

CONSTITUTION
OF
THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ANTIOCH



amended and approved by
the Holy Synod
September 22-26, 1998

*St. Ephraim Seminary, Maarat Saidnaya,
Damascus-Syria*

General Statutes

Article 1. The *SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ANTIOCH* is One Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church, whose Apostolic See was established in Antioch by Saint Peter, the Head of the Apostles, in the year 37 A.D. Its present headquarters is in Damascus, Syria.

Article 2. His Holiness (H.H.) the Patriarch is the Supreme Head of the Church and its Holy Synod.

Article 3. The Holy Synod, headed by H. H. the Patriarch, is the supreme religious, spiritual, legislative and administrative authority of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.

Article 4. The Archdioceses of the Apostolic See of Antioch are :

1. *Damascus*, a Patriarchal Vicariate. Its headquarters is located in Damascus. It covers the two Counties of Damascus and suburbs.
2. *Homs, Hamah & Environs*, an Archdiocese, located in Homs. It covers the Counties of Homs, Hamah & Tartus.
3. *Aleppo*, an Archdiocese, located in Aleppo. It covers the Counties of Aleppo, Edleb, Alraqqa and Lattackiya.
4. *Al-Jazirah & Euphrates*, an Archdiocese, located in Al-Hassakah. It covers the Counties of Al-Hassakah and Dair-El-Zor.
5. *Beirut & Zahle*, an Archdiocese, located in Beirut. It covers the Counties of Beirut and Bekaa.
6. *Mount Lebanon*, an Archdiocese, located in Al Bouchriyeh. It covers the Counties of Mount Lebanon, Tripoli and South of Lebanon.
7. *Baghdad & Bassra*, an Archdiocese, located in Baghdad. It covers the Counties of Baghdad and Basra.
8. *Mosul & Environs*, Archdiocese, located in Mosul. It covers the County of Mosul, Sinjar, Qarah-Qosh, and the Northern Counties of Arbel, Al-ta'meem (Karkook) and Suleimanieh.
9. *St. Matthew's Monastery*, an Archdiocese, located at St. Matthew's Monastery. It covers the villages of Bartilleh, Ba'sheeqah, Bahzaani, Aqrah and Merkey.
10. *Mardin & Environs*, an Archdiocese, located in Mardin. It covers the Mardin villages, Qillith, the Counties of Diyar bakir (Amid), Malatya, Adiyaman and Al-Aziz.

11. *Tur-Abdin*, an Archdiocese, located in Midyat. It covers the Tur-Abdin villages, Beth-Zabday (Azekh) , Nusaybin (Nisibis) and its environs.
12. *Istanbul*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, located in Istanbul. It covers the Counties of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir.
13. *Jerusalem & Jordan*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, located in Jerusalem. It covers Palestine and Jordan.
14. *Eastern USA*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, located in New Jersey. It covers the Eastern States of United States of America.
15. *Western USA*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, located in Los Angeles. It covers the Western States of United States of America.
16. *Canada*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, located in Montreal. It covers the whole of Canada.
17. *North America of Malankara*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, located in New York. It covers the United States of America and Canada.
18. *Brazil*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, located in San Paulo. It covers the whole of Brazil.
19. *Argentina*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, located in La Plata-Buenos Aires. It covers Argentina.
20. *Sweden & Scandinavia*, an Archdiocese, located in SØdert-1je. It covers Sweden and the Scandinavian countries.
21. *Sweden*, Patriarchal Vicariate, located in SØdert-1je. It covers the Churches of the Vicariate in Sweden.
22. *Central Europe & Benelux*, an Archdiocese, Located at St. Ephrem's Monastery in Losser-Holland. It covers Austria, France, Switzerland and the Benelux countries.
23. *Germany*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, Located at St. Jakob of Sarug's Monastery in Warburg-Germany. It covers the whole of Germany.
24. *Australia & New Zealand*, a Patriarchal Vicariate, Located in Sydney. It covers the whole of Australia and New Zealand.
25. *Knanaya*, an Archdiocese, located in Chingavanam, Kerala. It covers all the Knanaya churches in / out of India.
26. *Catholicate of the East*, its headquarter is Kerala. It covers all the Syrian Orthodox Archdioceses in India, except the Knanaya Archdiocese, the churches of the Patriarchal See, and the Evangelical Ministry Associations in India.

Article 5. All churches, their organizations and Evangelical Ministry Associations, not included in the Syrian Archdioceses mentioned in *Article 4*, are governed directly by H. H. the Patriarch.

Chapter One

Ecclesiastical Hierarchy

- Article 6.** The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy consists of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch: Episcopate, Priesthood and Diaconry. Each of these is divided into ranks. The Episcopate consists of : the Patriarchate, the Catholicate and the Metropolitanate (wherever “Metropolitan” is mentioned in this Constitution, it also means the Bishop). The Priesthood consists of : the Archpriest (βᾶνίϥ) and the Priest (ἑὸίϥ) while the Diaconry is comprised of these ranks: the Archdeacon, the Deacon, the Subdeacon, the Reader and the Chanter.
- Article 7.** *H. H. the Patriarch* is the legitimate successor of St. Peter the Head Apostle. He is the Pontiff who is lawfully elected by : His Beatitude the Catholicos, the Metropolitanans of the Archdioceses, the Metropolitanans Patriarchal Vicars in the Archdioceses, and the Metropolitan Assistant Patriarch. The Patriarch is the Supreme Head of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, the symbol of its unity, its representative and spokesman everywhere, and the spiritual father of all Syrians worldwide. He must be obeyed by the Catholicos, Metropolitanans, priests, monks, nuns, deacons and all laity. At his consecration, his name shall be : His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius . . . (his personal name is to follow). His name shall be proclaimed throughout the churches of all Syrian Orthodox Archdioceses during the Holy Mass and canonical prayers, before the name of the archdiocese Metropolitan, and in India before the name of the Catholicos. His title is : His Holiness the Supreme Pontiff Moran Mor Ignatius . . . Patriarch of Antioch and all the East and the Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church.
- Article 8.** *His Beatitude The Catholicos* (ἁγνίᾶϥ ἁ ἑᾶίϥ) ranks second after the Patriarch within the Syrian Orthodox Church hierarchy. He is elected only by the Metropolitanans under the jurisdiction of the Catholicate See. They must obey him, so must the priests, deacons and all the people within the Syrian Orthodox Archdioceses in India. At his ordination, he is proclaimed : Mor Baselius . . . (his personal name is added here). His name shall be proclaimed throughout the archdioceses in India during the Holy Mass and canonical prayers, after the name of the Patriarch and preceding the name of the Archdiocese Metropolitan. His name should be mentioned also at every Syrian church where he attends prayer. His title is: His Beatitude Mor Baselius . . . Catholicos of the East and Metropolitan of Malankara.
- Article 9.** *The Metropolitan (Archbishop)* is one of the church shepherds, the successors of the Apostles. He is nominated by H. H. the Patriarch and elected by the vacant Archdiocese. He is then appointed after the Holy Synod’s approval. He should be obeyed by the priests,

