

THE WORD



SAINT SOPHIA OF
KLEISOURA

LET THE APOSTLES
SPEAK

THE FELLOWSHIP OF
ST. JULIAN FOR MEDICAL
PROFESSIONALS

SPEAK THE TRUTH
WITH LOVE

THE WORD

الكلمة



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COVER: Board of Trustees with His Beatitude John X – Pilgrimage to Lebanon, October 2, 2025

SPEAK the TRUTH with LOVE

His Eminence Metropolitan Saba

Much is said these days about “truth.” All people cling to their own truth, seeing it from their own perspective, whether for personal benefit or the interests of their group. Yet the Absolute Truth, God Himself, is often the most forgotten. Strangely, people still appeal to Him to justify their cause, and to strengthen their battle to obtain what they call their rights.

But in our faith, truth is not simply a law or custom—it is God Himself. The Lord said in the Holy Gospel: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). He is both the Truth and the Way to the Truth. To follow Him, to walk according to His commandments, to love Him and to humble ourselves before Him—these

allow His presence to fill us, protecting us and those around us from error and falsehood.

The Lord also says: “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

If you are a follower of Christ, you belong fully to the Truth—not partially, but wholly. The presence of Christ within you purifies you from every stain and falsehood. You cannot belong to Him and to someone else at the same time. Either you open yourself entirely to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17 and 15:26), or you remain divided and unstable.

How, then, can you remain faithful to Him while sin still finds a place in you? Faithfulness lies in your sincere striving toward Him, in



*The Apostles were first called Christians
in Antioch.* Acts 11:26

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wordmag@aol.com

Subscription Office:

358 Mountain Road
Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
Theworld@antiochian.org

Submissions for "Communities in Action" must be approved by the local pastor. Both may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All submissions emailed and provided as a Microsoft Word text or editable PDF. Please do not embed artwork into the word documents. All art work must be high resolution: at least 300dpi.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:

U.S.A. and Canada, \$40.00
Foreign Countries, \$50.00
Single Copies, \$3.00
Checks should be made payable to
THE ANTIOCHIAN ARCHDIOCESE.

The WORD (USPS626-260) is published in September, November, January, March, and May, by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America at 358 Mountain Road, periodicals postage paid at Englewood, New Jersey 07631-5238 and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster send address changes to The WORD,
358 Mountain Road, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238

ISSN 0043-7964 www.antiochian.org.

Canada Post Publication Agreement No. 40043404
Return Canada address to
American International Mail, STN A – BOX 697,
Windsor ON N9A 6N4, Canada

following His footsteps wherever they lead, and in remaining conscious always to live in loyalty to Him. Yes, you will face obstacles and temptations either from within yourself or from the outside. Do not be afraid, although the devil never sleeps. "Like a roaring lion, he prowls around looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Do not despair if you fall once or many times. What matters most is that you rise quickly after each fall. Faithfulness to the Lord does not mean you will never sin. Rather, it means that when you do sin, you are ready to repent, to be corrected, and to continue walking toward Him in truth.

The Lord has not left you alone in this struggle. He promised: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16–17). To stray from the truth, then, is to turn away from the Spirit of God dwelling within you.

People may disagree endlessly about what they call "truth." But too often they forget that truth cannot be separated from love. If in your pursuit of truth you lose love, you are no longer on the right path. At such moments, you must pause, examine yourself carefully in the light of the Gospel, and repent.

In your search for truth, you may sometimes confuse what is actually the truth with what only appears to be so. Your passions and lack of purity—whether as an individual, a group, a worldly institution, or even a church in this fallen world—play large roles in clouding your vision. Imagine, for example, the magnitude of the deception when you are under pressure from your friends or those around you! Reflect also on how dangerous it becomes when the truth to which you cling and defend is shaped by competing interests, politics, and the struggles for influence and power that dominate this world. To remain faithful, you must be willing to die to yourself in order to live in truth, integrity, and loyalty to God.

Your spiritual confusion will provide you with many justifications, sometimes disguised as logic, self-interest, craftiness, or wisdom. All of this pushes you to walk by the standards of this world, protecting yourself and your reputation, and supporting them with the spirit of the world—a spirit that is not yours if you are a disciple of Christ. For the world does not place its priority on bearing witness to the truth, but rather on cunning and compromise, which stand against the Gospel. The lure of power and influence, and the love of possession can lead you to build a seemingly logical structure for your ambitions, filling it with noble goals that justify your actions—while in reality you are only covering up the evil within and the harm of your behavior.

“

**SPEAK THE TRUTH
AS YOU SEE IT,
BUT ALWAYS
WITH LOVE.**

”

Do not forget the Gospel’s warning about wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15). You could be that wolf when you let evil lead you to seek your own desires disguised as virtue, or poison in honey. Be watchful, lest you become a tool of the evil one even while believing you are resisting him. Your distortion of truth is most painful when you direct it against those closest to you. Remember what Christ said: “Because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me” (John 8:45).

The Lord said: “A man’s enemies will be those of his own household” (Matthew 10:36). And the Arab poet reminds us: “The injustice of kin is the hardest to bear.” Your suffering is also made heavier when people label you as belonging to one camp or another, simply because the truth you spoke happened to align with their position. This, too, is part of your cross, if you remain faithful to the Gospel and the teachings of the Church. Expect your reward from the Lord alone. Many before you stood against the entire world and paid a heavy price, yet it was the truth they proclaimed that triumphed in the end.

What grieves the Lord is that some entrusted with His Church busy themselves with things He never asked for, while His children hunger for the word of life and thirst for the living water that could relieve their suffering. While God’s creation longs for salvation, attention is instead directed to pursuits that have nothing to do with salvation, and efforts are poured into superficial concerns that feed and heal no one. Even more painful is that those who clearly understand their evangelical mission and pastoral responsibility are forced to spend their energy correcting distortions, rather than dedicating themselves fully to nurturing true righteousness in the hearts of Christ’s beloved.

And so, you are called to remain steadfast in both truth and love. Speak the truth as you see it, but always with love (Eph. 4:15). The moment you sense within yourself the presence of anger, pride, or malice, remain silent and turn to the Lord in humble prayer. Ask Him to place His word on your lips, so that you may become a real witness to the Truth. As for false witnesses, leave them to the Lord and to the judgment of history.

SAINT Sophia of Kleisoura

The Ascetic of the Panagia: *Tragedy Transfigured*

Fr. Michael Shanbour

**"One is the Lord and one is the Lady (Theotokos),
the rest of us are all siblings."**

This saying of the relatively unknown Eldress (now Saint) Sophia provides us with a fitting summary of her simple and single-minded sanctity, her complete devotion to our Savior, incarnated as humility and love for all. But this sanctification and experiential knowledge of God was forged in the fire of suffering and loss, a "forced" self-denial followed by voluntary asceticism. Instead of being overcome by sadness and despair, Sophia gathered her spiritual energies, as light intensifies to form a laser, and offered all to the Lord, blessing Him who gives and who takes away (Job 1:21). As with the Apostle Paul, her earthly loss became a heavenly gain:

"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:7–8).

After seven years of marriage, her two small children died one after the other in 1914. Then her husband "disappeared," never to be heard from again after being drafted in the First World War. This was the crucible from which sprang this newly canonized ascetic and fool sometimes known in her own time as "Crazy Sophia."



Beginnings

Sophia Saoulidi was born in 1886¹ in the village of Trebizond in Pontus of Asia Minor, when the presence and piety of Holy Orthodoxy still flourished there. This region (modern-day Turkey) had been evangelized by the apostles Andrew and Peter and has produced great saints, ancient and more recent, from St. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (d. 156), to St. Basil the Great (d. 379), to St. Arsenios the Cappadocia (d. 1924) who baptized the future St. Paisios of Mount Athos just prior to the forced exchange of populations in 1923 following the Greco-Turkish War.

Sophia had not desired marriage from the outset, being attracted to the monastic life. But her parents were of a different mind and married her off quickly. Both from her youth and during her married years she had always urged people to repentance and love God. She had a special relationship, as we shall see, with the Holy Great Martyr George, who urged her to “have patience” in her time of grief. She also had an extraordinary intimacy with the Panagia, the All-Holy Theotokos.

After the loss of her husband, Sophia began an intensified life of prayer and fasting as a hermit on a mountain in Pontus some distance from her village. Her great repentance and purity of heart was such that she quickly became a vessel of gifts of grace and was found worthy of revelations from the world beyond. One of the first of these revelations came as St. George appeared to her, warning of the coming persecution—the Armenian genocide (1915–16)—thus allowing those in her village to be spared. However, about 350,000 Greeks were slaughtered during this genocidal massacre.

¹ Some biographies say 1883 or 1887.

