



## The Antiochian Metochion in Moscow celebrates the birthday of Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis



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On December 4, 2024, the Feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple and his 83rd birthday, Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis, Representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus', celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the Holy Archangel Gabriel, assisted by clergy of the Antiochian Orthodox Church's Metochion. The Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, sent heartfelt congratulations to Metropolitan Niphon.

In the evening, a reception was held at the Antiochian Metochion to mark the birthday of its rector.

Addresses to Metropolitan Niphon were delivered by the Advisor to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus', Protopriest Nikolai Balashov; the Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for the Middle East and Africa, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia M.L. Bogdanov; the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Lebanese Republic to the Russian Federation, Shawki Bou Nassar; and representatives of Russian and Lebanese society.

Protopriest Nikolai, conveying congratulations from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, highlighted

Metropolitan Niphon's remarkable achievements over 47 years of pastoral and ecclesiastical-diplomatic service in Moscow and his well-deserved high reputation. He reminded those present of the 65th anniversary of Metropolitan Niphon's ordination, celebrated earlier this year. Father Nikolai emphasized that Metropolitan Niphon's work has always been directed toward strengthening Orthodox unity and fostering friendship among peoples. He praised the Metropolitan as a good shepherd to many faithful and a wise spiritual mentor not only for Orthodox Christians but also for generations of diplomats from various countries who have come to serve in Moscow. This was evidenced by the diverse gathering at the reception, Father Nikolai noted, concluding with a wish for the speedy establishment of a just peace in the Metropolitan's homeland of Lebanon, scarred by war.

The reception was attended by ambassadors from Australia, Austria, Albania, Argentina, Bahrain, Belgium, Bulgaria, Brazil, Greece, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Canada, Qatar, Cyprus, Colombia, Kuwait, the League of Arab States, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United States, South Korea, Romania, and Switzerland, as well as representatives of public organizations, the Executive Director of the Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage, E.I. Skopenko, clergy, and parishioners of the Metochion.

In his concluding remarks, Metropolitan Niphon thanked everyone who joined him in the celebration. "For me, this celebration is an occasion to thank God for His gifts, which prolong the days of my life so that I may glorify His name by performing good deeds and live with great hope on a peaceful planet where love for God and one's neighbor are the two main commandments," said the hierarch.

The Metropolitan continued: "For 65 years of my life, I have been honored to serve the Church, which has been and remains my entire world. Of those, 47 years have been dedicated to my ecclesiastical service in the Soviet Union and Russia, and I am deeply impressed by the traditions and spirituality of Orthodox Russians. I have faced many challenges, difficulties, and trials, met with Church leaders, heads of state, politicians, diplomats, believers, and non-believers, the rich and the poor; in this way, I became one of those who witnessed history. By God's mercy, I carried the cross prepared for me, and in the twilight of my life, by God's will, I successfully built a church in my hometown in honor of the icon of the Mother of God, 'Unexpected Joy,' thus fulfilling my dream."

Metropolitan Niphon also mentioned that the consecration of this church in the Lebanese city of Zahle is planned for May 18, 2025.