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Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America - Met. Joseph visits Ottawa for the Retirement of Archpriest Ghattas Hajal



His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph visited St. Elias Cathedral of Ottawa, Ontario to preside over the celebrations for the retirement of Archpriest Ghattas Hajal from November 26-December 1, 2019. It was a time full of blessings in which the flock gathered around their chief shepherd to express their love to him and to Fr. Ghattas who has served this parish for 28 years, and the Antiochian Archdiocese for almost 30 years, forming the majority of his 43 years in the holy priesthood.

Many events marked this event including a luncheon at the Lebanese Embassy in Ottawa hosted by His Excellency Fadi Ziadeh, Ambassador of Lebanon to Canada, who honored His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph and thanked Fr. Ghattas for his years of service.

In addition to the various midweek meals hosted by the faithful of the Cathedral, His Eminence presided over a special parish council meeting which was followed by

a dinner hosted by the Council President George Hanna.

A highlight of the week was a pilgrimage that His Eminence led to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Virgin Mary the Consolatory in Lachute, Quebec. There, His Eminence was joined by His Grace Bishop Alexander of the Diocese of Ottawa, Eastern Canada and Upstate New York, and several clergy and faithful from the Ottawa and Montreal areas.

Metropolitan Joseph had desired to meet with the various ministries at St. Elias. Thus, the weekend was delightfully packed with three separate meetings and Q&A sessions: One with the Antiochian Women, another with the Youth Ministry Organizations (SOYO, YAM and OCF), and a third open to all the families and parishioners of the Cathedral. In these meetings, we saw a father meet with his children. The flock could feel His Eminence's Christian love through the effort and time he took to answer people's questions, and share his experiences and wisdom with them.

The weekend was also filled with worship. The cathedral gathered for Great Vespers on Friday evening in honor of St. Andrew the First-called Apostle on the occasion of his feast day, as well as for Great Vespers on Saturday evening to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Later Saturday evening, the cathedral hosted a gala celebration to mark the retirement from active ministry of Fr. Ghattas.

In that gala, over 500 people came to express their gratitude to Fr. Ghattas' leadership, service and dedication. The parish prepared a short video in tribute to Fr. Ghattas that highlighted his journey from the world of high finance into the holy priesthood. The program featured several speakers who spoke lovingly of Fr. Ghattas, who in turn thanked His Eminence, his parish and his community for their support and love throughout the years. Sayidna Joseph concluded the evening by speaking of the appreciation he has for Fr. Ghattas, adding that he is worthy of the honor his flock has bestowed upon him.

On Sunday morning, His Eminence celebrated the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Joining him Fr. Ghattas Hajal, Fr. Joseph Purpura, Fr. James Griggs, Fr. Mark Wyatt, Fr. Milad Selim, Fr. Nektarios Najjar, Dcn. John El Massih, Dcn. Alexander Moisa and Dcn. Yakoub Daoura.

In his sermon, Sayidna Joseph again thanked Fr. Ghattas for his service to the Orthodox Church and to the Antiochian Archdiocese. Then, His Eminence appointed the cathedral's assistant pastor, Fr. Nektarios Najjar, as the new pastor and dean,

saying: "The trust is being transferred from one trustworthy priest to another trustworthy priest."

The final event of the week was a luncheon that followed the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy which over 550 people attended. This event was emceed by St. Elias' Teen SOYO chapter and the speeches were offered to thank Fr. Ghattas by the different youth ministries and all organizations of the parish which shed the light over Fr. Ghattas' pastoral work and contribution.

We pray that the Lord God will grant Fr. Ghattas many years of health in his retirement, and that He will bless the ministry of the new pastor, Fr. Nektarios, and all the faithful of St. Elias Cathedral in Ottawa, through the prayers of our Holy Master and Chief Shepherd Metropolitan Joseph.



— Source: antiochian.org