Festive events held in Balamand to mark the 80th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church metochion in Lebanon



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On 31 October 2026, a delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate, headed by Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, attended festive events at the Patriarchal Monastery of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos in Balamand, marking the 80th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church Metochion in Lebanon.

Metropolitan Anthony and those accompanying him were invited to a reception hosted by His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East. The Russian Orthodox Church was also

represented at the meeting by Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, Advisor to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, Deputy Chairman of the DECR; Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), Representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' to the Patriarchal See of Antioch; and Priest Nikolai Vasin, Secretary to the DECR Chairman. The Antiochian Orthodox Church was represented by Metropolitan Silouan of Mount Lebanon, Metropolitan Anthony of Zahle and Baalbek, Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis, Representative of the Patriarch of Antioch to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus', and Archimandrite George (Yacoub), Abbot of Balamand Monastery. The Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia was represented by Archimandrite Seraphim (Shemyatovsky), Rector of its Metochion in Moscow. Also attending the meeting were A.N. Rudakov, Ambassador of Russia to Lebanon; S.V. Stepashin, Chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (IOPS); Wadih Haddad, Head of the IOPS Representative Office in Lebanon; Jacques Sarraf, Honorary Consul of Russia in Lebanon; and I. Warrak, President of the University of Balamand.

A concert by the Moscow Patriarchate Synodal Choir and the Choir of St John of Damascus of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Balamand was then held in the monastery's assembly hall.

The concert programme featured liturgical chants, as well as classical and contemporary sacred compositions by Russian and Lebanese composers, including Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Dmitry Bortniansky and Andrew Michael. The choirs also performed a Lebanese hymn entitled "My Joy, Christ Is Risen!", recently composed by Jack Naoum and Bassam Azar and inspired by the well-known words of St Seraphim of Sarov. The Synodal Choir concluded its performance with the Russian songs "Kalinka" and "Katyusha". The concert ended with both choirs performing the song "Polyushko-Pole" together.

The guests at the festive evening were then addressed by His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East, who expressed his admiration for the concert. "What we have heard today is the language of angels," said the Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Church.

"We thank the Lord for our fraternal relations, which have continued for centuries," His Beatitude Patriarch John emphasised.

He recalled that the first Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church was Metropolitan Michael of Kiev, a native of the Syrian city of Safita. The Antiochian Church had contributed to the elevation of the Russian Church to the dignity of a Patriarchate in the 16th century. In 1917, when revolution was raging in Russia, the Antiochian Orthodox Church collected and sent donations to support the Russian Orthodox Church. "And during the difficult times that we have experienced, the Russian Orthodox Church has always stood by us and helped us," Patriarch John added. His Beatitude also expressed gratitude for the assistance provided by the Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage.

His Beatitude offered a prayer for Russia and for the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church. "We express our love for you and pray for everyone," the Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Church said in conclusion.

In his turn, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk noted that the concert marked the beginning of the festive celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Russian Metochion in Lebanon. "The chants performed belong to different musical traditions. On the one hand, they reflect the centuries-old history of the Antiochian Church, while on the other, they represent the relatively young Russian tradition of church singing. Yet both traditions serve a common purpose: to glorify God and inspire the faithful to prayer. It is in this diversity that our unity lies, and this unity is reflected in the relations between the Russian and Antiochian Orthodox Churches," the DECR Chairman noted.

On behalf of His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus', he conveyed his gratitude to His Beatitude Patriarch John "for his care for the Russian-speaking flock residing in Lebanon, Syria, the Arabian Peninsula and all the countries where the ancient Patriarchate of Antioch carries out its ministry". He continued: "For your dedication to the cause of Church unity, for your readiness to proclaim God's truth, and for the courage and fortitude with which you lead the Antiochian Church amid the trials faced today by your long-suffering flock. The prayers and support of the Russian Orthodox Church have been, are and will remain with you. And we shall always stand together," Metropolitan Anthony assured him.

As a token of prayerful remembrance, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk presented the Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Church with a panagia depicting the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God.

A festive dinner was subsequently hosted on behalf of His Beatitude Patriarch John of Antioch.

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