



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

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March 26, 2009

Protopresbyter Paul O'Callaghan and
The Council of Presbyters of the Diocese
of Wichita and Mid-America
c/o St. George Orthodox Cathedral
7515 East 13th at Broadmoor
Wichita, KS 67206-1223

Beloved in Christ:

Greetings and Blessings to you during this holy season of The Great Fast!

We have received and reviewed your letter dated March 17th, 2009 in which you pose fifteen questions related to the February 24th, 2009 decision of the Holy Synod of Antioch regarding the status of all bishops across the Holy See of Antioch. We will try our best to answer these questions as follows:

1. Are there other diocesan bishops, outside our Archdiocese, that are affected by the Holy Synod's decision?

Answer: Yes. In the Patriarchate there are three bishops, the Bishop of Saydnaya, the Bishop of Qatana, and the Patriarchal Vicar. In addition, the Archdiocese of Akkar had the Bishop of Tartous and the Bishop of Marmarita & Al Hosn. The Bishop of Marmarita & Al-Hosn was elected as the Metropolitan for the Archdiocese of Western and Central Europe. The Bishop of Tartous was elected to succeed Metropolitan Paul Bendali in the Archdiocese of Akkar. He refused to have either diocesan or auxiliary bishops in his Archdiocese at this time.

2. There seems to be differences in tone and meaning between the Arabic original and the English translations of articles 77 and 78. Can these be clarified?

Answer: The English translation was my best effort. If someone can produce a more accurate translation, this would be most welcome.

3. What were the intentions of the Holy Synod in formulating these amendments?

Answer: The intention was to have good order and consistency throughout the Holy See of Antioch by normalizing the status of all bishops.

4. Is the Pittsburgh Constitution binding, since it was duly approved and implemented by the legally binding decision made at special Archdiocesan Convention of July 2004?

Answer: The constitution is binding to the extent that it is consistent with the decisions of the Holy Synod of Antioch, which is the highest authority in the Church of Antioch. The Holy Synod has the prerogative to modify any decision that it had previously approved.

5. Since official Archdiocesan documents state that the provisions for self-rule, including those pertaining to the local synod of the Archdiocese, are irrevocable, as witnessed both by the Pittsburgh Constitution and the Patriarchal version of October 15, 2004, how can they be overturned by amendment of the Patriarchal by-laws?

Answer: We can find no language in any Constitution, or the original decision of the Holy Synod dated October 10, 2003 which indicates that the provisions of any constitution or by-laws are irrevocable.

6. Given that the granting of self-rule required that the Patriarchal Constitution be amended to reflect the self-ruled status of the North American Archdiocese, and that this Constitution governs its by-laws, not vice versa, how could the Constitution be overturned by amendments of by-laws?

Answer: The Patriarchal Constitution was never amended to reflect self-rule status, so the February 24th decision is consistent with the current in-force Patriarchal Constitution.

7. What was the need, and why the urgency, for a special meeting of the Holy Synod of Antioch? Were constitutional procedures followed for the calling of that meeting?

Answer: At the October 7th, 2008 meeting of the Holy Synod in Damascus, His Beatitude appointed a special committee which included the Archbishops of Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Akkar to study the question of the status of bishops across the See of Antioch, and to make a recommendation which would normalize that status. The meeting of February 24th, 2009 was convened to hear this recommendation and to act on it. The Patriarch may convene a meeting of the Holy Synod at any time that he sees fit.

8. Given the fact that the mechanism of resolution for possible problems or disagreements is specified in our Constitution as belonging to the Local Synod of Bishops, with right of appeal to the Patriarch and the Holy Synod, why were these amendments necessary?

Answer: The February 24th decision was not a result of any wrongdoing by any bishop. It was necessary to normalize the status of all bishops across the See of Antioch.

9. We are not aware of any study, investigation, or report containing information regarding concerns of disunity or other issues of disagreement within our Archdiocese. What was done by our bishops that precipitated the Holy Synod's decision? Did the Patriarch discuss these issues with our bishops when he visited in the fall of 2008?

Answer: Once again, our bishops did not do anything that precipitated this decision. It should not be viewed as a matter of discipline, since this was not the intention. To my knowledge, the Patriarch did not discuss this with our bishops during his visit in the Fall of 2008.

10. How can enthroned diocesan bishops be dethroned other than on specific canonical grounds?

Answer: To dethrone a bishop is to remove him from his Episcopal throne. This has not been done. The status of the bishops has changed from diocesan

bishop to auxiliary bishop.

11. If there is no Local Synod within our Archdiocese, in what way do we retain our status of Self-Rule?

Answer: Our Archdiocesan Synod remains in place. The February 24th decision made no mention whatsoever of self-rule, or a change in status of the Archdiocesan Synod.

12. If Bishop Basil, for example, is no longer Bishop of Wichita, what is his current title?

Answer: Our bishops will carry the title Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of (name of Diocese). As an example, Bishop BASIL carries the title Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America.

13. How are we to understand the status of bishops who were not only enthroned but also consecrated for specific dioceses, if they are no longer bishops of those dioceses?

Answer: They are Auxiliary Bishops who are overseeing a Diocese on behalf of The Metropolitan.

14. Are the dioceses which were created at the time of our becoming self-ruled now reduced to regions?

Answer: No. The dioceses remain intact and they retain their current names.

15. We understand that the decree was sent for approval to all the members of the Holy Synod. Did they all respond? What were their responses?

Answer: We are not privy to the individual responses from each member of The Holy Synod. Suffice it to say that the decision was approved by a majority of the Holy Synod.

It is our prayer that the remainder of your Lenten journey will be greatly blessed.

Your father in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Metropolitan Philip". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+Metropolitan PHILIP
Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America

Cc: His Beatitude, IGNATIUS IV, Patriarch of Antioch and All The East
Bishop ANTOUN, Bishop JOSEPH, Bishop BASIL,
Bishop THOMAS, Bishop MARK, Bishop ALEXANDER