

Diocese of Los Angeles and the West
General Assembly
October 23, 2004
Fairfield, CA

Fellowship of St. John the Divine Vice President Michael Habib called the meeting to order at 1:20PM.

He welcomed Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Purpura to the meeting and welcomed Fr. Paul Baba as the newest priest of the Diocese.

He congratulated Bishop JOSEPH on his enthronement.

Amanda Hadad gave the TEEN SOYO Report.

- They are trying to compile a list of teen contacts from each parish in the new diocese.
- They will have upcoming deanery retreats this winter.
- They have revamped their website at antiochian.org/soyo.

FSJD Vice President Michael Habib reported on the FSJD. They did not have enough delegates for a quorum, but had a nice meeting in which they exchanged several ideas about parish ministry.

Bishop JOSEPH addressed the assembly as the first Bishop of the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West:

“And Jesus looking upon them saith, ‘With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible’” (Mark 10:27).

To all the Faithful of the God-protected Diocese of Los Angeles and the West:

On September 12th, at St. Nicholas Cathedral, our Archbishop, Metropolitan PHILIP, declared the formal end of this Region, and the formation of two Dioceses: the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West; and in the foreseeable future the Diocese of the Pacific Northwest.

During the Divine Liturgy, I was enthroned as the first Bishop of Los Angeles and the West. This is my “wedding” to this holy Diocese, and marked the formation of our “family.” We have been laying a foundation for this historic moment for many years, and this enthronement gave permanency to our relationship as shepherd and flock. I have been a Bishop for many years, so this was not an ordination, nor a consecration, nor promotion, but rather the fulfillment of my Episcopal ministry. I can think of no better place to make my spiritual home than with all of you.

The creation of the 9 Dioceses within the Antiochian Archdiocese is but only one aspect of many new changes which are now happening and which will take place in the near future. It is recognition that the Archdiocese has grown beyond the ability for one Bishop to comfortably manage, but it is also a symbol of

the trust and unity of the Archdiocese, in that we can form subdivisions without concern over schisms or competition.

Those of us who were able to attend our special Archdiocese Convention in Pittsburgh felt the wonderful sense of unity and brotherhood that transcended cultures and human divisions. The unanimous decision of the delegates to support His Eminence was only one of many signs of the mutual love and respect that we have for one another. I congratulated our Archbishop, Metropolitan PHILIP, on bringing us into this new era. Now, it is up to us to pick up the ball and run with it.

Our Archdiocese has come a long way since His Eminence took office in 1966: we have grown from around 60 parishes to over 250. The West is the “growth edge” of Orthodoxy in America, with more and more new missions being established each year. We have taken a significant place of leadership among other Orthodox jurisdictions in North America. We cannot afford to slow down, for each new day brings with it greater opportunities to spread the Good News of Christ and His Church.

To continue on this path, we must remain united to one another in mutual love and respect. Rancor and a spirit of unforgiveness will not only wound the soul, but also destroy the community, and breed fear and mistrust. Let us not dwell on old hurts, but quickly forgive and overcome our hurts, lest we find ourselves left behind by the quickly-moving Holy Spirit.

On September 12th, we have declared a new start. Let us forgive one another and be reconciled to those with whom we have borne grudges. Only a sense of unity and love will get us through the many changes coming our way. The future is so bright, but the “new shoes” of self-rule and diocesan structures will need some “breaking in.” We must be patient, and endure temporary discomforts as we introduce new ways of doing things, and as our new methods are perfected. I will be speaking to our Deans and begin working with them to develop our new policies and structures.

Also, I want to encourage the clergy to increase in the sense of brotherly love and mutual support which we recently experienced at this year’s Clergy Symposium. My vision is that we can improve our holy ministry and bring the Gospel Message to more people in order to build the Kingdom of God, while effectively serving our parish communities.

As ordained priests, our ministry is to bring Christ’s healing love to those in need. We must be careful not to lose ourselves in paperwork or business. Much of this kind of work must be delegated, so that we can focus on the ministry of saving souls. Ask God, and He will provide you the helpers you need from amongst the people. Don’t be afraid to entrust some of your work to others, so that you have a free hand to go after the lost sheep.

I know that many of you are undergoing trials. You are overworked, burdened by the suffering of our people. This is not a sign of failure, as it would be in worldly terms, but rather a confirmation that you have entered into the path of the martyrs. When we are persecuted, we become like our Lord, who was persecuted for His righteousness. He endured it that we might be free of death and corruption, and so now we take up His cross so that we can free others and be perfected in Him.

