



*"A Good Minister of Jesus Christ, Nourished in the Words of Faith" (1 Timothy 4:6)  
A Celebration in Honor of His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH  
On the Fifteenth Anniversary of His Episcopal Service  
To the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West*



*"For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins" (Hebrews 5:1-3).*

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Orthodox Christians living in what was known then as the Western Region of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America witnessed a new dawn in 1995. For the first time in its existence, the Western Region had a permanent auxiliary bishop to pastor the immediate needs of the clergy and laity in a closer, more personal proximity. This bishop took up residence in the Los Angeles Chancery to make regular visits to then 40-some (now nearly 60) parishes and missions in eight American states and three Canadian provinces, covering the largest geographic and diverse territory of the Archdiocese. When he was asked to come to North America, and eventually the West Coast, His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH (Al-Zehlaoui) did not question it for two reasons: his obedience to the Holy Orthodox Church; and because, he says, his new assignment came about so quickly there was no time for inquiry.

In January, 1995, Sayidna JOSEPH was in service as an auxiliary bishop to his spiritual father since childhood, His Beatitude, Patriarch IGNATIUS IV (Hazim), working and ministering to the Orthodox Christians of Damascus, Syria from the Patriarchal Headquarters and Cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary ("al-Mariamiyeh"). Suddenly, His Beatitude and the members of the Holy Synod of Antioch received a request from His Eminence, Metropolitan PHILIP (Saliba) to have Sayidna JOSEPH come west, so that the ever-growing flock of North America would benefit from his spiritual acumen and pastoral gifts. Almost instantly, the move was blessed and approved, and, on short notice, Sayidna would be leaving his world in the Middle East for a completely new ministry and endeavor. His service had taken him throughout Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece and England; and only to the United States and Canada for conferences and temporary visits. Now, shortly before his 45th birthday, Sayidna would be planting new roots in a land that hardly knew him, and he had experienced only limitedly. However, with the Holy Spirit guiding his steps and his words, Sayidna JOSEPH set out for a new life for Jesus Christ, quickly endearing himself to the clergy and the faithful—and vice versa—under his omophorion.

His Grace came to New York in the spring of 1995, first stopping at the Antiochian Archdiocese Headquarters in Englewood, New Jersey, where he would become more acclimated in the Archdiocese's administrative functions. Metropolitan PHILIP officially welcomed him at the Archdiocese Convention in Atlanta, Georgia that summer, announcing that Sayidna JOSEPH would shepherd the Western Region flock. On October 11, 1995, Sayidna arrived at Los Angeles International Airport, welcomed by his clergy, days before his first Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas Cathedral on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. In his first homily, Sayidna clearly stated his purpose: "I am here on vocation, not vacation." He immediately began his round of annual parish visits, starting with the Fall Delegates Meeting (now Fall Gathering) at St. Luke Church in Garden Grove, California, to get to know and love the clergy and faithful at every opportunity. One priest asked Sayidna JOSEPH how he was able to remember so many names. He replied, "Because I care." That same priest also learned that, on his many airplane trips, Sayidna would read "Al-Mawrid", the premier Arabic-English dictionary, just to make sure he could properly spread the Gospel in English in his new home, and keep his flock on the path of salvation in Jesus Christ.

His Grace spent the initial years of his West Coast ministry enhancing the unity of the parishes, clergy and faithful according to the words of St. Paul: "Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2). He stressed this administratively, but more so liturgically. In the late 1990s, Sayidna initiated the annual Diocesan Clergy Seminars, bringing in famed Orthodox Christian scholars and pastors to provide for the ongoing education of his priests and deacons, in order to meet the constantly changing needs of the faithful in the parishes. At these same Seminars, Sayidna has stressed the importance of true worship, bringing about not only the simple rubrics and movements of the clergy, but of the deeper meaning of the divine services. The Holy Orthodox Church expresses itself theologically,

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doctrinally and spiritually through its worship, and Sayidna knows these allow the faithful to become the strongest possible members of the body of Christ.

