

IOTA's Growth

Presidential Address, January 11, 2023

Paul Gavrilyuk, IOTA President

Friends,

It's good for us to be together again in the beautiful city of Volos. We are overjoyed to moor the IOTA ship in the Volos harbor. The Volos Academy for Theological Studies is our trusted partner and experienced conference organizer. We are grateful to Metropolitan Ignatius for his warm welcome, to Pantelis Kalaitzidis for his unfailing support, and for the good work of the Volos Academy staffers and volunteers.



When we started IOTA in 2017, there were skeptical voices telling us that the enterprise was simply impossible. That our church was too divided and that its life was too politicized. Given our jurisdictional tensions and divisions, what hope could we have for IOTA to become a reality? The enterprise seemed too daunting. And yet, as the Gospel of Luke reminds us, “what is impossible with mere human beings is possible with God” (Luke 18: 27). We are grateful to God and your synergy for making the impossible ...possible.

How did IOTA start? We owe the idea of IOTA to the spirit and experience of the Council of Crete. It is in Crete that Gayle and I began to realize that something like IOTA would be helpful for the church. In 2018, the founding leaders of IOTA met in Jerusalem. At that gathering, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we worked out a recipe for IOTA's future, spent time in fellowship, prayer, and pilgrimage. We journeyed to Bethlehem to offer our gratitude to the Divine Child and visited the Basilica of Christ's Nativity. I thought on that day that it was fitting to mark the birth of IOTA by commemorating the birth of Jesus.



First Chairs' Symposium. Jerusalem, Israel, 2018.



The acronym of our society, *iota* is the first letter of the word “Jesus” in Greek. Thus, the Holy Name of Jesus is inscribed upon IOTA. Jesus Christ must remain the foundation of our work. We are an international community of scholars, church leaders, and professionals whose pursuit of knowledge is grounded in serving Jesus Christ in faith and love.

IOTA has been a labor of love. Our society is run by volunteers. The service on our Board of Directors is voluntary. Our Advisory Council and International Governance Committee are volunteers. The volunteers also oversee our permanent groups.

The IOTA Republic of Learning

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| ❖ Biblical Studies | ❖ Orthodox Education |
| ❖ Byzantine Orthodoxy | ❖ Orthodox Theological Institutions |
| ❖ Canon Law and Pastoral Theology | ❖ Orthodoxy and Literature |
| ❖ Christianity in the Middle East | ❖ Orthodoxy and the Visual Arts |
| ❖ Church History | ❖ Orthodoxy in the Public Square and Media |
| ❖ Church Music | ❖ Orthodoxy, Politics, and International Relations |
| ❖ Dogmatic Theology | ❖ Patristics |
| ❖ Ecclesiology | ❖ Philosophical Theology |
| ❖ Ecumenical Dialogue | ❖ Philosophy of Religion |
| ❖ Liturgical Studies | ❖ Political Theology |
| ❖ Missiology | ❖ Romanian Orthodoxy |
| ❖ Moral Theology and Theological Anthropology | ❖ Science and Theology |
| ❖ Oriental Orthodoxy | ❖ Slavic Orthodoxy |
| ❖ Orthodox Asceticism and Spirituality | ❖ Women in the Orthodox Church |

This is our growing Republic of Learning. IOTA subsists in twenty-eight groups representing different knowledge domains. Each group is independently overseen by chairs and steering committee members. You might say that our groups are autocephalous. May I ask the Board of Directors, the Advisory Council, the International Governance Committee, the Group Chairs, and the steering committee members to please stand up to be acknowledged? IOTA appreciates your contribution to our common task. Thank you for being so generous with your time. Thank

you for sharing your vision. Thank you for attracting so much talent to our conference sessions. IOTA is growing because of your efforts and leadership. May God bless your work.



