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Death of the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church

CHURCH LEADERS ARE MOURNING THE DEATH OF CARDINAL VARKEY VITHAYATHIL, HEAD OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CATHOLIC CHURCH.

The cardinal, who headed the Syro-Malabar Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly, collapsed while celebrating Mass April 1 and was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he died, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News. The 84-year-old prelate had suffered from heart problems.

His funeral was scheduled for after April 10 because most Syro-Malabar bishops were in Rome for their "ad limina" visits, in which they report on the status of their dioceses.

Auxiliary Bishop Bosco Puthur of Ernakulam-Angamaly will take over as administrator of the Syro-Malabar Church and must convene a synod, which will elect a new major archbishop.

Mumbai Cardinal Oswald Gracias, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, praised Cardinal Vithayathil as a "great missionary and exemplary priest, who contributed a lot to the growth of the church in India and the Syro-Malabar Church."

"He was a man of deep faith who was loyal to the church. He worked strenuously for the good of the church even in his illness," said Cardinal Gracias. He also was "an effective administrator who took bold decisions for the good of the church in India."

Major Archbishop Baselios Cleemis Thottunkal of Trivandrum, head of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, said Cardinal Vithayathil worked to unify India's three Catholic churches of different rites.

The deceased cardinal provided "a mature leadership" to the Indian church when he was president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, 2008-2010, the archbishop said. The cardinal also played an active role in public issues of Kerala

state.

The Syro-Malabar Church, an Eastern Catholic Church, traces its origin to St. Thomas the Apostle. The Vatican made the Syro-Malabar Church self-governing in 1992, but retained the right to decide on administrative matters for Syro-Malabar dioceses outside Kerala.

The late cardinal was ordained major archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church in 1997, when the Eastern church was divided over its liturgical patrimony and the bishops were divided into two camps.

In 2006, the cardinal reiterated his call for more rights for Syro-Malabar Catholics. He said thousands of Syro-Malabar Catholics who live outside their church jurisdictions "have no parish, church or institutions" and have followed "the Latin traditions for more than 50 years."

Cardinal Vithayathil was ordained a Redemptorist priest in 1954. He taught for 25 years at the Redemptorist seminary and several other seminaries in Bangalore.

He was elected provincial of Redemptorists in India and Sri Lanka in 1978, a post he held for six years. He was also president of the Conference of Religious India, the national body of India's religious major superiors.

Pope John Paul II made him a cardinal in 2001. His death leaves the College of Cardinals with 200 members, 116 of whom are under 80.

Of India's more than 1 billion people, 2.3 percent are Christian and about 1.6 percent are Catholic. The Catholic Church has 161 dioceses in India; 128 of them are Latin rite, 27 belong to the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and six dioceses belong to the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. – CNS, April 1.

THE HOLY FATHER HAS SENT A TELEGRAM TO BISHOP BOSCO PUTHUR OF THE MAJOR ARCHIEPISCOPAL CURIA OF ERNAKULAM-ANGAMALY OF THE SYRO-MALABARS, INDIA, FOR THE DEATH AT THE AGE OF 83 OF CARDINAL VARKEY VITHAYATHIL C.S.S.R., Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

"I was deeply saddened to hear of the death of Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil, Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly. I offer you, the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the entire Syro-Malabar Church my deepest condolences and the assurance of my prayers. I recall with gratitude the cardinal's dedication and service to the Syro-Malabars and to the universal Church. I join you and all who mourn him, including the members of the late cardinal's family, in commending his soul to the infinite mercy of God our loving Father. To all assembled for the solemn funeral liturgy, I cordially impart my apostolic blessing as a pledge of consolation and strength in the Lord." – VIS, April 1.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches

ON FRIDAY, APRIL THE 1ST, HIS HOLINESS MORAN MOR IGNATIUS ZAKKA IWAS, SYRIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST, PAID A VISIT TO THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH, HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMEW I, AT HIS RESIDENCE IN FANAR, ISTANBUL, TURKEY. The Patriarch of Antioch was accompanied by their Eminences the Prelates of Aleppo, Syria, Tur'Abdin and Istanbul in Turkey, as well as the Patriarchal Assistant and Secretary in addition to a number of lay people from Turkey.

His Holiness was welcomed warmly by His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch. Patriarch Zakka thanked the Lord for allowing this meeting to take place and explained to his brother, His Holiness Bartholomew I, the love and prayers of the Church of Antioch to the Church of Constantinople. He then went on to explain the reasons and results of visiting the Prime Minister and the President of Turkey, in Ankara.

A discussion about the importance of dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches took place, for which His Holiness, Bartholomew I assured our Patriarch Mor Zakka Iwas I, of his personal commitment and encouragement to pursue the dialogue

The two Patriarchs then discussed world events, and specially the current situation in the Middle East and particularly the conditions in Syria. Our Patriarch requested his host to keep Syria in his prayers.

After the meeting, His Holiness Patriarch Zakka, paid a visit to the Fanar Patriarchal Cathedral, and offered prayers at the holy relics of the two Church Fathers, Saint John Chrysostom (407 A.D.) and Saint Gregory the Theologian (390 A.D.) Both Saints were Patriarchs of Constantinople. His Holiness, Patriarch Zakka I was greatly moved by seeing these relics for the first time, since they were brought from Rome to Constantinople (Istanbul) on the 22nd of November, 2004. – Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of the Eastern United States, April 2.

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH ANNOUNCED ON APRIL 21ST HIS INTENTION TO CONVENE A SUMMIT ("SYNAXIS") OF SOME PRIMATES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES. According to reports the Patriarch sent a letter to the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, as well as the Primate of the Church of Cyprus inviting them to gather to examine "the unstable political situation" in the Middle East, as well as address a series of "general questions concerning inter-Orthodox relations." The meeting is to take place on August 31 -September 1, 2011 at the Phanar, the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul. Each of the primates will be accompanied by one or two bishops.

In explaining the move the letter of invitation said that it is in "the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church to convene when the need arises the primates of the oldest church authorities" - namely the Patriarchates of the so-called "Pentarchy" of the first millennium - Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem (although no longer Rome.) The ancient Church of Cyprus, which was never a member of the "pentarchy" is to be included, however, because of its "apostolic foundation." Such meetings, the Patriarch stressed, "are no guarantee of future decisions to be taken at pan-Orthodox meetings" and are "not intended to exclude other local Orthodox Churches." Rather, the meeting will seek only to find "common, preliminary positions on particular important issues." This is seen as a reference to the profound disagreement of the Romanian and Russian Churches with the Greek Churches at the last session of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee held in February in Chambésy near Geneva. The meeting ended

after only three days. These disagreements now appear to block the continuation of Constantinople's preparatory process for its long-desired Council. -- Mark Stokoe for *Orthodox News*, April 27.

THE SPOKESPERSON OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE, FATHER DOSITHEOS ANAĞNOSTOPOULOS, HAS SAID TURKISH PRIME MINISTER RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN SAVED THE FUTURE OF THE PATRIARCHATE by offering Turkish citizenship to a number of archbishops in 2009.

In an interview with the *Star* daily, Anağnostopoulos said there were 12 archbishops on the Patriarchate's Spiritual Board at the time. "Most of [those archbishops] are very old. In order to become a member of this board, one has to be a Turkish citizen. If the Patriarch dies one day, it seemed unlikely that a new Patriarch would be elected from the board [due to the members' age]. This danger has now passed. The prime minister attended a luncheon on Büyükdada in August 2009 ... and said the problem with the Spiritual Board will be overcome if archbishops applied to become Turkish citizens. He assured us that applicants would be granted citizenship," the spokesperson stated.

Anağnostopoulos defined the prime minister's remarks as the "most positive moment in his lifetime." "After the prime minister's call, 27 of 35 archbishops abroad submitted applications to become Turkish citizens. Thirteen of them have already been granted citizenship," he added. In 2010, CNN International ran a story on the Greek Orthodox Patriarch in which it suggested that Patriarch Bartholomew could ultimately be the last Patriarch if Turkish laws, demographics and attitudes do not change. According to Anağnostopoulos, however, this is no longer the case, thanks to Erdoğan.

The spokesperson also said Erdoğan and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç were the first state authorities to express their wish to re-open a closed Greek Orthodox seminary on Heybeliada, off the coast of İstanbul. The Halki Seminary was closed in 1971 in accordance with a law that put religious and military training under state control.

In addition, Anağnostopoulos said the Halki Seminary is of high importance for the Greek Orthodox population as it was once a base where clerics were trained for the religious community.

"An argument has been put forward by some people in Turkey. They say the Greek Orthodox population comprises only 2,500

people, and we needn't train clerics for so few people. They say we may 'import' clerics from abroad. However, they should know that the Greek Orthodox Patriarch is the most senior among Orthodox churches in the world. This is why he was granted the ecumenical title. We also have followers outside of İstanbul, including in North and South America and some parts of Europe, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand. Their priests and archbishops are appointed by our Patriarch. And for their appointment, it is a must for candidates to have graduated from a seminary," he stated.

Anağnostopoulos also said the re-opening of the Halki Seminary would not run contrary to the Treaty of Lausanne. He also ruled out fears that the "Byzantine spirit" would be revived if the seminary is re-opened.

"Some fear that it will go against the principles of the Republic of Turkey if the Patriarchate is a very strong institution. This is wrong. The Republic of Turkey has a secular character. Every religious group has the right to continue its activities provided they are not engaged in politics. It is now a fact that the closing down of the Halki Seminary was not legal. I personally believe that the seminary was used as a trump card in the Cyprus issue and was eventually shut down," he noted. – *Today's Zaman*, April 11.

THE COLORADO STATE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON APRIL 7 UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE. With this action, the Colorado Senate and House join 35 other states that have adopted similar resolutions of support.

The resolution, sponsored by Representatives Lois Court, John Kefalas and Senators Joyce Foster and Nancy Spence, calls on the Turkish government to discontinue a number of discriminatory policies directed at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, threatening the existence of this almost 2,000 year old Holy See of Christianity.

With the blessings of Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver, the effort in Colorado was led by Dr. Gregory G. Papadeas, Regional Commander of the Archons, Order of St. Andrew the Apostle of the 10th district.

Representative Kefalas stated, "As the only Greek-American in the Colorado General Assembly, I am honored to support the Greek-Orthodox community and this legislative resolution that speaks to the importance of upholding religious freedom."

Metropolitan Isaiah was honored by offering the opening prayer to begin the

legislative day. He commented, "Our heritage has always supported religious freedom for individuals. On that basis, we would like to also see religious freedom for our spiritual leader in Istanbul, Turkey!"

Dr. Papadeas remarked, "During this season of Great and Holy Lent, this is an important statement on behalf and in defense of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and for all religious minorities living in Turkey!"

The Colorado resolution initiative is part of the national State Religious Freedom Resolution project of the Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America.

