



❖ *The Holy Synod of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East* ❖

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARIAT

**Decrees of the Third Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East,
Convoked by His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch**

By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Third Holy Synod held under the presidency of His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East was convened in the Patriarchal Cell in the city of Erbil, Iraq, from the 22-27 April, in the year of our Lord 2024.

The Prelates that were present in the Synod are as follows:

1. His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia, Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon and Patriarchal Vicar General
2. His Beatitude Mar Afram Athneil, Metropolitan of Syria
3. His Beatitude Mar Awgin Kuriakose, Metropolitan of India and the Gulf Countries
4. His Grace Mar Aprim Khamis, Bishop of the Western USA
5. His Grace Mar Odisho Oraham, Bishop of Scandinavia & Germany
6. His Grace Mar Narsai Benyamin, Bishop of Iran, Armenia and Georgia
7. His Grace Mar Paulus Benjamin, Bishop of the Eastern USA
8. His Grace Mar Ahrs Youkhannan, Bishop of Dohuk and Nineveh
9. His Grace Mar Benyamin Elya, Bishop of Victoria and New Zealand and Secretary to the Holy Synod
10. His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis, Bishop of Western Europe and Ukraine
11. His Grace Mar Elia Isaac, Bishop of Baghdad



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Introduction

Placing its hope in the divine succour of God the Father, and the grace of the Only-Begotten Son, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who operates in all things according to His Holy will, the third Holy Synod convened under the presidency of the father of fathers, His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, who sits on the Apostolic See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and occupies the Apostolic Throne as the heir of the Apostolic preaching of the Blessed Apostles, St. Thomas of the Twelve, and Ss. Addai and Mari from the Seventy-Two, who are known as the Disciples of the East, and are the blessed founders of this Holy Church.

The Holy Synod prayed for world peace, especially in the countries of the Middle East region. Armed conflicts and the killing of human beings are against the holy will of God our Creator. The Holy Synod beseeches Almighty God to guide the leaders of the various governments of the world so that they may spread peace among nations.

The Holy Synod deliberated on numerous matters concerning the spiritual life of the faithful; in particular, in today's world, many challenges are arising against the Faith and true Christian morality. Therefore, the Synod exhorts the prelates as shepherds and heads of their dioceses and to the priests who are the spiritual fathers of the faithful in their parishes, that they have a divinely mandated responsibility to protect this Christian flock that has been purchased by the precious Blood of Christ from all teachings that are against the Holy Scriptures and the received Apostolic Tradition of the Church. The Synod reflected on various matters that are related to internal management of the Church, matters such as the holy liturgy, the mission and role of hierarchs and priests in the Church, synodal commissions, and financial management, having taken decisions that are related to Church life and also some internal decisions related to Church management with respect to canon law, liturgical services and the faith of the Church.

The Holy Synod also approved the publication of three synodal documents to guide the faithful in strengthening their faith and regular Church life. The first document concerns dialogue between the Assyrian Church of the East and other apostolic Churches and a statement by the hierarchs concerning the perpetual fidelity to the Church's faith, leadership and Tradition. The second document is titled the Synodal Document on Christian Marriage and Issues of Human Sexuality, which provides a didactic guideline to issues relating to the Church's understanding of Christian marriage in the light of the Holy Apostolic Tradition, and as elucidated in Sacred Scripture. It also touches upon issues of human sexuality prevalent in the daily life of the faithful in our modern day. The third document addresses the importance of Fasting and Prayer in the Church, as indispensable spiritual pillars upon which the Christian life is fixed. This Holy Synod



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counsels the faithful of the Church to equip themselves with fasting, and especially fasting of a spiritual nature, which is the purpose of the bodily fast. Therefore, we beseech in prayer that the children of the Church are constantly contemplating the above-mentioned matters so as to fulfill the holy will of our Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls and participation in everlasting life— “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” Matthew 6:16.

Hierarchical Covenant of Fidelity

The members of the Holy Synod affirmed by their signatures an official document of Fidelity that is transparent and outlines the essential elements for every dialogue that is current or that may take place in the future between the Assyrian Church of the East and any other (apostolic) Church. These primary and essential elements affirm that the hierarchs of our Church will unceasingly hold without division the sovereignty of our Church’s governance (leadership), which has always been independent from the time of the Blessed Apostles up to the present, and forever.

With these various dialogues, our Holy Church will preserve without any change or confusion its Faith, Teachings, Liturgy, Dogma of its Forefathers, Traditions, Theology, Christology, Language and all its Eastern Assyrian ecclesiastical heritage.

This Oath of Fidelity is signed and confirmed by the signatures of the hierarchs, the members of the current Holy Synod, and will be required of all future hierarchs who will become members of the Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East to also adhere to this oath. This Covenant of Faithfulness will be observed without any change in our Church until the Second Triumphant Coming of the Only-Begotten Son of God our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Synodical Statement Concerning Christian Marriage and Issues of Human Sexuality

This synodical statement is intended to be a clear and definitive statement from the Church’s highest authority concerning matters related to the proper understanding of Christian marriage and the divine and ecclesiastical laws dealing with diverse issues of human sexuality and Christian morality. Therefore, the faithful of the Church are called to adhere to the teachings found herein with the full assent of their will and mind, receiving them for the advancement of their life in Christ and for the spiritual good of their souls.