In 1923 the holy recluse, with many others, was exiled to Greece, coming by sea on the ship “Saint Nicholas.” During the voyage a violent storm arose, endangering the lives of all on board. Finally, when the storm subsided, the pious ship captain making the sign of the cross said, “You must have a righteous person among you that saved you.” Indeed, some of the passengers were aware that Sophia had been standing in a corner of the ship praying the whole time. This incident, later recounted on video by St. Sophia herself, provides a window into her virtuous soul, revealing her great sacrificial love for others: “The waves,” remembered Sophia, “were filled with angels and the Panagia appeared, saying, ‘Humanity will be lost, because they are very sinful.’ And I said, ‘Panagia, let me be lost because I am a sinner, so let the world be saved.’”

Ascetical Life

It was during her prayer, while the ship was storm-tossed, that the Panagia also gave her a command: “When you arrive in Greece, go to my monastery (or house).” To this Sophia inquired, “Where are you and where is your house?” The Panagia responded, “I am in Kleisoura.”

The monastery was the Nativity of the Theotokos, founded in 1314 by the Hieromonk Neophytos of Kleisoura and once again established in 1813 by Hieromonk Isaiah Pista of Kleisoura, who came from Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos after a vision of the Panagia.

However, Sophia did not go there immediately, but found herself in western Macedonia, living with her brother. It was suggested that she remarry, but she firmly refused. She was not content there, as she observed great impiety and lack of faith. Once again, Sophia lived as a hermit until 1926, when the Virgin

appeared to her again, repeating her message: “I am the Panagia of Kleisoura. Go to my monastery!”

Sophia began the journey and made it to the holy site, but she found a monastery and sisterhood in decline, without an organized monastic life for spiritual support. She lived there until it seemed she could not take it anymore. In the third year, she gave up and began the journey back home. During the journey she fell asleep in a meadow, but was awakened by a powerful slap on the face and a voice: “Go back! Be more patient! Even in the world one must be patient. And you, even more!”

That voice belonged to her beloved Panagia, and so she repented and returned. By then in her early 40s, she came under the spiritual guidance of the great Athonite Elder, Gregorios Magdalis. In this way, she was formed more perfectly in the life of prayer and asceticism.

She faced another difficulty along her path of virtue. Due to her beauty, Sophia unwittingly attracted the attention of men. In response, she began to clothe herself with worn out rags, did not wash, and purposely dirtied her face. The strategy worked, both to stave off advances and to cause many to look down on her as a fool. Indeed, she wanted people to mock her or take no notice of her so she could hide her inner treasure. Her diet was very frugal: bread, grapes, tomatoes, greens without oil, pickles, whatever might be found. She would often fast for many days. During the German occupation, the ascetic prayed without eating for more than a month.

Toward the end of the 1940s, a shift toward greater ascetical effort occurred. Sophia left her monastic cell and moved into the monastery refectory. Apparently inspired by the command of the Theotokos, she made her dwelling in the

fireplace. As a cover and pillow she had an empty paper sack and a blanket with holes. She became directly exposed to harsh weather, with rain and snow falling on her through the chimney as well as wind, the door of the refectory being often open. But Sophia would always remain healthy.

Once a visiting bishop saw her outside in the middle of winter, splashing frigid water onto herself like a child playing in the summertime, while he was clothed in layers and chattering from the cold. “Eldress, aren’t you cold?” he asked. Sophia struck her chest with her fist and said, “I am on fire from the love of Christ and you expect me to get cold?”

At the window she would always have a candle lit before the fresco of the Panagia. This is where she ate and spent her time. When visitors came to see her she would say their names before they even introduced themselves. People came from Thessaloniki and the surrounding areas, even as far as from Athens, just to see her. Her reputation quickly spread, so that people came not only from all over Greece, but even places like France and Israel to see her. Some villagers made fun of her however, calling her “Crazy Sophia.” Visitors would often give her money, which she would hide anywhere she could. And when someone had need, she would go and give the money immediately.

Miracles and Gifts

Once the Eldress and a companion went up to the chapel of the Holy Trinity, a 1,000 foot climb above the monastery. After lighting the lampada, praying, and venerating, they began the descent. A severe rainstorm commenced followed by large hail. Miraculously, the hail fell around them without touching them. Another time, at age 86, she made the climb with a couple. When it was time to come

down, the holy one told them to go on ahead. To the couple's surprise, upon their return they found Sophia back at the monastery. "Gerontissa, how did you get back before us?" "I flew. I flew and got here."

As with many saints, Sophia had a special relationship with animals. She would tell people, "Don't be afraid of the snakes. They are the Panagia's." She would take care of the birds, which would perch themselves all over her and around her. They would follow her into the church and "pray" with her as well, pecking (venerating) the icons. Sophia would say, "We have the birds for company and we are made joyful by them. The Panagia brought me here and made me to rejoice with this very joy!"



On one occasion, in 1949, coming out of the church she saw a bear. "Come here, my child, come here, sweetheart, and I'll give you bread and water." At these words, the bear stood up and then bent down and licked the feet of the ascetic.

Once a virtuous priest visited her. They spoke, but he did not tell her who he was, his name, or anything about his personal life. However, as he was leaving, Sophia called him by name: "Wait, Fr. Theodore!" She took a small bag of walnuts. "Take this for your presbytera." She then counted out five more. "Take these, one for each of your children!"

Another time, a girl came to her suffering from satanic influence. "Evil men have done you harm," Sophia revealed. "Don't lose your faith. Stay close to the Church. And say this prayer as well." The Eldress began dictating a prayer. The girl interrupted, "Eldress, I will forget it unless I write it down!" To this the saint responded, "Don't worry, you will find it in a book you are reading." The girl accepted this with faith and without much thought returned to Thessaloniki. Not long after, she picked up the lives of the saints. As she flipped through the book she found a paper inside. It was the prayer that Sophia had dictated to her.

In 1967, Sophia became very sick and was in great pain. Her stomach had open sores that smelled. She took the pain courageously, saying, "The Panagia will come to take away my pain. She promised me." Some Athenians have her on videotape explaining what happened soon thereafter: "The Panagia came with the Archangel Gabriel and Saint George, as well as other saints. The Archangel said, 'We will cut you now.' I said, 'I am a sinner, I must confess, receive communion, then you can cut me.' 'You will not die,' he said, 'we are doing a surgery on you,' and he cut me open."

The Teacher and Preacher

Sophia was a teacher of the simple, especially of women, and every word that came from her lips was spoken with humility and love. As with many “fools for Christ” of the past, the proud and the educated didn’t recognize her worth as much as those who possessed simple and humble hearts.

Out of humility, the ascetic preferred not to teach much, but the Panagia had commanded her: “Take a stick and speak. Preach repentance.” When Sophia replied, “I can’t. They don’t listen,” she heard in response, “You must speak. Do not cease giving advice!”

The humble servant received everyone openheartedly, with warmth and simplicity, but also with authority: “Welcome, my dears! Observe the fasts. Be crowned in chastity and purity.” On audio we hear her own voice saying, “I beg you, beloved children of God. Repent, go to confession, do good deeds. I beg you, do good deeds. May you be granted a good spirit and enlightenment!” Sophia would weep at the condition of the world. She said the Panagia weeps for us. She begged God not to destroy the world, “Say ‘My God, my God, let all the people repent.’”

“Oh, if you only knew what happened to the Lord on Wednesday and Friday, you would put nothing in your mouth. Neither bread, nor oil. Do not break the fast of Wednesday and Friday.”

She saw many scandalous things done by priests and lay people, but never criticized anyone. “Cover things, so that God will cover you,” she would say.

Last Days and Repose

The holy ascetic Sophia was notified by the Theotokos that she would repose in three days. On



that day she gave away her head covering saying, “Take my kerchief for a memento. Take it, it will help you. And you will be a help to others too.” Indeed, her head covering has helped barren women to give birth and pregnant women to give birth easily. In 1995, it began to give off a beautiful fragrance.

Eldress Sophia fell asleep in the Lord on May 6, 1974, and was buried on the grounds of the monastery. She was exhumed eight years later, and her bones were fragrant with a beautiful amber radiance.

The Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate approved the canonization of Eldress Sophia on October 4, 2011, and on July 1, 2012, she was officially glorified and numbered among the saints of the Holy Orthodox Church.

We conclude with her own words, as heard on audio recording:

“Goodbye, may you have all of the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—all the unfading gifts of God. Wherever you may go, have the fear of God in your heart, the fear of God. When you have fear of God, nothing bad will happen to you. Goodbye. Goodbye.”

Let the Apostles Speak:

Why We Should Preach More Often from the Apostolos

Devotional reflections for parish life, with pastoral suggestions for preaching
St. Paul in the Divine Liturgy.

Dn. Paul Najeeb Haddad, Ph.D.

