

HIS BEATITUDE MEETS WITH THE PATRIARCHAL TRUSTEE OF SIERRA LEONE – THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED DIOCESE OF SIERRA LEONE

On 12th January 2011, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, welcomed to the Patriarchal See the Very Reverend Archimandrite Father Themistocles Adamopoulos, the Patriarchal Trustee of the newly-established Diocese of Sierra Leone, to examine issues regarding the missionary and pastoral work there.

Father Themistocles Adamopoulos was born in Alexandria and immigrated together with his family to Australia as a child. He was involved in politics in the decade of the 1960's and studied Political Science and Philosophy in Melbourne, at the same time organising a musical group to satisfy his musical talents. At the beginning of the decade of the 1970's he turned his attention to seeking God through Biblical sources. He decided against an academic career, sold all that he had and was tonsured a monk. He broadened the horizons of his Theological knowledge through post-graduate and doctoral studies at distinguished American universities. After he was ordained, he enrolled as part of the missionary staff of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in 1999, working in Kenya. From January 2008, with the blessing of His Beatitude Theodoros II, he systematically undertook the organisation of Missions in the countries of the western horn of Africa, centred in Sierra Leone.

During Father Themistocles' first visit to the country in December 2007, the good propositions of the new missionary efforts became apparent. His Excellency the President of the Government, Mr Ernest Koroma, His Excellency the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Services and other high-ranking officials, enthusiastically accepted the proposal to start an Orthodox Mission, and granting already in 2008, land as well as a two-storey building in the capital, Freetown, for the establishment of a Missionary Centre and the building of a Cathedral. They also gave land in rich farming country for the creation of Agricultural Schools. Also, space was given in the national correctional institution of the capital in which to start catechetical and educational programmes. A school was also offered, for about 800 pupils, in Palmronko, Freetown, so that our Church could undertake educational activities to combat illiteracy.

As one of the poorest areas on our planet, Sierra Leone, wounded by wars and a high death rate due to infectious diseases, underwent huge difficulties due to the civil war, which apart from the enormous material destruction to the country, has left it with thousands of innocent citizens as quadriplegics and amputees. Therefore it was deemed absolutely necessary that a clinic and a centre of assistance for amputees to receive prosthetics to be established, in collaboration with the Greek Orthodox Philanthropic Organization of Australia "Paradise Kinds for Africa", as well as other missionary societies and brotherhoods in Greece.

Today, the local Church of Sierra Leone, through the efforts of Father Themistocles and the first four African priests, has two large Churches, a nursery school for 100 children, a school for 1500 pupils in primary and high school levels, a sewing school for the ladies of the national prison of Sierra Leone, and a home for the care of amputees either due to polio or to civil war. Also, from next September the Orthodox University of Sierra Leone will open its doors.

During the convocation of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of

Alexandria on 7th October 2010, by proposal of His Beatitude, the Holy Diocese of Sierra Leone was established by Patriarchal And Synodal Decree. In its jurisdiction it includes the countries of Sierra Leone, Gambia, Liberia, Senegal, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde.