

MONK'S TONSURE AND NOVICES' CASSOCK BLESSING AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On the 13th/26th of December 2023, in the chapel of the Holy Pentecost in the hall of the Patriarchate, H.H.B our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos held a monk's tonsure for novice Andreas Hatzistabulidis, giving him the name Alexander. The new monk has ministered successfully in Praetorium, Gethsemane and Bethlehem. At the same time, His Beatitude blessed the monastic cassocks for novices Alexander and Christos who have been serving at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

His Beatitude addressed the new monk and the cassock-clad novices with words of encouragement, underlining the honour and the responsibility of a monk's membership in the Order of the "Spoudaioi" (Studios) of the Holy Sepulchre.

In the spirit of these words and in view of the Christmas Feast, His Beatitude wished the monk and the novices for strength from above for a worthy Holy Sepulchre witness to this thirsty world, inspired by the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ.

From Secretariat-General

PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF CHURCHES URGE GAZA CEASEFIRE IN THE HOLY SEASON DURING A MEETING WITH DIPLOMATS

In a gathering at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches along with Ambassadors, Consul-Generals and Representatives of diplomatic missions assembled to address the challenges faced in the Holy Land, especially in light of the approaching Christmas season. His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, opened the session with a message of hope and spiritual significance, invoking the words from the Gospel of Saint John. Amid the cordial atmosphere, the Patriarch urged for a ceasefire in Gaza, emphasizing the need to protect community service institutions.

Expressing concerns about the challenges faced by Christians in the Holy Land, including systematic attacks by radical Israeli groups, the Patriarch of Jerusalem called for preserving the multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious fabric of Jerusalem. He emphasized the importance of stability and secure Christian Quarters for the thriving coexistence of all residents. The Patriarch conveyed his wishes for a swift return of peace and a Christmas season marked by hope.

The gathering included discussions on the challenging situations in Gaza and Bethlehem. The Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, shared the dire circumstances in Gaza, emphasizing the importance of supporting those who choose to stay in the besieged Strip. The Custos of the Holy Land, Father Francesco Patton, stressed the effects of Israel's military closures and the subsequent

economic challenges in Bethlehem, underlining the significance of connectivity between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Various Christian spiritual leaders conveyed messages of peace and discussed pressing issues, such as the pressure on Christian schools to change their curriculum into an Israeli one, which was expressively articulated by the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, Husam Naom. The issue of the illegitimate Israeli municipal taxes over Church property was also highlighted, and the need for international support to navigate challenges faced by the Holy Land Christians.

In response, diplomatic representatives expressed support, with Jordan, the EU, Egypt, and France affirming their commitment to engagement and assistance. The meeting highlighted the urgent call for a ceasefire to ensure a peaceful Christmas celebration and reiterated the importance of diplomatic collaboration to address ongoing challenges in the Holy Land.

From Secretariat-General

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL LEADERS UNITE FOR PEACE IN GAZA AT JERUSALEM MEETING

December 18, 2023

Jerusalem, The Holy Land

In a momentous gathering at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem earlier today, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem convened to address pressing matters relating to the

war in Gaza and the holiday season. The meeting commenced with a heartfelt prayer, underscoring the spiritual significance of the assembly. His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, extended gratitude for the esteemed participants, acknowledging the importance of collective wisdom.

One of the focal points of discussion was the crafting and endorsement of a unified Christmas message. The Heads of Churches dedicated time to formulate a message that embodies hope, peace, and spiritual unity, intending to convey a shared voice during the forthcoming Christmas season.

A pivotal decision emerged as the leaders resolved to meet collectively with the President of Israel. Their objective is to earnestly reiterate their plea for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and advocate for the restoration of peace amid the tumultuous situation.

Acknowledging the sombre reality of the escalating civilian casualties in Gaza, the Heads of Churches reached a consensus to maintain the tradition of seasonal visits in a more subdued manner. This adjustment reflects the churches' stance to temper celebratory activities while mourning the profound losses endured during these challenging times.

The celebration of Christmas in Bethlehem and the revered procession of the Heads of Churches, along with the faithful, to the Church of the Nativity were discussed with great reverence. A notable point raised was the request to the Israeli government to permit the entrance of Heads of Churches, Priests, and laity through the checkpoint at Rachel's Tomb. The leaders reiterated their commitment to celebrating the festive occasion with modesty, demonstrating solidarity with those affected by the ravages of war.

This gathering of spiritual leaders not only emphasized the spiritual significance of the season but also showcased a profound commitment to advocating for peace, underscoring the

gravity of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza.

From Secretariat-General

ARMENIAN COMMUNITY LEADERS IN JERUSALEM SEEK SUPPORT FROM PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III AMIDST EXISTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Jerusalem, December 16, 2023

Representatives of institutions of the Armenian community in Jerusalem engaged in a momentous visit to the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, where His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, graciously received them. The meeting served as a platform for community representatives to express gratitude, discuss recent existential challenges, and seek guidance from the Patriarch.