deacons and all the people of his Archdiocese. His name shall be proclaimed throughout the churches of his Archdiocese after the name of H. H. the Patriarch. His title is : “His Eminence...” The title of the Bishop shall be: “His Grace Mor...”..

Article 10. *The Priest* is the one who ministers the Church Sacraments, and shepherds the spiritual affairs of the faithful within the church he is assigned to, through the guidance of the Archdiocese Metropolitan.

Article 11. *The Deacon* assists the clergy in performing church rites.

Chapter Two

His Holiness The Patriarch

Article 12. *H. H. the Patriarch* is the Supreme Head of the church and its Holy Synod.

Article 13. His Holiness the Patriarch convenes the Holy Synod.

Article 14. His Holiness the Patriarch presides over the Holy Synod meeting sessions, sanctions, and announces its decisions.

Article 15. H. H. the Patriarch ordains the lawfully elected Catholicos and Metropolitans, and consecrates the Holy Chrism (ܐܘܢܝܘܢܐ). In performing these services, he is to be assisted (by his invitation) by at least two Metropolitans or one Metropolitan in Circumstances of absolute necessity. H. H. the Patriarch also confirms the election of all Metropolitans who are under the jurisdiction of the Catholicate See. He also ordains Metropolitans of the Knanaya Archdiocese, and the Evangelization Associations, and the Apostolic See churches by right, and Metropolitans of the other archdioceses in India if necessary.

Article 16. H.H. the Patriarch signs all agreements, documents treaties, contracts, documents of all kinds and letters, and all that relate to the affairs of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.

- Article 17.** His Holiness the Patriarch dispatches the clergy on ecclesiastical and cultural assignments.
- Article 18.** His Holiness the Patriarch appoints a cleric (ⲡⲁⲓⲛⲓⲠⲓϸ) as a Patriarchal Envoy (ⲁⲟⲓⲛϸ
ⲧⲟⲛⲓⲛⲃⲓϸ) in vacant archdioceses. He also notifies the concerned civilian authorities and the Metropolitans of the archdioceses under the Antiochian Apostolic See.
- Article 19.** When H. H. the Patriarch visits an archdiocese, he sits on the cathedral seat in the church. Next to him sits the Metropolitan of the archdiocese, then his accompanying Metropolitans according to their ordination seniority. None of the Metropolitans shall carry their crosiers (pastoral staffs) in his presence, in reverence to the Apostolic See, and acknowledgment of his superiority.
- Article 20.** H. H. the Patriarch bestows decorations on whomever he finds worthy.
- Article 21.** H. H. the Patriarch has the right to examine, correct, scrutinize, eliminate or introduce new church rites. Moreover, he is the defender of the faith of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, its holy doctrines and the Apostolic and patristic traditions
- Article 22.** Matters in which H. H. the Patriarch confers necessarily with the Holy Synod are :
- A-* The approving election of the Catholicos, Metropolitans and their ordination.
 - B-* Moving Metropolitans from one Archdiocese to another.
 - C-* Removal of the Catholicos, and Metropolitans, and the acceptance of their resignations.
 - D-* Altering the geographical boundaries of Archdioceses.
 - E-* Creating, establishing or abolishing Archdioceses.
 - F-* Selling part or all of the Patriarchate's real states and endowment.
- Article 23.** The management of all Syrian Orthodox monasteries and Patriarchal organizations is directly bound to the Patriarch.
- Article 24.** All archdioceses must give 10% of their properties' income to the venerable Patriarchate as annual dues in addition to the patriarchal tithe according to the old custom. Monasteries

however, should give to the Patriarchate 20% of their annual income.

Article 25. H. H. the Patriarch visits all the Archdioceses of the Antiochian Apostolic See at home, abroad and in India; making whatever observations he deems necessary. Also, he holds accountable the Archdiocese Metropolitan, the priests, church Boards of Trustee, and all other institutions, whenever necessary.

Article 26. H. H. informs the Holy Synod's members of all his accomplished activities during the period between convening of the last and present Synod .

Article 27. The Patriarch communicates personally with the Catholicos, the Metropolitans and bishops. He addresses the Catholicos as: Your Beatitude (ϠæÈÉäæÉÄ ïÂÍæä) our brother; a Metropolitan as: Your Eminence (ãÚáíæÉÄ ïÂÍæä) our brother; and a bishop (ÂÝÓþæÝÇ): Your Grace our (ãÑæÉÄ ïÂÍæä) brother. His signature shall be at the bottom of the letter. However, pastoral encyclicals (bulls) will bear his name and seal at the top of the letter.

Chapter Three

Election of the Patriarch

Article 28. In the case of the death of the Patriarch, the **Patriarchal Assistant** (ãÚÏÑäÇ ÝØÑíÑßíÇ) and the **Patriarchal Vicar** (ÂÝØÑæÝÇ ÝØÑíÑßíÇ) of Damascus shall immediately notify His Beatitude the Catholicos and the Metropolitans in order to participate in the burial service. They will also inform the highest local civilian authorities where the Patriarchate is located, and the heads of all denominations.

