

Panel Discussion: “The Christian Presence in the Middle East and Demographic Distribution” Held during the Holy Synod of the Antiochian Church



Balamand, October 9, 2025

On the afternoon of the third day, the Holy Synod continued its sessions by addressing the third theme, which focused on the Christian presence in the Middle East and demographic distribution. The discussion was moderated by journalist Zeina Yazigi, with contributions from Mr. Rabih El Haber and Dr. Shawki Atiyeh.

Both speakers emphasized that the Christian presence is not merely a matter of numbers, but rather a lived mission. They stressed that efforts to anchor Christians in their homeland should not be based on their status as a minority, but on their role as partners in shaping a future rooted in faith, citizenship, and openness.

Key points raised included the urgent need to conduct a census of parishes and to prepare a detailed study highlighting the latest demographic shifts, which are

being significantly influenced by factors such as declining marriage rates, delayed marriages, divorce, and emigration. The speakers underscored the importance of developing a strategic plan to help Christians remain in their homelands, raising demographic awareness, and encouraging childbirth.

As a continuation of this theme, the day concluded with an open session featuring a sincere discussion on the current situation in Syria and Lebanon. Participants asserted that, in light of the developments following the major political changes in Syria and the ongoing crises in Lebanon, His Beatitude's orientations and initiatives to address the resulting challenges affecting Christians and other citizens represent a just stance that strengthens Christians and reflects the feelings of all the nation.

In this context, all present emphasized the pivotal role of His Beatitude, as well as the wise national and ecclesiastical positions that he has expressed in his sermons, speeches, meetings, and visits.

The participants concluded the session by emphasizing the necessity for church leaders and faithful to unite and show mutual support, so that the Church may continue to be the salt of the earth and a bridge of encounter among all components of society, regardless their affiliations—especially that the Antiochian Church, historically rooted in this region, has extended its presence all over the world.

They reiterated the Church's unwavering commitment to earthly concerns through its clear and steadfast positions in raising the voice of truth, defending the oppressed, and upholding the values of citizenship, justice, democracy, and respect for diversity.

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