Each divine liturgy, after the Trisagion hymn subsides and the deacon intones, “Let us attend,” the Church places in our hearing the living voice of the apostles. The apostles themselves who bore witness to the resurrected Jesus were “sent forth” (literally the meaning of *apostolos* in Greek) to proclaim the Good News. The *Apostolos* reading therefore is not a prelude to the “real” reading; it is the apostolic proclamation itself! These are letters penned to communities like ours, read aloud in the assembly, meant to shape a people into living icons of Jesus Christ. When the reader concludes and the celebrant blesses saying, “Peace be to thee that readest,” we glimpse what the Church Fathers knew: Christ’s peace reaches us not only in the four Gospels but through the apostolic word that interprets the Gospels for the Church’s life. The epistles encompass 21 of the 27 New Testament books. Those attributed to St. Paul number 13, about half of the New Testament. They are not appendices to the four Gospels but are the living gospels in the life of the Church.

Yet the epistle reading passes quickly, rarely, if I may say, becoming the focus of the homily. Sometimes the *Apostolos* is read, not chanted, in a low, hurried, and/or a minute voice. It may

be the case (not always!) that the epistle is seen as the “runner up” to the proclamation of the Gospel. Without diminishing the primacy of the Holy Gospels, this article makes a simple plea: let us preach more often from the *Apostolos*, and especially from St. Paul. Doing so will deepen our ecclesial identity, ground our people in sacramental



life, and give voice to a pastor whose words remain uncannily contemporary. This argument is devotional because St. Paul speaks to the heart, and scholarly because preaching the *Apostolos* demands careful attention to holy tradition (scripture, church fathers, councils, liturgics, etc.).

The Apostolic Word in the Liturgy

From the beginning, Christian worship included the public reading of scripture and the apostolic writings. Paul commands that his letters be read “to all the brothers and sisters” (cf. 1 Thess 5:27; Col 4:16), and he charges Timothy to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). The letters were not private correspondence; they were homiletical declarations sent to be proclaimed. Notice, even in the case of Philemon, the letter is not only addressed to Philemon but to “the church in your house” (Phlm 2). The first home of the epistles was a Eucharistic assembly, their first audience were baptized men, women, and children who gathered around the Lord’s table.

One of the earliest historical witnesses that the epistle was read out loud during liturgical celebrations comes from an early third-century text called the Didascalia Apostolorum, likely written by a third-century Syriac bishop for a non-Christian community. It says that at the “conclusion of all the scriptures” that the “Gospel should be read, as being the seal of all the scriptures” (Canon 8, trans. Margaret Dunlop Gibson)¹. Thus we presuppose the liturgical placement of the *Apostolos* before the Gospel reading. In the late fourth century, the Apostolic Constitutions were formulated in Antioch, and it explicitly spelled out the order of the readings to include the law and the prophets, the epistles, Acts, and finally the Gospels (2.57). In other words, the

Apostolic Constitutions codified for the Antiochian Byzantine Tradition the liturgical placement of the *Apostolos* before the Gospel.

Our liturgical structure has preserved this order. The *Apostolos* follows the prokeimenon, a psalm verse that attunes the heart, and precedes the chanting of the Alleluia, with its verses, and the holy Gospel. The sequence is theological: the prophets and psalms prepare us, the *Apostolos*/apostles announce Christ’s saving work in the Church, the Gospel discloses the deeds and words of the Lord, and the homily gathers these threads into a word for this people, in this place, today. When we avoid the epistle, we subtly suggest that the apostolic witness is lesser. When we preach from it regularly, we show the faithful that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Evangelists also formed the Church by the mouth of the apostles.

The Orthodox Byzantine lectionary itself invites this balance. In the post-Pentecost cycle the Church leads us through extended portions of Romans and the Corinthian correspondence. During the Sundays of Great Lent, readings from Hebrews train our eyes on Christ’s priestly sacrifice. Throughout feasts and fasts, Pauline pericopes recur like familiar friends. The Church, in other words, has always intended us to hear St. Paul as a guide across the year, not sporadically, but as a sustained teacher in the midst of worship. For this reason, our holy father St. John Chrysostom says of St. Paul:

“I love all the saints, but I love most the blessed Paul, the chosen vessel, the heavenly trumpet, the friend of the bridegroom, Christ. And I have said this and brought the love which I have for him out into the public eye so that I might make you, too, partners in this love charm” (homily on 2 Cor 11:1 in Patrologia Graeca 61.476).

¹ Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *The Didascalia in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 19.

Why Paul, and Why Now?

Saint Paul is, above all, a spiritual father and a pastor (cf. 1 Cor 4:15). His letters are not abstract treatises but are spiritual direction in the shape of prose. He admonishes, consoles, argues, sings, weeps, and prays. He knows the names of people and the peculiar sins and hopes of communities. He blends doctrinal clarity with fatherly patience. He gives us self-understanding in the Church, he articulates the sacramental life for us, he addresses moral and cultural confusion with evangelical courage, while remaining a good shepherd to his flock.

No one speaks more extensively than Paul about the nature of the Church. In him we learn that the Church is Christ's Body (1 Cor 12), a holy temple indwelt by the Spirit (1 Cor 3; Eph 2), and a household of faith (Gal 6). He refuses factionalism:

"Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor 1:13). He insists on unity through baptized diversity: "one body ... one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:4–5). In our own fractured age, Paul teaches us that ecclesial unity is not ideological uniformity but Eucharistic communion in the crucified and risen Lord.

Much of our sacramental understanding comes from Paul. In Baptism we are "buried with [Christ] ... and raised ... to walk in newness of life" (Rom 6; cf. Gal 3:27). In the Eucharist we participate in the one bread and one cup (1 Cor 10), discern the Lord's Body (1 Cor 11), and are knit together in thanksgiving. Paul's theology of marriage culminates: "This mystery is great ... I speak of Christ and the Church" (Eph 5). In Ordination we recognize the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6) and the entrusting of the apostolic deposit. Preaching from these texts forms a people



who know what they are doing when they come to the baptismal font, the holy altar, and the marriage bed: they are living sacramentally in Christ!

Ancient Corinth was not unlike our world. It was a tangle of wealth, promiscuity and licentiousness, status, philosophy, and religious pluralism. Paul does not offer mere rules to live by but rather gives us a Christ-shaped ethic: “You are not your own ... therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:20). He forms conscience in love (Rom 12–15), teaches the freedom of the Spirit (Gal 5), and orders charisms for edification (1 Cor 12–14). In the thicket of political slogans and culture wars, St. Paul instructs us in cruciform freedom, namely, faith working through love (Gal 5:6).

Whether facing persecution (2 Cor 4–5), grieving the dead (1 Thess 4), or confessing weakness (2 Cor 12), St. Paul’s word gives hope to the weary. The phrase “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:10) could be the motto of each of our parishes. Preaching Paul turns us from cynicism to patience, from self-reliance to grace.

Antioch and the Apostle: Our Heritage

For the faithful of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, St. Paul is not a distant figure. Antioch was his first base of missionary activity. It was there the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). From Antioch, Sts. Paul and Barnabas were sent on mission by prayer and fasting (Acts 13:1–3). In Antioch, Sts. Peter and Paul confronted one another painfully, honestly, and charitably about the truth of the Gospel (Gal 2). The Church of Antioch learned early that apostolic life means missionary zeal, theological clarity, and fraternal correction in love.

The Golden-Mouthed preacher of Antioch, as noted above, St. John Chrysostom, poured forth

homilies on Paul because he believed the apostle speaks with enduring pastoral power. To cultivate a Pauline homiletic today is to stand in the Antiochian lineage, not to innovate. It is to recover a native accent of our tradition.

Why We Often Neglect the Apostolos and How to Recover It

If Paul is so central, why do we hesitate? Several reasons are common:

- **Perceived complexity.** Paul can seem difficult—dense arguments, unfamiliar first-century problems, unfamiliar rhetoric and grammar.

- **Fear of controversy.** Passages on sexuality, marriage, obedience, or church order provoke anxiety in a polarized climate.

- **Habit.** We have simply grown accustomed to preaching almost exclusively from the Gospel.

These concerns are understandable but not decisive. The remedy is not to avoid the holy apostle, but to preach him well: patiently, contextually, and pastorally. A few orientations may help.

1. Preach Paul as a letter to a church

Remind the faithful that each pericope belongs to an actual letter. Name the city (Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus), describe its situation briefly, and situate the reading within the flow of the epistle. One or two minutes of context opens the text.

2. Let the lectionary lead

The Church gives us a continuous cycle of sorts across weeks—Romans and Corinthians after Pentecost, Hebrews during the Lenten Sundays, and so forth. Consider a short series (two or three homilies) that follows Paul’s argument, even if the



Gospel pericope remains the day's focus in other weeks. This builds biblical literacy.

3. Read with a Christological compass

Paul's center is always Christ crucified and risen. Even when addressing disputes, his answer is not a policy but a Person: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). Preach Christ from Paul, and pastoral application will follow.

4. Address the hard texts as a physician, not a pundit

When Paul speaks about sexuality, discipline, or obedience, he speaks as a spiritual father forming a holy community. He does not shout at the world; he heals the Church and subsequently heals the world through the Church! We can do the same: speak truth with tears, committed to the salvation of our people.