The goal of this project, which represents one component of the overall, multi-faceted religious freedom initiative, is the adoption of religious freedom resolutions in support of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in every state legislature. This project is an ongoing effort of the Order of Saint Andrew and represents an important part of the governmental and public affairs strategy of the Religious Freedom Initiative. – *Archons News*, April 7.

IN A DISPLAY OF OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE, ALL SIXTY-TWO (62) MEMBERS OF THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE AND ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOUR (144) MEMBERS OF THE NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY SIGNED LETTERS CALLING FOR THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT to cease its discrimination against the Holy See of Constantinople. Similar to the religious freedom resolutions passed in other states, the letters call for the Turkish Government to recognize the ecumenical status of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to respect its rights to property and to ecclesiastic succession, and to grant it the right to train its clergy—including by opening the Theological Seminary at Halki.

In the legislature, the effort was led by Senators Dean Skelos and Michael Gianaris and Assemblywomen Aravella Simotas and Nicole Malliotakis, each of whom diligently approached colleagues individually to educate them about the Turkish government's harmful policies toward the Ecumenical Patriarchate and to encourage them to sign on to the letter.

His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America, Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, noted the significance of the overwhelming support the letters received. "This is a great day for the State of New York and for the Greek Orthodox Church in America," His Eminence stated. "The cause of religious liberty is fundamental to

the American way of life, and the State legislature of New York, under the leadership of Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, Senator Michael Gianaris, and Assemblywomen Aravella Simotas and Nicole Malliotakis, have borne a powerful witness to the rights of all by underscoring the rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We also commend the Archons of the Order of Saint Andrew, and the effective leadership of Archon John Catsimatidis, the chairman of the Archon Religious Freedom project. We look forward to the day when every one of the fifty states stands up for the spiritual freedom and human dignity of our Holy Mother Church of Constantinople, and the American values of justice and fairness for all are enshrined in all the State Houses of government."

Senator Michael Gianaris also noted the importance of the bipartisan effort, stating: "The future of Orthodox Christianity is being threatened by the Turkish government's oppressive policies restricting the full exercise of religion in its country. I am pleased that the New York State Senate has taken a bipartisan stand for religious freedom and look forward to the day when people of all faiths feel free to worship as they see fit." – *Archons News*, April 15.

THE OUTCOME OF THE FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NEWLY-ESTABLISHED EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF AUSTRIA AS WELL AS THE OVERALL ISSUES OF THE COUNTRY'S 500,000 ORTHODOX FAITHFUL, WERE PRESENTED TO THE AUSTRIAN FEDERAL PRESIDENT Heinz Fischer by the Conference's president, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Austria-Exarch of Hungary and Central Europe Michael, during the courtesy call paid by its members to the presidential mansion in Vienna, on Thursday.

Metropolitan Michael was accompanied by the bishops of the Orthodox Churches of Russia, Romania and Serbia and the president of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria.

Metropolitan Michael, stressing during the federal president's briefing that the Orthodox faithful in Austria constitute an inseparable part of its religious landscape, hailed the impending amendment in the Austrian Law on Orthodoxy with which, among other things, the Episcopal Conference of Austria that was established last October is recognized as the official interlocutor for the Austrian Republic, while the possibility of the recognition of Orthodox bishoprics in the country is also settled. -- D. Dimitrakoudis for *ANA*, April 28.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, THE REV. DR OLAV FYKSE TVEIT, HAS URGED CHRISTIANS TO GIVE THIS YEAR'S CELEBRATION OF EASTER A CLEAR ECUMENICAL PROFILE and to work for a common date of Easter for the future, noting that this year it falls on the same day 24 April for both eastern and western traditions.

"In a world divided by poverty and violence, it is important that we are one in our witness to the crucified and risen Christ in actions as well as in words," said Tveit. "We rejoice that this year Christians of eastern and western traditions will celebrate the resurrection of the Lord on the same date."

Because the date of Easter is calculated using either the Julian calendar used by most Orthodox churches, or the Gregorian calendar, Christians of eastern and western traditions often celebrate Easter on different Sundays.

There have been five times in the past 10 years when Easter has fallen on the same date for all Christians. In the future this will be less frequent with the next coinciding dates being in 2017 and 2025.

Significant work was undertaken in the 1980s on agreeing a common date at the Pan-Orthodox level, but implementation was difficult at the time because many churches concerned were living under communist regimes. This work was taken up at a consultation in 1997 in Aleppo, Syria, sponsored jointly by the WCC and the Middle East Council of Churches, which proposed a way of calculating the date of Easter so that it would always be celebrated on the same day.

"I hope that in the decade ahead, Christians from different traditions will work together in trust and mutual accountability to come to agreement about a common date for Easter, on the basis of the process laid out in the Aleppo document," said Tveit. – WCC Press Release, April 14.

ON 31 MARCH 2011, METROPOLITAN HILARION, HEAD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, CURRENTLY ON A VISIT TO THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH at the invitation of His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia and with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, met with the President of the Republic of Serbia Boris Tadić at his residence in Belgrade.

They were joined in the meeting by His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia; Bishop Irinej of Bačka; Serbian Minister of Foreign

Affairs Vuk Jeremić; Serbian Ambassador to Russia Jelica Kurjak; rector of the Russian Orthodox Metochion in Belgrade archpriest Vitaly Tarasjev; and DECR secretary for Inter-Orthodox relations Rev. Igor Yakimchuk.

The head of Serbia expressed his gratitude to the Russian Orthodox Church for support it has always given to the people of Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church, first of all in connection with the problem of Kosovo and Metochia. Metropolitan Hilarion assured President Tadić that the Russian Orthodox Church has always been and will be with the Serbian people and intends to help the monks of the Serbian Church in the monasteries of the region.

The President of Serbia, who is the chairman of the Public Council for construction of the Cathedral of St. Sava, mentioned the interior decoration of the cathedral. The DECR chairman confirmed the willingness of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian business circles to take part in the project.

After the meeting, Metropolitan Hilarion and his suite went to the Cathedral of St. Sava to see its interior decoration. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, April 1.

THESE ARE THE REMARKS DELIVERED BY METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK DURING HIS MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN-ISRAEL PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE (AIPAC) on 5 April 2011, at the Danilovskaya Hotel in Moscow:

1. I would like to welcome such a representative delegation of the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee to the Russian land. With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church is represented at this meeting by the head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for church-society relations, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, and myself in my capacity as chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations. We will share with you our opinions concerning issues which are a matter of concern for you and which are related to the problem of the Middle East. We will also be glad to listen to your considerations and to answer questions from the audience.

2. The Russian Orthodox Church attaches great importance to her relations with the authorities of the United States of America. The Department for External Church Relations has maintained contacts with the US Embassy in Moscow and especially with the head of the US diplomatic

mission, Mr. John Beyrly. This February I visited the USA where I had several meetings with state officials. The focus of these meetings was an account of the inner life of our Church, her external activity and experience of service in today's world.

We highly appreciate the fact that your organization stands for the repeal of the Jackson-Vanik amendment which was adopted at the height of the cold war and which hampers the development of American-Russian relations today. We also give a high value to the concern of your organization for broadening relations in the triangle Russia-Israel-USA. It is my conviction that the time has come to overcome the artificially-erected dividing walls in relations between our nations.

3. The Russian Church has a long history of constructive dialogue with the Jewish community in the USA. For over thirty years we have been in close cooperation with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation founded and led by Rabbi Arthur Schneier. During my recent visit to the United States I had a talk with him which has left good impressions. We work together to promote initiatives for developing interreligious cooperation, including on the platforms of international organizations. At present we are working out a mechanism of high-level dialogue between traditional world religious communities in partnership with UNESCO.

4. For Orthodox Christians the Holy Land is a special magnetic place, where the Lord Jesus Christ lived, died and was raised from the dead. After the lifting of the visa requirement between Russia and Israel in September 2008, the number of our citizens coming to Israel has grown considerably. Among them are Orthodox pilgrims from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and other countries under the pastoral responsibility of the Moscow Patriarchate.

As is known, there are many of our expatriates living in Israel – which is an additional favorable factor in relations between our countries. This factor is often underestimated. The Russian Orthodox Church gives a special importance to the efforts to preserve unity in the multinational diaspora of our expatriates throughout the world.

5. We are aware of the efforts undertaken by your organization to foster peace in the Middle East and to promote the negotiation process between the Israeli Government and the leaders of the Palestinian Autonomy. The Russian Church is interested in good neighborly relations between peoples living in the Holy Land and consistently advocates a peace settlement of the

long-standing conflict. The confrontation has lasted for many years now and cost many innocent people life and health. The conscience of any believer rebels against the situation of permanent bloodshed in places held so dear. Precisely for this reason a resolution of the Middle East problem is unthinkable without an appeal of all peoples in the region to their religious traditions which can keep people from violence.

The Russian Church is convinced that the Holy Land should be made a place where the faithful of all world religions could freely profess their beliefs and have access to holy places.

Unfortunately, the peacemaking contribution of religions in the Middle East settlement remains to a large extent unclaimed. The work of international mechanisms is in fact closed to the participation of religious leaders. The expressly secular nature of international organizations makes believers not subjects of peace settlement but rather objects of all kinds of programs and actions elaborated without their involvement. As a result the situation becomes even more aggravated. The Russian Orthodox Church is ready to act as mediator in the peace process, offering her assistance to the sides of the conflict.

6. Israel claims to be a secular state, but unfortunately this claim has often led to disregard for the feelings of believers, not only those of Judaism but also other religions. In the Russian Church, we felt regret at the reports about holding the so-called 'pride parades' of homosexual minorities in the Holy City. We are convinced that only traditional morality can be a solid support for the life of society and relations between people. This is why it is so necessary to have dialogue between religious communities, the state and all the public forces so that its results could be of benefit to society.

7. I would like to share with you my concern over the recent social and political developments in North Africa and the Middle East. A change of political regimes and clash of interests between various public forces lead to a situation of uncertainty, an outburst of violence and lawlessness. There is a threat today that power in these countries will be seized by radical Islamists notorious for their calls for reprisal against both Jews and Christians. We can see growing Christianophobia which results in pogroms of Christian churches and killing of Christians. All this happens with the still persistent anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the background. The world community should rise in defense of the right of everyone to confess one's faith freely and to live

in accordance with religious norms and principles.

In this connection, I highly value the fact that the European Parliament adopted on January 20, 2011, a Resolution on the Situation of Christians in the Context of Freedom of Religion. It is for the first time that the European parliamentarians stated in full voice their opinion on the problem they have preferred to keep silent about so far. Thus, a major political body of the European Union has recognized the persecution of Christians in the world. Earlier, only certain politicians have confined themselves to talks about certain violations of the rights of Christians in a particular country. Now they are talking openly of the strategy of some terrorist organizations and fundamentalist movements aimed at the destruction or ousting of Christians living in the Moslem countries as “the fifth column” of the West.

