



ON THE ROAD TO AUTONOMY: AN UPDATE

ENGLEWOOD, NJ) — ON December 18, 2002, His Eminence Metropolitan Philip (Saliba), Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, announced that the Joint Committee established by the Holy Synod of Antioch in June, 2002 met in Geneva, Switzerland from November 20 through 22, 2002. The Holy Synod's charge to the Joint Committee, chaired by His Eminence Metropolitan George (Khodre) of Mt. Lebanon, was to propose a constitution for the Archdiocese of North America in light of its petition for autonomy being blessed by the historic June 14, 2002, decision of the Holy Synod.

The result of the Geneva meeting was a document entitled "(Proposed) Resolution of the Holy Synod of Antioch," which will be submitted to the Holy Synod for adoption at its next meeting in the spring of 2003. This Geneva Resolution consists of eight fundamental points, all unanimously agreed upon except for one detail which will be left to the discretion of the Synod, which will form the basis upon which amendments to the constitutions of both the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Archdiocese of North America will need to be made in order to reflect the new reality of autonomy of the Archdiocese of North America.

The Holy Synod blessed the autonomy of the Archdiocese of North

America as a result of a resolution submitted to it by the General Assembly of the 45th Archdiocesan Convention held in Los Angeles, California in July, 2001. The Los Angeles Resolution petitioning the Holy Synod for autonomy received the support of 97.7% of the Convention's delegates (clergy and lay), representing the Archdiocese's 230 congregations, 350 clergy and 500,000 faithful. The text of the Los Angeles Resolution is as follows:

WHEREAS, the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America ("Archdiocese") has grown from a small mission, directed chiefly to immigrants from the near East, into a vast archdiocese of approximately 230 parishes and missions, over 350 clergy and approximately 500,000 faithful, whose ethnic diversity increasingly approximates the rich ethnic diversity of North America itself;

WHEREAS, among other things, the growth of the Archdiocese has been accompanied by an increase in the number of bishops serving in it, from a single Metropolitan to a Metropolitan and four auxiliary bishops;

