



**The Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
OF NORTH AMERICA**

358 Mountain Road, P.O. Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
Telephone (201) 871-1355 * Fax (201) 871-7954
Website: www.antiochian.org * Email: archdiocese@antiochian.org

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Beloved Sayedna, our Chief Shepherd in the homeland and overseas.

We greet you with our ever-renewed deep filial love. I am in receipt of your paternal and loving letter dated February 3, 2005, while I am in Florida undergoing my yearly physical examination. I give thanks to God who always bestows upon me good health.

Our relationship with you, Master, is neither literal, nor legalistic. "The written code kills, but the Spirit gives life." The constitution of our Archdiocese has been in existence since 1948, when the Archdiocesan Board of Trustees was established. This Constitution was amended tens of times, without sending the amendments to the Holy Synod for approval. Sayedna, the Constitution of the Archdiocese is tailored according to the needs of this Archdiocese in specific time and place. When we were recognized as a religious organization by civil authorities, we were obligated to submit a constitution, according to which we have received a tax-exempt status.

Our relationship with you is older and deeper than the constitution. In spite of our love for all the other Antiochian Archdioceses of the Holy See of Antioch, we are not comparable to them. We are an Archdiocese, established oversees, i.e., in the United States of America and Canada, which has its own particularities. In our administrative methodology we differ from all the other Archdioceses. For example, the main Patriarchal constitution is suitable to the Antiochian see in the homeland, but not oversees. Additionally, we have a mechanism for amending the constitution which we can not overstep. If we do overstep this mechanism, then any parishioner may sue us before the civil courts. We are neither at variance with the first part of Article Ten of the main Patriarchal constitution, nor at variance with Article Seventeen concerning the duties and responsibilities of the Patriarch. We revere the Patriarch, especially you personally, because you are the source of

our pride and boasting, and we implore God to grant you many years. We are not at variance with the authority of the Holy Synod, which is the “highest authority in the Church.” Since the distance between the amended constitution of July 16, 2004, and the amended constitution of October 24, 2004 in Damascus is short, there is no need for misunderstanding, disturbance and discontent. We can overcome all the obstacles by good intentions, provided that there is no interference by lawyers.

My beloved Master, there is a mechanism for amending our constitution which has been in effect for fifty seven years. The Constitution of the Archdiocese is amended according to the following:

Every Parish in the Archdiocese, or every member of the Board of Trustees, or every organization has the right to propose any amendment to the constitution. This proposed amendment has to be submitted to the Department of Legal Affairs, and then sent to all the parishes for deliberation, and finally submitted to the General Assembly for approval or disapproval. According to our registered constitution, neither the Holy Synod, nor the Metropolitan, nor the Local Synod can impose any amendment to the constitution without the approval of clergy and laity, i.e., the General Assembly of the Archdiocese. Sayedna, the American people are consumed with democracy. When the Americans revolted against the British Crown in 1776, they wrote a constitution, which starts with these words: “We the people.”

We want your visit with us to be comfortable, relaxing, and enjoyable. Therefore, we will not put the issue of the amendment of the constitution on the agenda of the upcoming Archdiocesan convention next July. The bishops, “the children whom God has given me” and myself are anxiously anticipating your visit.

Beloved Sayedna, I ask for your prayers.

+PHILIP

Metropolitan of the Self-ruled Antiochian Christian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America.