Theological Motifs That Preach

Certain Pauline themes recur in the lectionary and invite homiletic development. Take these points as examples. They are not exhaustive, but these major

motifs can be traced throughout the Pauline epistles. Though I may point to specific passages, consider how St. Paul writes his letters and the passage in question considering one or more of these motifs.

1. "In Christ" as a new creation

Union with Christ is at the center of all of St. Paul's letters. It could be made explicit as in 2 Cor 5:17; to be "in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17) is to live by baptismal identity rather than by the old self. Or it could be implicit, such as Paul lovingly chastising Philemon over his treatment of Onesimus; all who are in Christ should be treated as brothers and sisters. Preaching can explore identity, belonging, and transformation, not mere moralism but grace-enabled change.

2. The Body and its members

Paul's image of the Church as a body (1 Cor 12) preaches well in communities tempted either to clericalism ("the priest does everything") or consumerism ("I attend but do not serve"). Emphasize charisms as gifts for the common good, discovered and ordered in love.

3. The Eucharist as communion and discernment

From 1 Corinthians 10–11, we can teach both reverent awe and communal responsibility: the Eucharist makes us one and calls us to examine ourselves, reconcile, and care for the poor. “Discerning the Body” includes both the sacred mysteries and the members.

4. Kenosis and imitation

Philippians 2:5–11 is inexhaustible. Christ’s self-emptying love becomes the pattern for our life; Paul models it in his own ministry (e.g., 1 Thess 2; 2 Cor 11–12). Preaching can trace the downward path of love and an obedience to God that ultimately leads to exaltation.

5. Hope, endurance, and joy

Paul’s vocabulary of endurance, consolation, and joy in suffering (Rom 5; 2 Cor 1; 2 Cor 4) meets parishioners where they live. It is not optimism; it is a cruciform life with a resurrection-shaped realism.

Practical Helps for Clergy (and Readers)

- Invest in the reading itself. The epistle should be proclaimed, not mumbled. Train readers in diction, pacing, chanting, and microphone technique. Provide them with the text in advance with notes on names and sense units. A well-proclaimed *Apostolos* is already a homily!
- Announce the context. A single sentence before preaching, for example “Today’s epistle is part of Paul’s argument about unity in Corinth,” gives the faithful a frame for listening.
- Alternate preaching emphases. Without rigid rules, consider preaching from the epistle at least once or twice a month, especially during seasons

when a letter is read in sequence.

- Preach short series. For example, three homilies from Romans 12 (“A living sacrifice,” “Gifts that build up,” “Overcome evil with good”) or from 1 Corinthians 12–13 (“Many members, one Body,” “The more excellent way,” “Love never fails”).
- Connect doctrine and discipleship. Paul always moves from proclamation (“what God has done in Christ”) to exhortation (“therefore walk worthy”). Let homilies do the same: announce, then invite.
- Let Paul read us. Ask in preparation: what false gospels is my community tempted by (self-sufficiency, politics-as-salvation, consumerism)? How does this text unmask them and heal us?

Answering Common Objections

“Isn’t the Gospel the main thing?”

Yes—but “Gospel” in the New Testament is not only a book genre. It is also the announcement of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. Paul calls it “my gospel” (Rom 2:16) because he proclaims Christ’s saving work and its implications for the Church. Preaching Paul is preaching the Gospel.

“Paul is too hard for our people.”

Our people navigate tax law, medical forms, and complex jobs. They can learn St. Paul when he is taught with love. Clear structure, brief context, and a few well-explained terms open the door. Patience is the key. Give your family/flock time to grow.

“Paul is controversial.”

He is pastoral before he is controversial. When he confronts sin, he does so to heal a community, not to win a debate. If we preach with tears rather than with scorn, the Church will hear him as a father, not a political pundit.

“We might neglect the Gospel reading.”

We need not choose. Many Saturdays and Sundays the *Apostolos* and Gospel illuminate one another; sometimes one may argue that the epistle deserves primary focus (definitely a pastoral decision). Regularly alternating epistle and Gospel preaching (or combining the two) trains the parish to receive all of Scripture, apostolic and evangelical alike, as the Church’s living word.

A Devotional Way to Hear Paul

Encourage the faithful to receive the *Apostolos* devotionally, not only intellectually.

- Pray and chant the prokeimenon. Let the psalm refrain prepare the heart and echo through the week. The tradition of the Church was to chant the prokeimenon and verse(s), which has fallen out of practice in both the Antiochian and the Greek Orthodox traditions. The benefits of reviving this custom in some of our parishes may outweigh any perceived negatives.
- Listen for a single imperative. Paul often turns to *therefore*, *walk*, *put on*, *rejoice*. Receive one command as a word for you today.
- Memorize a sentence. Carry it through the week; let it become prayer. Romans 12:12, Philippians 4:4–7, or 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 are good beginnings.
- Confess and commune with Paul’s vision. Let the epistle reveal where we are out of joint with the Body; seek reconciliation and Eucharistic unity.

In households, consider reading the upcoming epistle during Saturday supper. In parish bulletins, print a brief note situating the epistle with a guiding question. Adult education can periodically offer a “Paul for Parish Life” series, which can be short, accessible sessions on major themes.

A Pastoral Benediction

The epistle reader’s blessing “Peace be to thee that readest,” could be understood as directed for the whole Church. Peace to those who proclaim the *Apostolos* with clarity and care. Peace to those who hear it in humility. Peace to preachers who grapple with Paul’s sentences until a word emerges for his people. Peace to parishes who allow the apostolic voice to become their own.

Let us, then, preach from the *Apostolos* more often. Not as a novelty but as obedience to the Church’s living tradition. Let us sit again at the feet of the apostle who loved the Church of God unto tears and who still bears us upon his heart. And let us ask St. Paul’s intercession, that our parishes may become what he imagined under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: holy temples, radiant households of faith, bodies alive with charity, communities conformed to the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.



Will I Co-Suffer?

Fr. Peter Kavanaugh

“The greater your love, the greater your suffering.” *St. Silouan of Athos*

I am moved with compassion,” our Lord said as he beheld the crowd of several thousand. Tabgha is the remote land at the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is known for its seven springs of fresh water: a foreshadowing, perhaps, of the Spring of Life that would usher forth such hope. There on those ancient hills, what did Christ see: men, women, children, hunger, poverty, fright, or desperation? Our Lord was not inspired by an intellectual ideal. He did not act out of a sense of duty to mankind, religious obligation, or a call to social justice.

“I am moved with compassion,” He says. “My heart, my gut, my bowels ache for their pain.” How does Jesus Christ respond in our lives? What is his reaction to our pain? Christ acts from his internal compassion, deep co-suffering, for each and every one of us. This is the quality of soul God wants in us.

Σπλαγχνίζομαι ἐπὶ τὸν ὄχλον

Σπλαγχνίζομαι, from the root σπλάγχνον, is a very old word. It means how it sounds: σπλάγχνον—the gut, the internal organs. The ancient Greeks associated it with the depths in the heart from where hate and passion flow. The Hebrews associated it more with tenderness and affection—*rawkham*—one’s bowels or even the womb.

“The godly care for their animals, but the wicked are always cruel” (Proverbs 12:10).

Rešā’im werahāmē: A good man’s inner gut aches when he sees pain, even the pain of a small animal. The wicked are cold and aloof. Most strikingly, *rawkham* is a word profoundly associated with the divine. God is moved, is for us, in his σπλάγχνον, his gut, in his inner being. God co-suffers with us.

This concept runs deep in all Christian languages. The English word “compassion” comes from the Latin *compati*: to co-suffer; to share and join with another’s suffering. For “compassion” the Russians use the word *sostradanye*: from *stradanye*; to suffer. We can look to their slavic poets to understand this word. Yevgeny Yevtushenko recounts a memory from his childhood, in the streets of Moscow, when the city groaned under the oppression of Stalin and war with Hitler. One day, the pavement swarmed with desperate onlookers. 20,000 German war prisoners were marched forward, guns at their backs, the enemy, the despised.

“The crowd was mostly women—Russian women with hands roughened by hard work, lips untouched by lipstick, and with thin hunched shoulders which had borne half of the burden of the war. Every one of them must have had a father or a husband, a brother or a son killed by the Germans. They gazed with hatred in the direction from which the column was to appear ... The women were clenching their

fists. The soldiers and policemen had all they could do to hold them back.

Their hate was real; their hurt was real.

“All at once something happened to them. They saw German soldiers, thin, unshaven, wearing dirty, blood-stained bandages, hobbling on crutches or leaning on the shoulders of comrades; the soldiers walked with their heads down. The street became dead silent—the only sound was the shuffling of boots and the thumping of crutches.”

“Then I saw an elderly woman in broken-down boots push herself forward and touch a policeman’s shoulder, saying, ‘Let me through.’ She went up to the column, took from inside her coat something wrapped in a colored handkerchief and unfolded it. It was a crust of black bread. She pushed it awkwardly into the pocket of a soldier, so exhausted that he was tottering on his feet. And now from every side women were running toward the soldiers, pushing into their

hands bread, cigarettes, whatever they had. The soldiers were no longer enemies. They were people.”

