

**IN THE NAME OF THE SELF EXISTANT
SEMPITERNAL OF NECESSARY EXISTENCE, THE ALMIGHTY
IGNATIUS PATRIARCH OF THE HOLY SEE OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST
SUPREME HEAD OF THE UNIVERSAL SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
ZAKKA 1, IWAS**



After praying for your well being we are pleased to inform you that the Holy Synod meeting was held at St. Ephraim the Syriac monastery – Ma'arrat Saydnaya, Damascus from September 10 to September 12, 2008 which was attended by majority members.

After requesting the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and aid from our Lord Jesus, and after approving the agenda according to the constitution of our church and prayers for the Lord to ease our mission in our Christian Syrian Orthodox message, we declared that the theme for this meeting of the Holy Synod to be :”Forgiveness and absolution.” In our speech we stressed upon calling our church children who disobeyed and defied church Bylaws to return with real regret and full repentance to the church and repair the damage they had done and pledge not to rise up or revolt again. As a result, the church shall forgive them and lift the excommunications, thus they will feel that the church is a compassionate mother who cares for her children and welcomes their return like the prodigal son who was accepted by his father who gave him new clothing and put a ring on his hand. Thus, a new chapter will be opened for all to return to the bosom of the church with repentance and regrets and the church will forgive their sins. The Holy Synod discussed very important subjects in our church, and the role of the laity in serving the church on all levels.

We also discussed the situation in our beloved Archdiocese of Germany which is facing difficult administrative circumstances. With cooperation and understanding among delegations, clergy and laity, who came to St. Ephraim the Syriac monastery at Ma'arrat Saydnaya, and after a thorough analysis to the root of this crisis, we decided to keep the status quo till the next Holy Synod's meeting in September 2009. For now, His Eminence our brother Mor Julius Youhanna Aydin shall stay Patriarchal Vicar for this Archdiocese temporarily till the holy Synod meeting next year. As for churches that disagree with the unification of the Archdiocese of Germany, they will report directly to the Patriarchate. And we shall dispatch our brother, His Eminence Mor Philoxinos Mattias Nayis, Patriarchal Assistant, to perform spiritual services and administrative matters until appropriate decision is taken at the Holy Synod's meeting next year. These measures are temporarily and suit the situation in the Archdiocese of Germany.

According to reports received from St. Gabriel monastery in Tur'abdin and other monasteries and churches in their vicinity, there are some neighbors trying to harm and infringe on our endowments. We shall exert efforts with the officials in the Republic of Turkey and many other religious and administrative institutions in the East and the West to lift this intrusion on our endowments and church properties. We hope that the officials in Turkey will respond positively for the sake of the religious, historic, and national heritage.

We also discussed the state of our faithful who speak languages other than Syriac, in order to keep their faith and abide by church traditions. Their eminences, the clergy, the boards of trustees, and church institutions will provide necessary means to let them understand these rituals in their own languages while preserving our Syriac language which is the official language of our church, in addition to languages of countries we live in.

About our church in India, we studied its issues and explained to the fathers of the holy Synod the pleasing situation regarding its success and progress, and the positive steps of cooperation extended by our brother His Beatitude Mor Baselius Thomas 1st, Mapherian (Catholicose) of India, his Holy Synod, clergy, and church institutions. These news delighted members of the Holy Synod and we are joyful to announce it to you also.

We studied the suggestions and remarks of their eminences regarding amendments to some items in the constitution while stressing upon many practices and traditions that the church follows. We are happy to announce them to you in this, our apostolic decree.

Regarding Fasts: We assure all of you that the order of fasting and prayer is one of the most important worshipping orders of the church in general, and in our Holy Syrian Orthodox church in particular.

These prayers and fasts were organized by our fathers, the saints, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in wonderful rituals. And we stress upon all believers to fully adhere with the Holy Church obligation, reminding everyone that we fast all year round and according to the Syriac Orthodox calendar before every hallowed feast. We fast on Christmas for ten days starting December 15, Nineveh's fast, which precedes the Great Lent by three weeks, for three days. Our faithful approach this fast with firm faith, good hope, and overwhelming love specially the youth of both sexes for they spend three days abstaining from food or drink as was done by Nineveh's people who fasted in the Old Testament and as our Syriac fathers did in the early centuries till today. God Almighty will always respond to these good intentions with kindness and fatherly love. And we fast the holy Great Lent observing the first and last week which is the week of passion, and on Wednesdays and Fridays as decided by our Holy Synod in 1965. We thank God that many of our faithful fast the whole period abstaining from greasy food. Clergy are required to observe the whole period of the Great Lent as an example to believers. We fast the Apostles' fast for three days starting June 26, the fast of the Virgin Mary for five days starting August 10, and we are pleased to see many faithful vowing and fasting even for longer periods than what our Holy Synod had set for years because the church, for livelihood circumstances, had allowed decreasing the fasting periods. In addition to Wednesdays and Fridays all year round except the fifty days that follow the feast of Resurrection (Easter) till Pentecost, and between Christmas and Epiphany, and Fridays and Wednesdays which follow Nineveh's fast till the Great Lent.

In response to questions from our children, clergy and laity, we emphasize in our decree that if the apostles' fast, or the Virgin's fast, or Christmas fast, falls on a Sunday, we do not fast the first day in honor of the day of the Lord (Sunday), and we allow the blessing of the crowns on that day.

As you all know, we do not bless the crowns during the Great Lent. Our Holy Synods and our church constitution left the matter to their eminences metropolitans of the Archdioceses to allow blessing of the crowns to the faithful during the apostles' and the Virgin Mary's fasts for utmost necessity only. We also discussed the ecumenical movement and our

church's role for we are the pioneers of the universal ecumenical movement and we cooperate with sister churches, East and West, in theological discussions in order spread the word of the Lord Jesus all over.

By this decree, we urge our faithful children in all Archdioceses to abide in their life and among their families, societies, and countries, by revered virtues that serve God and humanity, specially the needy as we see through them our Lord Jesus Christ who came to serve and not to be served and who sacrificed Himself for the sake of many.

We ask God to fill your souls and hearts with His heavenly blessings, May His grace be with you all. **ܘܚܘܨܘܢܐ ܘܚܘܨܘܢܐ ܘܚܘܨܘܢܐ**

Issued at our Patriarchal house in Damascus – Syria
On the 15th day of September, in the year Two Thousand and Eight of our Lord
Which is the 29th year of our Patriarchal reign