



Patriarch John X Announces Antiochian Unity Conference June 26-28

Dear ones,

I would like to thank you for your presence with us today on this blessed hill of Balamand. We are striving to make this place into a hill of spiritual, intellectual, human and national radiance. Here is where we launch all our good efforts in the service of the people of these lands. Like you, we feel how much our nations are in need of solidarity and of combining the efforts of all their children in order to overcome the trials and challenges that they are facing.

Today we are announcing our general ecclesial conference, the Antiochian Conference which will be held here at the Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand on June 26-28. We are calling for this conference not only on account of the need for our children to express their unity of faith, but also so that they can express their concern for the state of their nations and their readiness to play a fundamental and critical role in preparing their future, whether they reside here or in the diaspora. For us, our Church, which is present in all the countries of the Arab region, is responsible alongside all the people of these lands for dignity of life and the proper conduct of public life.

This conference aims to study some of the issues that are at the forefront of the most important fields for highlighting the features of Antiochian unity. With the potential offered today by modern communications and rapid travel and in the context of the way situations in the Church are developing and demographic realities, our people need to feel the contents of this unity within their ecclesial and public life. They need to be active and interactive with these contents. It seems obvious to all who are following the pastoral situations of the faithful that the Church, in all her constituent parts, is called to take the essence of Orthodox thought and its exigencies beyond the theoretical propositions we all agree on and to bring it into the realm of practice, through plans that will be implemented in the dioceses in a spirit of unity and on the level of the Patriarchate as a whole in a spirit of mutual complementarity.

Through examining points of discussion with clear goals, the conference will strive to be a first step toward forming comprehensive ideas that will take the form of policies, workshops and plans that will be submitted to the Holy Synod in the hope that they will help to create a plan that will be built up, brick by brick, in view of a manifest Antiochian unity that is lived at all levels of the Church's internal life and her witness in the world.

At this conference there will gather a wide range of faithful coming from all dioceses in the homeland and the diaspora. Naturally, each diocese will choose its own representatives.

The conference's points of discussion will center on the following five topics:

1. Promoting mutual complementarity between parishes in the dioceses and between the dioceses themselves within the Patriarchate as a whole.

The regulations of the Church of Antioch express the Church's theology. Their purpose is to make it possible to live out the principle of collegiality in the Church. This point of discussion aims to study ways to develop the process of consultation on the parish, diocesan and patriarchal levels. Likewise, ongoing



changes in the geography of the Orthodox diaspora impose on us the necessity of strengthening the relationships of the dioceses of the diaspora with the dioceses of the historic Antiochian territory.

The work of this discussion will be to propose mechanisms, activities and means of constant communication that give a lived dimension to Antiochian unity through arranging occasions where they can express their unity and their common bond, which is reflected in their life in the Church and in the world.

2. Developing endowments and financial solidarity.

Today as pastoral exigencies are increasing, the development of church institutions, pedagogical services, and social work is an urgent necessity. Likewise, it is no less important to arrange the livelihood of those who serve the Church, to preserve our Christian presence in the Middle East, and to support research and efforts that strengthen our presence in society, honoring our history and heritage.

This discussion will attempt to study the practical approaches that can make financial organization into a support for pastoral work. It will propose some development plans and ways of facilitating the process of undertaking development plans in the service of institutions and increasing pastoral, social, educational and medical work on the levels of the dioceses and of the Patriarchate.

3. Social Work

Social work is one of the foundations of Christian witness in society. However, social developments as well as the forced or voluntary displacement of people and economic decline now impose the necessity of adopting new foundations for action that combine efforts and are integrated at all levels: medical and health, social, assistance and emergency.

This point of discussion will approach the social dimension as a basic element of the life of parishes while also working to propose local projects or projects that will help to strengthen solidarity on the level of relationships between the dioceses and the role of the Patriarchate in coordinating this work. The organizational dimension that permits the Patriarchate and the dioceses to rapidly respond to developments affecting the life of the Church and her people is very important, especially right now.

4. Presence in Society

Today our region is experiencing a time in which the conjunction of politics and religion is reflecting negatively on religious communities and believers. Thus the Church sees herself compelled to speak the truth in fields where the image of humanity, religion and Christianity is sometimes tarnished, where the adjectives “Christian” or “Orthodox” are exploited for personal reasons or for reasons completely unrelated to the message of Christianity.

The “quality” of the social presence to which we aspire is a basic focal point for us. We need to study some ideas that can be a point of departure for instruments of consultation that will make our presence in the life of society palpable and more effective. This is something not limited to the geographical boundaries of Antioch. It affects all the other dioceses in the diaspora.



5. Communications

Communication, in all its many forms— audio-visual, written and relation— constitutes the cornerstone of transmitting information and interacting with it. Communication is no longer limited to the media understood as merely a technique of transmitting news, opinion or a special event. It has become necessary to look at this new era with a new style, one to which our Church has not yet grown accustomed. Additionally, given the opportunity available to all to rapidly access anything published in the media, communications is an important tool for Antiochian unity. Our initiative in this area will protect the Church from being taken hostage by others' media and give her the ability to take the initiative and demonstrate her particular character.

Studying communication and media policy on the level of the Patriarchate as a whole and treating this policy as an aspect of Antiochian unity and of raising awareness of the solidarity within the Church is something extremely important. We must arrive at concrete mechanisms that can be gradually adopted and can express Antiochian unity through the contribution of all dioceses and technical means that can be acquired in order to make the Antiochian presence effective, both internally and in society.

Last but not least, the work of the conference will be crowned with the service of the Divine Sacrifice on Sunday, June 29 in order to lift thanks up to God for His gifts and for the work of His Holy Spirit in us. I call on all the faithful to participate by being present with on on that day, which is also the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, founders of our Apostolic See. Joining together this way in prayer will be an expression of the depth of our unity in the Lord.

Dear ones,

As you may notice, even if our conference will focus on Antiochian unity, in practice it looks at this unity as emblematic of service to all society. We only see the Church in terms of her being a Church that is active in the world that God loved, for the salvation of which salvation He suffered and rose. We as a Middle Eastern Church— numerically the largest in the Levant and geographically the most widespread— are perfectly aware of the importance of the task entrusted to us in these fateful circumstances that our region is going through. The body of our Antiochian Church continues to suffer in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq and our Arab humanity is oppressed and homeless in Palestine. Many of our brothers have died or have been cast out of their homes or have been kidnapped— in particular we do not forget our brothers the metropolitans of Aleppo Youhanna and Paul. The situation is the same for many of our brothers in citizenship. When we affirm our unity, we are eager to assume the role that is our duty, to wipe away the tears, without any distinction between communities or between the children of our societies, Muslims and Christians. We console the sorrowful and we support the poor and the sick. We affirm to the world that our message is for everyone, in word and deed, so that violence may stop and the language of peace may prevail.