“Compassion [*sostradanye*] was the most important, perhaps the sole law of human existence” (Fyodor Dostoyevsky).

This is what Jesus Christ felt on that day in Tabgha.

“In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away’” (Mark 8:1–3).

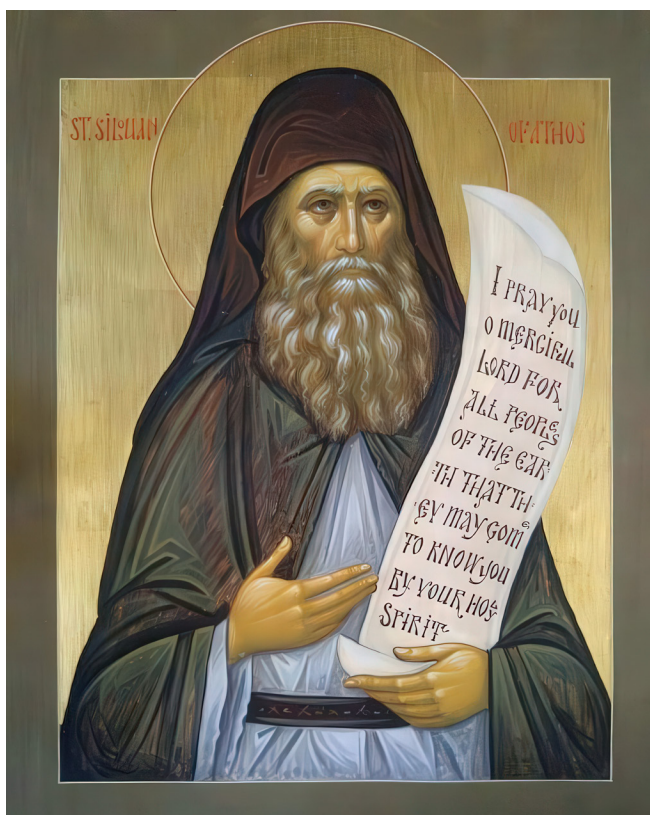
The Miracle of the Feeding of 4,000. This is a most beloved story everyone cherishes. It brings us hope to see how Christ feeds the hungry. Christ comforts the poor. Against all odds, despite all hope, Christ brings life and nourishment. But before we get too excited about the fruit of Christ’s actions, we need to stop and remember the motivation behind the miracle. Deep down, in his gut, in his bowels, Christ is moved with co-suffering.

“The greater your love, the greater your suffering.” St. Silouan of Athos

“Nothing else pleases God so much,” St. Gregory enjoins, “as love for the poor ... as compassion and kindness to fellow humans.” “Nothing else is as beloved to Him as compassion.”

As we offer thanks to God for his co-suffering, we must remember this. How am I living? How do I regard my fellow man, my spouse, child, neighbor, co-worker, or fellow parishioner?

Will I co-suffer?



MINUTES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SEVENTH CONVENTION OF THE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

CONVENED AT THE HYATT REGENCY O'HARE – CHICAGO, IL - JULY 20–27, 2025

Thursday, July 24, 2025, 11:15 AM

I. Opening Prayer

Most Reverend Metropolitan SABA opened the General Assembly with the Trisagion Prayers, the Apolytikion of Holy Pentecost in both Arabic and English, and with the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the Assembly.

II. Declaration of a Quorum

Upon the call of Metropolitan SABA, Rev. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor, declared the existence of a quorum and the qualification of the Assembly to conduct the business of the Archdiocese.

III. Appointment of the Convention Sergeants-at-Arms

Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice Chairman of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees, appointed Honorable Walid Fakhoury, Very Rev. Fr. Michael Nassar, and Very Rev. Fr. James Shadid as Convention Sergeants-at-Arms.

IV. Introduction of the officers and Members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees

Mr. El Khoury introduced the officers, members and honorary members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees who were in attendance:

Most Reverend Metropolitan SABA (Primate), Rt. Rev. Bishop Thomas, Rt. Rev. Bishop John, Rt. Rev. Bishop Anthony, Archpriest Michael Ellias (Secretary of the Archdiocese), Archpriest Joseph Samaan (Protosyngellos), Archpriest Thomas Zain (Vicar General), Archdeacon Emile Sayegh (Chancellor), Deacon Christian Manasseh, Daniel Abraham, Edward Assile, Richard Ayoob, James Bach, Dr. Antony Bashir, Daniel Braun, Roger David, Samira Bitar Ellis, Ayham Farha, Darlene Haddad, Eli Haig, Carol Laham, Dr. Nawar Mansour, Dr. Fadi Metri, Kameel Najjar, Mary Winstanley-O'Connor, Mansour Rayan, Emile G. Sayegh, Philip Saliba, Dr. George Thomas, Sheryl Vanderwagen, and Dimitri Zeidan.

Mr. El Khoury extended the regrets of members of the Board of Trustees who were not present – Sam



Assad, George Laham, James Moses, Kelli Kouri Neagle, Douglas Skaff, Sr., and Ernest Younes.

Mr. El Khoury requested prayers for the health of Bishops Alexander and Nicholas who could not attend, and he noted the repose of members and former members of the Board of Trustees since the last convention – Ralph Abercia, Dr. Elias Hebek, Elaine Heider, Khalil Kardous, and George Nassor, as well as family members Sam Homsey, Douglas Skaff, Jr., and Najat Saliba. He asked for a moment of silence.

V. Acceptance of the Minutes of the 56th Archdiocesan Convention held in Phoenix, AZ, in July 2023.

Fr. Joseph Purpura noted that the minutes should reflect that His Beatitude the Most Rev. Patriarch JOHN X opened the General Assembly with prayer.

The Assembly accepted the minutes as amended by acclamation.

VI. The Address of Metropolitan SABA to the 57th Archdiocesan Convention

The address of Metropolitan SABA was posted on the website of the Archdiocese and was printed in the Word Magazine.

N.B. All reports of the archdiocesan departments and organizations were distributed electronically in advance of the convention. The chair asked

presenters to provide only highlights and to respond to questions from the floor.

VII. Report of the Department of Finance – Mr. Salim Abboud, CFO

Mr. Salim Abboud, CFO, acknowledged the excellent work of Fr. Paul Matar and the staff of the Archdiocese. He noted that the financial team now resides in its own office space approximately 10 minutes away from the chancery office. He also acknowledged the presence of Mr. Mark Luther, the auditor from the Catanese Group, which has been instrumental in improving the financial and reporting systems of the Archdiocese.

Mr. Abboud presented a detailed overview of the Archdiocese's financial status and reported that the Archdiocese had received four (4) consecutive clean and unmodified external audits. The full report is available at antiochian.org.

The Assembly adjourned at 1:00 PM and reconvened at 1:35 PM.

Mr. Abboud continued the report of the Department of Finance. He presented the Financial Report for FY 2024 as well as the proposed budget for FY 2026. He provided an introduction to the work of the various Finance committees, acknowledging their chairs – Roger David (Investment), Daniel Braun (Real Estate and Capital Improvement), Dr.



Anne Bourjaily Thomas (Charitable Outreach), Dr. George Thomas (Financial Strategic Planning and Budgeting), and Kameel Najjar (Assessment).

Mr. Najjar stressed that the worksheets the parishes are required to complete each year are a matter of collective stewardship and analysis in order to identify areas of strength and areas which require attention and support.

Mr. Abboud concluded the report of the Department of Finance by inviting volunteers who have experience and expertise in any or all areas of the department's work to offer their services.

Mr. Emile Sayegh moved to accept the report, and Mr. Dimitri Zeidan offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

At this point in the agenda the Chair invited several of the twenty-eight (28) seminarians and recent seminary graduates who had recently completed a pilgrimage to Jordan and Lebanon to share their experiences. Fr. Nicholas Fine, Fr. John Vazquez, Fr. Thomas Miller, Fr. Anthony Gilbert, and Fr. Mark Saltany stressed that they had witnessed the pastoral care and courage of the clergy in the region who minister in the face of insurmountable challenges. They experienced tremendous love and hospitality and encouraged others, whether born into the faith or adopted into the faith, to go and connect with our patriarchal homeland. The seminarians concluded their reflections by singing the Apolytikion of St. Raphael of Brooklyn and by showing a video compilation of their travelogue.

VIII. Organization Reports

A. Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch – Mr. Roger David

Metropolitan SABA thanked Mr. David on behalf of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees and the

entire Antiochian Archdiocese for his ten years of outstanding and sacrificial service as the National Chairman of the Order. He presented Mr. David with the Gold Order of the St. Raphael of Brooklyn Medal, and the Assembly gave Mr. David a standing ovation.

Mr. David provided an overview of the work of the Order of St. Ignatius with an emphasis on the Order's goal of encouraging 250 current knights and dames of the Order to upgrade to knight and dame commanders.

