

**BISHOP ANTOUN**

**50 Years**

**Symposium 2010**

**July 22nd**

**Economos Antony Gabriel**

Your Eminences,  
Metropolitan Philip and Metropolitan Ephraim,  
Hierarchs of the God-protected Archdiocese,  
Brothers/Sisters in Christ.

On the life of Bishop Antoun.

This evening I was tempted to recall all the humorous episodes in our life that we shared with you.

However, it is “serious” business to salute you on the occasion of your 50 consecrated years in God’s holy Priesthood. Few among this audience know of the Antoun we met in 1959 and the suffering you endured in your early years in North America, miles away from family and friends in a different culture and attending St. Vladimir’s Seminary in New York City with professors who at times were difficult to understand with their various accents, living with complete strangers who barely spoke English.

For a time we shared space together, after you recovered from a broken leg. Oh, how we share so much with you in those years.

Let me recapitulate briefly on his ministry:

From the day of his ordination (incidentally, we bought his first vestment, I believe, for 45 dollars) by Metropolitan Antony in Boston and his first parish in Philadelphia, this earnest young man exemplified “pastorship” in every sense of the word. He loved, and was loved in return, by every parish he served.

Reminding me of St Simeon the Theologian’s prayerful musings, that he so fervently loved his flock, that he prayed with scalding tears, that his flock would be saved or he would follow them into Hell, so much did he love them. Bishop Antoun is “love incarnate” for his parishioners and priests and, therefore, embodies all the virtues articulated during this Symposium, on the meaning of servanthood a true shepherd of God.

This assembly most likely does not remember that in 1981 in Los Angeles, the laity and clergy nominated him as Auxiliary to assist the Metropolitan, whose health and ever-growing Archdiocese required his assistance. There was a hiatus until November 1982 when we traveled to the Holy Synod meeting and Metropolitan Philip resolved this issue of auxiliaries to assist him, leading to Antoun’s consecration in January 1983 by His Eminence, Archbishops Michael, Elia, and Bishop Paul Bendaly at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn. Hundreds traveled throughout North America to shout “Axios” to a man who had endeared himself to so many.

Antoun traveled a long journey from Damascus to Englewood, NJ. He has and had distinguished himself by his fidelity to the Church. His unquestioned loyalty having served under Patriarch Alexandros, Metropolitan Forzley of Brazil and

Metropolitan Antony Bashir, who received him into this Archdiocese, and, of course, our own beloved Metropolitan Primate.

A classmate of Saidna Philip at the Balamand, and those of us who were his classmates at St. Vladimir's, recall the trials he endured in his early years in North America as well as in South America.

In spite of the struggles he had to overcome, ANTOUN remained, and is to this day, a straight arrow, industrious and well-known for his innocent faith And therefore deserves to be saluted by all of us as one of God' s beloved.

And so, as I conclude these remarks, Dearest "Shammas" (as you were when we met you on 121st and Broadway), your precious smile which honestly went from ear to ear, warmed our hearts and captured our friendship forever.

The earnestness, with which you offered your own friendship and even mentorship whenever possible, has been a source of security and comfort for us throughout these many years.

Most of all, the laughter and special times you have brought to our lives and the lives of our children are indelibly imprinted on our souls.

One of the first things we say in teaching Sunday school children is that "GOD IS LOVE." How very simple that sounds, but the truest thing about the truth IS that it IS simple.

It is the simple truth: “God is Love” and for Lynn and I, and our children and for so many, you His Child, and unquestioning SERVANT is the closest reflection of GOD’ S love that we have experienced in our years together.

**THANK YOU FOR THE BOTTOMLESS WELL OF YOUR FRIENDSHIP!**

Axios! Many years Master and friend!