His patient perseverance in the face of slander and unjust punishment led to the Resurrection and redemption of mankind from the bonds of the enemy, and so your dedication will overcome all adversity and lead to your increased holiness and the realization of who you truly are. In the tortures and privation of the martyrs, we see in their witness of power and glory of Christ. So, you will also shine with this Divine Light through endurance.

These hardships can be compounded by our own untreated passions. We must make serious efforts to be healed in our own lives, so that we can heal others. Use your afflictions to discover your own imperfections and bring them out of the dark places, that they may have no more power over you. Offer your weaknesses to the Lord, and He will make them your strengths. Then, you will laugh in the face of the devil, for he has no power over you. You will be free, and lead others to freedom.

Do not expect your work with the people to bear immediate fruit. You are sowing seeds which others will reap. Only the Lord can bring about the blossom, deep in the hearts of those who, right now, refuse to listen to you. Yet, as their pride and envy denies the good Word you spread amongst them, deep down they crave it. Such passions cannot be overcome by clever words, but there is a better chance if we wear down the walls of animosity with love.

To all the beloved faithful everywhere, I urge you now, more than ever, to support and uphold your priest as your spiritual father and to give him all your love and respect as a minister of Christ. I expect all of you to keep your commitment strong and don't let the evil one distract you from focusing on the Kingdom of God.

In addition, to your parish ministries, I would like to exhort all of you to become more involved in the life of the Archdiocese in general and this Diocese in particular. We should also strive to be involved in national organizations such as the Antiochian Women, the Order of St. Ignatius, the Fellowship of St. John the Divine, and Teen SOYO. Most especially, I hope that all of you will take a second look at your support for missions, and see how supporting a new mission will, in fact, cause your own community to grow in God's blessings.

Do not be satisfied with what you are doing yourselves, because you know deep within you that you could do better. This is true of all people, for we aspire to be like the Infinite Christ. This means we have infinite potential for growth. If you say, "I have enough, I am happy with myself, I need not grow anymore," then you have been deceived. Even us Bishops know that we must continue to grow and to improve.

The first step in growing is education. If you do not know what to grow towards, then you cannot grow at all. The direction of spiritual growth is set through education. It is not conferred at Baptism, so being born in the Church does not mean we automatically know everything and automatically are saved.

This implies hard work and sacrifice. We must give up TV time and meaningless activities for moments of prayer, meditation and study. We cannot aspire only to live lives of leisure as the non-Christians do. That is their reward in this life. But, if you desire eternal life with God, then you must prepare yourselves for it. You educate your children to perform in school so that they may have good jobs, yes? You should spend more time preparing them for their eternal lives in Christ, for this life is transitory at best. The first step is

to not leave holiness to the clergy, but remember that God will judge us according to the example we have set for our young people.

Never forget that all of the people of the Church are called to minister to the world. Our love for one another is the greatest evangelical tool we have. It brings back the lost sheep, reconciles families and friends, heals the wounded, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the shut-ins; your love for one another is a Divine Light in the darkness.

Writing a check or bringing food to the parish on Sundays is only the beginning. There is more to be done. See how busy the priest is, trying to help the flock? There is much work to be done. Your ministry awaits, and in it you will find peace and blessing that you have never imagined.

We all know the story of Mary and Martha. Mary sat at the feet of the Lord and heard His work. Martha was busy, too busy to listen. However, after listening, Mary went on to serve. We cannot serve unless we first learn. This brings us back to education, and its vital connection to service.

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

Orthodox spirituality is about developing a fearless life. Our own Antiochian tradition has been one of taking steps that others feared to take. During this history-making phase of our Archdiocese’s development, I urge all of you to draw near to God who loves you. Let us be a united family because the Kingdom of God is about the pursuit of holiness, and Holiness isn’t possible without unity. I will be faithful to you, and I ask you all to be faithful to me and to each other. In the end, this mutual pledge of faithfulness will draw us all closer to the same Master and Lord Jesus Christ.

Bishop JOSEPH then read the following letter from the archdiocese stating that the Holy Synod of Antioch has approved the Constitution of the Archdiocese:

HOLY SYNOD OF ANTIOCH APPROVES THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SELF-RULED ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

On Thursday, October 14th, 2004, the Holy Synod of Antioch voted to approve the Constitution of the self-ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. By this action, the final step has been taken and this Archdiocese can now function as a self-ruling Archdiocese.

