



Summer Institute for students of the University of Balamand takes place in Russia



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From 25th July to 6th August 2026, Summer Institute was organized in Russia for students of St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology of the University of Balamand, Orthodox Church of Antioch. It was done with the blessing of His Beatitude Patriarch John X of the Great Antioch and All the East and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'. The Summer Institute programme, prepared by the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, was aimed at acquainting Orthodox students from Lebanon with the life of the Russian Orthodox Church and activities of its higher educational institutions.

The delegation, which included 14 students, was led by Archimandrite Chrysostomos (El Mecherki), Assistant Professor of St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology of the University of Balamand.

On 26th July, the delegation members took part in **patronal celebrations at the Moscow Metochion of the Orthodox Church of Antioch**. Celebrating the Divine Liturgy in the Metochion Church on the feast day were Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, and hierarchs of the Orthodox Church of Antioch – Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis, Representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'; Metropolitan Silouan of Byblos, Botrys and Dependencies (Mount Lebanon); and Metropolitan Antonios of Zahleh, Baalbek and Dependencies. Among their concelebrants were Archimandrite Chrysostomos (El Mecherki) and ordained students of the University of Balamand – Priest Silouan Jbara, Priest Athanasios Makhoul and Hierodeacon Arsenius (Koussa). Some of the liturgical hymns were performed in the Arabic language by a student choir of the Balamand University.

Later that day, the delegation members visited Saints Martha and Mary Convent of Mercy. During an excursion organized for them there, they learned about the convent's history and were shown around the Memorial House of the Venerable Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna.

On 27th July, the guests visited the Stavropegic Monastery of St. Andrew, where they received a warm welcome from its abbot, Hegumen Dionisy (Shlenov), Director of the Synodal Library of the Russian Orthodox Church. Father Dionisy told the students about the monastery's life in the past and at the present day, showed them around the Synodal Library and read a lecture in the Greek language.

From St. Andrew's Monastery, the delegation departed for the Pokrovsky Stavropegial Convent (of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos). While there, they venerated the holy relics of Blessed Matrona of Moscow and were shown around the convent's museum complex.

Later that day, the students visited St. Tikhon's Orthodox University of the Humanities. They were joined by Metropolitan Antonios of Zahleh and Baalbek, who **was also visiting Moscow** at the time, and Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis. Archpriest Konstantin Polskov, Vice-Rector for Research and International Work of St. Tikhon's University, gave the guests a tour of the University's historical building in Likhov Lane which in the past had been the seat of the Diocesan House. The excursion was followed by a meeting with the Rector of St. Tikhon's University, Bishop Mefody of Yegoryevsk.

In the evening, the students took a walk in Red Square.

On 28th July, the Feast of the Baptism of Rus', Archimandrite Chrysostomos and ordained members of the delegation were among the concelebrants of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' who officiated at the **Divine Liturgy** in the Holy Dormition Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin. In the altar, Father Chrysostomos and the students had a brief conversation with His Holiness. The Primate of the Russian Church warmly greeted the Antiochian students, expressing his pleasure at their visit to Russia,

and presented them with commemorative gifts.

Later that day, the participants in the Summer Institute visited the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, went on an excursion to the Diamond Fund of the Moscow Kremlin and visited the Stavropegial Convent of the Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos by St. Anna, where they were shown around an underground museum devoted to the convent's history.

On 29th July, the students of the University of Balamand made a pilgrimage to the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius Lavra. The guests venerated the relics of St. Sergius of Radonezh and the Trinity Icon by St. Andrew Rublev, visited the Holy Dormition Cathedral, the Refectory Church of St. Sergius and the Museum of Christian Art – Church-Archaeological Cabinet – of the Moscow Theological Academy. Visiting the Lavra that day were also hierarchs of the Patriarchate of Antioch – Metropolitan Antonios of Zahleh and Baalbek and Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis. The hierarchs and the students met with the Rector of the Moscow Theological Academy, Bishop Kirill of Sergiyev-Posad and Dmitrov. After the meeting, Priest Antony Borisov, Professor of the Moscow Theological Academy, read a lecture in English on inter-Christian dialogue for the Summer Institute students.

On 30th July, the students visited Saints Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies. The guests went on an excursion to the Patriarchal Chernigov Metochion and met with the Institute's Rector, Archpriest Maxim Kozlov. During the meeting, Father Maxim gave a brief overview of the Institute's activities. After the meeting, the students attended a lecture in English delivered by the Head of the Department of Church History and Ecclesiastical Law of Sts. Cyril and Methodius Institute of Postgraduate Studies, Ms Natalya Semenova.

Later that day, the guests visited the Sretensky Stavropegial Monastery and the Sretenskaya Theological Academy. A coenobite of the monastery and lecturer of the Academy – Hierodeacon Vasily (Nemets) – delivered a lecture in English for the students of the Summer Institute. After the lecture, the delegation members shared a repast with students of the Sretenskaya Academy.

On 31st July – 2nd August, the representatives of the University of Balamand visited the Nizhny Novgorod Diocese. On 1st August, the commemoration day of St. Seraphim of Sarov, Archimandrite Chrysostomos (El Mecherki) and ordained members of the delegation were among the concelebrants of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' who officiated at the Divine Liturgy in the Convent of St. Seraphim of Sarov in Diveyevo. On 2nd August, the guests concelebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Holy Trinity Cathedral of the Diveyevo Convent with Archbishop Stefan of Gomel and Zhlobin. While in the Nizhny Novgorod Diocese, the students visited the Holy Resurrection Cathedral, the Museum of Russian Patriarchs and St. Nicholas Convent in Arzamas, as well as the Nizhny Novgorod Kremlin. At the conclusion of their trip to the Nizhny Novgorod Diocese, Archimandrite Chrysostomos gave an

interview to local media.

In the evening of the 2nd of August, the participants in the Summer Institute arrived in St. Petersburg. On 3rd August, they visited the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and met with the Secretary of its Academic Council and Head of its International Department, Archpriest Dimitry Sizonenko. On 4th August, the delegation took part in patronal celebrations at the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Equal-to-the-Apostles, in Pavlovsk. There, they were warmly greeted by the Chairman of the Protocol Department of the St. Petersburg Diocese, Mr Ivan Sudosa.

While in St. Petersburg, the guests also visited the Cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God, St. Isaac Cathedral, the Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood, St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra, the Novodevichy Convent, the Convent of St. John on River Karpovka, the Chapel of the Blessed Xenia of Petersburg in the Smolenskoye Cemetery and the Peter and Paul Fortress. The delegation members also went on excursions to the Pavlovsk Palace and the Royal Cathedral of the Feodorovskaya Icon of the Mother of God in the town of Pushkin.

On 6th August, the participants in the Summer Institute concluded their visit to Russia.

Accompanying the representatives of the University of Balamand on their trip were staff members of the DECR Secretariat for Inter-Orthodox Relations – Deacon Sergy Monakhov and Mr Konstantin Shilin, as well as interpreter Majeed Raffoul.

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