I O T A

IOTA Leaders:

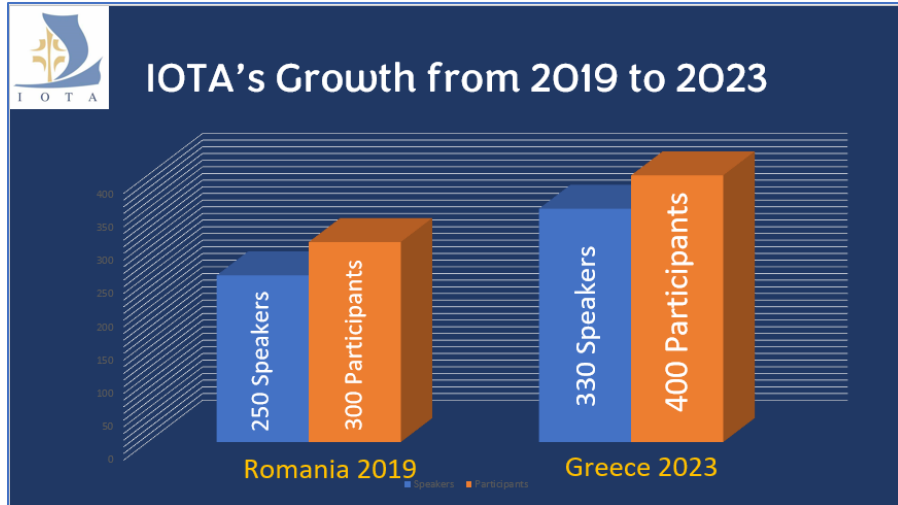
- Board of Directors
- International Governance Committee
- Advisory Council
- Group Chairs
- Steering Committee Members of Groups

(Please stand up to be acknowledged. Thank you).

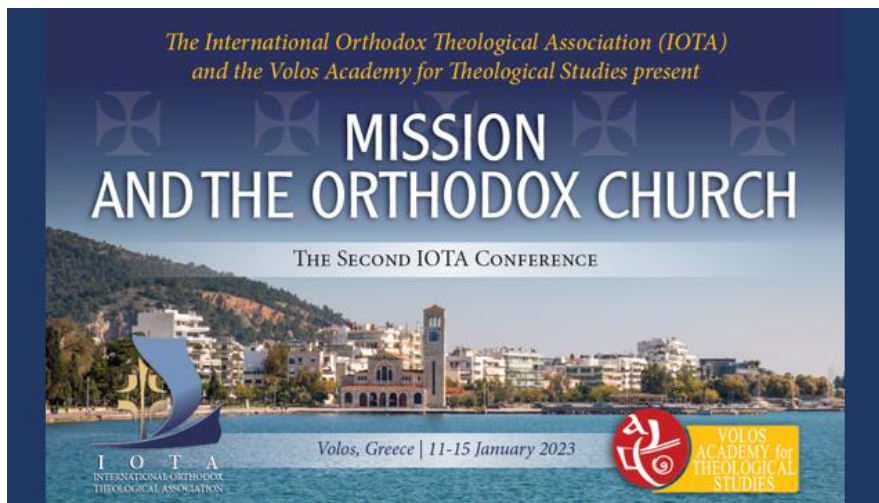
Under your leadership, IOTA has grown. Four years ago, we gathered for our Inaugural Conference in Iasi, Romania.




We promised to you then that we will organize IOTA's mega-conferences every four years, like the Olympic games. By God's grace, we have kept our promise. In Romania, we had 250 speakers and over 300 participants. This conference includes 330 speakers and over 400 participants. Contrary to fears and apprehensions, IOTA conferences have become a bit like a miraculous catch of fish.



How has this growth been possible? My answer is twofold: first, we are driven by your initiative. Our group chairs and other leaders make IOTA. Our conference speakers shape IOTA. Your enthusiasm and dedication, your contributions to this event enrich IOTA. Second, an increasing number of scholars, church leaders, and professionals finds our mission compelling. Our mission is straightforward: to foster a worldwide exchange of knowledge within the context of the Orthodox tradition for the sake of serving Christ and the church. The church is where the IOTA ship is headed on this picture. The church is where we wish to dwell. This means that at our conferences and projects, we wish to include all intellectually respectable and spiritually healthy points of view that build up the Body of Christ.



Since 2019, the list of our major supporters and co-laborers has more than doubled. We appreciate your input and your financial support. Thank you for making this conference possible. Various Orthodox seminaries, universities, centers, institutes, and societies have joined IOTA. All worthwhile initiatives that build up the Body of Christ are welcome to IOTA. We hope that more will join us in the years ahead.



