

**THE FIRST EUMENICAL COUNCIL**

**A GATHERING OF THE “ SPIRITUALLY ELITE”**

**For nearly three centuries, the Christian Church was forced to endure ridicule and persecution from the pagan Roman Emperors. The blood of Christian martyrs flowed freely in the early days of the Church’s existence. When Christianity was finally deemed acceptable, and, indeed, proclaimed to be the OFFICIAL RELIGION of the Byzantine Empire by Constantine the Great, it was hoped that these faithful communities of believers would find the peace and contentment for which they longed.**

**But it was not to be so! The Church now had to contend with an “enemy” from within: an Alexandrian priest named Arius, who was spreading a teaching that Christ was CREATED by God the Father, and, therefore, was NOT EQUAL to Him. The Church was shaken by this heretical teaching, which quickly gained widespread acceptance.**

**In an effort to combat this heresy, an unprecedented gathering of bishops, priests and other ecclesiastical dignitaries was convened in the city of Nicaea in the year 325 A. D. The list of the Church Fathers present was a “who’s who” of early saints! St. Nicholas was there, as was St. Spiridon, St. Athanasius, St. Eustathius of Antioch, St. Eusebius of Caesarea and many others.**

**After heated deliberations – which saw an enraged St. Nicholas actually strike Arius – the Council condemned the works of this heretical cleric. This Council also definitively confirmed the Symbol of Faith (the Creed), which was later expanded upon at the Second Ecumenical Council.**

**The First Ecumenical Council also established the guidelines for determining the date of Pascha, set the date of September 1 as the beginning of the liturgical year and decreed that celibacy should not be imposed upon the clergy.**