Mr. Joseph David moved to accept the report, and Dr. Michael David offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

B. Antiochian Women – Ms. Sheryl Vanderwagen

Ms. Vanderwagen shared highlights of the activities of the Antiochian Women during the prior year. She especially noted the creation of the Widowed Clergy Fund which now stands at \$1 million in its first year. She also described the grant process of the Antiochian Women in support of the continuing education of qualified applicants.

Ms. Julie Abboud moved to accept the report, and Sh. Susan Sayegh offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

C. SOYO – Ms. Sophie Burt

Mr. James Kaufman presented the report of SOYO on behalf of Ms. Sophie Burt who was serving on the staff of the Antiochian Village Camp.

Mr. Salim Abboud moved to accept the report, and Dr. Antony Bashir offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

Metropolitan SABA shared some additional comments from the participants on the recently completed pilgrimage to Jordan and Lebanon.

The Assembly adjourned at 3:45 PM.

Friday, July 25, 2025 – 11:05 AM

IX. Department Reports

A. Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries – Fr. Nicholas Belcher

Fr. Nicholas Belcher presented the report of the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries inclusive of the departments of Christian Education, Youth Ministry, Camping, and Young Adult Ministry on behalf of Fr. Philip Rogers, Ms. Ann-Sarah Farha, Ms. Erin Ghata, and Mr. Khalil Samara.

Fr. Nicholas explained that the department has integrated curriculum among all of the various ministries across the board. In response to a question about acquiring additional camp properties, Metropolitan SABA reminded the Assembly of the need for more resources. He further proposed the concept of a national 5-day youth festival in the coming years.

Fr. Jean Ojaimi moved to accept the report, and Fr. Demetri Darwish offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

B. Department of Clergy Insurance and Retirement – Fr. Michael Ellias

Fr. Michael Ellias summarized the report of the Department of Clergy Insurance and Retirement. In response to a question on the floor from Thursday he outlined the historical development of both the Retired Clergy Housing Allowance Fund (old plan) and the new Defined Contribution Plan (401k).

Fr. Milad Selim moved to accept the report, and Fr. Joseph Purpura offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

C. The WORD Magazine – His Grace Bishop John

His Grace Bishop John summarized the report of the WORD Magazine. In response to questions from the

floor he confirmed that the WORD Magazine would continue to appear in print and that it was possible to submit articles to any of his email addresses.

Metropolitan SABA recommended an evaluation of the magazine's audience and content.

Mr. Emile Sayegh moved to accept the report, and Mr. Mansour Rayan offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

D. Western Rite Vicariate – His Grace Bishop John

His Grace Bishop John summarized the report of the Western Rite Vicariate.

Dr. Nabil Saltany moved to accept the report, and Fr. James Shadid offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

E. Department of Internet Ministry – Deacon Christian Manasseh

The Assembly received the report of the Department of Internet Ministry by acclamation.



F. In the absence of Fr. Adrian Budica and Kh. Melinda Johnson, the Chair referred the Assembly to the previously submitted reports of the Departments of Hospital Chaplain and Pastoral Counseling Ministry and of Ancient Faith Ministries, respectively.

G. Department of Inter-Orthodox and Inter-Faith Relations – Fr. Thomas Zain

Kh. Claudia Zain moved to accept the report, and Kh. Laila Ellias offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

H. Department of Liturgics – Fr. Thomas Zain

Fr. Thomas Zain presented the report of the Department of Liturgics. In addition to his submitted report he announced that the new Gospel book for liturgical use is being typeset and printed, and it should be available next year. Fr. Thomas indicated that bilingual texts for baptisms, weddings, and funerals will be forthcoming. He also secured the blessing of Metropolitan SABA to include the celebration of “All Saints of North America” in next year’s commemorations.

Fr. John Mahfouz moved to accept the report, and Fr. Michael Nassar offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

I. Department of Communications – Dn. Peter Samore

Deacon Peter Samore summarized the report of the Department of Communications. He encouraged clergy and laity alike to submit materials for publication only after securing the approval and blessing of the parish priest. He indicated that all submissions would be coordinated with the WORD Magazine, and he emphasized the preference for video submissions because they draw more attention.

Fr. Michael Pappas moved to accept the report, and Ms. Sheryl Vanderwagen offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

J. Department of Statistics and Credentials – Fr. Thomas Zain and Fr. Paul Matar

The Chair referred the Assembly to the previously submitted report of the Department of Statistics and Credentials.

K. Department of Missions and Evangelism – Fr. John Finley and Fr. Gabriel Karam

Fr. John Finley thanked Metropolitan SABA for the addition of Fr. Gabriel Karam to the department. He reported that a new mission had been established in the Chicago area and that since the submission of his original report which included four (4) new missions and twelve (12) potential missions, two more missions were forming.

In response to a question from the floor Fr. John indicated that in the next ten (10) years he expected that there would be the formation of more Arabic-speaking missions than English-speaking missions; however, it is the policy of the department that all missions must include English in the services in order to accommodate inquirers and succeeding generations. He also reaffirmed the mission of the department to “bring North America to Orthodoxy.” This mission includes using additional languages such as Spanish and French in Canada.

Fr. Elias Ayoub moved to accept the report, and Fr. Michael Pappas offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

L. St. Athanasius Academy – Fr. Adam Roberts

In the absence of Fr. Adam Roberts, the Chair referred the Assembly to the previously submitted report of St. Athanasius Academy.

M. Department of Home Schooling – Fr. Noah Bushelli

Fr. Noah Bushelli presented the report of the Department of Homeschooling. He noted that approximately 10% of households in the Antiochian Archdiocese utilizes some form of homeschooling. He stated that families are protecting their children from harmful influences and that homeschooling programs and cooperatives can be an important outreach tool.

Metropolitan SABA encouraged the department to develop a Christian education curriculum for inclusion in homeschooling programs.

Fr. Peter Akel moved to accept the report, and Fr. Joseph Olas offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

N. Antiochian House of Studies – Fr. Fadi Rabbat

Fr. Fadi Rabbat reviewed the report of the Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS).

Fr. Kamal Alrahil moved to accept the report, and Fr. Amin Houli offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

O. Department of Liturgical Translations – Fr. Michel Najim

In the absence of Fr. Michel Najim, the Chair referred the Assembly to the previously submitted report of the Department of Liturgical Translations.

P. Antiochian Village Camp and the Heritage and Learning Center – Mr. Dimitri Zeidan and Ms. Amy Stiffler

In addition to their written report Mr. Dimitri Zeidan and Ms. Amy Stiffler highlighted developments at the Antiochian Village Camp including the establishment of a new

homeschooling program, a retreat for neurodiverse campers, an improved health center, and multiple capital improvements. At the Heritage and Learning Center there has been the addition of a deacons' retreat, an enhanced bookstore, upgraded internet and television offerings, upgraded lodging rooms, and assistance with the Antiochian House of Studies. There will be a museum redesign, and the bust of Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory will return to the lobby. They invited parishes to submit photographs of their buildings for display in the Center's corridors. Plans for the future include a new church with greater capacity, a women's monastery, and a cemetery.

Fr. John Hamatie moved to accept the report, and Fr. George Al-Dehneh offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

Q. Department of Sacred Music – Ms. Mareena Boosamra-Ball

In addition to her previously submitted report, Ms. Boosamra-Ball announced that the new Archdiocesan Choir has received an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall in New York City in June 2026. Details of the appearance will be forthcoming.

Mr. Christopher Holwey moved to accept the report, and Deacon Gregory Abdalah offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

R. Department of Lay Ministry – Dr. Antony Bashir and Dr. Richard Robbat

Dr. Antony Bashir presented the report of the Department of Lay Ministry on behalf of Dr. Richard Robbat. Dr. Bashir traced the development of the department and paid tribute to his long-time partner, the late Dr. John D. Dalack. He highlighted several of the parishes which have participated in strategic planning sessions, and he invited others to



avail themselves of the department's services. He also invited others who may have an interest in continuing the work of the department to offer their services.

Fr. Mark Saltany moved to accept the report, and Fr. George Mokbel offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

S. Joy Magazine – Fr. Peter Ackle

In addition to the report of Fr. Peter Ackle, Metropolitan SABA encouraged the parishes to provide subscriptions to Joy Magazine for all of the children for their education, edification, and enjoyment.

Fr. Malatius Zafaran moved to accept the report, and Fr. Nicholas Fine offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

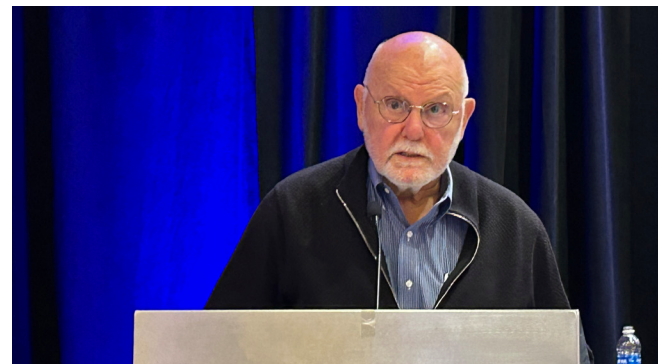
X. Presentation of Proposed Resolutions for Adoption by the Assembly – Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor

The Assembly approved four resolutions by acclamation. Those resolutions are attached below.

