we renew our seminary, honoring cherished traditions like this lecture while prayerfully working towards an even brighter future.

Tonight, we are blessed to have with us Dr Henry Maguire, a renowned scholar of Byzantine art, and his wife, Dr Eunice Maguire. We accept with gratitude their magnanimous visit and financial generosity to our Seminary. Thank you and welcome!