Article 29. At the Patriarch's death, the Patriarchal Assistant and the Patriarchal Vicar in Damascus, and whoever is assigned a duty in the Patriarchal office together with their Eminences the Metropolitans who have arrived at the Patriarchate, will immediately seal, by red wax, all his movable legacy, his notes and records. After concluding the funeral and burial service, they will be recorded, noted and sealed by the above-mentioned people in order to be delivered, by a committee of Metropolitans, to the Patriarch-Elect.

- Article 30.** If H. H. the Patriarch insists on his resignation, the Holy Synod will convene and he shall render his resignation in writing to the Holy Synod. The Metropolitan with the highest seniority by ordination will immediately inform His Beatitude the Catholicos and the Metropolitans. They will convene, presided by the lawful Catholicos if present, or by the most senior (according to ordination) of the present Metropolitans, to review the resignation within a time period not to exceed two weeks. If it is impassable to convince H. H. the Patriarch to rescind his decision, or, if the existence of permanent physical obstacles is confirmed by the opinion of at least three specialists, a majority of two thirds of the Holy Synod will, approve his relief. The Antiochian Patriarchal See will thereby, be considered vacant.
- Article 31.** In case the resignation of H.H. the Patriarch is accepted, the Holy Synod will provide a suitable place for his spiritual and physical habitation. His living expenses and healthcare will be properly provided for. His name also will be mentioned in prayers following the name of the new Patriarch.
- Article 32.** The Patriarchal Assistant and Patriarchal Vicar must telegraph His Beatitude the Catholicos and the Metropolitans in order to select a Metropolitan to act as a *Patriarchal Locum Tenens* (ፆገጃጃ ሃዕሽገጃጃ) according to the provisions of this constitution. This responses must be received within one week, and whoever fails to vote within this period, will forfeit his vote.
- Article 33.** The Patriarchal Assistant and the Patriarchal Vicar must open the incoming telegrams in the presence of the present Metropolitans. The two will record the choice and the present Metropolitans will sign it. The name of the Metropolitan who obtains the majority votes will be declared as the Patriarchal Locum Tenens, and he will be immediately notified.
- Article 34.** The Patriarchal Locum Tenens must come to the headquarters of the Patriarchal See as soon as possible. But, in the event of his delay or death, the one who received the second highest votes will take his place.
- Article 35.** If two Metropolitans receive equal number of votes, the senior in ordination wins. In all cases, the civilian authorities concerned, in the location of the Patriarchal See, should be notified about the name of the elected Patriarchal Locum Tenens.

- Article 36.** The Locum Tenens shall not leave the Patriarchal headquarters except in an emergency. He shall have no right to change any thing in the Patriarchal headquarters or any office or institution belonging to it. Further He shall not remove or promote anyone of the clergy or others. Also he shall have no right to sell or buy or exchange any properties, or to permit anyone to do such things in the Archdioceses.
- Article 37.** The Patriarchal Locum Tenens will summon His Beatitude the Catholicos and the Metropolitans, who are members of the Holy Synod, to elect the new Patriarch within a period not to exceed fifteen days. They are required to appear in the set date, and if anyone fails to be present due to a legitimate reason, he should cast his vote in a formal, sealed and confidential letter, electing whomever he prefers, otherwise he loses his vote.
- Article 38.** The Patriarch to-be-elected should be well known for his righteousness and capability in administration, possessing theological and literary knowledge. He should also master both the Syriac and Arabic languages, in addition to another living foreign language. He must be proven, by his past conduct, to be a defender of the faith of the Syrian Orthodox Church. Also, he should have successfully served the Metropolitanate rank for no less than seven years.
- Article 39.** No one below the age of forty years shall be elected as Patriarch.
- Article 40.** His Beatitude the Catholicos, the Metropolitan of the Knanaya Archdiocese, the Metropolitans of the churches of the Antiochian Apostolic See in India, and the Metropolitan of North America of the Malankara Archdiocese will participate in electing the Patriarch, but may not be elected.
- Article 41.** The Patriarchal Assistant and the Patriarchal Vicar in the headquarters of the Apostolic See, and the Patriarchal Vicars who are appointed to archdioceses, who all are of the Metropolitanate rank, have the same privileges of voting as of other Archdiocese Metropolitans.

Article 42. The Patriarchal Locum Tenens will hold a closed meeting in the Patriarchal Cathedral, presided by His Beatitude the Catholicos, if he is present, and attended by the Metropolitan who are members of the Holy Synod. After the reading of a station (ܐܘܨܬܐ) from the Pentecostal Rite, and invoking the Holy Spirit; a secret election is conducted using ballots bearing, in the Syriac language, the names of the venerable prelates who meet the nomination conditions. The voter takes a ballot from the presiding officer and after signing that he received it, he ascends the steps of the Holy Altar, and marks clearly, with a red pen, the sign of the cross next to the name of his choice. Then he places the ballot in the chalice placed on the life-giving Altar. Later, the presiding officer, accompanied by the Patriarchal Locum Tenens and two of the most senior Metropolitan in ordination, count the number of the election ballots. Then, they read them publicly, after checking their legibility, and record the names openly. The ballots then are burnt after the minutes of the meeting are recorded. But the letters bearing the votes of the absent prelates are saved for to be used in case the elections repeated. The election event should be recorded in the minutes of the Holy Synod meetings.

Article 43. The presiding officer will ask the prelate, who is elected Patriarch, if he accepts the election. If he agrees, his name will be proclaimed unto the Holy Synod. Then, all the prelates shall rise from their seats to pay him his accorded obedience and reverence. Afterwards, the committee supervising the election prepares a record, signed and stamped by the voting Metropolitan. The presiding officer then announces the name of the Patriarch-Elect to the crowd of faithful by ringing the church bells and conducting a thanksgiving prayer. The Patriarch-Elect concludes the prayer by giving his blessings.

Article 44. If the prelate elected refuses to accept the Patriarchate, the election will be repeated once again. Likewise, if the votes were split equal among two or more, the election will be repeated one more time. If the votes were split equal again, the prelates will resort to another way of voting. The Metropolitan shall never leave the church until the election is completed.