Major Supporters

<p>Agape Hellas</p> <p>Anonymous Benefactors</p> <p>Eagle River Institute</p> <p>Encountering Orthodoxy Initiative, University of St. Thomas</p> <p>Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and its General Secretariat on Religious Affairs</p> <p>Holy Metropolis of Demetrias and Almyros</p>	<p>Huffington Ecumenical Institute, Loyola Marymount University</p> <p>Orthodox Christian Studies Center, Fordham University</p> <p>Orthodox Theological Society in America</p> <p>Orthodox Vision Foundation</p> <p>St. Philaret Society</p> <p>St. Phoebe Center for the Deaconess</p> <p>Volos Academy for Theological Studies</p>
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Co-Laborer Organizations

<p>Axia Women</p> <p>Department of Theology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens</p> <p>European Academy of Religion</p> <p>Holy Cross Orthodox Seminary</p> <p>Institute for the Study of Eastern Christianity, Catholic University of America</p> <p>Lausanne Orthodox Initiative</p> <p>New Georgian University</p> <p>Orthodox Christian Association of Medicine, Psychology, and Religion (OCAMPR)</p>	<p>Orthodox Christian Laity</p> <p>Orthodox Christian Mission Center</p> <p>Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration</p> <p>Pappas Patristic Institute</p> <p>RESILIENCE Research Structure</p> <p>Sankt Ignatios Theological Academy</p> <p>Science and Orthodoxy around the World</p> <p>St. Irenaeus Orthodox Theological Institute</p> <p>St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary</p> <p>University of Sofia (Institutional Member)</p>
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For its part, IOTA will provide the broadest possible international forum for your endeavors. This year, for example, the Orthodox Theological Society in America ([OTSA](#)) has joined IOTA's conference for its annual meeting. This is a welcome development. We hope that other Orthodox professional societies and groups will follow OTSA's example. If you oversee a project that could be publicized by IOTA, share your initiative with the Board of Directors. Talk to us during a coffee break. Tell us what you are doing and how we can help you grow. To put this differently: how can we help you to do better what you are already doing well?

To make this conference as accessible as possible, we have expanded our travel grants program. Compared to the Inaugural Conference of 2019, for this event we have increased the amount awarded by a factor of six, offering over \$30,000 in travel grants. We have added new categories of grant recipients: student speakers, scholars-in-need, and scholars from the Global South. We are especially delighted to welcome the speakers from Africa, South America, and Asia. You

came from countries as far away as Argentina, Brazil, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Korea, and Uganda. We are committed to keeping IOTA open-textured by cultivating students, emergent scholars, and future church leaders.

We are also dedicated to providing a supportive environment for the gifts and talents of female scholars. There is much that the international Orthodox community could still undertake to embrace the contributions of women to the life of the church.


In response to your initiative, the Board of Directors has added the following new groups: Church History, Orthodoxy and Literature, Orthodoxy and the Visual Arts, and Oriental Orthodoxy.



New Groups:

- Church History
- Orthodoxy and Literature
- Orthodoxy and the Visual Arts
- Oriental Orthodoxy

We especially welcome an opportunity to include the Oriental Orthodox scholars and church leaders in IOTA. We pray that one day the Chalcedonian Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Christians will share the Eucharistic communion. If we could offer our *iota* towards making intercommunion a reality, we will all be very grateful.



Local Churches Represented by Hierarchs:

- Ecumenical Patriarchate
- Patriarchate of Alexandria
- Patriarchate of Serbia
- Patriarchate of Georgia
- Church of Greece
- Orthodox Church in America
- Coptic Orthodox Church
- Syriac Orthodox Church

Among us today we have the hierarchs representing eight local Orthodox churches, including the Oriental Orthodox communions. We are honored by your presence. As a society that embraces all Orthodox jurisdictions, IOTA is committed to an open and constructive collaboration with episcopate. It's important that scholars and church leaders continue building mutual trust and understanding. It warmed my heart when Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, of blessed memory, enthusiastically received the news of IOTA's founding, and became our keynote at the Inaugural Conference. Metropolitan Kallistos also had this to say about our work:

The International Orthodox Theological Association is performing a ministry essential for the life of the worldwide Orthodox Church, and it is a ministry that no one else at present is fulfilling. As Orthodox thinkers and pastors we have everything to gain by keeping closely in touch with one another, both through publications and still more through personal contacts at conferences. Long may it continue to flourish!



