

SPECIAL ARCHDIOCESE CONVENTION
ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

Hyatt Regency at Dallas-Fort Worth Airport
Dallas, TX
Friday, January 13, 2023

I. Opening Prayer Metropolitan Antonios, Patriarchal Vicar

Proceedings opened at 9:58 AM with the Trisagion Prayers, Apolytikion and Kontakion of Pentecost and petitions.

Introduction and welcome by Vicar General, Fr. Thomas Zain.

II. Declaration of Quorum Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor

Out of a possible 915 delegates, 688 were present, and a quorum was declared.

III. Message from His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X, read by Fr. Zain.

IV. Appointment of Convention Officers

- A. Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice Chairman
- B. Rev. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor
- C. Mr. Philip Saliba, Westport, CT (Sergeant-at-Arms)
Mr. Roger David, Grand Rapids, MI (Sergeant-at-Arms)
Mr. Dimitri Zeidan, Ottawa, ON (Sergeant-at-Arms)
Mr. James Moses, Dallas, TX (Sergeant-at-Arms)
Ms. Mary Winstanley O'Connor, Boston, MA (Parliamentarian)

Mr. El Khoury thanks Trustee James Moses of American Airlines for helping with travel plans and logistics in Dallas.

He also thanks Metropolitan Antonios for guiding the archdiocese and for his visits throughout the archdiocese.

He notes the effective operation of the Antiochian Archdiocese and addressed the completion of an external audit, to be completed by end of January, for first time in the archdiocese's history. He credits Fr. Michael Tassos and Mr. Salim Abboud, CFO.

He thanks the clergy and laity for making the effort to participate in the election process.

He also His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X for welcoming the Temporary Operating Committee from the archdiocese, emphasizing the love of His Beatitude for the welfare of Archdiocese of North America.

V. General Report of His Eminence Metropolitan Antonios, Patriarchal Vicar, who received a standing ovation.

His report, as well as other presentations from the Special Convention, will appear in The WORD Magazine and on Antiochian.org.

VI. Opening statement regarding the nomination process of the three candidates to the office of Metropolitan of New York and All North America

Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor, read a statement from Metropolitan Antonios.

VII. Presentation of Eligible Candidates to the office of Metropolitan of New York and All North America

Mr. El Khoury introduced candidates and asked those present to stand. He reviewed the process of selecting a committee to tally votes, reading their names from a list.

Discussion

Subdeacon Charles George, St. Anthony Church of San Diego: He thanks Metropolitan Antonios. He asks why can't we elect an indigenous candidate to be Metropolitan?

Fr. Joseph Abud, St. George Church of Flint, Mich. asks about distinction between usage of "region" versus "diocese" in correspondence.

Metropolitan Antonios responded that's not on the agenda for today. The new Metropolitan will address that issue in the future.

Mark Najjar of St. George Church of Fishers, Ind. asked why just now hearing about some of the questions and answers discussed herein. He says he knows little about some of the potential candidates.

Metropolitan Antonios said he wished he could visit all of the archdiocese's nearly 270 parishes. He relied on pastors and social media and interpersonal contacts. He added the clergy and the faithful are also responsible to take the initiative to educate themselves on candidates and to discover what is required in a new metropolitan. The proceedings are not only about elections, but choosing the person God wants.

Fr. John Reimann, St. Anthony Church of San Diego – many have wounded and need to be healed. He wants a definitive statement concerning Metropolitan Joseph. He had not heard of any results of and investigation. He called for transparency instead of external alternative sources.

Metropolitan Antonios acknowledged he heard these comments in many places. He reiterates that Metropolitan Joseph had sent a retirement letter that was published on the website of archdiocese, received by Holy Synod. It was not forced, but he cannot discuss it here. Metropolitan Joseph met with His Beatitude for three days, then decided to retire. The Holy Synod accepted his retirement without an investigation. Only the Patriarch and the Holy Synod can investigate a metropolitan for canonical matters. Now only Metropolitan Joseph can ask the Patriarch and the Holy Synod to open an investigation.

Mr. El Khoury said the Board of Trustees has no standing to undertake a spiritual court. Its only job was to look into legal or financial issues.

Fr. Nabil Hanna of St. Nicholas Cathedral of Los Angeles – thanks for diligent work, especially for Los Angeles to heal as epicenter of trauma. The Metropolitan will need more time to continue the process of healing. He requests to hear from nominees to articulate their vision for the future.

Mr. El Khoury notes shortage of bishops, and that other bishops have gone beyond their own dioceses to minister. He assures the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West will not be neglected.

