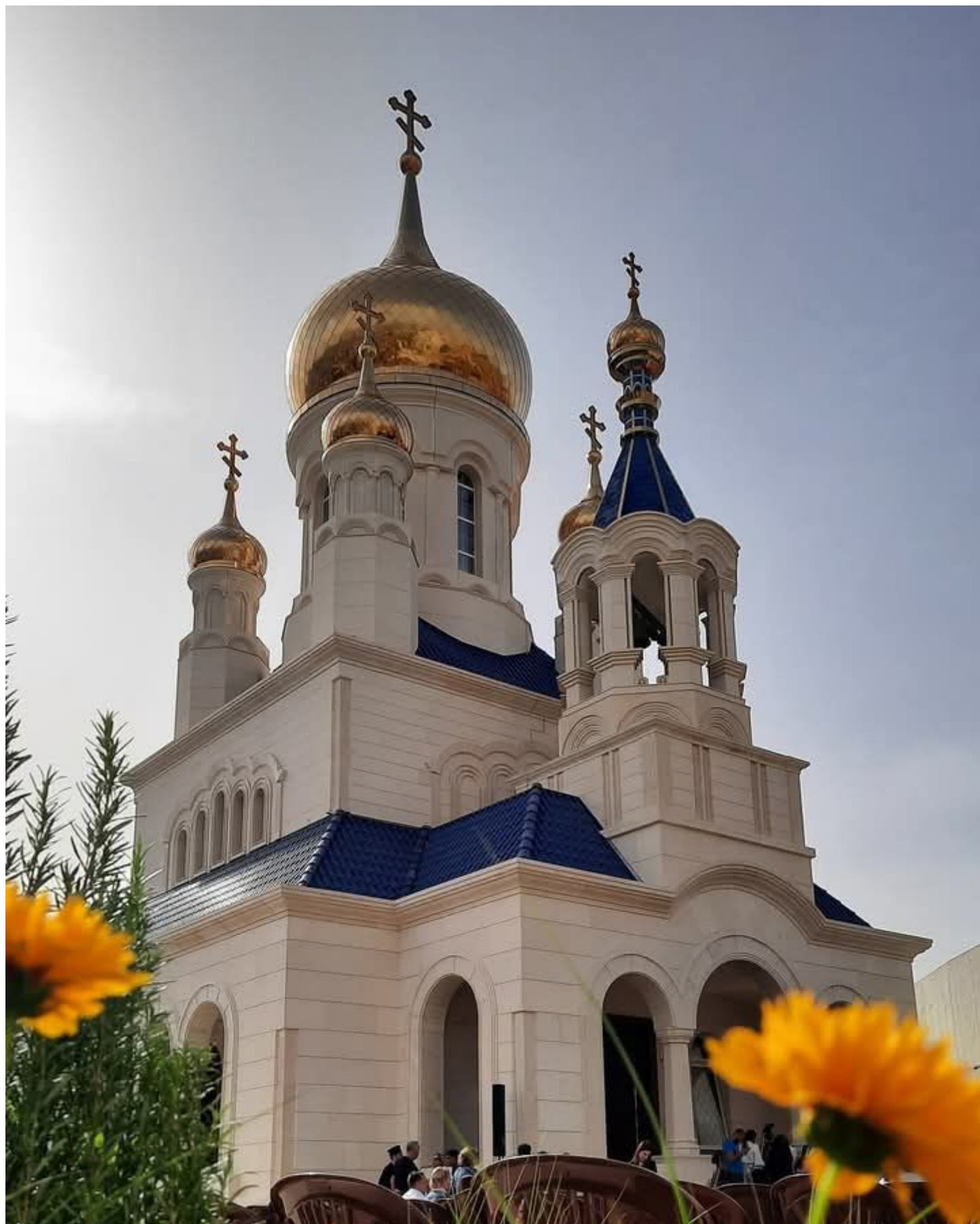




**THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Department for External Church Relations

## **Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk takes part in the consecration of a church in Zahlé, Lebanon**



**DECR Communication Service, 18/05/2025**

On 18<sup>th</sup> May 2025, during his work trip to Lebanon, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, took part in the celebrations

marking the great consecration of the Church of the “Unexpected Joy” Icon of the Mother of God in the city of Zahlé.