XI. Old Business - None

XII. New Business

A. Discussion on the 2029 Convention Site – Mr. Raed Sweiss and Ms. Carol Jazzar, Co-Chairs, Department of Convention and Conference Planning



The department is currently in discussion with potential sites for the 2029 Archdiocese Convention, but there are no confirmed candidates. The department must take into consideration the capabilities of hosting parishes as well as the contractual obligations to hotels. The department will continue to inform the Archdiocese Board of Trustees of all developments.

B. Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America – Fr. Nicholas Anton

In the absence of Fr. Nicholas Anton, Ms. Spyridola Fotinis offered an overview of the direct ministries and affiliated agencies of the Assembly of Bishops (AOB). The Assembly viewed a detailed slide presentation.

C. Fellowship of St. Julian – Dr. Nawar Mansour

Dr. Nawar Mansour offered an introduction to the Fellowship of St. Julian, a fellowship comprising a wide range of medical professionals throughout the Archdiocese. He encouraged the clergy to

help identify and recruit medical professionals in their parishes to participate in local chapters of the fellowship. He said that these chapters were not intended for fundraising purposes, but rather for mutual support and the exchange of experiences and challenges. A slide presentation highlighted several of the current chapters in action.

D. Report of the 2027 Archdiocesan Convention in Anaheim, CA

Fr. Josiah Trenham, Host Pastor, introduced the co-chairs of the convention and their management team. A video presentation introduced the convention site (and included footage of Fr. Josiah roller blading!) and various local attractions. The committee hopes to provide a scholarship program to make the convention more affordable for as wide a range of participants as possible.

Mr. Raed Sweiss moved to accept the report, and Fr. Elias Houli offered a second, and the Assembly received the report.

E. Report of the Nominating Committee for the Board of Trustees – Fr. Joseph Samaan, Chairman

Fr. Joseph Samaan presented the slate of candidates for the Archdiocese Board of Trustees. Fr. Joseph Purpura moved to direct the Secretary to cast one unanimous ballot for the slate of candidates, and Fr. Malatius Zafaran offered a second, and the motion passed. The General Assembly elected:

Mr. Edward Assile
 Mr. Richard Ayoub
 Mr. Dan Braun
 Mr. Anthony DeLaCruz (to fill the vacancy of Mr. Ramey Younes)
 Ms. Darlene Haddad
 Mr. Eli Haig
 Ms. Carol Laham

Ms. Mary Winstanely-O'Connor
 Dr. George Thomas
 Mr. Dimitri Zeidan
 Mr. Rami Khairallah will represent the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch.

F. Appoints by Metropolitan SABA to the Archdiocese Board of Trustees

His Eminence Metropolitan SABA appointed five additional members and one honorary member:

Mr. Daniel Abraham (Honorary)
 Mr. Fawaz El-Khoury
 Hon. Walid Fakhoury
 Ms. Zeina Fares
 Mr. George Hanna
 Mr. Salim Sassine

His Eminence thanked Mr. James Moses, Ms. Kelli Kouri Neagle, Mr. Douglas Skaff, Sr., and Mr. Rami Younes for their dedicated service as they departed the Board of Trustees.

XIII. Adjournment and Closing Prayer

Fr. Fouad Saba moved to adjourn the General Assembly. Fr. Milad Salim seconded the motion. The motion passed, and His Grace Bishop John closed the General Assembly with prayer at 2:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

V. Rev. Fr. Michael Ellias, Secretary
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America



RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION TO THE HOST PARISH

WHEREAS, St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church of Cicero, Illinois, has graciously hosted the 57th Biennial Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Rosemont, Illinois, from July 20-27, 2025;

AND WHEREAS, the Pastor, Very Rev. Fr. Fouad Saba and the Convention Chair, Darlene Haddad, together with her Vice-Chairs, Karen Nawas, Sandra Barbari, Victor Imreibe and the entire Convention Committee, the Parish Council and all the faithful have worked tirelessly for years and spared no efforts to assure the success of this Convention, and providing wonderful hospitality for our every need, family fellowship and spiritual growth;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this 57th Biennial Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Rosemont, Illinois from July 20-27, 2025, in unanimity and by acclamation extends to the Host Pastor and the entire Convention Committee, its heartfelt thanks and appreciation for an outstanding convention.

RESOLUTION ON THE PROMOTION OF PEACE IN THE HOLY LANDS AND THE MIDDLE EAST

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and He taught us, saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9); and

WHEREAS, The Church has always prayed for "peace from above and for the salvation of our souls," as well as "peace for the whole world, the good estate of the holy churches of God, and the union of all"; and

WHEREAS, The Holy Spirit, Whom Christ promised to send as our Comforter and Guide (John 14:26; 16:13), is the Spirit of unity, reconciliation, and divine love, Who alone can heal the divisions and hatreds that separate peoples, and Who inspires acts of justice, mercy, and wisdom through those who labor for the common good; and

WHEREAS, The lands of the Middle East— a region that forms an integral part of the historic cradle of Christianity—has for many years endured conflict, displacement, destruction of communities, and the suffering of innocent men, women, and children whose shared humanity transcends all divisions; and

WHEREAS, Among those affected by the violence in these lands are members of our own Orthodox Christian community—both clergy and laity—some of whom have been injured, displaced, or even deliberately targeted and killed; and

WHEREAS, The Orthodox Christian faithful in these regions, have consistently and faithfully borne witness to the Gospel of peace in the midst of great suffering and danger, serving as agents of reconciliation, bridges between divided communities, and vital contributors to the cultural and economic life of their societies; and

WHEREAS, The United States of America possesses extraordinary diplomatic, economic, and strategic influence in global affairs, and bears a moral responsibility to employ that influence toward the promotion of human dignity, justice, and lasting peace; and

WHEREAS, The exercise of power is judged not only by its strength but by its mercy; and

WHEREAS, The blessings of peace are manifold—bringing security to the vulnerable, healing to the wounded, and the possibility of a shared future to those long at war; and

WHEREAS, Equal treatment under the law and freedom of religion for all citizens—principles long safeguarded in the United States—must be actively upheld and integrated into the political structures of the region, with meaningful consequences for violations, if any enduring peace is to be achieved;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America gathered in solemn assembly and prayer, have met as the General Assembly at the 57th Biennial Archdiocesan Convention in Rosemont, Illinois from July 20-27, 2025 affirms the urgent need for a just and lasting peace in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon, and the broader region; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this assembly, both clergy and laity, implores the President of the United States, the Secretary of State, and the members of Congress to exercise their offices in the spirit of peacemaking and moral leadership, advocating for diplomatic efforts that uphold the equal protection of all human life, guarantee freedom of religion, bring about the cessation of hostilities, and support the rebuilding of shattered communities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we commit ourselves to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for the sake of peace in the Middle East, invoking the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos, the joy of

all who sorrow, and all the saints who have borne witness to the Gospel in those lands, trusting that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, will guide all efforts—both spiritual and diplomatic—toward reconciliation and healing; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, the Secretary of State, and other appropriate public officials, as well as to the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem, as a sign of our solidarity and our abiding hope that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) may prevail.

RESOLUTION HONORING THE LEGACY OF HIS GRACE BISHOP BASIL

WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 57th Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese Convention here in the Hyatt Regency (“O’Hare”) from July 20–27, 2025;

WHEREAS, His Grace, Bishop BASIL, a life-long member of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, having been born to William and Genevieve Essey in 1948 and having been raised in the Holy Orthodox Church, entered St. Vladimir Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York, earning his Master of Divinity in 1973 and was assigned as pastor assistant, St. George, Detroit, Michigan;

WHEREAS, following his ordination to the sub-diaconate and the Holy diaconate on September 30, 1979, by the late Metropolitan PHILIP (of thrice-

blessed memory) at St. Ignatius of Antioch Church at the Antiochian Village in Bolivar, PA, and on January 27, 1980, he was ordained to the Holy Priesthood at St. Anthony, Bergenfield, New Jersey, soon followed by his elevation to the rank of the dignity of Archimandrite, again by the late Metropolitan PHILIP at St. George, Wichita, Kansas;

WHEREAS, from 1975 until 1986 he served as director of the Archdiocese's Department of Youth Affairs working from the Archdiocese headquarters in New Jersey;

WHEREAS, in 1989 while residing at Balamand Monastery in Lebanon, His Grace studied, taught and did research and translation for "The Liturgikon": the Book of Divine Services which was published by the Archdiocese in 1989 and used by all members of the clergy;