Article 45. If the Patriarchal Locum Tenens is the Patriarch-Elect, His Beatitude the Catholicos is the one to ask him if he accepts the election result, otherwise the most senior Metropolitan in ordination does.

Article 46. Before his inauguration, the Patriarch-Elect must agrees, in a statement attested to in the presence of a notary-public, that all that he owns, such as liquid and fixed assets wherever

they are, will be the sole property of the Patriarchal See after his death, and that nobody shall have the right to claim any of it ever.

Article 47. The Holy Synod will designate the nearest holiday, or Sunday, following the fortieth memorial prayer for the departing Patriarch, to conduct the inauguration ceremonies for the new Patriarch. The Archdioceses will be notified to attend the inauguration celebration. Likewise, the civilian authorities concerned and leaders of the other religious denominations will be informed.

Article 48. If present, His Beatitude the Catholicos shall celebrate the Holy Eucharist, otherwise, the Patriarchal Locum Tenens, or the most senior Metropolitan in ordination (in case the Patriarchal Locum Tenens is himself the Patriarch-Elect). All the prelates will join in the celebration. During the Holy Liturgy, the inauguration of the elected Patriarch will be conducted in accordance with the Syrian Antiochian Rite.

Article 49. H. H. the new Patriarch, shall take possession of the legacy (inheritance) of his predecessor from the committee which recorded the legacy, and a formal record must be kept of the proceedings.

Article 50. The patriarchal See must not be left vacant more than fifteen days, except in extreme circumstances.

Chapter Four

The Metropolitan

Article 51. The ***Metropolitan A***: presides over and administers the Archdiocese. He ordains its priests and deacons, consecrates its altars, temples and the *Tebleethos* (Θεαίεϛ). He also consecrates the Holy Oil for Baptism. He looses and binds. Moreover, he makes local laws according to familiar church traditions as long as they do not conflict with this Constitution and with local Government laws. If there is a Preliminary Spiritual Court, he is its head. In special and urgent cases, he can transfer priests from one church to another within his Archdiocese. He also can discipline any offending priests with behavioral punishments.

B: the Metropolitans Patriarchal Vicars, who are appointed to Patriarchal Vicariate, have the same administrative privileges as those of Archdioceses Metropolitans.

Article 52. The Archdiocese shall give its Metropolitan all his pastoral dues in accordance with its established customs.

Article 53. When a Metropolitan visits another church, in the presence or absence of its own Metropolitan, his name is to be proclaimed after the name of the Archdiocese Metropolitan during the Holy Liturgy and canonical prayers.

Article 54. No one shall build or renew a church, or an Altar in a church, without the consent of the Archdiocese's Metropolitan.

Article 55. *A-* Metropolitan maintains official registers (signed and sealed by the archdiocese seal) bearing records on baptisms, engagements, weddings, deaths, wills, property titles and all contracts and deeds, legacy records and spiritual decrees, and safeguards them.
B- He supervises the planning of, and approves the Archdiocese's annual budget.
C- He requires from every priest in his Archdiocese to submit an annual written report on all activities of his parish, including proper reports on births, baptisms, marriages and deaths.
D- He also confirms society, committees, clubs and all ethnic institutions affiliated with the Church. Furthermore, if any one of these is not approved by the Metropolitan, it will be considered null and its activities void.

Article 56. The Metropolitan will be vigilant in choosing the best priests whom he ordains, according to church rules and traditions after obtaining approval from H.H. the Patriarch.

Article 57. The Metropolitan has the right to submit his resignation to H. H. the Patriarch, or to retire at the age of seventy. However, his retirement is mandatory at the age of seventy five. His Holiness the Patriarch has the right to extend the term of his service.

Article 58. If a Metropolitan becomes too old to run , or becomes incapable of running his archdiocese for any reason, or if he resigns or retires, the archdiocese which he served shall provide for his living in an honorable manner. The location of his residence however, is decided by H.H. The Patriarch.

- Article 59.** If a complaint is lodged against a Metropolitan in a matter concerning the Church's faith, its canons, by-laws or its traditions, H. H. the Patriarch investigates the matter and studies it intensely, and if necessary, he dispatches a committee of Metropolitans to undertake an investigation. If the complaint is validated, the committee counsels him to avoid the causes of suspicions. However, if the accused adheres to his position, H. H. the Patriarch will convene the Holy Synod to look into his case.
- Article 60.** If the accused Metropolitan refuses to respond to the summons of the Holy Synod, H. H. the Patriarch will suspend him from performing the duties of a Metropolitan. If the accused then repents, H. H. will review his case. Otherwise, he will be subject to ecclesiastic chastisements.
- Article 61.** If a Metropolitan punishes one of his priests with ecclesiastic chastisements, he notifies H. H. the Patriarch, detailing the causes which required the action.
- Article 62.** The affidavit of any priest or deacon who complain against his bishop who punished him earlier for his transgressing behavior, is rejected.
- Article 63.** When Metropolitans visit a church, they sit in the order of their ordination seniority. Such is the case also in the Holy Synod. A Metropolitan is ahead of a bishop in all situations, even if the bishop is more senior in ordination except at his own Archdiocese.
- Article 64.** A Metropolitan shall be in charge of only one Archdiocese. But it is within the rights of the Holy Synod, or H. H. the Patriarch, to assign him temporarily over another neighboring Archdiocese when necessary.
- Article 65.** If a Metropolitan is lawfully transferred to another Archdiocese, then all that he has acquired through his service in his first Archdiocese belongs to him.
- Article 66.** The Metropolitan shall strive to continuously pray, fast, preach and guide, and to be a good example to the clergy and believers, for the prosperity of the Church.