The church in the Russian style was built on the initiative of Metropolitan Nifon of Philippiopolis, Representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus’, in his home city. The construction works continued from 2019 to 2024 and were carried out with the financial assistance of the Foundation for Support of Christian Culture and Heritage and with donations from private benefactors.

Taking part in the festive divine service together with Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk were the following hierarchs of the Russian Church and the Church of Antioch: Metropolitan Antonios of Zahlé and Baalbek, Metropolitan Nifon of Philippiopolis, Metropolitan Elias of Tyre and Sidon, Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon, Metropolitan Feodor of Volgograd and Kamyshin, and Metropolitan Alexy of Chelyabinsk and Miass.

The archpastors, in concelebration with an assembly of clergymen, performed the rite of the great consecration and celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the newly consecrated church. Among those who took part in the divine service were Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, Adviser to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus’; Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), Representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus’ to the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Rector of the Russian Orthodox Church’s Metochion in Lebanon; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR Deputy Chairman; Archimandrite Seraphim (Shemyatovsky), Rector of the Moscow Metochion of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia; Archpriest Daniel Andrejuk, Representative of the Orthodox Church in America to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus’; Priest Nikolai Vasin, Secretary to the DECR Chairman; and other clerics of the two Patriarchates.

The liturgical prayers were read in the Arabic, Greek, and Church Slavonic languages.

Among those in attendance were Mr Tarek Mitri, Deputy Prime Minister of Lebanon; Mr Elias Nicolas Bou Saab, Deputy Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament; Mr Alexander Rudakov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Lebanon; Mr Valér Franko, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic to the Republic of Lebanon; Mr Vladimir Yakunin, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation; Mr Yegor Skopenko, Executive Director of the Foundation for Support of Christian Culture and Heritage; as well as representatives of the local Muslim community and non-Orthodox Christian denominations, and Lebanese public and political figures.

After the divine service, Metropolitan Antonios of Zahlé and Baalbek warmly greeted all those present.

Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk also addressed the participants in the celebrations, conveying to them cordial greetings from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'. His Eminence noted that on the day of the consecration Metropolitan Nifon's dream of many years to build a church in the Russian style in his home city finally had finally come true. Now the newly constructed church shines with its golden domes, Metropolitan Anthony added. As the DECR chairman also pointed out, the Russian Orthodox Church had been happy to help implement the plan of Metropolitan Nifon, who has been worthily serving as Representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch to Moscow for 48 years and has gained widespread fame and deep respect there, and who has come to love Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church as ardently and wholeheartedly as his own homeland. The DECR chairman emphasised that the church in Zahlé became a visible symbol of that love, and its consecration was of great importance not only for Zahlé and Lebanon, but also for the relations between the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Moscow Patriarchate. Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk handed over to Metropolitan Nifon a high church award – the Order of the Venerable Andrew the Iconographer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, conferred on His Eminence Nifon in consideration of his contribution to the construction of the Church of the “Unexpected Joy” Icon of the Mother of God in Zahlé and on the occasion of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his diaconal ordination. As memorable gifts, Metropolitan Anthony presented a holy panagia to Metropolitan Nifon and an altar cross to the church.

Metropolitan Nifon expressed his deep gratitude to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, saying that he felt His Holiness's presence thanks to the presence of his representative, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, and other hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The benefactors who had contributed to the construction of the church received Patriarchal awards.

The blessing of a museum located in the church territory took place after the Liturgy. After that, Metropolitan Nifon of Philippopolis invited the participants in the celebrations to a festive dinner.