Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk begins a working visit to the Antiochian Orthodox Church



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On the 20th of January, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, arrived in Lebanon. Metropolitan Anthony was accompanied by Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, Adviser to His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, Deputy Chairman Department for External Church Relations, and Priest Alexander Ershov, Assistant to the Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations.

On arrival in Beirut, Metropolitan Anthony and his entourage went to the Metochion of the Russian

Orthodox Church, where they were warmly welcomed by its rector, Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East.

The delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church then visited the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Jal El Dib, which is being reconstructed with the assistance of DECR with funding fr om the Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage. Since 2020, with the blessing of the ruling bishop of the local diocese of the Patriarchate of Antioch, Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon, services have been held in this church for the Russian Orthodox community of Lebanon.

Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon and Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, accompanied by local clergy and Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), performed a thanksgiving service.

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Lebanon, A.N. Rudakov, Executive Director of the Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage, E.I. Skopenko, manager of the reconstruction of the church, architect D. Naamen, and numerous parishioners of the Russian Orthodox community were present at the service.

Prayers were said in Arabic and Church Slavonic.

At the end of the service, Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon addressed the dignitaries with words of greeting: "I pray that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Holy Protector of this church, together with St. John the Baptist, St. Anthony and St. Silouan may offer protection to your delegation during your visit to the territory of our Antiochian Church, and that this visit may be fruitful. The whole world now needs our prayers and the prayers of God's heavenly benefactors, so that we may all remain in peace".

"I am grateful for the good, holy relations between our two Churches - Antiochian and Russian," the hierarch added. – "I would like to express special gratitude personally to His Eminence Metropolitan Anthony and all the members of his delegation, because the brotherly love and friendship that exists between us is very important in today's world."

Bishop Silouan noted that receiving guests fr om the Russian Orthodox Church was a great joy for him and for the members of the community of the Church of the Annunciation in Jal el Dib. Those people live in Lebanon, but have come fr om all over the world - from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and other countries: "These people have come to Lebanon from different places, but here they live together and also participate in the Divine services. We hope that in a few months the restoration work will be completed and services will once again be held in the church".

In his response, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, stressed that all members of the delegation were very happy to visit the blessed Antiochian Orthodox Church, its diocese of Mount Lebanon, starting their visit with the Church of the Annunciation in Jal El Dib.

Vladyka Anthony visited this church just over a year ago. "When Father Philip and I came here, he told me about the idea of building a church for those believers who have a spiritual connection with the Moscow Patriarchate," said the Metropolitan. - "We prayed then at this place and asked God's blessing for this endeavour. And now we thank God, because the active phase of restoration of the church has begun. We prayed today that the Lord would bless the speedy completion of this project so that there would soon be a home for all believers who would like to pray in their native language and follow the Russian Orthodox liturgical tradition." Metropolitan Anthony stressed that was made possible thanks to the blessing of His Holiness, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon, as well with the great assistance of the Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage.

"Vladyka Silouan, for many years you have lived abroad, wh ere you served the flock of the Antiochian Orthodox Church staying outside Lebanon, so you know fr om your own experience how important it is for people who live far from their homeland to feel at home in the Church," said the Chairman of the DECR. - "You have given us such an opportunity here, and we are very grateful for it. We pray for God's aid in your work and for God's blessings in the ministry of the Church of Antioch. We understand that this ministry is carried out under difficult circumstances, so please know that you have full support of the Russian Orthodox Church. We are always with you in our prayers".

The representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), stressed: "The visit of Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk to the Patriarchate of Antioch begins with the ancient Lebanese land, with the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was given to us with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Silouan for the needs of the community of the Russian Orthodox Church in Lebanon. Today you can see what work has already been accomplished, thanks to the assistance of the Fund for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage and the work of Vladyka Silouan's assistants.

He mentioned that the congregation gathered that day to pray for the continuation of the work and for that church to be a place of attraction for the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church living in the country, wh ere they could come every day and wh ere liturgical life could be built on the basis of Russian Orthodox liturgical tradition. In conclusion, Archimandrite Philip presented Metropolitan Anthony with a panagia in the form of a Lebanese cedar.

The DECR Chairman and his entourage were then invited to the metropolis of the Mount of Lebanon, wh ere they had a conversation with Metropolitan Silouan. The hierarchs exchanged views on the situation of Christians in the Middle East and around the world and discussed a number of other topics of mutual interest. As a memento of the meeting Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk presented Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon with a holy panagia.

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