- Article 67.** Every Metropolitan shall have Parish Councils or Boards of Directors over which he presides, or headed by his representatives in his absence, in accordance with the Unified By-laws of the Boards of Trustees with consideration to local civil laws.
- Article 68.** Every Metropolitan shall have a clerical council, presided by him, to look into the spiritual matters of the Archdiocese.
- Article 69.** Every Metropolitan shall keep at his headquarters all books, registers, wares, all possessions, property deeds and records of gifts that belong to the Archdiocese.
- Article 70.** A Metropolitan shall not receive a monk without the consent of the latter's spiritual superior, or a priest without the consent of the head of his Archdiocese, within the same region. If from another region, he will not accept him without the consent of H. H. the Patriarch.
- Article 71.** A Metropolitan shall have no right to interfere in another Archdiocese that does not belong to him. Moreover, he is not allowed to perform church services in it, except by permission from the head of that Archdiocese and with his consent. Also, if he performs any ordinations there, they are considered void, and the matter will be referred to H. H. the Patriarch.
- Article 72.** It is unlawful for a Metropolitan to designate his successor, under any circumstances. However, H. H. the Patriarch and the Holy Synod can appoint an assistant to him if need be. However, it will be proper to obtain his approval.
- Article 73.** Any Metropolitan who accepts grafts for the ordination of priests or deacons, will be suspended from his duties for a period no less than two months, and the ordinations performed will be considered invalid. If he repeats the act, he will be expelled from his bishopric office.
- Article 74.** In an Archdiocese, a Metropolitan is accountable to H.H. the Patriarch and the Holy Synod for his transgressions against the Church Constitution, and for not implementing the resolutions of the Antiochian Holy Synod. Moreover, he is responsible for all religious publications originating from his Archdiocese.

- Article 75.** *A-* The Metropolitan shall hold in remembrance the primacy of H. H. the Patriarch. He also shall remember his brothers the Metropolitans when conducting spiritual services.
- B-* He fulfills the wishes of H. H. the Patriarch, and of his brethren the Metropolitans within his abilities.
- C-* He is required to attend the regular and special sessions of the Holy Synod.
- D-* He seeks the Patriarch's permission to travel to the Patriarchal Center, and to any Archdiocese outside his region, provided that he notifies its Metropolitan upon his arrival.
- E-* He shall not negotiate with heads of other churches, or other religions religious institutions in church or spiritual matters unless permitted by H.H. the Patriarch.
- F-* He shall not lend, borrow, sponsor, or put in trust or lease the properties of the Archdiocese, or those of the churches, associations and charitable institutions, without the consent of the local Board of Trustees.
- G-* He shall not exchange, mortgage or sell any of the properties of the Archdiocese, or churches, associations, and charitable institutions without the consent of the local Board of Trustees and the Patriarch's approval.

Article 76. The Metropolitan undertakes the following matters :

- A-* He continuously visits the members of his Archdiocese.
- B-* He supervises the census and the records of the members of his Archdiocese on official registers.
- C-* He works to establish churches, to start Syriac schools, centers for religious training and other church organizations in his Archdiocese, and helps them grow.
- D-* Trains those he chooses to join the Sacred Priesthood, to exercise the customs, spiritual activities and the duties of the Priesthood.
- E-* He maintains a special record about the clergymen in his Archdiocese, containing all information pertaining to each one of them.
- F-* He submits to the Patriarch, prior to the convening of the Holy Synod's regular session, a detailed written report about his Archdiocese.
- G-* After his return from abroad on a mission, a Metropolitan shall give H.H. the Patriarch a full report.

Article 77. The Metropolitan starts a letter addressed to H.H. the Patriarch with this expression: "I kiss your right hand ...", and ends it with the expression: "your spiritual son ...".

Chapter five

Election of the Metropolitan

Article 78. An archdiocese is considered vacant in the following cases:

A- Death. *B-* Resignation, removal or retirement. *C-* Permanent physical obstacles.

Article 79. In the case of death, the priests and the Board of Trustees shall inform H. H. the Patriarch and the civil authorities. They also shall seal the deceased's legacy with "red wax" and prepare a signed record of it.

Article 80 In the case of resignation or retirement, the Archdiocese Metropolitan submits a written statement to H. H. the Patriarch to be studied by the Holy Synod.

Article 81 In case of permanent physical obstacles, the Archdiocese Metropolitan shall submit a letter of resignation to H. H. the Patriarch, signed by the clergy and the Board of Trustees, and the report shall be sent to the Holy Synod for assessment. In case he declines to renders his resignation, His Holiness the Patriarch shall have the right to resort to legal procedures to deal with the matter

Article 82 In case H. H. the Patriarch is informed of a death, he notifies all the Metropolitans of the Antiochian See. Then His Holiness or a representative designated by him, will go with a group of Metropolitans to the seat of the Archdiocese to perform the funeral service for the late Metropolitan.

Article 83. In the case of resignation and permanent obstacles, H. H. the Patriarch shall send a delegation, led by a Metropolitan, to investigate and urge him to withdraw his resignation. The delegation shall also confirm the presence of permanent obstacles as established by three specialists, and a written report is to be submitted to H.H. the Patriarch. Thereafter, His Holiness, within a week from receiving the report, shall write to the Metropolitans asking for their opinion.

- Article 84** When an Archdiocese becomes vacant, H.H. the Patriarch shall immediately appoints a Patriarchal Envoy to run its affairs.
- Article 85.** The **Patriarchal Envoy** (ἄρχιεπίσκοπος ὑποπρωτοπρεσβύτερος) must not leave the Archdiocese without the permission of H. H the Patriarch, and for a very short period of time only. He shall have no right to change anything in the Archdiocese; neither to replace the employees or promote them. He must not appoint a clergyman to the Archdiocese or meddle with its possessions. Rather, he should accurately manage its accounts regarding the income and expenses which he will relinquish to the new Metropolitan.
- Article 86.** A Metropolitan is chosen from among monk-priest (ἱερέων μοναχῶν) and is nominated by H. H. the Patriarch. He is elected by the majority of the clergy and the faithful of the Archdiocese for which he is nominated. However, if it is not possible for the faithful to do so, then the Archdiocese clergy, Boards of Trustees, church institutions and active committees will elect him, and submit his name to H.H. the Patriarch, who in turn must consult with members of the Holy Synod. If he receives the majority of their votes, he then ordains him. The Metropolitans will then exchange with him the oath of fellowship. A Bishop, however, is to be chosen from among widowed priests.
- Article 87** If the elected candidate is a widowed priest, he shall be ordained as Bishop
- Article 88.** A Metropolitan is chosen from priest-monks. He should be known for his virtuous conduct, be qualified and has studied Theology and the Syriac language. Also he should be known for his adherence to the true faith.
- Article 89.** Metropolitans who do not have their own Archdiocese, may be nominated for vacant Archdioceses.
- Article 90.** To be ordained a Metropolitan, a candidate must be at least thirty years old.
- Article 91.** If an Archdiocese could not elect a Metropolitan, within six months after the seat became vacant, then, H.H. the Patriarch and the Holy Synod have the right to choose and ordain a

Metropolitan for it following the legal procedures in accordance with this Constitution.