Besides, a thorough attention was paid for the first time to the work of people gathering objective information about persecution of Christians in the world. For instance, it was for the first time that information contained in the annual report prepared by a non-governmental organization, “The Aid to the Churches in Need”, was made public officially. According to it, there were seventy-five Christians out of every one hundred killed as a result of religious intolerance in recent years. This statistics is stunning.

The European Parliament addressed the EU bodies and proposed concrete methods of influencing the situation. The principle is simple: money and business in exchange for the observance of human rights. Economic agreements between the EU countries and the states with the recorded violation of religious freedom of Christians and other religious minorities should be concluded only when the situation of religious groups infringed in their rights is improved.

We are witnessing cases of not only gross violence against Christians, but also of their physical destruction. The blood of Christians is again being poured on the land of Biblical history, the site of glorious heroic deeds of the martyrs and confessors of the Church.

Not only world Christian communities, but also Muslims, Jews, and representatives of other traditional religions do not stay indifferent to the recent acts of violence. It is a paradox that news of the oppression of Christians sometimes comes from those regions of the world where representatives of different religions have peacefully coexisted for centuries, and any manifestation of

Christianophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism has always been implicitly denounced by the leaders of traditional religious communities.

8. In conclusion, I would like to cite the Prophet Isaiah: “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet” (Is. 62:1). Let these words of Holy Scriptures inspire us in our desire to bring well-being to the Biblical land. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, April 5.

ON 9 APRIL 2011, HIS BEATITUDE ARCHBISHOP IERONYMOS II OF ATHENS AND ALL GREECE MET WITH METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, CHAIRMAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE’S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS (DECR), WHO ARRIVED ON A VISIT TO GREECE with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

Metropolitan Hilarion conveyed cordial greetings and best wishes from the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church to His Beatitude Ieronymos II, who welcomed the guests saying that the ties of fraternal love have bound the Russian Church and the Church of Greece and Russian and Greek people.

A cordial talk followed which included discussion of bilateral relations and Orthodox cooperation in the preparation of the Pan-Orthodox Council, cooperation in theological education and exchange of students, the Church’s role in the life of contemporary society, pastoral work with the youth, dialogue with the workers of culture and science, and different forms of missionary work.

His Beatitude Archbishop Ieronymos and Metropolitan Hilarion delivered welcoming speeches at the Throne Hall of the Archdiocese. Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Messinia, Bishop Prokopios of Christianoupolis, protosingel archimandrite Gabriel, and ordained staff members of the Archdiocese were in attendance.

His Beatitude Archbishop Ieronymos thanked Metropolitan Hilarion for his visit and asked him to convey the feelings of respect and love of all our brethren here to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

In his address Metropolitan Hilarion noted that it was a great joy for him to visit the Orthodox Church of Greece and meet with its Primate, hierarchs and clerics, and convey greetings from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill who has visited the holy Archdiocese several times as metropolitan and chairman of the DECR.

“We see that the Orthodox Church of Greece finds itself in a difficult situation after the economic crisis. The relations between the church and the state are not cloudless, but we hope that these problems will be resolved, justice will triumph, and the Church will occupy its proper place in this wonderful ancient country sanctified by the apostles’ feet,” Metropolitan Hilarion added.

The Primate of the Orthodox Church of Greece and the DECR chairman exchanged gifts. Metropolitan Hilarion signed the book of distinguished guests. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, April 10.

ON APRIL 9-13 A DELEGATION OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH HAS BEEN VISITING KYIV. THE DELEGATION IS LED BY BISHOP STEPHEN PLATTEN OF WAKEFIELD, THE HEAD OF THE LITURGICAL COMMISSION OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH who is responsible for ecumenical relations and is also a member of the House of Lords of the British Parliament. The bishop is accompanied by two canonists of the Anglican Church, the ecumenical secretary of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Fr. Jonathan Gudall, and an experienced participant of the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue, Fr. Hugh Wybrew. The delegation was also accompanied by the leader of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, Malkhaz Songulashvili who is engaged in scholarly-theological activity in England.

According to the members of the delegation, their trip is aimed at studying the state of inter-denominational relations in our country, possibilities of establishing regular cooperation between the Anglican Church and the Christian denominations in Ukraine as well as to personally get acquainted with the life of the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches of the Kyivan and Moscow Patriarchate. The Anglican Church is interested to see with its own eyes the real picture of the life of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy instead of judging from other people’s accounts. So reported the press-service of the Kyivan Patriarchate.

On 11 April, at the patriarchal residence of the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC-KP), the Anglican delegation met with Patriarch Filaret. The participants exchanged opinions of the state and prospect of the ecumenical dialogue, the challenges facing the Christian Churches in modern Europe. The guests were interested to learn about the activity of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO). In the end, Patriarch Filaret presented to Bishop Stephen Platten and

Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili the Orders of Christ the Saviour and to the canonists, Fr. Jonathan Gudall and Fr. Hugh Wybrew the Orders of St George the Victorious.

On that same day, the visitors accompanied by Bishops Ilarion and Yevstratii visited Bishop Stanislav Shyrokoriadiuk of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine. Bishop Stanislav told them about the life of RCC in Ukraine and answered their questions. On the same day, the delegation met with the ex-head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Cardinal Lubomyr (Husar). On 12 April, the delegation visited the Apostolic Nunciature of the Vatican in Kyiv.

The delegation of the Anglican Church was received in the premises of the parliamentary committee by the head of the Committee on Culture and Spirituality of the Supreme Council of Ukraine, a Ukrainian deputy, Volodymyr Yavorivskyy. The meeting was especially interesting as Bishop Stephen Platten is a member of the House of Lords of the British Parliament. Bishop Stephen noted that it is important for the Anglican Church and British society to support high standards of the freedom of worship and confession, standards which should also apply in Ukraine. Therefore, he and other representatives of the Anglican Church show interest in state-Church and inter-denominational relations in Ukraine as they seek to promote their successful development on the democratic basis.

After that, the members of the delegation were received by the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), Metropolitan Volodymyr at his residence in the Kyiv Cave Monastery.

The program of the visit also included a meeting with the heads of the Protestant denominations of Ukraine, the head of the all-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Baptist Christians, Viacheslav Nesteruk and Senior Bishop of the Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) of Ukraine, Mykhailo Panochko. The heads of the Protestant Churches told the visitors about their denominations, their life in USSR and in the independent Ukraine, and the visitors told them about the goal of their visit. After that, the participants exchanged ideas on many issues, of which the question of fruitful inter-denominational cooperation within the framework of the AUCCRO, the Conference of Christian Churches of Ukraine and the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine was the main one.

The foreign guests together with Bi-

shop Ilarion visited the cathedral of the Holy Sophia.

The Tuesday program ended with a visit to St. Michael's Vydubytskyi Monastery. In St. George's Cathedral, Patriarch Filaret in the presence of the Orthodox and Anglican clergy, prayed for the people of Japan who are suffering from natural and technological disasters.

According to the report of the press-service of the Kyivan Patriarchate, all the participants expressed confidence that the visit has been a successful beginning and a pledge of fruitful cooperation between the Anglican Church and the Ukrainian Churches. – *RISU*, April 13.

ON 14 APRIL 2011, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA CHAIRED THE FIRST MEETING OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH. The meeting took place at the Red Hall of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

In his introductory speech His Holiness named the main reasons of establishing a new body of collective leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church and its tasks.

Bishop Merkursy of Zaraisk, chairman of the Department for Religious Education and Catechization of the Russian Orthodox Church; archpriest Dimitry Smirnov, chairman of the Synodal Department for Cooperation with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies; and Mr. Vladimir Legoida, chairman of the Synodal Information Department, presented reports.

The reports and current tasks of the Supreme Church Council set by the church authorities were discussed.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia launched an initiative of establishing the Supreme Church Council at the Bishops' Council that took place in February 2011. The Bishops' Council supported the initiative and resolved to give formal status to the conferences of heads of the Synodal Departments as Supreme Church Council by analogy with the body that had been established by the 1917 All-Russia Church Council which had to end its work in the years of persecution.

The Holy Synod, at its session held on 22 March 2011, adopted Provisions of the Supreme Church Council of the Russian Orthodox Church and approved its membership. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, April 14.

THE RUSSIAN AND GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCHES ARE OBJECTING TO PLANS IN BOTH COUNTRIES TO INTRODUCE ELECTRONIC NATIONAL

IDENTITY CARDS intended to streamline bureaucracy and, in the case of Greece, facilitate integration into the European Union.

Church officials are demanding close study of the cards and asking that authorities make them optional. They say that the personal and financial information that would be consolidated on the microchips in the cards could be manipulated to discriminate against believers.

In an interview with *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, an official government newspaper, earlier this month, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations, said: "Credit cards, which a person uses to take money from a bank machine or for payment in a store, are one thing, but a personal card in which all the information about a person's life and activities will be entered, about his bank accounts, health and travels is a different matter. These are different grades of state control over people."

Conservative and nationalist wings within the churches have held demonstrations in Athens and Moscow and claim that the cards will compromise national and religious identity. Many have gone so far as to say that identity numbers such as 666 are the "mark of the beast" from the Book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament.

At a demonstration in Moscow on 16 April, Orthodox nationalists joined forces with members of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. The Communists also oppose the Universal Electronic Card (UEC), which is scheduled to be introduced in Russia next year.

Segodnia.ru, an Internet publication that often covers religious and nationalist issues, commenting on the demonstration, said, "the introduction of the UEC makes it possible to build an unheard of, super-totalitarian electronic dictatorship, in which each individual person becomes a remote-controllable bio-object, for all practical purposes a robot with a bar code on his body or a microchip implanted under his skin."

Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church told a meeting of the Bishop's Council of the Russian Orthodox in February that "the church understands the position of people who do not wish to be subject to control that makes it possible to gather all-encompassing information about their private life, and could in the long-term be used to discriminate against citizens based on their world view."

On 27 March, thousands of Greek Or-

thodox priests, monks, nuns and lay people marched through Athens to the Greek parliament building in protest. In April, the Synod of Bishops of the Church of Greece expressed its concern about the cards and said it would hold meetings with top government officials. Metropolitan Prokopios of Philippi, Neapolis and Thasos, who chairs the synod's committee on dogmatic and canonical questions, reported that as a result of preliminary talks with the Greek government, the church had received assurances that, among other things, the numerals 666 would not appear in the cards in any form.

Archimandrite Iannuarii Ivliev, a professor of biblical studies at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy told the May edition of *Neskuchny Sad*, a Russian Orthodox magazine, that the obsession with symbols such as 666 are the result of a primitive interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

"Many years of atheism and the ban on all Christian education ... has had a poisonous effect," he said. "Several generations of people have grown up whose religious consciousness, through no fault of their own, is on the most primitive level. They are baptized, but unfortunately not enlightened by the light of Christ's Gospel ... They think that they are under siege from all sides by 'demonic forces.'"

