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A Statement of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East



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Damascus, April 4, 2020

To all our beloved children of the Antioch Church, clergy, monastics, and all faithful

First of all, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you, and may His peace fill your hearts with the light of His Resurrection, as the anchor of reassurance for tomorrow, abiding in “faith and hope” (1 Cor. 13:13), in the joy of the redeemed children. May He strengthen you by His love, through which He conquered on the Cross, once and for all, the “last enemy to be destroyed” (1 Cor. 15:26).

We, the hierarchs of the Holy Synod of Antioch, under the primacy of His Beatitude John X, address you today, as pastors of your journey in Christ, walking in the midst of the most serious health issue from the beginning of the twentieth century. We lift up our prayers for you and your families’ well-being, and for the whole world.

Beloved Children

As you know, we have been committed to halting church services, and we have requested from you to abide by these general measures taken by the whole world and to stay at home. Our previous directives came in the context of our great concern for the physical, mental and spiritual safety of each one of you, as a way to incarnate our communities’ evangelical love concerned for the safety of each human being in the world, and as a sign of our commitment to the social measures taken by the official authorities for the safety of all.

These unusual measures come in the midst of our holy Lenten journey to Pascha. These measures increase our longing to the Holy Eucharist and to the common participation in prayers and supplications in our churches. It is a rightful longing that is held by us as a “mystery” of sonship. However, our Church, whose history testifies to its several harsh episodes in which her children and saints were displaced, has remained gathered alive, following the concerns of her people. The Church is present in the prayers of her children, who associate themselves closely with the words of the Holy Scripture and form temples with their kneeling bodies a holy sacrifice on the Lord’s altar.

Therefore, the first thing we invite you to contemplate these feelings, and to abide by the Divine joy which no suffering can impede. You are called to do this through intensifying your daily prayers and reading of the Bible, writings and lives of the Holy Fathers, and everything that makes your houses “little churches” filled with entreaties and prayers, while remembering that the “Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). Beloved, lift up one another to the Lord, and pray for the whole world, for the sick, wounded, needy, displaced, kidnapped, and all the victims. Pray for all scientists and physicians, for all nurses who are working to help people out of this tribulation. Pray for the workers and janitors, for those who keep the security and regulations, and for all those unknown soldiers that work for your well-being and social safety, who are endangering their lives in order to provide you with the basic necessities of life. Pray for your shepherds. See Christ in the needy and in all those

who are suffering from these circumstances. Share your bread and your goods with them. Protect yourself from all fear and panic, remembering that you are the children of the Creator of life, Who said: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mat. 28:20). In doing this, you are the one gathered Church, longing to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Church that the Lord desires, and in which He is pleased today. Make out of your time, the time of confinement and staying at home, a desert of repentance and longing to Holy Communion, and an "acceptable time" to work for the Lord and for the neighbor (2 Cor. 6:2). Endure this stage in light of the experience of monastics who went out to the desert in the beginning of Great Lent, in order to focus on prayer and repentance, and to fuel the longing for the meeting of the brothers and sisters at the Risen Christ's feast.

Beloved Children

In addition to the foregoing, and to our prayers for you and for the sake of the world, we are keeping pace with the developments of the pandemic that threatens human life today. After meeting with each other, through communication and consultation between His Beatitude the Patriarch and Their Eminences the hierarchs, especially in light of the imminence of the Great and Holy Week and the Glorious Pascha, while facing the tragedies and repercussions of this difficult ordeal, we inform you of the decisions and directives we have taken:

Firstly: We emphasize the necessity of strict adherence to the procedures adopted and taken by the official authorities specialized in fighting this pandemic and its spread, including the stay at home policies, while experiencing the mystery of the family as the joy of life.

Secondly: We call upon the believers in all the Archdioceses, clergy, monastics and laity, to fully cooperate with the competent official and health authorities, in everything that provides aid and serves the welfare of the social health security.

Thirdly: The services and prayers during the Great and Holy Week, and during Palm Sunday and Great Pascha (April 19) are to be held by just the priests and monastics in churches and monasteries, offered for the sake of all the people and for the peace of the whole world. In other words, the services are held behind closed doors, without the participation of any of the believers, while activating the possibility of direct broadcasting of daily prayers through the websites of the parishes, thus allowing the believers to follow the services from their homes.

Fourthly: We pray, when conditions allow, and by God's mercy, to celebrate the Paschal service together on the day of the Leave-taking of Pascha (May 27, 2020), when the Paschal service is celebrated in its entirety and with our participation together. We hope that by that by time we will have triumphed over the pandemic and the life cycle be returned to normal. In order to prevent any confusion, the holy forty-days period of fasting ends at twelve o'clock at midnight of Saturday-Sunday,

April 19.

Fifthly: The parish priests and all believers, along with the parish councils and various church organizations and brotherhood are called to work together and collaborate in everything that helps and supports the needy and relieves the suffering of the victims and their families.

Sixthly: The Church prays that the Lord may have compassion for His creation, remove this health distress from our world, strengthen the medical staff, nurses and all paramedic teams in hospitals and society, protect them from all harm, heal every patient, have mercy on all the deceased, and inspire all specialists, physicians and scientists to work on whatever protects life and the universe from all pandemics and evils.

Seventhly: These measures were taken according to the latest data and developments, with our hope that these days will be shortened and life will return to its natural cycle

Eighthly: While we accept the diversity of opinions and differing ideas in the approach to these matters, the aforementioned decisions and directives express the official position of the Antiochian Church. Accordingly, every violation of these decisions constitutes an explicit violation of the Church's position, and the Church authorities are not responsible for any civil consequences of these violations.

Beloved children,

We pray and hope that this worldwide tribulation will end, and that it will not cause us any hardship, difficulty, or suffering. We ask you to be strong in the Lord, looking forward to seeing the joy after this storm. We ask you again to look forward to the day in which we will make our contribution to a new world dawning upon us with reassurance, stability, solidarity, joy and splendor, under the Lord's protection. In this hope, we entrust you under God's protection, hoping that you be steadfast in your prayers, so that we can cross this stage together, without carrying in us any pain and wound, other than our longing for the Savior's Body and Blood.

— Source: facebook.com/Antiochpatriarchate.org