Article 92. If the new Metropolitan does not take up his position with the Archdiocese he is chosen for within a period of three months from the date of his appointment without a lawful excuse, the Holy Synod then will review his case.

Article 93 H. H. the Patriarch shall appoint the Patriarchal Assistant and the patriarchal vicars to the patriarchal headquarters or to vacant Archdioceses. When necessary, he shall ordain one of them a Metropolitan, after obtaining the approval of the Holy Synod.

Article 94. The new Metropolitan should correspond with all the Metropolitans to ask for the oath of fellowship.

Chapter six

The Patriarchal Assistant and The Patriarchal Vicar at the Headquarters of the Antiochian Apostolic See

Article 95. The **Patriarchal Assistant** and the **Patriarchal Vicar** of Damascus, are appointed through nomination by H. H. the Patriarch and the consent of the Holy Synod. Their rank shall be that of a Metropolitan, and their privileges are the same as those of the active Metropolitans.

Article 96. The Patriarchal Assistant's functions shall include the following:

A- He presides over the spiritual Court of Appeals. His Holiness the Patriarch may vest this responsibility to others whenever he wants. The president of the spiritual court of appeals

must inform H. H. about each case, and no decision shall be taken without the approval of the Patriarch..

- B-** He Supervises the Patriarchal secretariat, along with its financial, organizational and internal affairs.
- C-** Whenever necessary, he is delegated by H. H. the Patriarch to oversee the affairs of Patriarchal Vicariates and churches that are directly administrated by H. H. the Patriarch, or any other Archdiocese.
- D-** He is name is mentioned after that of the Patriarchal Vicar in the churches of the Damascus Patriarchal Archdiocese. He sits directly to the left of H. H. the Patriarch.

Article 97. The Patriarchal Vicar's function in Damascus includes the following :

- A-** He presides over the Preliminary Spiritual Court in Damascus.
- B-** He heads the Board of Trustees in the Patriarchal Archdiocese on behalf of His Holiness the Patriarch..
- C-** He reviews the status of the Archdiocese, visits the faithful, and performs spiritual services.
- D-** He grants all certificates issued by the Patriarchal Vicariate in Damascus.
- E-** He keeps all records pertaining to the Archdiocese.
- F-** His pastoral name is mentioned after the name of H.H. the Patriarch in the Patriarchal churches of the Damascus Archdiocese. He also sits at the right side of the Holy Altar.

Chapter Seven

The Holy Synod

Article 98. The **Holy Synod** is headed by H.H. the Patriarch, and is composed of all Metropolitans of the Antiochian Archdioceses of the Apostolic See, the Patriarchal Vicars of the Metropolitan rank as well as the Patriarchal Assistant.

Article 99 The Holy Synod convenes, by an invitation of its president H. H. the Patriarch, every two years, and whenever deemed necessary. However, if H. H. the Patriarch, under normal circumstances, fails to invite the Synod to three consecutive sessions, the Holy Synod then has the right to meet, headed by the most senior Metropolitan in ordination.

Article 100. When deemed necessary, H. H. the Patriarch calls for a General Synod, headed by His Holiness, where all members of both Synods of Damascus and India, including His Beatitude the Catholicos will attend under the presidency of H.H. the Patriarch.

Article 101. If a Metropolitan fails to attend the meetings of the Holy Synod without a valid excuse he will receive a warning from the latter. If his absence is repeated appropriate measures will be taken against him.

Article 103 The Synod is considered in a lawful quorum if attended by two thirds of its members. Its decisions will be considered enforceable when voted for by the majority.

Article 104. The Holy Synod has the following functions:

A - Election and consecration H. H. the Patriarch.

B - Approval of a Patriarch's nominee for the Episcopal rank.

C -Questioning and impeachment of H.H. the Patriarch and the Metropolitans.

D -Looking into religious heresies and violations of church traditions and regulations, and judging the offenders, be they clerics or laity, and taking disciplinary actions against them.

Article 105 A-The Matter of referral of H.H. the Patriarch to the Holy Synod for questioning shall not be looked into unless a written request is submitted by 2/3 of Synod members to two most senior Metropolitans who are members of the Holy Synod.

B - It is not permitted to take H.H. the Patriarch into the Holy Synod for impeachment, unless approved by two thirds of the Holy Synod members.

- C** - If, within one month, the Synod fails to reach its decision, H.H. the Patriarch will be considered innocent according to the laws, without further need for a decision in that regard.
- D** - The Holy Synod shall announce its judgement upon the Patriarch, in accordance with the Church rules and laws, by a two thirds majority of the attending members. The other one-third who fail to attend should give their opinion in writing. If the Patriarch is found guilty and is relieved from his position, then the Apostolic See will be declared vacant. In such a case, the specific articles relating to the election of a Patriarchal Locum Tenens, and the election of a new Patriarch will be implemented in accordance with this Constitution.

Chapter Eight

Priests, Deacons and their Duties

Article 105. To be ordained a **Priest** (ܦܘܪܝܫܘܬܐ) a candidate must be known for his piety and good conduct, zeal gentleness, good health, and blemishlessness. He must have, studied the Holy Bible along with its commentaries, completed his Theological studies, read some books of the church fathers and its canonical books and by-laws, learned the Syriac language and the language of the land where he is to be ordained, learned church rites with sufficient hymns, and church music. Further, he must be married only one time.