Sayidna keenly understands that pastoral formation is not limited to seminars, retreats and seminaries. He knows the vital roles of these institutions, but many clergy remark that Sayidna is at his best one-on-one, father talking to son or daughter. He knows how fearful it can be to serve the Lord and His Church in any capacity, but His Grace can always inspire courage. While addressing students at St. Tikhon Orthodox Theological Seminary in 2007, Sayidna said, "St. John Chrysostom thought so little of himself that he hid from the men sent to his home to bring him to his ordination (On the Priesthood 1:6). St. John understood the awesome task of the priest, and hid out of fear of his own unworthiness, but was later consecrated as one of the most powerful bishops of the Church." Sayidna has also increased stability in parishes, working with his Diocesan flocks to solve their problems, cease divisions and eliminate disruptions that, unattended, could lead to quick "non-solutions" like transfers of clergy and falling away of the laity.

His Grace valiantly assisted Metropolitan PHILIP in his initial years in the West, ensuring that the holy traditions of the Church breathed life into this continent. When "Self-Rule" status was granted by the Antiochian Holy Synod in 2003, and when the auxiliary bishops of the Archdiocese were to be enthroned as ruling diocesan bishops, Sayidna JOSEPH naturally made the transition. On Sunday, September 12, 2004, His Eminence presided at Sayidna's Enthronement, the first in the Antiochian Archdiocese in 38 years. This historic day at St. Nicholas Cathedral marked a milestone in Sayidna's ministry, as well as the coming of age of the Western Region. On that day, the Region became the Diocese of Los Angeles and West, a more localized body that could better and faster meet the needs of a territory that had grown exponentially in recent decades. The increase came thanks to the continuous evangelization of those who sought the true faith, those who were born with it and remained steadfast, and the constant immigration of those who carried it with them from their homelands.

The fruit of all these actions and of Sayidna's continued labors are manifested in the Diocesan flock's constant involvement in the Holy Orthodox Church at several levels. The annual Parish Life Conferences have averaged 800 attendees in the past decade, including four that reached over 1,000 and shattered Archdiocesan records. The PLCs bring our local communities together in a spirit of fellowship and reveal the greater Church, which both constantly inspire the laity. Youth Festivals have also seen dramatic increases in participation through the dozens of teens that express their faith through the Oratorical Festival, and the dozens of teams that compete in the exciting Bible Bowl, one of the highlights of Sayidna's year. Traditionally, he throws candy to the audience in this festival, showing he is as energized as everyone cheering for their parishes. At one Bible Bowl, with hundreds of people hanging onto his words on a Saturday night in a hotel ballroom, Sayidna said, "Tonight, we eat candy, but tomorrow, something more important: the Body and Blood of Christ!"

That Eucharistic unity has carried over into Sayidna's work with his brother bishops of the canonical Orthodox Church jurisdictions in the West. On Bright Tuesday, April 10, 2007, Sayidna JOSEPH hosted their historic first gathering in Los Angeles. In attendance were His Eminence, Metropolitan GERASIMOS (Michaleas) of the Greek Orthodox Christian Metropolis of San Francisco; His Grace, Bishop MAXIM (Vasilijevic) of the Serbian Orthodox Christian Diocese of Western America; and His Grace, Bishop BENJAMIN (Peterson), of the Orthodox Church in America's Diocese of the West. His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH opened the gathering by stressing the importance of expressing our Holy Orthodox Faith with one voice. To this end, they concelebrate the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on the Sunday of Orthodoxy every year. In his message to the gathering in 2010, Sayidna elaborated on the theme of unity. "We are the same body

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of Christ, expressed in many languages and traditions, but we are the same in sacraments and substance," Sayidna said. "On this day, we can discover ourselves and discover our unity in the body of Christ. We want God to enable us so that we can be purified to do His will." More history was made in December of 2009, when the hierarchs, at Sayidna's suggestion, hosted the first-ever inter-Orthodox clergy retreat at St. Nicholas Ranch and Retreat Center in Dunlap, California. Many priests and deacons—also for the first time—now had the chance to behold "how good it is to dwell in unity" (Psalm 133:1).

Sayidna has carried this spirit of unity overseas in various capacities. He has represented the Patriarchate of Antioch officially at conferences and meetings, but he has also visited churches in other lands simply as a gesture of oneness as the undivided Body of Christ. His pilgrimage in 2008 to Russia followed the latter course, as he took the delegation to the historic, holy sites to venerate the relics and even the grounds of Russia's Orthodox Christian martyrs. Sayidna's plan was to place the Faith above mere diplomacy. Following Great Vespers with the Kneeling Prayers of Pentecost, Sayidna told the standing-room-only congregation at the Antiochian Metoxion (representative parish) in Moscow how proud he was of them for believing as strongly as they did both during and after the dark times of Communism. One could tell their appreciation of this acknowledgement simply by looking into their delighted faces.