He said the Bishop's Council of the Russian Orthodox Church asked the government to make electronic forms of identification optional. – Sophia Kishkovsky for *ENI*, April 26.

TODAY THE HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH (UAOC), METROPOLITAN MEFODII (KUDRIAKOV), ADDRESSED THE STANDING CONFERENCE OF THE ORTHODOX BISHOPS OUTSIDE UKRAINE WITH A STATEMENT AND REQUEST TO "INCLUDE THE UKRAINIAN QUESTION IN THE AGENDA of the Special Synod of Eastern Patriarchates." On April 23, 2011, the Patriarchate of the UAOC sent a similar address to the Standing Conference of Heads of the Ancient Patriarchates, reports religion.in.ua.

According to the address, one of the painful issues of modern Orthodoxy "is the problem of church division in Ukraine." "There are about five and a half thousand Orthodox communities in Ukraine that are not part of the Moscow Patriarchate but that have not broken their organic unity with worldwide Orthodoxy and sincerely aspire to resolve the canonical crises by establishing communion with the Ecumeni-

cal Patriarchate and the national Orthodox Churches."

The UAOC welcomed the coming Synod of Heads of the Ancient Patriarchates and expressed hope that the future similar pan-Orthodox gatherings "will pay attention to the Ukrainian Church issue and will outline the canonical model and specific mechanisms of renewing the Eucharist communion."

In his address to the Standing Conference of the Ukrainian Orthodox Bishops Outside Ukraine, Metropolitan Mefodii asked them "as Ukrainian Orthodox Bishops canonically recognized by Ecumenical Orthodoxy to ensure that the above-mentioned synod consider the Ukrainian church question, which is important for millions of Orthodox faithful."

The address says that in the struggle for the status of the Ukrainian Church, the UAOC made also its "own mistakes" but is ready "to review its positions and correct canonical mistakes."

In particular, the statement recalls the decision of the bishops of the UAOC on August 26, 2009, regarding their readiness "to join the Ecumenical Patriarchate with autonomy" and to resume mentioning in prayer the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew during the services.

According to the head of UAOC, no church jurisdiction in Ukraine, including the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate, is "able to heal the painful wound of the church division today independently, without the assistance of the ecumenical Orthodoxy."

The address says that unification of the Orthodox of Ukraine "cannot be based on either schismatic ideology preached by some hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyivan Patriarchate or the ideology of the 'Russian World,' proposed by Russian Church leaders."

According to the UAOC, the healing of the tragic divide is possible only with the participation of the canonical institution of the Council of the Heads of the Ancient Patriarchates. – *RISU*, April 27.

ON 28 APRIL 2011, THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION GAVE A FESTIVE PASCHAL RECEPTION AT THE MINISTRY MANSION IN MOSCOW. HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA WAS MET BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER SERGEI LAVROV.

Representatives of scholarly circles, Russian public organizations, foreign diplomats, and representatives of the non-Orthodox Christian Churches and traditional religious communities in Russia were

among the guests.

Minister Lavrov greeted them all and acknowledged the role of the Church as the largest and most authoritative public institute of Russia at present, underscoring that for centuries the Orthodox Church has been a custodian of traditional values of our society, including love of neighbor, willingness to self-sacrifice, tolerance, justice, and peace among nations.

The Russian Foreign Minister awarded the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Gorchakov Medal "in recognition of his merit in promoting the ideals of good throughout the world."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church presented an Easter egg to Minister Lavrov in token of today's feast.

The Moscow Synodal Choir conducted by the honored artist of Russia Alexei Puzakov sang Paschal hymns.

This is the Address given by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at the Easter reception:

Dear Sergei Viktorovich,
Reverend Bishops,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Brothers and Sisters:

I cordially greet you all who have gathered here on this radiant feast of the Resurrection of Christ. Christ is Risen!

First of all I would like to thank the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov, for having invested me with the Commemoration Medal honoring Alexander Gorchakov, an outstanding Russian diplomat of the nineteenth century. I see in it a testimony to the recognition of services rendered by all those who represent the Russian Orthodox Church in the field of external church relations.

Our meeting today has become a good Easter tradition, a good indicator of developing relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian diplomacy. We share the festive repast with all those who have joined us to express respect for the people of our country whose historical journey has been inseparably linked with Orthodoxy.

For every believer, the Resurrection of Christ is a source of joy and hope that gives us strength on our spiritual journey of spiritual perfection, honest work and service to our neighbors. It is not easy to live according to conscience and truth, but to live according to conscience and truth means to build real social welfare, true peace and accord on the earth. Pascha calls us to transformation, renewal and review of our life. Following this way, we can change the world around us.

The deed of Christ the Savior crowned

with victory over sin and death cultivates in the human soul the ability for self-sacrifice. Its loftiest manifestation is the willingness to lay down one's life for others, even for people we do not personally know.

Yesterday I came back from Ukraine, where I took part in commemoration events marking the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. On April 26, the anniversary of the tragedy which coincided with Tuesday of Easter Week, we prayed for the repose of those who died in the reactor's explosion and afterwards. People who self-sacrificially performed their duty in a situation threatening their life and health acted according to the gospel. They did not spare their life but saved it for eternal life (cf. Lk 9:24). Saving their neighbors without thinking about themselves and their own future, they fulfilled the words of the Savior, Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends (Jn 15:13). It is not the only example of the heroism of people in the face of destructive man-made and natural disasters.

With joy we can testify that the Japanese people have withstood in an organized and courageous manner the catastrophe that occurred at the Fukushima nuclear plant. This man-made catastrophe touched the Moscow Patriarchate directly: in Japan there exists the daughter church of the Russian Church, the Japanese Autonomous Orthodox Church, which became the fruit of the mission of Russian Orthodoxy on the Japanese islands in the nineteenth century. The East Japanese Diocese, with its centre in Sendai, especially suffered. Thank God, no one of the clergy was affected, but there were victims among parishioners and several churches were destroyed. At present, the Moscow Patriarchate is raising funds for repair of the damaged churches and construction of the new ones. I thank God that people have responded to our appeal. We have already transferred a large sum of donations to Japan and, I hope, restoration work will begin in the very near future.

The courage and strength of spirit which unite people, enabling them to develop a system of human solidarity before dangerous challenges – whether natural disasters or man-made – evokes a sense of deep respect. Therefore I want to repeat that we value highly the spiritual condition of the Japanese people, who have courageously resisted the calamity visited upon them.

Next year we shall celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the demise of St. Nicholas of Japan, Equal-to-the-Apostles. He was a Russian priest, then archbishop, who brought Orthodox Christianity to Japan,

and subsequently headed the Japanese Church. God willing, I hope to visit Japan next year and in particular the diocese of Sendai, destroyed by the elements, in order to express my solidarity with our Japanese brothers and sisters in their hour of need and at the same time pray with them, and then to think of how we can in other ways help to overcome quickly the consequences of this catastrophe.

Regrettably, in today's world we hear about examples of self-sacrifice and kindness on rarer occasions than about conflicts and clashes of interests. Heavy upheavals have shaken the Middle East and North Africa, where there is a considerable number of Christians, including those who are Orthodox.

Humanity needs solidarity, so that we could together oppose the temptation to settle international contradictions by military means and oppose the threat of terrorism and extremism, confrontations on ethnic and religious grounds and social injustice aggravated by crises in the economic sphere. Sincere, steadfast faith gives us the strength to create a common space of trust, negate violence, falsehood and double standards, show love and be well meaning, and where necessary to show sacrifice in relation to our neighbors and those far from us.

Believing people are convinced that the way to building good-neighborly relations between nations lies through the assertion of traditional spiritual and moral values on which nations and civilizations build their life. In this sense a special place is occupied by traditional moral values. I thank you, Sergei Viktorovich, and in your person the Russian diplomacy for the initiatives in pushing through the Human Rights Council the corresponding UN resolution.

I recall how the first time at a session of this Council several years ago I expressed my thoughts, which fortunately later found reflection in this resolution. I must say that I did not expect such a favorable reaction. It was perhaps the only instance when at a session there were present ambassadors from almost all countries represented at the UN. It seemed to me that after my speech there would ensue criticism as it looked like a challenge to the firmly established views on the topic of human rights, but the lengthy discussion convinced me that the absolute majority of those present in the hall not only shared my thoughts but were also willing to defend them.

I thank once more Russian diplomacy for the fact that, guided by the loftiest ideas and principles, you have managed to construct a new paradigm for the philosophy of

human rights within the framework of which rights are linked to the dignity and responsibility of the human person. May God grant this interpretation of human rights – rights which are realized within the moral system of values – enter the consciousness of people today. Without the tying of human rights to moral responsibility, we may be faced by the danger of the unfettered human instinct which, while laying claim to human rights, will destroy all that is around it by subjugating the environment to gratification of instinctive consumption.

I would also like to point to an event which has become 'a moment of truth' for many Europeans and generally all those for whom religious symbols are an expression of their faith and cultural and religious self-awareness. Italy, supported by other states including Russia, has defended her right to place crucifixes in Italian public schools. It is a sign of hope for the preservation of common European Christian identity. This decision is a result of joint efforts made by Christians in Europe including statesmen. Thank God that this long-standing court case has ended with the victory of common sense, with the realization that Europe without its Christian heritage simply cannot exist. And we may note that in other parts of the world greater respect is now being paid to religious symbols and historical religions.

I hope that this decision will become a starting point for a critical review of the concept of aggressive secularism which leads in Europe to the restriction of the rights of Christians in public life.

Brought together by the great Feast, we express hope for a future of humanity that would be worthy of the great Sacrifice offered by Christ the Savior for each of us. Once again, I greet you all who have gathered here with the Pascha of Christ. I wish you good health and God's help in your future work.

Sergei Viktorovich, allow me to thank you for the remarkable words you have uttered. As Patriarch, I am ready to subscribe to them. I am a fortunate Patriarch, as I do not recollect a time when the opinion of the Church and the opinion of the authorities on very important philosophical topics and questions of world-view have so happily coincided. May God grant that our accord become a part of the experience of practical co-operation, which is already sufficiently rich, yet, I hope, will become ever richer and important, will serve the genuine prospering of Russia, of all the Russian world, and will make its contribution to the prospering of global life and the

institution of justice on our planet.

Christ is Risen! – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, April 28.

"THERE WILL BE NO DELAY OR HINDRANCE" TO THE PROJECT FOR ANOTHER 200 ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN MOSCOW, THE MAYOR OF THE CAPITAL, SERGEI SOBIANIN, ASSURED THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE, yesterday, April 29, after the many controversies that followed the go-ahead for the construction of new places of worship. "Now we have to move on to the practical phase, of designing and building new churches," said the Mayor, laying the foundations of the first churches to be built, near the infamous Dubrovka theater. Here in 2002 a siege by Chechen rebels ended in bloodshed with the involvement of Russian security forces.