I hope that Met Kallistos is now smiling from heaven at this event too.

The response from other bishops has been reassuring. At this conference, we are particularly grateful to have Metropolitan Ambrosios of South Korea, who has a distinguished record of missionary work, as our keynote speaker. We hope that the number of the churches represented by their hierarchs at our conferences will be growing in the years ahead.

We also welcome Catholic and Protestant participants. Your presence is integral to IOTA. Orthodox theology cannot be done in isolation. There could be no authentic conciliar thinking without engaging your work. We value your participation and look forward to learning from you.



For greater flexibility, we are experimenting with new session formats. For example, Orthodoxy and Literature will organize a luncheon discussion. Orthodoxy and the Visual Arts will run an iconography workshop housed in the Achilleion Cinema. We have also added book review sessions, round tables, and plenaries. The plenaries will address the questions that are on everyone’s mind: the social doctrine of our church, the pandemic, and war and peace. The pandemic has affected all of us. Many have had Covid. Some suffered through the pain of losing a relative or a friend in the pandemic. At IOTA’s meetings, we do not hide from the reality of human suffering and death in the ivory tower; on the contrary, we wish to “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

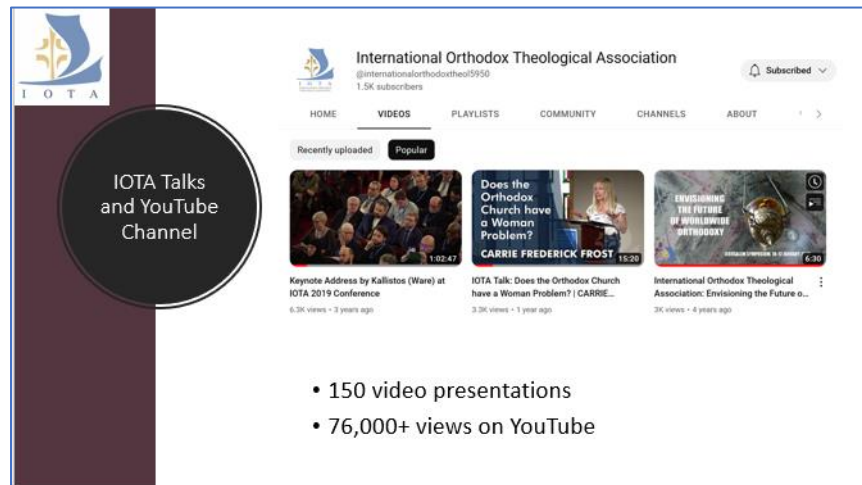
IOTA Prayer for Victims of Pandemic and War: Lord our God, in your compassion, hear the petitions of your servants who have assembled for this solemn occasion. Send your mercies upon us who put our trust in you. Grant eternal rest and blessed repose to our fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters who are victims of coronavirus and war. Grant safety and shelter to all victims of violence and war, to refugees and asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Ukraine. Restore your broken people to wholeness. Give us the peace from above and send down upon us your Spirit of Truth, the Comforter, so that we may be one, as you and the Son are one. For you are the comforter of the bereaved, the guardian of the lonely, the refuge for the listless, the father to the fatherless, and the bridegroom of widows, and to you we send up glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

All of us are aware of the bloody war, still going on in Ukraine. Among us today are colleagues who arrived from that blood-stained country. They’ve experienced disruption of their normal lives, bombings, and other horrors of the war first-hand. To express our solidarity, many of us have engaged in war relief efforts. Some also have written articles and petitions unmasking the designs of those who fan the flames of this war. Much more will need to be done for the restoration of peace. Let us make IOTA a forum where all existential issues, including the Orthodox attitudes towards violence and war, can be confronted openly, honestly, and respectfully.

At today's Vespers and other church services, we will continue to commemorate the victims of the pandemic, the casualties of the war, and all those who have experienced loss and bereavement. Please let us honor and remember them now with a moment of silence.