Though he has extraordinary achievements to his credit, it is the simpler things that most endear Sayidna JOSEPH to his flock. He has baptized our babies, celebrated our weddings, ordained our sons, eulogized our departed ones, opened his chancery to all who need him, launched "Thought for the Day"—quotes from the Holy Fathers to inspire us as we begin each day—ensured that our worship and hymnography are uplifting and edifying, yet streamlined, understood and accessible through the creation of the "Service Texts"—word-for-word compilations of the daily divine services like Great Vespers and Orthros—and a website to see it all: [www.antiochianladiocese.org](http://www.antiochianladiocese.org). The world can watch our Diocesan father interact with his parishes and their combined testimony to the enlivening work of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who makes all things new (Revelation 21:5).

In all of his years of service to the Holy Orthodox Church, and in particular his fifteen years in the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West, His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH has striven to live by these words read over him as he was consecrated to the Holy Episcopacy in 1991: "Grant, O Christ, that this man, who has been appointed a steward of the episcopal grace, may become an imitator of Thee, the True Shepherd, by laying down his life for Thy sheep." His life is the church and the Orthodox Faith, and he welcomes all with open arms who want to serve the Lord. His chancery and phone lines are constantly busy, as Sayidna makes all sacrifices to ensure his clergy and faithful are cared for, meeting with them at every opportunity. He makes no distinction between those who have grown in the Faith and those who are new to it; no discrimination between those born overseas or in this country. His message at the chancery, at parish visits, at greater church gatherings and throughout the world is clear and unchanging: living a life of holiness in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

May God grant our Father-in-Christ, His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH, mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, visitation, pardon and remission of his offenses, and all things good and profitable for his soul, so that we may have him and his witness for our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ for many more years!

Εἰς πολλά ἔτη, Δέσποτα! Many years, Master!

Photography and Design: Subdeacon Michael Habib and Subdeacon Michael Haddad  
Story: Subdeacon Peter Samore

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*His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH's Enthronement as the First Bishop  
Of the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West  
Sunday, September 12, 2004*

*Sayidna's Enthronement marked the coming of age not only of his ministry on the West Coast, but of that of his clergy and faithful as a whole Diocese. The Enthronement allowed for increased localized ministries and outreaches, recognizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit already bestowed the bishop, clergy and faithful of the Diocese. "It is an immeasurable blessing to work diligently with the grace of the Spirit which the living God has bestowed upon us in this Diocese," Sayidna said in his address. "We were made to be a living Diocese without blemish, beautiful, not adorned with gold or pearls but with the Spirit that is more precious than these." St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles was filled beyond its capacity with overflow seating and closed-circuit television coverage being projected on large screens in the parish hall next door.*



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*His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH's Work with His Brothers  
The Canonical Orthodox Christian Bishops of the West Coast*

*Orthodox Christian unity at all levels has long been the priority of the Antiochian Archdiocese, and Sayidna shares in this. He has built official relations with His Eminence, Metropolitan GERASIMOS (Michaleas) of the Greek Orthodox Christian Metropolis of San Francisco; His Grace, Bishop MAXYM (Vasiljevic) of the Serbian Orthodox Christian Diocese of Western America; and His Grace, Bishop BENJAMIN (Peterson) of the Orthodox Church in America's Diocese of the West. From their first gathering on Bright Tuesday, 2007 to their newly-established tradition of concelebrating the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, Sayidna has stressed the importance of expressing our Holy Orthodox Faith with one voice, not just administratively, but through the liturgy and the sacraments. The hierarchs hosted the first-ever inter-Orthodox clergy retreat during the 2009 Advent Season, allowing many priests and deacons to meet each other for the first time.*



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*His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH's Pilgrimage with the Diocesan Delegation  
To Russia, June 9-18, 2008*

*Sayidna led a group of twelve to some of Russia's holiest sites in St. Petersburg, Sergiev-Posad and Moscow, venerating the relics of martyrs and the soil on which they tread. The trip was not to establish mere diplomacy, but to witness the resurgence of Orthodox Christianity in this once repressed and tortured land. On several occasions, Sayidna and the delegation visited churches in the middle of baptisms, yet were still warmly received. Churches were jammed packed with believers grabbing onto the Faith that was denied them for decades. On Holy Pentecost, Sayidna met with His Holiness, Patriarch ALEXY II (Mikhailovich Ridiger), who would enter into the Eternal Kingdom just six months after the historic visit.*