In approving the Constitution, several important changes were made to the version that had been approved by the General Assembly of the Special Convention in Pittsburgh on July 16th, 2004. The following are the significant changes that were made:

1. The election of Diocesan bishops will be conducted by the Local Synod (Archdiocesan Synod), with the participation of only the Metropolitan, and the Diocesan Bishops who are members of the Local Synod (Archdiocesan Synod).

2. The consecration of Diocesan Bishops will be held at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Damascus, Syria.

3. Clergy from this Archdiocese who are eligible for election will be added to the master list of candidates held in the Patriarchate, and the General Assembly of this Archdiocese will nominate candidates from this master list.

4. Other minor changes that will be communicated in the near future

The final ratification of this amended Constitution by the General Assembly of this Archdiocese will be accomplished at the upcoming 47th Convention of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America which is scheduled to be held from July 24th through 31st, 2005, and hosted by St. George Church of Troy, Michigan.

In accordance with this decision, the Local Synod will elect three new Diocesan Bishops at its upcoming Fall meeting which will be held on Friday October 29th, 2004, in Naples Florida. The consecration of these new Diocesan Bishops will take place in Damascus at some time following the election. Some time after the consecration, they will be enthroned in the Cathedral of their diocese.

His Eminence was accompanied to the Middle East by the following members of our Archdiocese (listed in alphabetical order):

Dr. George Farha, Vice Chairman of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees

Very Rev. Joseph Antypas, Pastor of St. George Church of Troy, Michigan

Mr. Nicola Antakli, Member of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees

Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Member of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees

Mr. Walid Khalife, Honorary Member of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees

Mr. Anton Khoury, Member of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees

We are thankful to these men for the outstanding support that they gave to His Eminence throughout this arduous journey.

We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to Our Father in Christ, Patriarch IGNATIUS IV, and the members of the Holy Synod of Antioch for this vote of confidence in the North American Archdiocese. In addition, we thank our Metropolitan PHILIP for his vision and untiring leadership, without which, this historic event could not have occurred. We pray that God will grant them all Many Years!

AOCWNA President Widad Tarazi gave the AOWCNA report. The women talked about orthodox schools in their meeting. Fr. Joseph Copeland's church in Yakima, WA needs financial support for their school.

FSJD Vice President Michael Habib welcomed Fr. Mark Kern, a hieromonk at the monastery in Point Reyes.

Lew Malouf gave the CPCC report. He introduced the Souvenir Journal Funding Proposal that will assist the parish in producing a larger net profit. The proposal is that Each organization from each local church contribute a \$100 add to the souvenir journal for the parish life conference.

Lew Malouf made the motion that the three regional organizations accept the responsibility of producing a \$100 add per organization per chapter for each local parish
Jerris Tannous seconds. Discussion ensued.

Ed Malouf called for the question.

MOTION DENIED.

FSJD Vice President Michael Habib dismissed the Teens so that they may do their service activity. Lew Malouf continued with the CPCC report. He reported on the 2004 PLC in Anaheim in place of Fr. Michael Lewis. The Conference made \$28,000 profit. There were 1100 attendants.

Fr. Nicholas Borzghol, Jerris Tannous, and Tony Karam presented the PLC report for 2005 in San Francisco, CA at the Marriot Hotel. The hotel rooms will cost \$109 per night. Children's ticket books cost \$90, teenagers \$125, and adults \$135.

The ladies want to pay a maximum of \$30 for the ladies brunch. AOWCNA president Widad Tarazi will work with Jerris Tannous to find an agreeable cost.

Ed Malouf moved that the prices for the 2005 PLC are approved subject to the adjustment of the AOCWNA brunch prices. Dn. Polycarp Whitcomb seconded. MOTION PASSED.

Samia Habib moved to change the starting time of matins to 8AM on Sunday morning July 4. Seconded by Bishop JOSEPH. MOTION PASSED.

Ed Malouf gave the 2006 PLC report for St. George San Diego, CA. The body decided that the Towne & Country Hotel will suffice as a location for July 5-9, 2006.

Lew Malouf announced the location of the 2007-2009 conferences.

2007 – St. George, Portland, OR

2008 – St. Nicholas, Los Angeles, CA

2009 – Holy Resurrection, Tucson, AZ

FSJD Vice President Michael Habib adjourned the meeting at 3:32 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Howell

Secretary, Diocese of the Los Angeles and the West Fellowship of St. John the Divine