So far the municipality has given the Church 15 plots of land and will soon deliver another five. Work is already underway in 80 other sites, added the mayor. "By year's end - said Sobianin - work will be initiated for eight or nine churches. For its part, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill said that "200 churches are not sufficient to completely solve the problem, but the situation will radically change, because we will have the opportunity to work among people with churches within walking distance away from homes."

For the State, the Church's support is very helpful in the context of combating social ills such as alcoholism, ethnic violence and abortion. For this Sobianin has urged church leaders to make the churches not only a place of prayer but also a place of encounter and support for the young and needy. According to Kirill, Moscow will serve as an example to other regions and "if we succeed in implementing this program the entire religious image of Russia will change." According to data from the Patriarchate, the ratio between the number of churches and Orthodox believers in Moscow is one church for every 35 thousand inhabitants and in some districts even every 150 thousand or 200 thousand inhabitants. – *Asia News*, April 30.

ON 29 APRIL 2011, A BOOK IN TWO VOLUMES ENTITLED "ORTHODOX IN ESTONIA. STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS" ISSUED BY THE "ORTHODOX ENCYCLOPEDIA" CHURCH SCHOLARLY CENTRE WAS PRESENTED IN TALLINN with the blessing by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia with the participation of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Pa-

triarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR) and Metropolitan Kornily of Tallinn and All Estonia, Primate of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

In 2008, His Holiness Patriarch Aleksy II of Moscow and All Russia, who always paid special attention to Orthodoxy in Estonia, gave his blessing to compile the book. In his address at the 22nd session of the Public Supervisory Council and the Board of Trustees of the "Orthodox Encyclopedia" on 29 April 2010, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia said that the book should be a genuine scholarly edition and prove a historical truth, though much disputed today, that Orthodoxy in the Baltic countries is a fruit of missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church and that the Estonian Orthodox Church was in the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople for a short period of time "due to the tragic circumstances in the first half of the 20th century."

Speaking at the presentation at the National Library of Estonia, Metropolitan Hilarion said he was happy to present the book to the Estonian public. The first volume, "Studies," includes an abridged version of the fundamental studies made by His Holiness Patriarch Aleksy I of Moscow and All Russia. The complete text was published in Russian in 1998, and in Estonian in 2010 along with other materials on the history of Orthodoxy in Estonia. The present edition, though abridged, is supplemented by historical survey of major events in the church life in Estonia in the 20th and 21st centuries.

"The history of Orthodoxy in Estonia has been inseparably linked with the Russian Orthodox Church. Russian priests and missionaries have brought Orthodoxy to the land of Estonia, and the Orthodox church life in Estonia has been developing through the care of the Russian Orthodox Church," Metropolitan Hilarion noted. He spoke eloquently of the history and said in conclusion that the book would "contribute to the healing of wounds inflicted on Orthodoxy in Estonia and promote the finding of just and mutually satisfactory decisions."

Metropolitan Hilarion gave Metropolitan Kornily the first part of 300 copies of the new book that will be sent to Estonia with the blessing of His Holiness the Patriarch and thanked Metropolitan Kornily for his lengthy sacrificial service to Orthodoxy in Estonia.

Metropolitan Kornily thanked Metropolitan Hilarion for his visit to Estonia and his address at the presentation.

Editors-in-chief of the "Orthodox En-

cyclopaedia," S. Kravets, head of the Church Scholarly Centre, and archpriest Nikolai Balashov, DECR deputy chairman, presented reports on the materials and documents included in the book and its tasks.

S. Mjannik, a member of the Synod of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, led the presentation that was attended by Bishop Lazar of Narva; Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Yu. Merzliakov of the Russian Federation to Estonia and minister-counselor of the Russian Embassy A. Yashkin; chargé d'affaires of the Republic of Belarus in Estonia V. Lazarenko; deputies of the Estonian Parliament; clerics of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate; many representatives of the church and scholarly public circles of Estonia, Christian communities of the country and diplomatic corps. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, April 30.

THIS IS THE COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF THE DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF NEW GRACANICA AND MIDWESTERN AMERICA, HELD APRIL 8-9, 2011:

The clergy and delegates gathered at the Annual Assembly of the Diocese of New Gracanica and Midwestern America on April 8-9, 2011, under the spiritual leadership and chairmanship of our Diocesan Bishop, His Grace Longin, alongside the regular tasks in the sphere of work of the Annual Assembly foreseen by the Constitution of Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America, and with care for the good of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the faithful people of God, especially in the Diocese of New Gracanica and Midwestern America, which encompasses thirteen American States in the Midwest, in its allegiance to our Holy Serbian Orthodox Church, stated the following resolutions:

1. We convey our allegiance and faithfulness to the fullness of the Serbian Orthodox Church, with thanksgiving to God and His holy blessing and mercy, which is poured on the sinful Serbian nation and protects us from spiritual destruction and from all of the temptations of this world.

2. We are thankful to our spiritual father, our Diocesan Bishop Longin for his fatherly care and efforts shown to the clergy and flock of the God-protected Diocese of New Gracanica and Midwestern America that were given to him.

3. We owe immense gratitude to Metropolitan Christopher of blessed memory, for his great contribution towards the

realization of administrative unity in the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America.

4. In order to fully create complete church-administrative unity in the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America, the clergy and delegates of the Annual Assembly of the Diocese of New Gracanica and Midwestern America convey their hope that the remainder of unfinished unity on the territory of the Diocese of New Gracanica and Midwestern America will be positively decided at the next meeting of the Holy Assembly of Bishops, provided that the reorganization of the current Metropolitanate of Libertyville and Chicago and of the Diocese of New Gracanica and Midwestern America will be completed, so that the entire territory of Midwestern America will find itself under the jurisdiction of one bishop (metropolitan). The clergy and delegates of this year's meeting unanimously agree that for the Church on this continent, there is not a better decision. Any delay of this decision would prolong the division and would surely damage the Church. Being conscious of our oath, which dictates that we put the interest of the Church above all, we, the present participants of the Diocesan Assembly, feel that Bishop Longin, a Hierarch worthy of all praise, has done the most for the realization of church unity on this continent, and we express our hope that the most-esteemed Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church will find it beneficial to grant him the title of Metropolitan of New Gracanica and Midwestern America.

5. Conscious of the fact that in some church circles there is discussion about eventually changing the name of our Diocese, we, the participants of the Diocesan Assembly, request that our Hierarch, in accordance with the Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America (Article 8, Paragraph 2), suggests that the name of our Diocese remain the same without change. We do this while respecting the fact that this Diocese was created from parishes of the former Metropolitanate of New Gracanica and the former Metropolitanate of Midwestern America, and convinced that changing the name at this time would not be justified pastorally.

6. With sadness, the clergy and delegates affirm that there are still Serbs on the territory of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America who do not accept the church order that has already been achieved, but instead, are requesting that the American civil courts make decisions regarding church matters. This practice is

judged harshly, and those that are using these non-orthodox and non-Serbian methods are called to stop making this display of the Church for the sake of their souls and the souls of their family, but especially for the sake of the general interest of the Church and the Serbian People, since this is an unnecessary waste of funds and cause of suffering. – Diocesan website, April 10.

ON 11 APRIL 2011, IN THE EVENING, HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH DANIEL PARTICIPATED IN A DINNER THAT THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF STRASBOURG gave in his honor. On this occasion, the Primate of the Romanian Orthodox Church delivered the lecture with the theme *Orient, Occident: the Present Challenges of the Inter-religious Dialogue*, organized at the Cathedral of Strasbourg.

The following members of the delegation that accompanied the Patriarch of Romania were also present at the event: His Eminence Iosif, Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan of Western and Meridional Europe, His Eminence Casian, Archbishop of Lower Danube, His Grace Timotei, Romanian Orthodox Bishop of Spain and Portugal, Rev. Patriarchal Counselor Sorin Şelaru, Director of the Representation of the Romanian Patriarchate at the European institutions, and Mr. Adrian Lemeni, State Secretary for Religious Affairs. – *Basilica News Agency*, April 12.

TODAY, 12 APRIL 2011, HIS BEATITUDE DANIEL, PATRIARCH OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, PARTICIPATED IN THE WORKING SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE IN STRASBOURG.

The Primate of the Romanian Orthodox Church delivered a speech in the Parliamentary Assembly within the working session with the theme *The Inter-religious Dimension of the Inter-cultural Dialogue*.

Rev. Sorin Selaru, Patriarchal Counselor and Director of the Representation of the Romanian Patriarchate at the European Institutions, was present at the events and offered more information:

“At 10.00 o'clock (11.00 o'clock Romania's time), His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel participated in the debate within the plenary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the report entitled *the Religious Dimension of the Inter-Cultural Dialogue*. This report was worked out by the Culture Science and Education Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The report also emphasizes the importance of the religious

dimension of the inter-cultural dialogue for promoting the values that constitutes, in fact, the common basis of democratic society. Then, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel addressed the plenary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe developing in his intervention the need to deepen the dialogue and one's own spirituality in freedom, and the need for permanent education to develop a culture of living together in peace,” said Rev. Sorin Selaru. – *Basilica News Agency*, April 12.

ON 14 APRIL 2011, THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FOLLOWING RELIGIOUS CULTS OF ROMANIA MET IN THE CONVENTUS ROOM OF THE PATRIARCHAL PALACE UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH DANIEL:

- Romanian Orthodox Church; Orthodox Serb Diocese of Timișoara; Roman-Catholic Church; Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek-Catholic; Archdiocese of the Armenian Church; Russian Orthodox Archdiocese of Old Rite of Romania; Reformed Church of Romania; A.C. Evangelical Church of Romania; Lutheran Evangelical Church of Romania; Unitarian Church of Transylvania; Christian Pentecostal Cult – Romanian Apostolic Church of God; Union of the Conferences of the Adventist Church of the 7th Day; Jewish Communities Federation of Romania – Mosaic Cult; Muslim Cult of Romania.

The Christian Baptist Cult – Union of the Christian Baptist Churches of Romania and the Christian Church according to the Gospel of Romania – Union of the Christian Churches according to the Gospel of Romania participated as observers.

The participants agreed, in principle, to constitute the Consultative Council of the Religious Cults of Romania, but the final agreement is to be given by the leading bodies of every religious cult.

The daily agenda included the drafting of the principles of organization, analysis of the draft Statutes, and the formulation of some practical proposals concerning the operation of the Consultative Council of the Religious Cults of Romania.

The representatives of the participant cults established the equal status of the member cults, annual presidency of the cults by rotation and adoption of the decisions by consensus, as general principles of operation.