Article 106. In order to be ordained, a priest must be, at least, twenty three years old in the extreme necessity.

Article 107. A priest is ordained for a particular church, through a lawful election, devoting his full-time for its service. Priests beyond the needs of a church should not be ordained. However when necessary, it is permitted to ordain a part-time priest according to prescribed rules.

Article 108. The duty of the Priest is to minister the church mysteries with piety and reverence, preach to the believers, visit their homes teaching Christian principles, visit the sick, help reconcile adversaries and guide them to receive the Holy Sacraments. He is to seek the sheltered poor taking care of them. He is also to observe the status of his parish especially that of the young ones. He himself should be a good example for the faithful.

Article 109 A priest is not to conclude a contract or bless a marriage ceremony without obtaining a permit from the Metropolitan of the Archdiocese and only after submitting the necessary documents, otherwise he shall be subject to ecclesiastic discipline. Moreover, a priest is not allowed to have his own stamp or official licenses bearing his name unless authorized to do so by his Metropolitan, and only in urgent necessity.

Article 110 If a priest acts improperly as to the administration of any of the church mysteries or by-laws, demonstrate misconduct, then his Metropolitan will have the right to suspend him from service, and discipline him accordingly with ecclesiastical chastisement. However, if he persists in his deviation to the point of causing offenses within the church, his case will be referred to H. H. the Patriarch who alone has the right to strip him from priesthood and to issue his excommunication.

Article 111. A priest is not to bless a believer in the presence of prelates.

Article 112. A priest is not to be transferred from one Archdiocese to another, except in extreme necessities, and with the approval of the Metropolitans of both Archdioceses and the consent of H. H. the Patriarch.

Article 113. A priest shall be considered resigned or retired at the age of seventy (70). If necessary, the Metropolitan of the Archdiocese may extend the term of his service.

Article 114. A resigned or retired priest is not permitted to return to service at any parish unless approved by the two Metropolitans and confirmed by H. H. the Patriarch.

Article 115 A priest who is retired lawfully for reaching retirement age can serve in any parish that chooses him with the approval of its Metropolitan and confirmation of His Holiness the Patriarch.

Article 116 The retired priest receives a pension according to the rules and regulations of the Archdiocese and the Parish of the country he lives in. His pension from the Archdiocese shall be stopped if he serves in another Archdiocese.

Article 117 In case of death of a priest the Archdiocese shall provide the cost of living for his wife and his under-age children according to the regulations of the country he lives in.

Article 118 If a priest leaves his church in defiance of his Metropolitan, he is not to be accepted in another church, and he shall be subject to ecclesiastic disciplinary action. If he persists in his defiance he will be given a final warning. If he still does not comply, His Holiness will strip him of Priesthood at the request of his Metropolitan.

Article 119. An Archpriest (Ἄρχιερεύς) is higher in rank among priests (ἱερεῖς). No priest is elevated to the rank of an Archpriest without a request from the Metropolitan of the Archdiocese, and a written permission from H. H. the Patriarch, provided that there will be no more than one Archpriest in one city.

Article 120. He who is under the age of 16, may not be ordained as Sub-deacon. Likewise, a person who is below the age of twenty two may not be ordained as Deacon. To be ordained as Deacon, one must have gone through the lower ranks of : Chanter, Reader and Sub-deacon.

Article 121. No one is to be ordained **Archdeacon** (Ἀρχιδιάκονος) before reaching the age of forty, and the candidate must be known by his good conduct, knowledge in religion and church rites. There is to be only one Archdeacon per Archdiocese.

Article 122. No Deaconess (ἀδελφὴ διάκονος) is ordained as Chanter (ἀδελφὸς ψάλτης) before reaching fifteen years of age.

Article 123. A clergyman who strays from the church and follows another denomination, and then later repents and returns to its bosom, shall not be promoted above the rank which he had at the time of his stray regardless of his qualifications. Likewise, he who has been chastised with severe ecclesiastical punishments shall not be promoted.

Article 124. If a cleric (ἐπίσκοπος) from another church joins this church, he is not to be elevated above the rank he holds unless approved by H. H. the Patriarch.

Chapter Nine

Clerical Vestments

Article 125. H. H. The Patriarch wears purple cloth and a black robe with purple hems. He also wear a cross and two icons on his chest, the monastic hood (ἀσπίς) and the turban (βάσις πόαι) on his head.

Article 126. The Metropolitan wears purple or black cloth with red hems and buttons, and a black robe with purple hems. He also wears a cross and an icon on his chest, the monastic hood and the turban on his head.

Article 127. A- The Archpriest wears a violet girdle, a black robe with violet hems, a black cloth with purple buttons, a black hat and a black skull-cap (ῥιπίς) on his head.

B- If H. H. the Patriarch awards an archpriest (by a recommendation from his Metropolitan) with a cross, he should wear it only when he represents the Archdiocese Metropolitan at official functions, and on the Lord's Holidays.

Article 128. The Priest wears a black cloth and robe, a black hat or a black skull-cap on his head.

Article 129. The Monk wears a black cloth and robe, a monastic hood on his head and a black hat.

Article 130. No one is allowed to alter any of the church clerical vestments at all.

Article 131. The clergy are permitted to wear special attire according to rules and customs of the clergy of the lands which they serve in. However, letting of the beard is necessary for all clergy.

Chapter Ten

Monasticism

Article 132. The monastic vows are: celibacy (chastity), obedience and voluntary poverty. The pursuers of monastic life, from both genders, must be bound by these.

Article 133. The seeker of monasticism must have good conduct and good reputation. He shall not wear the monastic habit until after a probation period.

Article 134. No one under the age of twenty shall wear the monastic habit.

Article 135. A monk who is a beginners shall dress according to the code in article 129 of this Constitution.

Article 136. A nun wears a monastic hood and a habit according to the rules of her location.

Article 137. H. H. the Patriarch is the Supreme Head of the monasteries and monastic centers of both genders. He is the one who appoints and dismisses their abbots. Moreover, he transfers monks and nuns from one monastery to another, and from one center to another, with the knowledge of the monastery's abbot.

