



## ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

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### **Beloved Antiochian Women throughout our God-protected Archdiocese,**

Greetings and blessings to you in this holy Lenten season of repentance and renewal.

Each year, March is a special time for us to recognize the essential contribution of women in our archdiocese. This month is so appropriate for such a reminder because it includes the Feast of the Annunciation and the singing of the Akathist Hymn, both of which celebrate the essential role of the Most Holy Theotokos in the economy of God for our salvation. This is, therefore, a time to reflect on her exemplary womanhood and to appreciate how the women of our archdiocese continue her legacy today.

At the Annunciation, Mary the Theotokos encountered Archangel Gabriel, who informed her that she, as a virgin, would give birth to the Son of God for the salvation of mankind (Luke 1:26–38). Imagine her shock and surprise! Consider what thoughts went through her mind! Yet none of this shook her faith in the sureness of the word of God sent to her. By accepting this word, she accepted God the Word into her womb; through her faith, she received the promised blessing, as the Only-Begotten Son of God took flesh within her. While remaining ever virgin, she thus became the Mother of God (the Theotokos), as well as an icon of obedience to the Lord. She said, “I am the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38), and by this example she has inspired Christian women throughout the centuries to follow in her footsteps, bringing Christ into the world by faithfully and courageously embracing the word of God in their lives.

Dear sisters, this is the courageous faith we all need when God calls us to serve Him, in ways large and small. Setting aside doubts, fears, and any other distraction, let us embrace the word of God to us, the cosmic work of salvation that God even now calls us to participate in.

Antiochian Women across this archdiocese support the Church in so many ways. In particular, each year you work hard to raise funds for crucial needs in our archdiocese, through your annual project. In light of the recent devastation caused by the powerful earthquake in Syria and Turkey—including in the historical center of our patriarchate, Antakya—we have decided to shift this year’s fundraising to support “Disaster Relief.” I encourage you to redouble your efforts so that those suffering from unthinkable tragedy might receive the fruits of your labor as a life-sustaining support and a gesture of love.

Wishing you and your families—in the name of His Beatitude Patriarch John X and on my own behalf—a blessed remainder of the Great Fast and a most joyous Pascha, I remain,

Yours in Christ,

✠Metropolitan ANTONIOS

Metropolitan of Zahle, Baalbek, and Dependencies  
Patriarchal Vicar of New York and All North America

*“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)*

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