May we all find peace and may the memory of the departed be eternal. Thank you.

IOTA Talks and YouTube Channel



The image shows a screenshot of the International Orthodox Theological Association's YouTube channel. On the left, a dark purple vertical bar contains the IOTA logo and a circular callout box with the text "IOTA Talks and YouTube Channel". The main content area shows the channel's profile with 1.5K subscribers and a "Subscribed" button. Below the navigation tabs (HOME, VIDEOS, PLAYLISTS, COMMUNITY, CHANNELS, ABOUT), there are two tabs: "Recently uploaded" and "Popular". Three video thumbnails are visible under the "Popular" tab: "Keynote Address by Kallistos (Ware) at IOTA 2019 Conference" (6.3K views, 3 years ago), "IOTA Talk: Does the Orthodox Church have a Woman Problem? | CARRIE FREDERICK FROST" (3.3K views, 1 year ago), and "International Orthodox Theological Association: Envisioning the Future of Orthodox Christianity" (3K views, 4 years ago).

- 150 video presentations
- 76,000+ views on YouTube

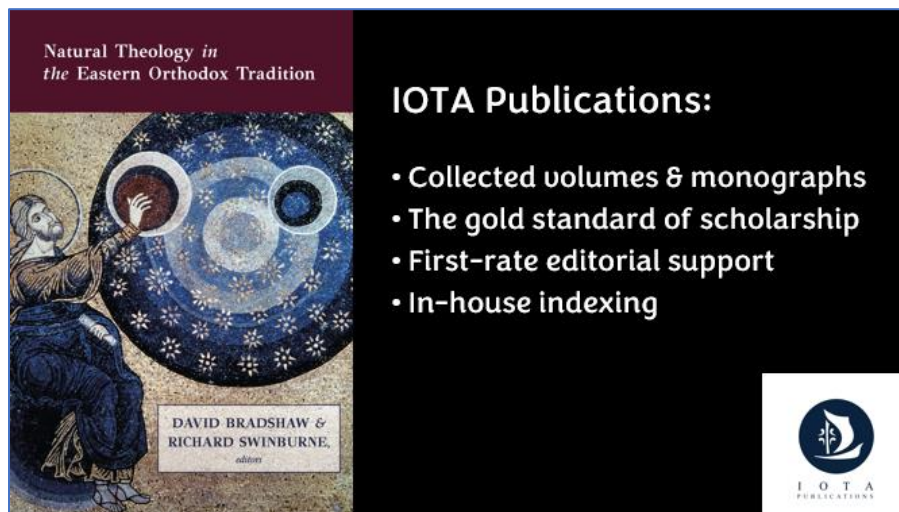
IOTA is committed to promoting your work for the good of the church. After our Inaugural conference in Romania, we launched our own YouTube Channel, which has grown to over 150 videos. Our content has had over 76,000 views. With more content, the audience can only grow in the years ahead. We will also record the presentations delivered at this conference and make them available online.

In 2021, we partnered with the Eagle River Institute in Alaska to launch the IOTA Talks. Our template for this project is TED Talks: short, attractively produced, and accessible talks on matters of broader interest to inquirers and believers. At this conference, we will produce over twenty such talks and make them available on our YouTube channel. These talks are a vital part of our educational mission. Please share them with your friends, especially all those who are new to the faith.