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*His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH Encompassed by His Diocese  
The Annual Parish Life Conferences*

*St. Ignatius of Antioch tells the Smyrnaeans, "Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church" (Smyrnaeans 8:2). The Diocese has borne witness to this teaching in the form of the annual Parish Life Conference, reuniting the children with their Father-in-Christ. In the first decade of this millennium, the PLCs have averaged 800 clergy and faithful per year, even topping 1,000 people in four of those years, shattering Antiochian Archdiocese records. The PLC is the highlight of Sayidna's year, as he enthusiastically teaches, worships with and witnesses the growth of his flock. He is most delighted by the Oratorical and Bible Bowl, the premier youth festivals. Those "younger" children carry Sayidna's same enthusiastic spirit with them to Archdiocesan functions, where they proudly represent the Diocese with the affectionate acronym "D-LAW."*



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*Our Father-in-Christ, His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH  
With His Flock*

*The bishop belongs to the Church, clergy and faithful alike. In his fifteen years of ministry in the West, Sayidna has traveled nearly one million miles by plane, train and automobile, from the biggest cities to the remotest reaches, just to be with each member of his Diocesan flock around the Lord's table in the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Sayidna uses his pastoral visits to the fullest extent, meeting with our Sunday Schools, Teen SOYOs, Fellowships, Antiochian Women, St. Ignatius members, parish councils, priests and deacons and everyone he can, rallying them to the fullness of the faith and the everlasting chalice of our Lord Jesus Christ.*



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*His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH Receives Honorary Doctorate  
St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, May 29, 2010*

*Before giving the commencement address to the class of 2010, the faculty and trustees of St. Tikhon's Seminary bestowed upon His Grace the Doctor of Divinity degree, *honoris causa*. Sayidna reminded the graduates that the theologian is "the one who prays."*



**RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF ST. TIKHON'S ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
ON THE CONFERRAL OF THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF DIVINITY, *HONORIS CAUSA*,  
ON BISHOP JOSEPH (AL-ZEHLAOU)**

WHEREAS, His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH (Al-Zehlaoui) has given his entire life to the service of the Holy Orthodox Church of Antioch in many lands, most notably Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece, England and, currently, the western United States and Canada;

AND WHEREAS, he has shepherded the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Diocese of Los Angeles and the West for nearly fifteen years, a diverse flock of Middle Eastern immigrants, native-born North Americans, and those who have chosen Holy Orthodoxy as the one, true Faith, making no distinction between their backgrounds;

AND WHEREAS, he has spearheaded inter-jurisdictional cooperation on the West Coast and pledged, with his brother bishops in that region, to provide the clergy and the laity an example of liturgical unity in Christ Jesus above all obstacles, manifesting that the Sacraments dissolve all divisions;

AND WHEREAS, he is devoted to the ongoing pastoral formation of his current and future clergy, stressing the importance of seminaries and all institutions of higher Orthodox Christian learning, as well as attendance of the annual Clergy Seminars to continue and build on their knowledge for the benefit of their parishes;

AND WHEREAS, he is personally committed to the growth of each one of his sheep, giving and doing all that is necessary to counsel, teach and lead them in "The Way", freely giving of his spiritual acumen for the sake of their life and salvation in Jesus Christ;

AND WHEREAS, he has wisely guided his clergy in the evangelization of the Diocese entrusted to him, remaining steadfast to the Antiochian traditions while transfiguring them with the newness of Orthodoxy in this land, ensuring that the Gospel is spread through its four corners, and that newcomers to the Faith are securely and properly rooted in Holy Orthodoxy;

AND WHEREAS, he has inspired ministry of the laity of all ages, providing for programs of camping, youth education, and teen outreach, as well as college campus activity for young adults; parish council and organization leadership; and, above all, a greater participation in the liturgical arts, guiding the clergy and laity into organic, dynamic unity with their heritage of true worship;

NOW BE IT AND IS HEREBY RESOLVED by the Board of Trustees of St Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, to confer on His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH (Al-Zehlaoui), loyal son of Antioch and devoted father in North America, illumined educator and patient shepherd, inspiring churchman and loving archpastor, the academic degree Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*.

Given in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, this 29th day of May, 2010.

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