

Final Communiqué

Bishops Synod June 2011

In the week preceding Pentecost, in the light of the Holy Spirit, and under the presidency of His Beatitude Bechara Peter RAI, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, with the participation of His Beatitude and Eminence Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir, their Excellencies, the Bishops of the Maronite Church, those living in Lebanon, or in the eparchies within the patriarchal territory or coming from abroad : Syria, Holy Land, Egypt, Cyprus, Europe, USA, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Australia, met together for their yearly Synod in the Patriarchal See in Bkerkeh from 5 June to June 11. Their spiritual retreat was preached by Father Maroun Mbarak, the Lebanese Missionary, under the title “Bishop of 2012”. They began with a prayer for the repose of the souls of late Bishops Francis Zayek and Youssef Mahfouz. They studied the subjects on the agenda dealing specially with church questions, pastoral, social or administrative and national matters. At the end of the synod, they issued the following communiqué:

1 – In the opening speech, His Beatitude the Patriarch thanked the Fathers of the Synod, for electing him father and head of the Maronite Church and expressed in their name the esteem of the Synod for His Beatitude and Eminence Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir and the pride of all in his wise and loving leadership. He asked the Fathers to seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit so that they may read the signs of times properly and discern God’s will and do accordingly. Then, entrusting all of them to Mary’s intercession and protection, in this fragile time of the region’s history, he gave the agenda of the Synod, wishing that its resolutions and recommendations would be up to the expectations and hopes set upon it.

2 – First, the Fathers applied themselves to study the report of the patriarchal committee for liturgy. They praised its work and expressed their satisfaction for its latest achievements, the most important of which is the ritual of the Sacrament of Penance. They, hence, underlined the importance of giving this sacrament its proper place in the Church and mentioned the necessity to carry reconciliation to the parishes and wherever they can. They also requested their sons and daughters to return to the purity of the Gospel so that they are effectively among the children of the kingdom.

The Fathers welcomed also the new translations into the local languages from the original Syriac text of the Missal, the Sacrament and ritual books, as they help to preserve the identity and the Church unity in the countries abroad. The additional liturgical publications expected for the coming days will help the faithful to participate in the liturgical ceremonies and gain spiritual fruits.

3 – The Fathers listened to the reports presented about the Maronite seminaries which are: Saint Maron at Ghazir, Saint Antony of Padua at Karm Saddeh, Saint Augustine at Kafra and Our Lady of Lebanon in Washington. They thanked God for the seriousness and knowledge which those in charge of them enjoy and for the strong devotion in forming vocations to priesthood and the necessary preparation to join in the service of the sacraments, the word and charity. They recommended that those in charge of the schools strengthen coordination among themselves and intensify the missionary spirit, free giving of self and formation in the spirituality of the cross. Given the importance of priestly formation, His Beatitude appealed to consecrate Wednesday 15 June to study more closely the situation of the seminaries with all those concerned, to reach more cooperation in these schools, work at implementing the chart of the Maronite education in all schools and issue the recommendations related to what

must be the formation of the priest of tomorrow. Finally, the Fathers saw the necessity to establish a center to care for preparing priests called upon to serve abroad, especially since the necessity there for generous workers is growing. All these matters were present in recent visit of His Beatitude to the seminaries in Lebanon and the hope of visiting the seminary of Washington in the near time.

4 – The Fathers listened also to reports about the situation of some eparchies, among which Jbeil, Batroun, Lattakia, the Vicariates of Jebbeh and Sarba, eparchies of Haifa and the Holy Land, and Europe. They were informed about the needs of the patriarchal curia and took the necessary resolutions about it.

Then, the Bishops of the eparchies of Mexico, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, and Europe presented the situation of their sons and daughters with the expectations of these eparchies, specifically the hopes, sufferings and most important, the achievements. They insisted upon their urgent need for priests from Lebanon to help them, because communities are growing and their needs increasing.