WHEREAS, following his nomination for election to the office of the Episcopacy by the General Assembly on July 26, 1991, he was elected on November 14, 1991, to serve as Auxiliary Bishop to the Metropolitan with the titular see of Enfeh el-Koura, Lebanon by the Holy Synod of the Church of Antioch and consecrated to the Episcopacy on May 31, 1992, at St. George Cathedral in Wichita, Kansas;

WHEREAS, during his ministry, His Grace co-chaired the Joint OCA-Antiochian Canonization Commission which on May 29, 2000, led to the glorification of RAPHAEL (Hawaweeny), Bishop of Brooklyn;

WHEREAS, additionally His Grace oversaw the publication of the book containing Saint Raphael's hagiography, akolouthia and Akathist; allowing for the full celebration of the new saint in our parishes;

WHEREAS, during his blessed ministry, His Grace worked tirelessly establishing mission parishes, educating clergy, organizing the ministry

of parishes that were entrusted to him and was formidable in furthering the Antiochian identity in North America for thousands of the Orthodox faithful spanning generations;

WHEREAS, through his efforts many people were moved by his influence inspiring a generation to return to their faith and reclaim the love for the Orthodox Church;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this 57th Biennial Archdiocese Convention, duly assembled at Rosemont, Illinois, from July 20-27, 2025, in unanimity and by acclamation wholeheartedly and solemnly honors the life-long work and legacy of His Grace Bishop BASIL, and we convey our love and respect to His Grace, who will remain forever in our hearts and prayers.

RESOLUTION HONORING AND STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH HIS BEATITUDE JOHN X, PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST

WHEREAS, The ancient Patriarchate of Antioch, first established by the Holy Apostles and blessed as the place where the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26), continues to shine as a beacon of the Orthodox faith in lands long afflicted by war, hardship, and persecution; and

WHEREAS, His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X of Antioch and All the East, has shown unwavering pastoral courage, spiritual wisdom, and steadfastness in the face of violence, instability, and profound suffering among the faithful under his care; and

WHEREAS, The coordinated and deadly assault on the Church of St. Elias in Damascus, carried out on June 22, 2025, during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, on the Sunday commemorating “All Saints of Antioch,” resulted in the martyrdom of innocent souls and stands as a grave and sorrowful reminder of the dangers that continue to threaten the Christian presence in the region; and

WHEREAS, The words spoken by His Beatitude at the funeral of the martyrs of St. Elias—words of grief, challenge, courage, and faith in Christ—gave voice to the pain of a persecuted people while bearing witness to the Paschal hope of the Church; and

WHEREAS, The continuing unrest in Syria and the wider region, following years of conflict, places an immense burden upon the clergy and laity of the Patriarchate, who endure both material hardship and spiritual trial; and

WHEREAS, During the past week we have all joined together in true Christian fellowship with love, respect and unity, while mindful of the continued suffering of the great people of Syria and its region; and

WHEREAS, The faithful of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America remain spiritually united with our brothers and sisters in Syria, Lebanon, and throughout the ancient lands of the Patriarchate, and look to His Beatitude with deep love, respect, and obedience;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, The hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 57th Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention here in Rosemont, Illinois, offers its

heartfelt prayers for His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, and for all the faithful of the Patriarchate who suffer under persecution, displacement, and violence; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we denounce all acts of terror and sacrilege against holy places, we denounce all violence and grieve the loss of all innocent lives; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we commend the pastoral strength and witness of His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, and reaffirm our solidarity with him as our father in Christ and chief shepherd of our God-protected Patriarchate; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be sent with filial love to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, through the appropriate ecclesiastical channels, as a token of our payers, our respect, and our unwavering unity with him in the hope of the Resurrection—when “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, sorrow, or crying (Rev. 21:4).”



The Fellowship of St. Julian for Medical Professionals

Following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who was incarnate to heal our humanity and restore our communion with God, this Fellowship works to bring that healing of Christ to its members, and through them to the patients and communities they serve.

This Fellowship started under the name of North America Antiochian Orthodox Medical Professionals to highlight the audience invited to join it. However, with the blessing of His Eminence, the Fellowship adopted St. Julian of Homs, a renowned Antiochian third-century unmercenary, as its patron saint and is seeking his intercessions and inspiration.

The Fellowship of St. Julian is a network of medical professionals who work together, under the blessing of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, to grow in their relationship and commitment to Christ. In growing spiritually together, the group aims at bringing the healing presence of Christ to their own lives and to their professional practice every day. The main path to such growth depends on the local groups of practitioners in a decentralized manner. The ultimate role of an archdiocese-wide board is to offer the support and resources necessary for local success and to plan archdiocese-wide meetings (such as during the biannual convention or in virtual meetings).



The ways through which this Fellowship will achieve its goals, include but are not limited to:

- Plan regular, quarterly or semiannually, local events to bring medical professionals together for retreats and social gatherings depending on the local circumstances and needs of the group.
- Assist local priests in serving sick parishioners as needed (when hospitalized, or when needing second opinion, referrals, etc.), assist in residency placement for new graduates, and encourage high school students to pursue medical professions.
- Create an online platform to offer spiritual encouragement and edification to each other.

- Exchange the experiences of local groups to build on best practices to improve the engagement of local professionals.
- Offer professional expertise to the Archdiocese or organize medical mission trips when needed.
- Plan for archdiocese-wide meetings for group members in conjunction with Parish Life Conferences or Archdiocese Conventions.

No Fundraising at This Stage

At this nascent stage of forming the Fellowship, no fundraising efforts shall be pursued, neither locally nor nationally. The cost of organizing local events should be shared by the pertinent group as they see fit, and in coordination with parish and regional priests as the event itself requires.

What Has Been Done So Far

The Fellowship has already planned two archdiocese-wide online lectures delivered by

Dr. Daniel Hinshaw in April and September of 2024 entitled: “Orthodox Christianity and Medical Practice: Understanding the Basics”. These lectures drew hundreds of registrants and attendees of different specialties and lines of work. The recordings of these lectures are still available online for those interested. You can watch them at youtube.com/@fellowshipstjulian.

In addition, several local chapters of the Fellowship have called for meetings in their local parishes and are planning more for the coming few months. The towns include Memphis, TN; Potomac and Baltimore, MD; Cleveland, OH; Wichita, KS; Syracuse, NY; Tucson, AZ; and Jacksonville and Fort Lauderdale, FL.

Current Plans

The Fellowship of St. Julian is currently seeking to establish local chapters in different locales within the Archdiocese. The local group can be established by those professionals who are



interested, in coordination with the local clergy and the Fellowship's board. If a certain parish does not have a considerable number of medical professionals, then a chapter can be established to include those professionals who belong to local parishes that are a driving distance from each other (if that is feasible).

Expectations of Local Coordinator(s)

What is expected of the local coordinator(s) should not be overwhelming; the Fellowship board has compiled a few events/meetings ideas that would make it easy to execute. The role of the local coordinator(s) is to communicate with other medical professionals in that locale, in cooperation with the local clergy, and call for two or three meetings per year, if feasible. Some proposed activities include, but not limited to, book club discussion, social gathering with families, and spiritual retreat addressing a topic of interest to local members.

On the diocesan and archdiocesan levels, the Fellowship would encourage members to call for an annual meeting to all diocesan chapters during their Parish Life Conferences. Also, the Fellowship will have an archdiocesan meeting during the Archdiocese biennial convention.

How Can You Get Involved?

If you are a member of the clergy, please contact Fr. Luke Toumi or Dr. Nawar Mansour with recommendations of a local medical professional (or a few of them who can share the responsibility) who may coordinate the activities and communication with the local group.

If you are a medical professional who wants to establish a local chapter, find a few colleagues in your local parish (to share the responsibility), ask for the blessing of your local priest, and contact us.

You may establish the means of communication with the local group according to their preference.

Students of different medical professions are especially encouraged to join their local group and connect with established professionals in their parishes.

Stay in Touch

To stay in touch at the archdiocese level, we encourage all medical professionals to share their information. We will use your information to communicate any future events and the establishment of new chapters near you (if none has been established yet).

You may also stay in touch through our private Facebook page. The links to share your information and join the Facebook group are available on the Fellowship of St. Julian page on the Archdiocese website under Ministries, or scanning this QR code.

Celebration & Publicity

To celebrate the patron saint of the Fellowship this year (February 6), or when calling for a first meeting in your local parish, we invite all clergy across the Archdiocese to give a special blessing to medical professionals who belong to their parish at the end of the Divine Liturgy.

Also, we have prepared the life of St. Julian for distribution to parishioners either as a printed bulletin or in digital format, including means of communication for those interested in the Fellowship.

If you have any questions please contact: Dr. Nawar Mansour, MD, member of the Board of Trustees of the Archdiocese (nawarmansour4@gmail.com), or Fr. Luke Toumi, MD, PhD, the spiritual advisor of the Fellowship (frluketoumi@antiochian.org).



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