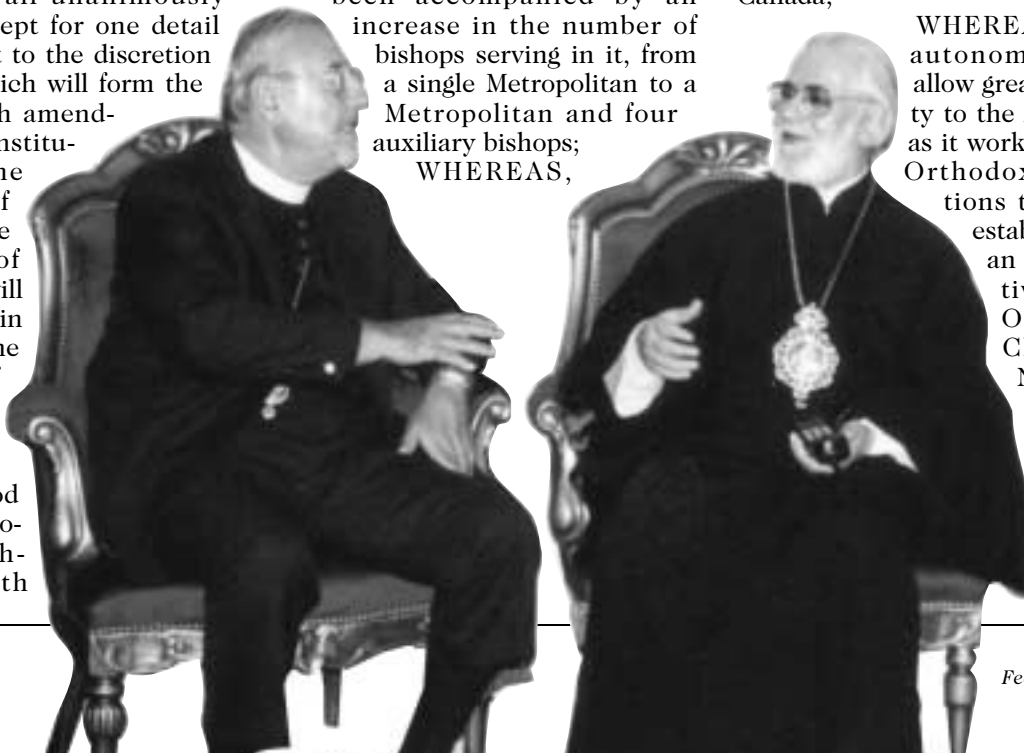
WHEREAS,

the Archdiocese has developed its own internal structures and institutions, which respond effectively to the particular cultural and political conditions in North America, while at the same time reflecting the Orthodox Church's perennial norms for the well-ordered life of an autonomous local church;

WHEREAS, the granting of the status of autonomy to the Archdiocese by the Holy Synod of Antioch at this time would confirm and strengthen the Archdiocese's capacity for effective self-governance, and thus help to ensure the stability of the Archdiocese and its continued flourishing in the future;

WHEREAS, such autonomy would safeguard the canonical principle that local matters should be handled locally, among other things allowing the selection of bishops for the Archdiocese whose life and work is known to the faithful here and who are familiar with the situation of the Church in the United States and Canada;

WHEREAS, such autonomy would allow greater flexibility to the Archdiocese as it works with other Orthodox jurisdictions towards the establishment of an administratively united Orthodox Church in North America, which would more fully embody the ecclesiology





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and canonical norms of Orthodoxy and advance the mission and witness of Orthodoxy on this continent;

WHEREAS, the autonomous Archdiocese would continue to maintain close ties with the Mother Church of Antioch, with its institutions and faithful, always mindful of its spiritual roots;

WHEREAS, His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius and His Eminence Metropolitan Philip will be meeting to discuss this resolution;

THEREFORE, the General Assembly of this 45th Convention of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese does hereby beseech the Patriarch and the Holy Synod of Antioch to grant the Archdiocese autonomy, the details of which would be worked out, in consultation with the Patriarch.

Metropolitan Philip submitted the Los Angeles Resolution to the Holy Synod of Antioch at sessions convened in Damascus, Syria, by His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV in June, 2002. This resulted in the historic Synodal Decision of June 14, 2002, which blessed the autonomy of the Archdiocese of North America and necessitated the convening of the Joint Committee.

The following is the translation of

the Synodal decision that was adopted unanimously on Thursday, June 13, 2002:

SYNODAL DECISION

The Holy Synod of Antioch, at its regular meeting held at the Patriarchate in Damascus, Syria from June 11 to June 14, 2002, and having reviewed the plea of the General Assembly of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America, which was adopted in Los Angeles, CA, July 26, 2001, and has been submitted to His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV and the Holy Synod, blesses the wish of its children in the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America, and recognizes their Archdiocese as autonomous.

This will render their witness more powerful and more effective, as they identify with the civilization of North America; and in order to express the canonical and pastoral factors of this renewed Archdiocese, which will affect the basic law of the Patriarchate on the one hand, and the constitution of the Archdiocese on the other hand.

Therefore, the Holy Synod decided to establish a committee, composed from six to eight persons,

appointed equally by His Beatitude and His Eminence Metropolitan Philip, to propose a constitution for this autonomous Archdiocese, to be presented to the Holy Synod of Antioch, in order to acquire its final canonical status.

The first meeting of this committee will be held in the coming fall.

Per the Synodal Decision, the Joint Committee which met in Geneva consisted of two delegations and was chaired by Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon. The Patriarchal Delegation was appointed by Patriarch Ignatius IV and headed by Metropolitan Elias (Audi) of Beirut, Lebanon, with Messrs. Ghassan Tuéni, Albert Laham and Tarek Mitri (all of Beirut, Lebanon) serving as members; the North American Delegation appointed by Metropolitan Philip was headed by Bishop Basil (Essey) of Wichita, KS, with Archpriest Joseph Antypas (St. George Church, Troy, MI), Dr. George Farha (Vice-chair of the Archdiocesan Board of Trustees from St. George Cathedral in Wichita, KS) and Mr. Charles Ajalat (Archdiocesan Chancellor from St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles, CA) serving as members.