5 – Following that, the Fathers dwelt a long time upon the challenges of the Church abroad. They assured that the Maronite expansion has become international, efficient, and interactive with most cultures and an integral part of our Church identity. While the basic challenge is in preserving the identity with the inhabitants of the countries where they live in witnessing to the faith before peoples and cooperate with their Churches in reviving Christian life, we still have to improve the management of this new situation on the organizational, parochial and spiritual levels for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

6 - At the start of the service of our Father the new Patriarch, and in accordance with the recommendations of the Maronite Patriarchal Synod and the paternal instructions of His Beatitude, the Fathers reviewed the suggested plan for the administrative and pastoral cadre in Bkerkeh on the theological bases which are summed up in rendering efficient collegiality and communion.

7 – The Fathers dwelt upon the situation of church tribunals, discussed the report presented about these tribunals during the year 2010 and remarked, with regret that the number of cases presented last year is increasing. This requires exerting more pastoral efforts to preserve family unity, and imposes upon the faithful more sacrifice, to be patient about the difficulties met in marital life, and deepen their faith and its requirements so that our families remain a witness of unity and love.

8 – The Fathers received also the study of the latest developments reached by the committee in charge of reconsidering the Particular law of the Maronite Church. After praising the efforts of those working at it, they hoped that the result of these studies be implemented in the near future.

9 – As for the national general question, the Fathers valued completely the Muslim-Christian summit held at Bkerkeh and hoped for much from the new dynamism which it created. They also hoped that much would come out of the meeting held recently by the Maronite leaders and deputies at Bkerkeh in response to the invitation of His Beatitude. They were optimistic about what resulted from the summit with the hopes to strengthen unity in the country, the consequence of which is to assure more stability, development and root deeply the constitutional life built upon effective democracy, the preservation of man's dignity and the earnest endeavor to preserve Lebanon's message and its prosperity.

While the Fathers assume again the necessity to return to the national basics and call for working towards reaching a united strategic view to move Lebanon forward in its efficient conciliatory democratic system, they

appreciate the withstanding of the Lebanese before the storms and their preserving their actual relations. They are sorry for the sharp division which still imprints the country's political life and impairs the work of the constitutional institutions. This has had the consequence to multiply the daily life crises for all the groups of the Lebanese people, harming, in particular, the poor and needy. They also wonder about the reasons behind the crippling delay in forming the government and do not understand the continuation of the state of stagnation gripping the formation which increases the recession in the different economic sectors. This also harms the production sectors directly, especially since we are on the entrance of the summer season. But that which increases the complication of the situation is the fast developments around us. This situation affects negatively the stability of Lebanon and its prosperity. That is why the Fathers appeal to all to return to their purity of origin and reject their differences and unite their ranks out of the national basics. The country, if united, can overcome all crises and the Lebanese, if they want, can quickly find the solutions to all the problems which the small homeland is suffering from, after having eliminated all the obstacles which hinder the start in the "repair shop" of all institutions.

10 – In this historical stage which the region is going through, the Fathers remind everyone of what the assembly of the last Synod, special for the Middle East Churches, said that violence cannot establish democratic values. Democracy is a long way built brick after brick, so that the citizens reach, through it, a civil system built upon equality, similar opportunities and liberty of expression and creed. The Fathers of the Synod join their voice to the voice of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, raising prayer with him, so that violence stops in all its aspects, specially the bloodshed, and that the concerned authorities initiate dialogue with their citizens, to respond to the legitimate expectations of the rising young generations, which aim towards a promising and stable future.

11 – In conclusion, on the eve of the Pentecost, the Fathers call upon all to realize their responsibilities and work with all their power to affirm security and peace. They call upon their sons and daughters to raise their faces towards heaven and thank the Heavenly Father, who granted us the spirit of the Son, the Paraclete, so that we may always follow the way of peace and remain faithful to the witness of love and unity in spite of the pressures surrounding us. They finally request their co-citizens in the homeland, and their sons and daughters, to never give up the national unity Pact among themselves which is based upon noble spiritual values and high moral examples. For all unity, be it humanitarian, social or cultural is a gift from the Spirit who continually calls us to establish peace in our homelands and live together in love. Only love builds homelands, preserves societies, guards the good and establishes the foundations for a just and permanent peace.
