

St. Tikhon was born Basil Belavin in 1865 to a priest's family in Toropets, near Pskov in Russia. A pious boy, he was tonsured a monk and ordained priest, serving as a teacher at various seminaries. At age thirty-two, he was ordained Bishop of Lublin in Poland. He served only a short time before being appointed bishop for the North American mission.

Bishop Tikhon arrived in New York in 1898, the "Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska." At that time, all Orthodox in North America looked to the Russian bishop for leadership, as the Russian church was the only one with a hierarch present on the continent. His diocese, therefore, was multi-ethnic, encompassing not only Russians but also Greeks, Serbs, Arabs, Romanians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, and native Alaskans. Tikhon traveled throughout the U.S. and Canada for nine years, strengthening the new churches. He established a seminary in Minneapolis and a monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. He commissioned a translation of the church services into the common language of English.

In 1905, Tikhon's see was moved from San Francisco to New York. He had a clear vision for the future of North American Orthodoxy. He wanted it to be an indigenous North American church and suggested to his fellow bishops in Russia that the diocese be autonomous, if not autocephalous. He was tireless in his promotion of Orthodoxy as the Faith for all Christians. He said, "Orthodox people must care for the spread of the Orthodox Faith among the heterodox. The light of Orthodoxy is not lit for a small circle of people. It is our obligation to share our spiritual treasures, our truth, and our joy with those who do not have these gifts."

In 1907, he was recalled to Russia to take important posts there. His work culminated with his election as Metropolitan of Moscow in 1917. As Metropolitan, he presided over the church council of 1917, which restored the patriarchate (abolished by a tsar two hundred years earlier). When the Communist Revolution broke out, the Church suffered great persecution. Tikhon stood firm against the atheists, excommunicating the Bolsheviks and recalling them to Christ. "Recover your senses, madmen," he wrote. "You are committing the deeds of Satan, which are condemning you to the flames of hell in the next world."

In 1922, the Communists placed him under house arrest for a time. They constantly harassed him in his work, and his health deteriorated. He was given a dose of morphine to "ease the pain"—which proved fatal. He fell asleep in God, a confessor and sufferer for Christ, in 1925.