The Consultative Council of the Religious Cults of Romania is an ethical, social, autonomous, non-political, non-governmental organization with no legal personality and non-profit.

The major purposes of the Consultative Council of the Religious Cults of Romania are the following: promotion of faith in God and its importance in the life of the person and of society, defense and promotion of the human being and of his or her dignity, promotion of the respect for the divine creation (man and surrounding nature), adoption of some common positions and attitudes concerning the important issues of society, manifestation of solidarity and co-operation among the religious cults in the spiritual, cultural, educational and social fields, promoting prevention and negotiation to solve inter-confessional and inter-religious disagreements, as well as rejection and discouragement of any form of extremism etc. -- Secretariat of the Consultative Council of the Religious Cults, April 14.

BULGARIA'S ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH CELEBRATED ON SUNDAY THE CANONIZATION OF ITS FIRST SAINTS IN 47 YEARS. Hundreds of worshippers packed the golden-domed Alexander Nevski cathedral in Sofia for the canonization of the victims of the bloody crushing of an 1876 uprising against Bulgaria's Ottoman rule.

The canonization was the first in Bulgaria since 1964 and also the first performed by Bulgaria's 96-year-old Patriarch Maxim during his 40-year term. It declared as saints two clergymen, eight nuns and up to 5,000 unknown Bulgarians, rounded up and killed in a monastery in the central town of Apriltzi and the southern town of Batak in 1876.

The crushing of the so-called April Uprising in Bulgaria sparked an international outcry and indirectly led to the Russian-Turkish war and Bulgaria's 1878 liberation from Ottoman rule. Its victims were not proven to have performed a miracle but were nevertheless recognized as "martyrs for the (Christian) faith," Bulgarian Orthodox Church officials explained.

The last canonizations performed by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church were those of clergymen and national revival forefathers Paisiy Hilendarski in 1962 and Sofroniy Vrachanski in 1964. -- Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate, April 4.

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF GREECE AND THE GOVERNMENT IN ATHENS ARE ATTEMPTING TO AGREE ON A REDUCTION OF THE NUMBER OF PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS which is required by the program to stabilize public finances, according to a report by the religious information website Amen.gr on March 3.

In Greece, a country where the church is not separated from the state, the clergy are paid by the state. Because of its rigorous budgetary policy which calls for a reduction of the number of government workers and their salaries, the government announced at the end of 2010 that in 2011 priestly ordinations would be limited in order to apply to the clergy the general rule of hiring one employee for every five who leave.

This decision caused a wave of protests by the bishops of the Church of Greece. Since that time, several diocesan bishops, for example Metropolitan Ignatius of Volos, have announced that they will continue to ordain the number of priests they consider to be necessary, even if for now the newly ordained priests will not receive a salary from the state.

Other Metropolitans advocate another solution, and are studying the possibility of authorizing the new priests to continue their previous employment along with their pastoral ministry, or of asking the parishes where they are assigned to pay them a salary directly.

Meanwhile, the Greek government has announced that the number of clergy in the Church of Greece has diminished more quickly than predicted last year because of the number of retirements -- 240 in the last half of 2010. In total, from 10,800 members of the clergy in the period 2006-2009, the number went down to 10,421 in 2010. In view of these official statistics, the leadership of the Church of Greece has expressed the hope that that government will authorize the ordination of 300 priests in 2011. -- *SOP*, n. 357 (April 2011). Trans. by RR.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

SOURCES FROM THE EGYPTIAN COPTIC CHURCH SAID ITS LEADER, POPE SHENOUDA III, IS COMMUNICATING WITH THE ETHIOPIAN CHURCH IN AN EFFORT TO HELP RESOLVE THE WATER CRISIS, which erupted after Ethiopia began constructing a Millennium Dam on the Nile.

Sources said that a trip by the Pope to Ethiopia has been suggested.

Bishop Morcos, head of the information committee at the Holy Synod, said the strong ties between the two countries' churches may help resolve the crisis, and said, "We won't hold back in performing our roles if political leadership asks for that."

Ethiopian Bishop Boules visited Egypt at the end of 2010 and prayed with Pope

Shenouda, added the sources. They said Shenouda is willing to travel to Ethiopia -- although he arrived from a treatment trip in the US weeks ago -- for the sake of Egypt's security.

Shenouda wants the Ethiopian church to convince the government there not to escalate the water problem with Egypt and Sudan. Shenouda had declared earlier that there have been communications with the Ethiopian church in this regard.

However, the Ethiopian church said the situation was difficult in light of the secular nature of the Ethiopian government. -- *US Copts Association*, April 3.

A GROWING NUMBER OF EGYPT'S 8-10 MILLION COPTIC CHRISTIANS ARE LOOKING FOR A WAY TO GET OUT AS ISLAMISTS INCREASINGLY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NATIONALIST REVOLUTION that toppled long-standing dictator Hosni Mubarak in February.

Egypt Daily News reported on Tuesday that "lawyers who specialize in working with Coptic Egyptians... say that in the past few weeks they have received hundreds of calls from Copts wanting to leave Egypt."

"They are insisting on leaving Egypt because the risks of staying here are too great," Naguib Gabriel, a Coptic human rights lawyer, told *Egypt Daily News*. "Many Christians are afraid of the future because of the fanatics in the mosques."

At least 20 Christians have been killed in sectarian violence with Muslims since Mubarak's ouster. And groups like the Muslim Brotherhood have been taking an increasingly visible role in forming Egypt's next government.

Coptic leaders have complained that they are being left out of the decision-making process, raising fears that the Egypt of tomorrow will be far less free and democratic than even the Egypt of Mubarak. -- *US Copts Association*, April 15.

THOUSANDS OF CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS PROTESTED IN THE SOUTHERN EGYPTIAN PROVINCE OF QINA FRIDAY AGAINST THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEW CHRISTIAN GOVERNOR.

Witnesses said the protesters, mostly observers of the conservative Islamic Salafist movement, threatened to bar Emad Mikhail, the new governor, from entering the province.

The previous governor, whom Mikhail will replace, was also Christian.

Qina has seen sectarian strife in the past. Late last year, dozens of Christians and Muslims were arrested in the province after nearly a dozen homes were burnt in

clashes between members of the two religions. – *US Copts Association*, April 16.

EGYPTIAN COPTS TODAY CELEBRATE EASTER SUNDAY AMID HEIGHTENED SECURITY MEASURES. CHURCHES, CINEMAS AND OTHER PLACES OF CELEBRATION WERE SURROUNDED BY FENCES.

Pope Shenouda III led holy Mass on Saturday night at the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Abbasseya. Thousands of Copts, senior officials and public figures attended.

Deputy Prime Minister Yehia al-Gamal attended and conveyed greetings from Prime Minister Essam Sharaf to the Pope. Representatives from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) were also present, along with three presidential candidates, including Mohamed El Baradei, and several ministers.

Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, head of the SCAF, conveyed his greetings to the Pope.

Meanwhile, protesters in Qena suspended protests against their newly-appointed governor to join Coptic celebrations.

Copts in Atfeeh held mass at the Two Saints Church, demolished in March following sectarian clashes but now rebuilt.

On Saturday, the church also held a lunch banquet for Muslim villagers who came to convey their greetings. Members from the SCAF, policemen and other executive officials attended.

The church pastor told Al-Masry Al-Youm that the presence of Muslims in the Coptic celebrations helps restore good relations. – *US Copts Association*, April 24.

VIOLENCE AGAINST RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN EGYPT, INCLUDING COPTIC CHRISTIANS, HAS PROMPTED AN INDEPENDENT U.S.-BASED COMMISSION TO CITE EGYPT AS A COUNTRY THAT VIOLATES RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.

The designation, in a report released on 28 April by the Washington-based U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, marks the first time that the panel has recommended that Egypt be placed on a U.S. government list of "countries of particular concern" that violate religious freedom.

Countries on the list are those "whose conduct marks them as the world's worst religious freedom violators and human rights abusers," Leonard Leo, head of the commission, said in issuing the annual report.

Leo said Egypt was cited because "instances of severe religious freedom viola-

tions engaged in or tolerated by the government have increased dramatically since the release of last year's report, with violence, including murder, escalating against Coptic Christians and other religious minorities."

He added that since former President Hosni Mubarak's resignation from office in February, "such violence continues unabated without the government's bringing the perpetrators to justice."

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom is an independent, bipartisan advisory commission created in 1998 to give independent policy recommendations and monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief outside the United States. The U.S. Department of State issues its own report on international religious freedom and can choose to accept or reject the commission's recommendations. – Chris Herlinger for *ENI*, April 28.

IN 2011, ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONCURRENCE OF THE FEAST DAY OF THE GLORIOUS RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST WITH THE REMEMBRANCE DAY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE, REV. DR OLAV FYKSE TVEIT, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, and Dr. Viorel Ionita, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, extended their support to the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church, jointly urging all the member Churches to honor the commemoration of 1.5 million innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide in their Easter messages. The appeal was made on April 13, 2011.

Below is the message in full:

Easter, the glorious Day of Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, falls this year on April 24 which coincides with Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. For the first time since 1915 April 24 falls on Easter Sunday in the Armenian church calendar. It is truly a meaningful coincidence, as the existence of the Armenian nation and people itself is a special sign of the power of the resurrection in a world of death. When Christians all over the world celebrate Easter on the same date this year, it will be an historic opportunity for all of us to pay tribute to the memory of the innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide.

As the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian people observe the 96th year of the Armenian Genocide, the World Council of Churches and the Conference of Churches in Europe appeal to all member churches to commemorate the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide during

their prayers and messages on Easter day 2011.

The World Council of Churches has addressed the need for public recognition of the Armenian Genocide. In 1984 the WCC published a document called "Armenia: the Continuing Tragedy" which helped in making known the history and plight of the Armenian people. The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs raised the issue of the Armenian Genocide in the UN Commission on Human Rights with reference to the latter's "Revised and Updated Report on the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide." As was stated at the 2005 WCC Central Committee meeting, the WCC believes that, "from the Christian perspective, the path towards justice and reconciliation requires the recognition of the crime committed as a sine qua non condition for the healing of memories and the possibility of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting but to look back with the intention to restore justice, the respect for human rights and relationships between perpetrators and victims."

In a public statement of 11 April 2005, the Presidium of the Conference of European Churches joined the World Council of Churches in inviting all its member churches "to make April 24 a Day of Memory of the Armenian Genocide and to consider further appropriate actions related to the 90 years Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide." The CEC Presidium further urged "the Turkish government to initiate a process of reconciliation between the Turkish and the Armenian peoples, in which the recognition of guilt and the proclamation of the truth need to be integral elements."

In this spirit, as we approach Easter Sunday this year, we call upon all brothers and sisters of faith in Jesus Christ to join with the Armenian people in offering prayers for Armenians and other victims of genocide.

