

To our Beloved in the Lord, The Hierarchs, Priests, Deacons, Members of the Board of Trustees, and Spiritual Children of our Holy Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America,

Beloved,

After the Holy Synod of Antioch convened in its extraordinary session at the Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand, I send you this letter from Antioch that is ravaged by the earthquake that struck its depth, repeating what I often said during my last visit a few years ago to your God-protected Archdiocese, that we are steadfast in the mother land of Antioch, no matter how many challenges beset us, even if we are struck by an earthquake.

Yes, we are steadfast in our mother and native land, so that our children, wherever they are abroad, can rightly say: "Our origins and roots are in Antioch, and these Antiochian roots remain alive in us and before us."

At every crossroads in the life of our Church of Antioch, we are reminded that we have something that makes us unique and united: our Antiochian roots founded by the Apostles Peter and Paul, which our fathers in the Mother Church preserved with all preciousness and care, even by the shedding of blood. These were kept by their disciples, the Holy Fathers, who set out with the Good News to all ends of the earth.

Your fathers traveled to the New Land and cultivated in it the lofty spiritual values upon which they were brought up in the Antiochian East. They did this with great faith and deep spiritual struggle, and they built their churches as they built their homes. We are altogether today blessed by the grace that God has given you which you preserve with physical labor and spiritual vigilance, just as we are blessed by those who have seen in Antioch a Church, a mother in whose bosom they have taken refuge, and they received grace upon grace.

The Fathers of the Holy Synod of Antioch gathered in the Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand and flocked from the Archdioceses spread all over the world, from every part of the earth where the Lord willed for Antioch to have a holy dwelling place. This time, the Synod Fathers gathered for your beloved Archdiocese of North America, in order to elect for her a shepherd who will stand in your midst and watch over your care.

It is noteworthy for us, from our patriarchal position, that you be aware of the vision that unites the Synod Fathers every time they convene for one of the Antiochian Archdioceses. This vision is based on the following fixed precepts:

- Each Archdiocese is a unique and complete member of the Antiochian Body and her concerns are the concerns of the entire Church of Antioch.
- When dealing with issues and concerns related to a particular Archdiocese, the Synod Fathers unite their minds and hearts with the minds and hearts of the faithful in the concerned Archdiocese. These concerns are transmitted to the Holy Synod by the Archdiocese's Metropolitan in the case of ordinary sessions, or by the Patriarchal Vicar in the case of the extraordinary sessions, when the Archdiocese becomes vacant.
- The Synod Fathers are fully convinced that each Archdiocese has her own specificity and her distinct administrative needs, but they are also ecclesiastically convinced that the starting point is one and the same: the single Antiochian ecclesiastical tradition which is enshrined in the texts governing the life of the Antiochian Church throughout the Archdioceses.

In this spirit, the Synod Fathers gathered at the last extraordinary session and listened to the report presented by the Patriarchal Vicar, His Eminence Metropolitan (Al Sourì), and reviewed the papers of the Archdiocesan Special Convention held last January and the outcome of its work. The Holy Synod elected from among the three nominees given by the Convention His Eminence Saba Isper.

We are certain that His Eminence Saba Isper will be a finest shepherd for a finest flock. With him you will write a new chapter in the glorious history of your Archdiocese, consolidating the vision that has guided the Archdiocese through her close association with the Mother Church, having a distinct solid structure that unites her parishes throughout North America. Thus, you give an authentic Orthodox Christian Antiochian witness, which provides the healing answer given by the Orthodox faith to all the existential questions posed in our contemporary world filled with temptations and challenges.

As we wish for His Eminence Metropolitan Saba Isper success in his ministry, we ask the Lord Almighty, through the intercessions of the Mother of God, to grant him strength in this blessed ministry, for the good of the Archdiocese and the sanctification of the shepherds, along with the beloved faithful.

With our Apostolic blessings and paternal love.

Balamand, 23 February 2023.

+ JOHN X

Patriarch of Antioch and all the East