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As the Holy Church has in past times, again we reaffirm the eternal truth of Christian marriage as an inseparable bond between one man and one woman, both of whom come together for the begetting of children in a common sacred struggle to live perfectly in the light and love of Christ Jesus. Therefore, the union of the husband and the wife, by divine positive law, is intended to last everlasting and to be monogamous. The Sacred Scriptures declare this clearly and unequivocally: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24; cf. Matthew 19:4-5).

Synodical Statement on Fasting

In today's world, many challenges lead Christians away from dedicated Christian living. The Holy Synod, concerned about the spiritual well-being of the faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East worldwide, has developed a guide to fasting to help them remain in the faith and engage in the spiritual labour of fasting more actively. The Synod emphasises the need for faithfulness in this matter, as it is a spiritual deed that offers more significant benefits than mere physical struggle. Fasting is an indispensable way to examine the soul, to seek repentance, and to return to God. As St Ephraim teaches us: "Fasting purifies the soul, so that it may gaze at God and grow in His presence."

Since the Holy Church has set various periods of fasting throughout the liturgical seasons, we can actively renew and grow in our faith year after year. With each passing year, we can see fasting in a new light, thus helping us to grow spiritually in the love, knowledge, and faith in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. St. Ephraim again teaches us about the effects of fasting: "For the person that fasts, it heals, profits, sets free, instructs, conquers, gives radiance, and gladdens."



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The Decrees of the Holy Synod
Public

1. The Holy Synod decrees that His Grace Mar Abris Youkhanan will be the chairman of the Synodal Theological Commission, and Reverend Saaman Dawod is admitted as a member.
2. The Holy Synod decrees that His Beatitude Mar Awgin Kuriakose, Their Graces Mar Narsai Benyamin and Mar Elia Isaac are appointed as members to the Synodal Canonical Commission.
3. The Holy Synod confirmed the retirement of His Grace Mar Aprim Khamis will retire from his episcopal duties as the bishop of the Diocese of Western USA on June 1st, 2024, due to the canonical retirement of hierarchs having reached the age of 75, and in accord with the Synodal Canon of 2022, Decree 3 convened by His Holiness Mar Awa III, which states: 'The Holy Synod decreed that the canonical age of retirement of hierarchs will be 75 years of age. It is required that all Metropolitans and Bishops upon reaching the age of 75 submit their request for retirement in writing to the Catholicos-Patriarch. If the Holy Synod requests from the hierarch to extend his service due to the needs of the Church, then the hierarch may continue his service for the period that is required of him. In addition, the Church is required to look after the needs of livelihood of the retired hierarch.' The Holy Synod thanks His Grace Mar Aprim Khamis for his 51 years of service to the Holy Church and we pray for his physical and spiritual health. From the 1st of June 2024, the Diocese of Western USA will be administered by the Patriarchal See until such time as a Bishop is assigned to permanently head the diocese.
4. The Holy Synod has accepted and approved the request for early retirement by His Grace Mar Emmanuel Joseph, in accord with Decree 2 point 3 of 2022, which states... All hierarchs are free to submit their resignation from their active archiepiscopal or episcopal duties for valid personal reasons, even if they have not yet reached the age of 75. However, the Holy Synod must grant permission for this early retirement. The Synod offers its deep gratitude to His Grace Mar Emmanuel Joseph for his 33-year service to the Holy Church, and we pray that God may grant him good health. Therefore, the Patriarchal See will administer the Diocese of Canada until a new Bishop is permanently assigned to govern the diocese.



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5. The Holy Synod decreed a commemoration to be included in the Church Liturgical Calendar for St. Mar Isaac of Nineveh, to be observed on the Fifth Sunday of the Great Fast. The Synod also agreed that a commemoration be assigned commemorating Abgar Ukkama of Edessa, the first believing king in Christendom. The Liturgical Committee will propose a day for his commemoration.
6. The Synod discussed the uniformity of the clerical attire of hierarchs and priests. The diocesan bishop will expound the contents of this decree to the priests in his diocese.
7. For the year 2025, the Assyrian Church of the East will organize an academic conference on an international level to commemorate the 1700th anniversary of the convocation of the Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council of Christendom, convened in the year 325 AD. The theme of this conference will concentrate on the Assyrian Church of the East's reception of the Council of Nicaea. His Grace Mar Elia will assist with the organization of the conference.
8. The Holy Synod decreed that there be fixed age minimum requirements for the minor orders of Readers and Sub-deacons. Thus, Readers are not to be ordained below the age of 14 years, and Sub-deacons are not to be ordered below the age of 16 years. The canonical minimum age of ordination for Deacons is 18, as already established by canon law.
9. The Holy Synod decreed unanimously, that Bishop Mar Yohanan Yoseph, the emeritus bishop of the Archdiocese of India and the Gulf Countries, is hitherto suspended from all episcopal functions, duties and privileges on account of his open defiance and disobedience to the highest authority of the Church, thus violating the Oath of Obedience he submitted to the Church on the day of his episcopal consecration, i.e. January 17, 2010.
10. His Grace Mar Paulus Benyamin, the Bishop of Eastern USA, has submitted his resignation from the Mixed Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. His Grace Mar Elia Isaac, the Bishop of Baghdad, has been assigned as the new member of the committee.

Here conclude the Synodal Decrees.



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