Let us be reminded of what Christ has said, "I am the Resurrection and I am the Life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25). – Press Release, Holy Etchmiadzin, April 17.

FOR HIS SUPPORT OF THE ARMENIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, THE EASTERN DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF AMERICA HAS NAMED MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNOR DEVAL L. PATRICK AS ITS "FRIEND OF THE ARMENIANS" FOR 2011. The award will be officially bes-

towed during the annual Diocesan Assembly, meeting this year in Boston, April 28-May 1.

"We are what we are because of our willingness to face horrors like the Armenian Genocide—and to use them as reminders of the best of what we are. And the best of what we want to be is founded in tolerance and understanding."

The words were those of Governor Deval Patrick at the ceremonial groundbreaking and blessing of "Armenian Heritage Park" along the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway, on September 9, 2010.

More than a thousand people—Armenians from the Greater Boston area, leaders of the Armenian Church and national Armenian organizations, distinguished civic and municipal figures and elected officers—had turned out for the ceremony.

Governor Patrick stood alongside the visiting Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Karekin II, referring to the gathered crowd as his "brothers and sisters," as he offered his universal vision of human excellence grounded in tolerance and understanding.

"Let this park be a permanent tribute to that," Governor Patrick concluded.

The applause thundering from the crowd was more than a response to noble sentiments: it was an indication of the depth of respect and friendship that had blossomed between the Armenian community and the dynamic Massachusetts governor.

In Governor Deval Patrick, the Armenian Church community has seen a hope realized, and has felt privileged to work by his side, in a greater and universal cause. The Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America is honored to name him as its "Friend of the Armenians" for 2011. – Press Release, Eastern Diocese, April 20.

ON 31 MARCH 2011, A GROUP OF GERMAN THEOLOGIANs MET WITH HIS HOLINESS ARAM I. DURING THEIR CONVERSATION, THE CATHOLICOS SAID THAT ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY HAD LIVED TOGETHER IN THE REGION FOR CENTURIES. In view of present challenges, existential dialogue between Christianity and Islam should be based on common principles and values found in the teachings of the two religions.

Responding to questions regarding centuries long relationship between the Armenian Church and Islam, His Holiness said, "we have always insisted on peaceful co-existence based on mutual respect and recognition of rights." In response to questions on the Armenian Church, the Catho-

cos said, "Our church is the church of the people; the Catholicosate of Cilicia lives its religious life and vocation through its Diaspora, and is totally committed to ecumenism."

At the end of the meeting, the guests visited the Cathedral, the Martyrs monument, the museum and the offices of the Catholicosate. – Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, April 4.

HIS HOLINESS ARAM I WROTE TO PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD, SUPPORTING THE REFORMS HE HAS PROMISED. The Catholicos hoped that these reforms will contribute to the stability and prosperity of the country. At the end of his letter, Catholicos Aram I re-affirmed the commitment of the Armenian community in Syria to their country, and assured the President of their determination to work for its prosperity. – Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, April 9.

ON FRIDAY 8 APRIL 2011, MARONITE PATRIARCH BECHARA PETER RAI, ACCOMPANIED BY FOUR ARCHBISHOPS, VISITED ANTELIAS. HIS HOLINESS ARAM I MET THE PATRIARCH AND HIS DELEGATION AT THE MAIN HALL OF HIS RESIDENCE, and then led them in procession to St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral. After Canonical prayers in Armenian and Arabic, they returned to the Main Hall, where they met with the clergy, Executive Council of the Church, and the Armenian ministers and deputies.

His Holiness welcomed the Patriarch and his delegation and said, "May God bless you and guide you in your service to your flock." He then recalled the history of the Armenian Church and the close relationship between the Armenian and Roman Catholic Churches historically and currently, through the Oriental Orthodox-Catholic theological dialogue. He also mentioned the close cooperation between the Armenian and Maronite communities in the Diaspora. Referring to Lebanon, Catholicos Aram I said that Christians and Muslims in Lebanon have high expectations from Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai, having heard his call for tolerance and his emphasis on safeguarding the sovereignty of Lebanon and Lebanese identity. At the end of his welcoming speech, His Holiness offered a cross to the Patriarch.

In his response, the Patriarch thanked the Catholicos for his brotherly love and expressed his appreciation for Catholicos Aram I's commitment to ecumenism and to Christian-Muslim dialogue. He then said, "Today, we begin a new page in the rela-

tions between the Armenian and Maronite Churches." The Patriarch then paid tribute to the Armenian Church and people for their history of martyrdom, and acknowledged the contribution of the Armenian community to Lebanon. He then concluded, "Our visit today is a sign of our commitment to work together towards strengthening unity among the people of Lebanon."

At the end of exchanging greetings, Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai and Catholicos Aram I went to the Martyrs Chapel to pray, after which they had a brief private meeting. The visit ended with a luncheon offered by His Holiness Aram I in honor of the Patriarch and his delegation. – Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, April 11.

HIS HOLINESS MORAN MOR IGNATIUS ZAKKA II WAS, THE PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST HELD A MEETING WITH MR. RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN, THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY, on March 30. His Holiness was accompanied by Mor Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim Metropolitan of Aleppo, Mor Timotheos Samuel Aktas Archbishop of Tur-Abdin, Mor Philoxenos Yusuf Cetin Archbishop of Istanbul and Mor Philoxenus Mattias Nayis Patriarchal Assistant. The presidents of the diocesan councils of Tur-Abdin and Istanbul, as well as the legal team of Mor Gabriel Monastery were also included in the Patriarchal delegation. The meeting which lasted over one hour took place at the Prime Minister's official Residence in Ankara. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Mor Gabriel Monastery land dispute. Also present at the meeting were the Turkish Secretary for the Environment, whose office is responsible for Turkish Forestry, which is in litigation with the Monastery; senior members of the Turkish civil service representing different ministries involved in this case; and members of the diplomatic corps.

During the meeting His Holiness highlighted the ancient history of the Syrian Orthodox people in Turkey and the role of the Monastery in the life of our people who are still in the area, as well as, its importance to the Syriac people throughout the world. His Holiness stressed that justice must take its course in the restoration of the rights of the Church in Turkey affirming to the Prime Minister that the Church will not forsake its rights in its sacred places at any cost. Mr. Erdoğan highlighted his appreciation for the role and participation of the Syriac Orthodox in economic and cultural life in Turkey. Mr. Erdoğan told the Patriarch and his delegation that he will be

following the case and will do his utmost to find a proper outcome to settle this dispute after the issuance of the court's verdict. It was agreed that the Patriarch and Prime Minister Erdoğan will meet again soon after the court verdict, to follow up on the disputed lands of St Gabriel's Monastery. The meeting was widely covered by the Turkish media. – Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of the Eastern United States, April 1.

THE STANDING CONFERENCE OF THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN AMERICA HELD ITS SPRING MEETING ON THURSDAY, APRIL 7, AT THE COPTIC ORTHODOX PAPAL CENTER IN CEDAR GROVE, NEW JERSEY.

Bishop David of the Coptic Church hosted the meeting which was chaired by His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, of the Armenian Orthodox. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim represented our Archdiocese, accompanied by Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar and Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun. Attending also was His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Ecumenical Director of the Armenian Diocese.

Topics discussed included a proposed forum on Oriental Orthodox youth, future joint activities—including the annual United Nations prayer service—with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church on the local and International levels. The participants agreed on a date for the next concelebrated liturgy to be hosted by the Coptic Church on Staten Island. A Special guest Fr. Mark Arey of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese provided information on the recently formed Assembly of Bishops, which includes the canonical bishops of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Participants also engaged in a discussion on the situation of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt.

The Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches of America includes representatives of the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, and Syrian Orthodox Churches. The next meeting of the Conference will be hosted by our Archdiocese in fall of 2011. – Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of the Eastern United States, April 8.

The Catholic Churches

DURING THE PRIVATE AUDIENCE WITH POPE BENEDICT XVI, MAJOR ARCHBISHOP SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK SPOKE ABOUT THE CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH. The major archbishop noted that one of the

main objectives is to develop the ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox churches. "One of the tasks is to be open and work toward ensuring that the existing ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox churches continues in Ukraine. I told the Most Holy Father that the liturgy of my enthronement in Kyiv was attended by representatives of all the Orthodox churches of Ukraine. When I came up to each of them during the singing to say the liturgical phrase 'Christ is among us,' each of them answered: 'He is and shall be.' It was a very promising indication of their openness and shows that we really have many more objectives and much more work to do in this field," the head of the UGCC told BBC in an interview.

As for the prospect of establishing a unified church in Ukraine, according to Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, so far it is not about forming a unified structure.

"We are now at a certain stage where we must work toward renewing our cooperation to work out urgent issues in our relations that have been inherited from our history and, subsequently, to work together for the new evangelization of Ukraine and its culture," stressed the head of UGCC.

"Our visit to the Most Holy Father was not to talk about the Patriarchate or about our old aspirations regarding this or the status of our church. The aim of the visit was to show our visible and full communion with the Apostolic See," noted Major Archbishop Sviatoslav in the interview.

He also stressed that the UGCC will develop, "but the decision to grant the status of the Patriarchate is within the capacity of the Most Holy Father. We have not and will not devote excessive attention to this. We will work." – *RISU*, April 1.

IN AN INTERVIEW TO "LEFT BANK," IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION WHETHER HE WOULD LIKE TO MEET WITH PATRIARCH KIRILL AND WHAT HE WOULD SAY TO HIM, THE NEW HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH, MAJOR ARCHBISHOP SVIATOSLAV, said that the best way to communicate is to be open in a brotherly dialogue, be open to the purification of our memory, to ask for forgiveness and to forgive.

"I would like very much to visit him and hold a personal meeting with him. I am convinced that in peacefully and openly communicating with each other, we can relieve any tension.

"Our church has voiced its readiness and openness for a dialogue ever since it emerged from the underground. I remember how Patriarch Ivan Lubachivsky, who or-

dated me, after he moved to Ukraine, said: 'We forgive and ask for forgiveness.' It was a very deep call to reconciliation on his part. It was in the 1990s, at the time of the strongest confrontation, particularly in western Ukraine. There was the will for reconciliation on our part. Later, His Beatitude Lubomyr confirmed and repeated the same in the presence of Pope John Paul II who visited Ukraine.

"I think that today, we should heal the wounds rather than irritate and deepen them. One can heal the wounds of our memory only with mutual forgiveness. Therefore, as for any our brethren or neighbors who wounded us or were wounded by us, the best way to communicate is to be open in a brotherly dialogue, be open to the purification of our memory, to ask for forgiveness and to forgive," said Major Archbishop Sviatoslav.—*RISU*, April 1.