IOTA Publications

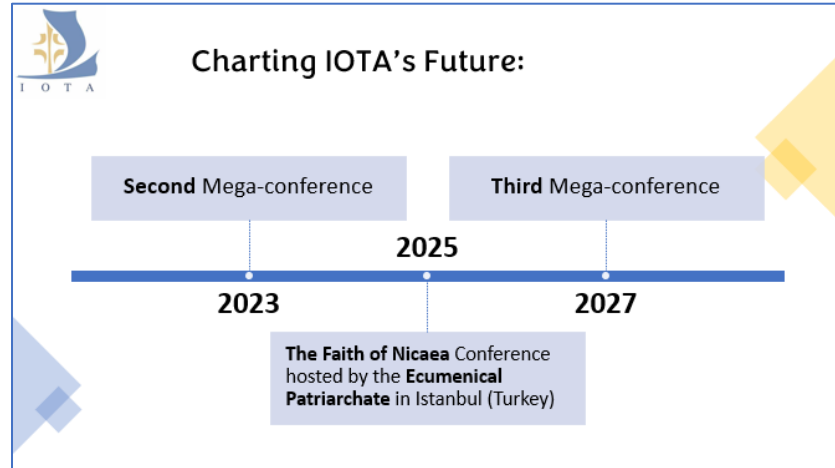


In 2020, we launched IOTA Publications with the first volume, *Pilgrims toward the Kingdom*. The volume tells IOTA's story and covers the Jerusalem Symposium and the Inaugural conference in Romania. The volume is richly illustrated. If you were with us in Romania, there are good chances that you will find your picture or your name in the volume. The volume is available at the Book Exhibit located in Park Hotel.



In 2021, we brought out our second book, *Natural Theology in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, edited by David Bradshaw and Richard Swinburne. The volume began its life at a session on natural theology at IOTA's Inaugural Conference in Romania. At this Volos conference, the volume will be discussed at a book review session and will be available for purchase. We expect a steady stream of publications to come out of our conferences. Our goal is to become the gold standard of Orthodox scholarship. Should you publish with us, you will be guaranteed a world-wide audience. Visit us online and send us a book proposal. We would love to hear from you!

Charting IOTA's Future



We plan to continue holding mega-conferences such as the present one, every four years, like the Olympics. If you'd like to host an IOTA conference, the Board of Directors welcomes your proposal. As the circumstances dictate, we will also organize more focused symposia in the interim years. For example, for 2025, we are invited by His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to organize a conference entitled "The Faith of Nicaea" to celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council. This conference will assess the legacy of the Council of Nicaea in the Orthodox tradition, will ponder the significance of confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God today, and raise the following central issue: what are Nicaea-sized questions for the church today? While 2025 conference will be a more focused event and smaller in size, all IOTA groups are invited to contribute to its preparation.

Mission and the Orthodox Church

In conclusion, allow me to say a few words about the overarching theme of this conference, "Mission and the Orthodox Church". We chose this theme because now more than ever, as a church we need to recover the centrality of the Great Commission, of "making disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). In the time of the Apostles, a distinguishing feature of Christianity was its sense of a world-wide mission. As the resurrected Jesus tells his disciples before Pentecost: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This was an extraordinary program, which providentially succeeded. The New Testament became a missionary text written by missionaries for missionaries.

Continuing the work of the apostles, the Church Fathers brought the Gospel "to the end of the earth". A daring vision of the church was articulated by the fourth-century author, bishop Cyril of Jerusalem:

[The Church] is called Catholic because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other; and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the

doctrines which ought to come to human knowledge concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; and because it brings into subjection to godliness the whole race of humankind, governors and governed, learned and unlearned; and because it universally treats and heals the whole class of sins, which are committed by soul or body, and possesses in itself every form of virtue which is named, both in deeds and words, and in every kind of spiritual gifts. And it is rightly named *ecclesia* because it calls forth and assembles together all people. (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 18.23).

This is a remarkably comprehensive vision of what a missionary church could look like. This is a church that is more than an ethnic club. This is a church that is more than a weekly schedule of services. This is a church that does not isolate itself from society and culture. On the contrary, it is a church whose intellectual reach extends to all domains of knowledge. It is a church whose spiritual vision is so compelling that it moves people of different walks of life. It is a church which dares to engage and transform all dimensions of culture. Finally, it is a church that abounds in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and is unafraid to share those gifts generously with the entire world.

Can we retrieve this missionary vision today? Can we recover the catholicity of the church in its glorious fulness, free of ethnic tensions and jurisdictional divisions? Can we confront the world's problems with courage, discernment, and humility? Might we, at IOTA's gatherings, begin to cultivate and embrace this vision?

I will leave the answers to these questions to all of you. We have the best, the brightest, and the most dedicated minds of our church gathered here. May the Holy Spirit guide our efforts. May we, gathered together in Christ's name, have an experience of conciliarity from below. May the work of our 100 sessions bear a hundredfold harvest in the life of the church. May God bless your efforts. I wish you a fruitful conference. Thank you very much.