Article 138. No monk shall travel from one region into another without a written permission from H. H. the Patriarch.

Article 139. Every monastery or monastic order has its own internal regulations, approved by H. H. the Patriarch, and observed by all who will join, males or females.

Chapter Eleven

Prayer and the Sacraments

Article 140. Prayer is a religious duty of all believers, male and female, in the morning and evening. One station (ⲡⲁⲁⲘⲥ) of prayer includes the Trisagion (ⲡⲓⲓⲟⲉⲓ ⲁⲁⲂⲥ) and the Lord's Prayer. Also, prayer is usually concluded by reciting the Creed (ⲉⲓⲁⲁⲥ ⲓⲁⲓⲁⲁⲉⲥ) of faith and the Angelic Salutation (ⲟⲁⲁⲥ ⲁⲁⲥⲃⲓⲥ). Whereas, Syriac is the liturgical language in the Syrian Antiochian Church, local language in conjunction with it may be used.

Article 141. The clergy, with all their different ranks, must say the canonical prayers including the common daily (ⲟⲓⲓⲁⲥ) prayer in the morning and evening, and whoever neglects this, without an acceptable excuse, falls into iniquity.

Article 142. All clergy shall submit to the lawful Sacrament of Confession before the legitimate Priest.

Article 143. Adult believers, men and women, should confess and receive the Holy Communion at least twice a year. This is also required from the Godparent, at baptism, and from couples to be married prior to the wedding ceremony.

Article 144. A priest is permitted to perform two Masses on one day, at the same church, on the same altar after he replaces the tablitho (Ⲑ̀ⲉⲁⲓⲉϥ). This is done for the sake of the growth of the church.

Article 145. The Archdiocese Metropolitan has the right to permit the believers to partake of the Holy Sacraments after a public confession and the receiving of absolution, provided that they fast at least three hours prior to receiving the Communion.

Article 146. Among the graces of God granted to the church, are the Seven Sacraments. They are: Baptism, Chrism (Confirmation), Repentance and Confession, Holy Communion, Priesthood, Matrimony and Anointment of the sick. Metropolitans and priests must urge the believers to practice these Holy Sacraments and encourage them to exercise the Sacrament of Anointment the sick when necessary.

Chapter Twelve

The Sacrament of Matrimony

Article 147. In the Syrian Orthodox Church, *Matrimony* is a Holy Sacrament and a lawful bond between a Syrian Orthodox man and woman. It is concluded by the designated Priest who blesses the wedding in the presence of just Christian witnesses.

Article 148. It is permitted to perform a wedding if one of the two parties is a non-Syrian Orthodox Christian.

Article 149. It is forbidden to perform a wedding or bless a matrimonial ceremony during the fasts of : Christmas, Nineva, the first and last weeks of Lent and all the other fasts. However, only

the Archdiocese Metropolitan has the right to permit the performance of marriage ceremonies during the fast of the Apostles and that of the Virgin Mary, and in urgent cases.

Chapter Thirteen

Sunday and Holidays

Article 150. The Lord's Day (Sunday) should be observed. So should the following Lord's (*ὑψηλὸς ἁγίασις*) Holidays: Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, Presentation in the Temple & Simon the Elder, Annunciation, Easter, Ascension, Transfiguration and that of the Cross Likewise, holidays of the Virgin Lady and of the Saints which the church decreed should be observed. Moreover, the Metropolitan of an Archdiocese has the right to move some of the non-Lord's (*ὑψηλὸς ἄς ἁγίασις*) and the minor (*ὑψηλὸς ἁγίασις ὀυαῖς*) Lord's Holidays to other convenient days.

Chapter Fourteen

Clergy Inheritance

Article 151. The Apostolic see of the syrian orthodox church of Antion is the sole heir of all properties left by a deceased Patriarch, be it movable or immovable. His kindred or any other person or persons shall have no right to claim any of these properties. Any claim to any such properties shall be null and void.

Article 152. The possessions of a Metropolitan must be identified and defined at the time of his ordination. A Metropolitan may dispose of his own properties only. He may not dispose of the properties and possessions of the Archdiocese or the Archdiocese headquarters. Any properties acquired shall be divided equally, after his death, between the Patriarchate and

the Archdiocese. As for the Bishop who has children, the movable assets shall be divided equally between his children and the Patriarchate. If the will of the deceased is in contrast to this item, consideration shall be given to this item.

Article 153. Immediately before his ordination, a Metropolitan shall pledge, by signing a document attested by a Notary Public, that all his possessions no matter where they are, will be the property of the Archdiocese and the Patriarchate, after his death, divided equally. No one under any circumstances shall have the right to claim any of his properties and possessions. There shall be no heir to him except the Church. This also applies to retired Metropolitans.

Article 154 If a monk dies, all that he owns shall be inherited by his monastery or by the honorable Patriarchate.

Article 155. The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch owns all its churches, monasteries, worship places, cemeteries, schools, real estate and endowments. This includes all the possessions and properties of its churches and centers such as manuscripts, printed books, vessels, clerical vests, furniture of the Patriarchate and the Archdioceses. The ownership of these properties and assets can never be disputed or contested by any body whatsoever. If it happens that an individual or a group separates from the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and joins another denomination, they shall have absolutely no right to claim any of the above mentioned properties or possessions. Any claim filed by anybody, be it an individual or a group, large or small, shall be positively and absolutely null and void.

Article 156. The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch has a special dress code for its patriarchs, Metropolitans and the rest of its clergy as defined in chapter nine of this Constitution. Therefore, if an individual or a group of individuals from the clergy decide to separate and join an alien denomination, they will not have the right to use the above-mentioned dress code anymore.

Conclusion

Article 157. Any article that contradicts with the provisions of this Constitution will be considered invalid null and void.

Article 158. This constitution will be in force as of the date of its sanctification and publication by H.H. the Patriarch.

Damascus: September 26th. 1998

We hereby sanction this
Constitution
Patriarch Ignatius Zaka I
Iwas