In light of recent adversities stemming from the aggressive actions of Israeli radicals, the Armenian community highlighted the lack of restraint by the Israeli police. The source of contention revolves around an illegitimate land deal concerning Church property, mirroring a situation akin to that of the Orthodox Patriarchate Jaffa Gate properties.

During the meeting, the community representatives extended their gratitude to Patriarch Theophilos and presented an official letter outlining the complexities they face. They passionately appealed for assistance in resolving the issues, acknowledging H.B.'s pivotal role in safeguarding the

interests of the Christian community in Jerusalem.

In response, His Beatitude expressed his awareness of the challenges faced by the Armenian community and assured them of His commitment to providing support. The Patriarch of Jerusalem recommended that the community should collaborate closely with their spiritual leadership, emphasizing the imperative of unity among Christian communities to fortify the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

His Beatitude extended His blessings to the Armenian community, lauding their courageous initiative in addressing the prevailing challenges. As the meeting concluded, the Patriarch conveyed His heartfelt wishes for a blessed Christmas season, fostering a spirit of hope and solidarity among the Christian brethren in Jerusalem.

This interaction stands as a testament to the unwavering commitment of Patriarch Theophilos to advocate for unity, peace, and justice within the fervent Christian communities of the Holy Land.

From Secretariat-General

**THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM
ADDRESSES THE URGENCY FOR A
CEASEFIRE IN GAZA AND AFFIRMS
COMMITMENT TO MULTIRELIGIOUS**

COEXISTENCE IN JERUSALEM

Tuesday, December 13, 2023

In a diplomatic visit, His Excellency Ambassador Sebastian Molina, the Representative of Chile to Ramallah, received a cordial welcome from The Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Theophilos III, at the Orthodox Patriarchate in the Holy City.

H.B. Opened his remarks with the hope of a quick ending to the atrocities in Gaza through an immediate ceasefire. H.E. Sebastian Molina reflected on his country's position regarding the war. He also highlighted the substantial number of Palestinian Orthodox Christians who migrated from Beit Jala, Bethlehem, and Shepherd's Field to Chile over the last two centuries. The Ambassador stressed that those Palestinian migrants and their descendants maintain a deep desire to uphold their pastoral and spiritual connection with the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, their Mother Church and the Mother of all churches.

Despite the Jerusalem Patriarchate's designating their pastoral responsibility to the Church of Antioch in the United States, as the Canon Laws of the Church dictate, the Patriarchate through H.B. expressed its genuine interest in keeping them in thought and prayer as well as personal engagement.

H.B. Theophilos III emphasized the religious significance of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, advocating for a solution to political problems based on shared values from the scriptures: love for all, peace, and reconciliation. H.B. assured the Patriarchate of Jerusalem's pledge to defend the Status Quo in Jerusalem under the Hashemite Custodianship of King Abdullah and to promote respect for every individual in the city as the image of God.

Touching upon challenges with radical Israelis seeking

exclusive control of Jerusalem, the Patriarch of Jerusalem underscored the city's multicultural and multireligious character. He added: "This inclusivity is evident in the thousands of pilgrims visiting holy places, particularly the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, irrespective of religious or ethnic backgrounds." H.B. pointed out that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem collaborates with other churches to advocate for peace and protect the rights of Christians in the Holy Land, rooted in the agreement between Patriarch Sophronios and Khalif Omar bin Khattab in the 7th century, recognizing the Patriarch of Jerusalem as an Ethnarch.

H.B. The Patriarch of Jerusalem also highlighted joint efforts of churches in sustaining schools where Christians and Muslims study together, fostering an environment for peaceful coexistence in society. H.E. Ambassador Sebastian Molina expressed gratitude for the update provided by His Beatitude and pledged to be cooperative and supportive of the Churches of the Holy Land. The meeting concluded with the exchange of gifts and expressions of gratitude.

From Secretariat-General

THE HEAD OF THE RUSSIAN MISSION IN JERUSALEM (MISSIA) VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

On Monday, November 28/December 11, 2023, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos received the Head of the Russian Spiritual Mission (MISSIA) Archimandrite Vassianos and Archimandrite Nikon for a visit to express thanks for His wishes on the Name Day of H.H.B. the Patriarch of Moscow Cyril

and to ask Him to send a Hierarch to the ceremony marking 150 years since the foundation of the Russian Monastery in Jericho, near the sycamore tree of Zacchaeus.

Likewise, Archimandrite Vassianos asked for the blessing of His Beatitude, so that the Russian Spiritual Mission (MISSIA) will celebrate a Divine Liturgy in the Basilica of the Nativity of Bethlehem on December 22nd 2023/January 4th 2024 in view of the approaching Christmas Eve, December 25, 2023 /7th January 2024.

From Secretariat-General

HIS BEATITUDE AWARDS A PRIEST

On Saturday, November 26/ December 9, 2023, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos honoured the Head of the Rum Orthodox Community of Bir Zeit, reverend Priest Stavros Aranki with the medal of the Cross-bearer, in recognition of his dedicated Priestly ministry.