Metropolitan Antonios announced that the Special Convention won't hear from candidates because some were not present, and others did not want to speak.

Fr. Maximos Saikali, St. Antonios Church of Halifax – Citing the Annunciation, the Theotokos made decision to bear Christ but probably didn't understand the whole concept. Yet, her decision saved the world. We should adopt the attitude of Theotokos and trust God.

Fr. Elie Estephan, St. Mary Church of Pawtucket, RI – Requests for sake of fairness and transparency not to shut down any question even if not on agenda.

Mr. El Khoury – won't shut down any speaker.

Mr. El Khoury noted that Fr. Fadi Rabbat withdrew his name as a candidate for metropolitan prior to the Special Convention.

Fr. Anthony Yazge, St. George Church of Indianapolis – when will the Holy Synod take up the question of next Metropolitan?

Metropolitan Antonios – God willing, you do your job, and we'll do our job. There should be a special synod convened for this purpose, ideally within 40 days.

Fr. Kamal Rahil, St. George Church of Jacksonville, FL – God' will be done, and there are plenty of qualified candidates.

Fr. Thomas Zell, St. James Church of Modesto, Calif. – I recognize the need to move forward but we have to look backward far enough to make sure that a crisis like this doesn't happen again. He claimed a lack of communication from the archdiocese.

Metropolitan Antonios – Metropolitan Joseph made his choice in order not to disturb the church, for which God will reward him. The archdiocese dealt with the crisis inside the church, not outside the church, and refused to give credence to social media presenting untrue rumors. The Church acted and was Church resolved the issue. Metropolitan Joseph met with His Beatitude for 10 hours over three days; therefore, we must accept the wisdom of the Patriarch and Metropolitan Joseph, and commit to preserve the Church without any distractions or tribulations. To do otherwise will only worsen the injury. God will protect His Church, no one else.

Mr. El Khoury – nothing was swept under the rug. Metropolitan Joseph had every opportunity to defend himself and authorized all appropriate meetings. We need to put the issue to rest. The archdiocese's investigation checked into a house that Metropolitan Joseph purchased. No archdiocesan funds were used for that.

Fr. Nektarios Najjar, St. Elias Cathedral of Ottawa – He thanks Metropolitan Antonios for demonstrating how to love each other and the Church. He hopes all of the candidates will understand North American context if called to be the metropolitan of the archdiocese. Let's remember identity of our Antiochian Archdiocese as openness to everyone, he said, but also apply to our hierarchs who can equally understand the culture of North America, no reverse identity.

Mr. Jeffrey Palmer, St. Nicholas Cathedral of Brooklyn, NY, as convert from Roman Catholicism, he said he was no stranger to controversy, but commends the archdiocese on how well this matter has been handled, especially under the leadership of Metropolitan Antonios.

Metropolitan Antonios responds by saying he is a convert of too. But once you have converted, you are no longer a convert!

Fr. Michael Massouh, retired, let's not use language as a criterion. Language can be learned, character cannot.

Deacon Basil Hinkle, Prophet Elijah Church of Ellensburg, Wash. moves the question, calling for the end of discussion. Fr. Amin Houli, Annunciation Church of Calgary, AB, seconds. The call is passed by voice vote.

VIII. Voting and Counting of Votes by the appointed teams

Fr. Zain reiterates that delegates can make only one selection per ballot. After ballots were collected, the committee retired to count the votes.

Break until 1:45 PM

His Grace Bishop Thomas introduced Fr. Christopher Salamy and Subdeacon Gregory Abdalah to present the Archdiocese Convention in Phoenix, Ariz. from July 24-30.

Resolution – Department of Legal Affairs

Fr. Samer Youssef and Fr. Nektarios Najjar presented a resolution commending Metropolitan Antonios for his service as Patriarchal Vicar, and asking the Holy Synod to consider him a candidate for Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of North America. Although the resolution was adopted via acclamation, His Eminence said to “let this pass from him.”

IX. Announcement of the three nominees in alphabetical order by first name

Metropolitan Antonios announced that Bishop John, Bishop Nicholas, Metropolitan Saba of Houran, Syria are the archdiocese's nominees for the new metropolitan. He delivered the results to Patriarch John.

X. Final statement regarding the conclusion of the nomination process

His Beatitude conveyed that he is proud of the Special Convention, the bishops, the clergy, and the faithful. He was happy to know the convention was a great manifestation of love of the Lord, the Church and the Archdiocese.

XI. Adjournment, closing prayer and dismissal

At 2:00 PM, Fr. Fouad Saba moved to adjourn the Special Convention, seconded by Fr Joseph Purpura.