

Visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew - Welcome Service of Prayer and Praise

Your All Holiness, With great joy we welcome you to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore. We who are members of the Catholic laity, religious women and men, and clergy of the Archdiocese of Baltimore are joined this afternoon by members of the Orthodox Church, by leaders of other Christian Churches, and of other faiths. Also with us are officials of our national, state and local governments, distinguished representatives of the academic community of this area, and leaders of the media. You began your historic visit to Baltimore at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral which honors the Mother of God, Theotokos, under the title of her Annunciation, recalling when the Word became flesh. The splendid service there did great credit to the congregation and to its zealous dean and pastor, Father Constantine Monios. You continue your visit at the historic church which recalls her Dormition, her entering into a full share of her Risen Son's victory over death. You come to Maryland, the Free State, where the roots of religious freedom go deeper than anywhere else in the English-speaking world. Here, within a few years of their establishing a colony in 1634, the Catholic leadership of the early Parliament, although a minority of the colonists, passed Acts of Toleration. Decades later the majority used its political power to set aside these laws. Nonetheless, Maryland's early posture helped inspire the framers of our national Bill of Rights to guarantee the religious freedom which has so blessed so many in this land. It has also provided the setting in which our Catholic and Orthodox communities have been able to flourish side by side with other faith groups. Your visit brings you to a Church rich in history and significance—the first cathedral of the first Roman Catholic diocese in the United States, in a city and place where so many of our first bishops were sealed by the Holy Spirit into the Apostolic Succession. Here also their successors convened ten times in the last century to determine in councils the course our Church should take in a land of freedom, opportunity and challenge. From the days of our first Archbishop, John Carroll, whose tomb lies here behind us, the Archdiocese of Baltimore has fostered a

tradition of cooperation with others in working for the common good in both religious and civic spheres of interest. Your commitment, as Ecumenical Patriarch, to the preaching of the gospel called to holiness, to ecumenical and interfaith initiatives, and to the causes of the ecology and religious freedom, is a commitment which brings light to a world too dark with sin and the effects of sin. Cardinal Lawrence Shehan, who shepherded this Archdiocese during the years of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), was sent by Pope Paul VI to Istanbul in December 1965, as president of a pontifical delegation. Another member of that delegation is present here with us today—Father John Long. There Cardinal Shehan took part in the ceremony in your patriarchal Cathedral of St. George during which the excommunications pronounced over nine centuries before in 1054 were, and I quote, “erased from the memory and the midst of the Church” and “consigned to oblivion.” A similar ceremony at which I had the privilege to assist took place at the same time in Rome at St. Peter’s Basilica. Cardinal Shehan was the first to chair our own United States Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and, in this capacity, he helped initiate the dialogue between Orthodox and Catholics in the United States. Our scholars’ Joint Consultation, begun in 1965 and co-sponsored by the Catholic Bishops’ Committee and the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America, was the first official one of its kind at the national level in the world. In time also a committee comprising bishops of both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches embarked on formal dialogue, especially regarding pastoral matters. Both the Sch