His Beatitude praised the Priest for his prosperous ministry so far and wished him to continue likewise by the help of the Holy Cross, for the benefit of the Christian flock of the Patriarchate.

From Secretariat-General

THE NEW HEAD OF THE RUSSIAN SPIRITUAL MISSION TO JERUSALEM (MISSIA) VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

On the morning of Monday, November 7/20, 2023, the new Head of the Russian Spiritual Mission to Jerusalem (MISSIA), Reverend Archimandrite Vassianos, visited the Patriarchate, accompanied by Archimandrite Nikon and asked for the blessing of His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos upon assuming his duties. Archimandrite Vassianos conveyed the wishes of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Moscow, Cyril and His thanks for Patriarch Theophilos' indicated interest in the Churches of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine and for the unity of the Orthodox Churches.

The new Superior Archimandrite Vassianos was received with praise by H.H.B. wishing him a fruitful service in the Russian Mission (MISSIA) within the framework of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, based on the always good relations of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Patriarchate of Moscow. This relationship is strengthened by the fact that the Church of Jerusalem is based on the Cross, of the redemptive blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His empty Tomb, testifying to the Resurrection.

In support of his ministry, His Beatitude presented Archimandrite Vassianos with an Archimandrite's Cross, the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Gethsemane and the renovated Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre and Chrysostom Papadopoulos's approved book of the History of the Church of Jerusalem.

From Secretariat-General

CHRISTIAN ACTIVISTS VISIT THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM IN SUPPORT OF HALTING NON- RELIGIOUS CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS IN SOLIDARITY WITH GAZA

Jerusalem, November 18, 2023

A high delegation representing the diverse Christian civil society institutions in Jerusalem, visited His Beatitude Theophilos III, The Patriarch of Jerusalem, at the Orthodox Patriarchate's headquarters. The purpose of their visit was to express gratitude for the decision taken by the Holy Land Churches to suspend all non-religious ceremonial celebrations of the Christmas Advent and Christmas feast. This decision is in response to the ongoing war in Gaza, aiming to show respect for the lives lost in the war and the suffering endured by civilians.

During the meeting, the representatives expressed their desire to co-sign the appeal issued by the Patriarchs and heads of Churches in Jerusalem, endorsing the call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. They delivered a signed letter in support of the churches' position on this matter.

The group strongly condemned the tragic atrocities in Gaza,

particularly the killing of 18 individuals in Saint Porphyrios' Church and the 500 lives lost at the Anglican Church hospital. In response, the Patriarch reassured the delegation that this year's Christmas celebrations would be marked by solemnity and reflection, refraining from the usual festivities due to the current situation.

His Beatitude emphasized the significance of the Christian presence in the Holy Land, the cradle of Christianity. Despite challenges posed by radical Israeli elements, the Patriarch affirmed his commitment to preserve the indigenous Christian presence and declared the land as a land for its people. He urged Christians to manifest their presence through participation in Christmas festivities, albeit in a more sombre manner this year.

Acknowledging the responsibility towards the people in Gaza, the Patriarch of Jerusalem emphasized the sanctity of every human life as an image of God. He proposed the formation of a group of individuals to maintain constant communication, working together to promote an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. The representatives affirmed their commitment to continue their engagement, scheduling another meeting with H.B. the Patriarch to further address matters of peace and solidarity with Gaza.

From Secretariat-General

THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

AND THE ITALIAN CONSUL GENERAL HOLD A MEETING ADDRESSING GAZA CRISIS

Jerusalem, November 14, 2023

Today, His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, received in His office His Excellency Mr. Domenico Bellato, the Consul General of Italy in Jerusalem. The meeting comes at the onset of His Excellency's tenure, which commenced on October 8, 2023.

During the meeting, the Consul General conveyed his government's point of view on the ongoing war in Gaza and emphasized the importance of ensuring the safe departure of Italian citizens residing in the affected areas.

The Consul General sought insight into the Patriarchate's perspective on the political situation, prompting His Beatitude to stress the role of faith leaders in diffusing tensions. His Beatitude emphasized the need to envision a future beyond the conflict, promoting peace for all residents of the Holy Land.

Patriarch Theophilos also expressed concern for all the residents of Gaza who have been victims of unbearable living conditions. He called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and a total halt of all hostilities.

The Patriarch asserted the importance of preserving Jerusalem's multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious character and the historical significance of agreements, such as that between Caliph Omar Bin Al-Khattab and the Patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronios.

His Beatitude stressed the importance of the Hashemite

custodianship over Muslim and Christian Holy Places and the adherence to the Status Quo while raising concerns regarding the Christian presence and threats posed by radical Israeli groups in various locations, including Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives.

His Beatitude underscored the collaborative efforts among churches to uphold biblical values of love, coexistence, and peace.

The meeting concluded with expressions of gratitude and an exchange of gifts, cementing the Consul General's commitment to fostering positive relationships for the well-being of Christians and all residents in the Holy Land.

From Secretariat-General