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**Into the Heart of Antioch: The North American Delegation to the Antiochian Unity Conference [Excerpt]**

In late June, an historic event took place in the life of the Church of Antioch: the first Antiochian Unity Conference, called by His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, to gather together representatives of the Patriarchate from across the globe. The conference was held in Balamand, Lebanon, from June 25 to 29, and concluded on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul with a massive outdoor Patriarchal Liturgy on the grounds of Balamand University, attended by faithful from across the region as well as those gathered for the Conference.

This gathering occurred during a momentous time for our ancient Patriarchate of Antioch. A strong and ascendant Patriarch, John X, in the early stages of his leadership, guides the Church with love and joy in the Holy Spirit, while the Church carries a heavy cross: the historic homeland of the Patriarchate in Syria suffers war and the constant threat of violence, and the Church in Lebanon struggles with the burdens of life on the doorstep of war. The discussions of the conference were informed by the presence in spirit of the brother of Patriarch John, His Eminence Metropolitan Paul of Aleppo, abducted during the conflict over a year ago, along with Syriac Metropolitan Yohanna of Aleppo. ...

Our North American Archdiocese was well represented at the conference, including an official delegation of nine members, as well as other attending hierarchs and invited clergy and laity. Over twenty people in total were present from the Archdiocese. The official delegation included Archpriests Thomas Zain and Timothy Ferguson, representing the clergy; Fawaz El-Khoury and Daniel Braun, for the Board of Trustees; Daniel Abraham, for the Order of St. Ignatius; Violet Robbat, for the Antiochian Women; Khalil Samara, for the Fellowship of St. John; Jordan Kurzum, for SOYO; and Douglas Cramer, for the Department of Internet Ministry. Very Rev. Fr. Michel Najim also attended, having been asked by His Beatitude to deliver one of the conference's major papers. ...



**Patriarch John X with Fr. Michel Najim**

The official delegation stayed during the conference in historic Byblos, Lebanon, on the Mediterranean coast, and commuted each day to the Balamand, enabling them to plan and speak together in order to provide a single witness and representation on behalf of the Archdiocese. Over the course of the conference, His Beatitude Patriarch John X took time to meet separately with the hierarchs, the clergy, and the laity who were in attendance from North America, in order to deepen the mutual love and communion between our Archdiocese and the Patriarchate of Antioch, during the final period of our transition following the passing of His Eminence Metropolitan Philip of thrice-blessed memory. ...

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