



The Special Convention of 2004

THE MAKING OF HISTORY

By FR. GEORGE KEVORKIAN

THE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX Christian Archdiocese of North America will gather for a Special Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during the weekend of July 16th through 18th, 2004 for the purpose of implementing the self-rule status that has been granted by the Holy Synod of Antioch. It will be a historic gathering that will launch a new era in the life of this God-protected Archdiocese.

On Thursday, October 9th, 2003, the Holy Synod of Antioch voted unanimously to grant self-rule status to the Archdiocese of North America. The highlights of the resolution that was adopted by the Holy Synod are:

- ❖ The recognition of the Auxiliary Bishops as Diocesan Bishops
- ❖ The formation of a Local Holy Synod of Diocesan Bishops under the leadership of the Metropolitan
- ❖ The nomination of candidates for Diocesan Bishop by the General Assembly of the Archdiocese
- ❖ The election of Diocesan Bishops by the Local Holy Synod of North America, with the participation of a number of Metropolitans named by the Patriarch of Antioch to represent the Holy Synod
- ❖ The consecration and enthronement of Diocesan Bishops in North America
- ❖ The requirement that the constitutions of the Archdiocese and the Patriarchate be amended to reflect these changes.

The 2004 Special Convention will be called and conducted according to the provisions set forth in Article V of the Archdiocesan Constitution. The provisions of this article which apply to the Special Convention are:

- ❖ That the Metropolitan Archbishop may call a Special Convention at any time he deems it necessary and advisable
- ❖ That all pastors, retired pastors, and clergy directly employed by the Archdiocese are entitled to one vote in person or by written proxy
- ❖ That every parish and mission community in good standing shall be represented by one lay delegate for every one hundred parishioners, and every fraction of one hundred that exceeds fifty persons, and that each lay delegate shall cast one vote either in person or by written proxy
- ❖ That each regular voting member of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees is entitled to one vote. Honorary members of the Board do not vote.
- ❖ That each region of the Fellowship of St. John the Divine, SOYO, AOCWNA, and The Order of St. Ignatius is entitled to one vote
- ❖ That a majority of churches and organizations (either attending in person or having submitted a written proxy), and a majority of the active clergy (either attending in person or having submitted a written proxy) shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

It is very important to note that a parish will **NOT** be seated as a community in good standing unless all of the following requirements have been met:

- ✓ It has met the entire financial obligation to the Archdiocese for 2003.
- ✓ It is up-to-date with the financial obligation for 2004 at the time of the Convention.

- ✓ It has submitted a Statistics and Census Report for the year ending December 31, 2003 to the Archdiocese office.

The agenda for the Special Convention will contain three major items of business:

1. The discussion and casting of ballots by the delegates for the proposed amendments to the Archdiocesan Constitution that will properly implement self-rule status. These amendments will be approved if two-thirds of those who are voting cast their ballots in favor of adoption.
2. The presentation of the proposed structure of the Archdiocese including the number of Dioceses and their geographical boundaries.
3. The introduction of candidates who are proposed nominees for the office of Diocesan Bishop, and the casting of ballots by the delegates for these nominees. The candidates who receive the highest number of votes will be submitted to the Local Holy Synod, who will elect new Diocesan Bishops from among these nominees. The election of the new Bishops by the Local Holy Synod will be held some time after the Special Convention.

The 2004 Special Convention will conduct its business on Friday, July 16 and Saturday, July 17, and will conclude with the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on Sunday, July 18. All delegates should arrive in Pittsburgh at least by Thursday, July 15, so that work can begin early on Friday morning. The site of the Special Convention is the Hilton Pittsburgh, Gateway Center, Downtown, and reservations may be made by calling 1-800-445-



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8667. Reservations must be made by June 15 in order to receive the special room rate of \$99.00 per night. The group name for this Convention is the “Antiochian Orthodox Church.”

The 2004 Special Convention will truly be a significant and historical event. As an Archdiocese of the Holy Orthodox Church of Antioch, we are the embodiment of that ancient Church in the United States and Canada. We are called to spread the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to the Holy Orthodox Faith which has been transmitted to us by Jesus Christ and the Apostles, and which has been defended by the blood of martyred saints. This Archdiocese, under the bold and visionary leadership of Metropolitan Philip, has always stood for the full participation of both the clergy and laity, working together in harmony for the glory of Christ’s Church. The entire process that has led us to this historic occasion has been true to this legacy and the Special Convention will likewise reinforce it. Every member of this Archdiocese should prepare himself by becoming involved in the planning, and by learning as much as possible about the issues that will be dis-

cussed. Every voting delegate should prepare for the awesome responsibility of representing his or her community by vote. Each of us must be mindful of the teaching of St. Paul on the nature of our roles as members of the Church:

“but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things unto Him who is the head — Christ — from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

The Church is the body of Jesus Christ, thus it is a dynamic and ever-vigilant force. We know that there is strength in unity, and weakness in division. Our Lord Himself teaches us “a house divided against a house falls” (Luke 11:17). President Abraham Lincoln echoed this theme in his famous speech of June 16, 1858 to the Republican State Convention in Springfield, Illinois, as he addressed the divisive effect that slavery was having on the young country:

“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I do not expect the

house to *fall* — but I *do* expect it will cease to be divided. Wise counsels may accelerate, or mistakes delay it, but, sooner or later, the victory is sure to come.”

The vision of our leader, Metropolitan Philip, is for Orthodox unity in North America. In his recent interview with *Again Magazine*, His Eminence again made this very clear:

“The unity of Orthodoxy in our country is inevitable because it is the will of God. This is what we see despite all obstacles.”

The granting of self-rule status to the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America can be an important step toward achieving this unity. We have the opportunity to set a shining example of what can be accomplished, and thus to show others that there is no threat from unity. Rather, it is unity that will break down perceived barriers, and build more trust among the Orthodox faithful of this land. This is no less than the desire of our Lord Himself as He prayed to His Father “that they may be one as We are” (John 17:11).

May the Lord bless our planning and deliberations for the Glory of His Holy Church.