THE ORDINATION OF MARRIED MEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD HAS NOT BEEN THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO THE NUMEROUS YOUNG VOCATIONS IN HIS EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCH, said the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk to EWTN. The average age of a Ukrainian Catholic priest is 35.

"In our tradition, we do have a married clergy, but a married clergy is not the main reason we have so many young priests," he said, noting that religious orders, which require a vow of consecrated chastity, also have numerous young vocations. "The possibility of being a married priest is not the main cause of an increase or decrease in vocations to the priesthood because this vocation comes from God."

The number one priority for each head of a church is evangelization, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in today's world, said the newly elected major archbishop. – *RISU*, April 4.

HIS HOLINESS MAR DINKHA IV, CATHOLICOS PATRIARCH OF THE HOLY APOSTOLIC CATHOLIC ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST, HAS SENT A LETTER TO THE NEW PATRIARCH OF THE MARONITE CHURCH IN LEBANON, Mar Beshara Butros al Rai, congratulating him on his consecration.

His Holiness Mar Dinkha expressed his warmest wishes towards His Holiness Mar Beshara, who was elected on 15 March 2011.

With peace the first priority for sister churches, prayers were offered asking that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ may protect and guide Mar Beshara through his

service.

Along with the wishes, His Holiness Mar Dinkha urged peace and unity between sister churches in Lebanon during current difficulties in the Middle East. Further, prayers for peace and harmony for the country of Lebanon were also expressed. -- *Assyrian Church News*, April 4.

EASTERN CATHOLICS IN THE UNITED STATES ARE PLANNING FOR THREE "ENCOUNTERS" TO FOCUS ON EDUCATION AND EVANGELIZATION.

The three separate encounters, to be held under the banner "Together in Christ," are tentatively slated for Cleveland, Los Angeles and the East Coast in September, October and November 2012.

The encounters are the outgrowth of two earlier pan-Eastern encounters, each of which had restricted participation, according to Father John Lucas, a Ukrainian-rite priest in Chicago.

"The first one was organized by Rome and had only bishops," said Father Lucas, who is editor of the *New Star News*, the eparchial newspaper for the Byzantine Ukrainian Eparchy of St Nicholas in Chicago. Father Lucas, who is also on an encounter planning subcommittee of Eastern Catholic Eparchial Directors of Religious Education, added: "The bishops could bring one priest with them."

That encounter was held in Boston in 1999 and was organized by the Vatican Congregation for Eastern Churches.

The second encounter, held in 2006 in Chicago, was planned by the (U.S. Eastern) bishops, Father Lucas said, but it was an invitation-only affair. "The bishops appointed people to go from their (jurisdiction's) education department or their evangelization department."

The 2012 series of encounters is "for anybody who wants to learn something," Father Lucas said, "and learning something specifically about what the Eastern Church is."

Planners are expecting a turnout of 100-150 for each encounter. Organizers are hoping to keep the registration fees modest, and would like to offer a group discount for five or more participants.

A two-day meeting was just held in St. Louis as part of the ongoing planning for the encounters; previous meetings have been held in Orlando, Fla., Sybertsville, Pa., Detroit and Houston.

"The whole idea of education and evangelization is something we're all involved with," Father Lucas said, "to make sure people know about their church -- and other people know about it as well. We're

kind of hoping to open up people's eyes and minds."

Although the details of the encounter series were subject to approval by U.S. Eastern bishops at a meeting later in April, plans call for a Thursday session for clergy who cannot stay for the weekend program because of parish responsibilities, according to Father Lucas.

Friday will be the day when other participants gather. Saturday's schedule will focus on speakers and presentations. Liturgies will be scheduled for both Saturday and Sunday of each encounter. "The Saturday service will not be the same ritual (as Sunday's). It might be Maronite, it might be Armenian. We're going to try to make sure that everybody feels welcome," the priest said.

Father Lucas said relations between members of different Eastern churches are generally good. "In some areas of the country they can (get together). In others they can't because there's no one around them," he noted, referring to the geographic distances separating members of the Eastern churches. "It takes a lot of work to get it (an encounter) done, and everybody's busy."

The Eastern bishops worked over several years in the past decade to develop "God With Us," a catechetical series for kindergarten through eighth-grade students now in use in most U.S. Eastern parishes. • - Mark Pattison for *CNS*, April 6.

AT NOON ON APRIL 7, IN THE CONSISTORY HALL OF THE VATICAN APOSTOLIC PALACE, HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI MET WITH A GROUP OF BISHOPS OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH OF INDIA. They had been received in separate audiences in recent days during their "ad limina Apostolorum" visits. This is the speech the Pope delivered on the occasion:

Dear Brother Bishops,

I offer you a warm fraternal welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* a moment which is now sadly marked by the death of Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil. Before you all, I wish again to give thanks to God for his able and willing service over many years to the whole of the Church in India. May our loving Savior welcome his noble soul into paradise, and may he rest in peace in communion with all the saints.

Thank you for the sentiments of respect and esteem offered by Mar Bosco Puthur on your behalf and in the name of those whom you shepherd. Your presence is an eloquent expression of the deep spiritual bonds which unite the Syro-Malabar

Church to the Church universal, in fidelity to Christ's prayer for all his disciples (cf. Jn 17:21). You bring to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul the joys and hopes of the entire Syro-Malabar Church, which my predecessor the Venerable John Paul II happily raised to the status of a Major-Archiepiscopal Church in 1992. My greetings go to the priests, the women and men religious, the members of the lay movements, the families and in particular the young people who are the hope of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council taught that "Bishops have been designated by the Holy Spirit to take the place of the Apostles as pastors of souls and, together with the Supreme Pontiff and subject to his authority, they are commissioned to perpetuate the work of Christ, the eternal Pastor" (*Christus Dominus*, 1). Today's encounter thus forms an essential part of your pilgrimage *ad Limina Apostolorum*; it is also an occasion to intensify the awareness of the divine gift and responsibility received in the ordination by which you became members of the College of Bishops. I join you in seeking the intercession of the Apostles for your ministry. They, who were the first to receive the charge of caring for Christ's flock, continue to guide and watch over the Church from their place in heaven and remain a model and inspiration to all Bishops by their holiness of life, teaching and example.

Your visit also provides a precious opportunity to give thanks to God for the gift of communion in the apostolic faith and in the life of the Spirit which unites you among yourselves and with your people. With divine inspiration and grace on the one hand, and with humble prayers and efforts on the other, this precious gift of fellowship with the Triune God and with one another will grow ever richer and deeper. Each Bishop, for his part, is called to be a minister of unity (cf. *ibid.*, 6) in his particular church and within the universal Church. This responsibility is of special importance in a country like India where the unity of the Church is reflected in the rich diversity of her rites and traditions. I encourage you to do all you can to continue to foster the communion between yourselves and all Catholic Bishops throughout the world, and to be the living expression of that fellowship among your priests and faithful. Let the gentle command of Saint Paul continue to guide your hearts and your apostolic endeavors: "Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor. Live

in harmony with one another" (Rom 12:9-10,16). Thus will the unity of the Triune God be proclaimed and lived in the world, and thus will our new life in Christ be experienced always more profoundly, to the benefit of the entire Catholic Church.

Within this mystery of loving communion, a privileged expression of sharing in the divine life is through sacramental marriage and family life. The rapid and dramatic changes which are a part of contemporary society throughout the world bring with them not only serious challenges, but new possibilities to proclaim the liberating truth of the Gospel message to transform and elevate all human relationships. Your support, dear Brother Bishops, and that of your priests and communities for the sound and integral education of young people in the ways of chastity and responsibility will not only enable them to embrace the true nature of marriage, but will also benefit Indian culture as a whole. Unfortunately, the Church can no longer count on the support of society at large to promote the Christian understanding of marriage as a permanent and indissoluble union ordered to procreation and the sanctification of the spouses. Have your families look to the Lord and his saving word for a complete and truly positive vision of life and marital relations, so necessary for the good of the whole human family. Let your preaching and catechesis in this field be patient and constant.

At the heart of many of the works of education and charity exercised in your Eparchies are the various communities of men and women religious who devote themselves to the service of God and their neighbor. I wish to express the Church's appreciation for the charity, faith and hard work of these religious, who by professing and living the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience offer an example of complete devotion to the divine Master and thus help considerably to equip your faithful for every good work (cf. 2 Tim 3:17). The vocation to religious life and the pursuit of perfect charity is attractive in every age, but it should be nourished by a constant spiritual renewal which is to be fostered by superiors who devote great care to the human, intellectual and spiritual formation of their fellow religious (cf. *Perfectione Caritatis*, 11). The Church insists that preparation for religious profession is to be marked by long and careful discernment with the goal of ensuring, before final vows are made, that each candidate is firmly rooted in Christ, solid in his or her capacity for genuine commitment and joyful in the gift of self to Jesus Christ and his Church.

Furthermore, by its nature, formation is never completed, but is ongoing and must be an integral part of the daily life of each individual and community. Much needs to be done in this area, utilizing the many resources available in your Church, above all through deeper training in the practice of prayer, the particular spiritual and liturgical traditions of the Syro-Malabar rite, and the intellectual demands of a solid pastoral practice. I encourage you, in close collaboration with religious superiors, to plan effectively for such a solid ongoing formation, so that religious men and women continue to be powerful witnesses to the presence of God in the world and to our eternal destiny, so that the complete gift of self to God through religious life may shine with all its beauty and purity before men.

With these thoughts, dear Brother Bishops, I once again express my fraternal affection and esteem. Commending you to the intercession of Saint Thomas, Apostle of India, I assure you of my prayers for you and for those entrusted to your pastoral care. To all I impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in the Lord. – Vatican Website, April 7.

THE VATICAN AND MANY OF THE LATIN BISHOPS OF INDIA ARE NOT TREATING THE SYRO-MALABAR CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH JUSTICE, AND THAT MAKES THE CHURCH LOOK BAD, AUXILIARY BISHOP BOSCO PUTHUR OF ERNAKULAM-ANGAMALY TOLD POPE BENEDICT XVI.

While other Christians and other religions enjoy the freedom to build churches and conduct services anywhere in India, the Eastern Catholic churches "are denied it, paradoxically not by the state, but by our own ecclesiastical authorities," the bishop said.

Bishop Puthur, administrator of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, made his remarks to Pope Benedict April 7 at the end of the Syro-Malabar bishops' "ad limina" visits to the Vatican to report on the status of their dioceses.

Generally, the leaders of the Eastern Catholic churches such as the Syro-Malabar church enjoy full freedom to elect bishops and erect dioceses only in their church's traditional territory; otherwise, the responsibility is left to the Pope, often in consultation with the Latin bishops of the region concerned.

In the case of the Syro-Malabar church, Bishop Puthur told Pope Benedict that its traditional territory was all of India until Latin missionaries arrived in the 15th century. Now any of its faithful living out-

side Kerala state are subject to the authority of the local Latin bishop.

"We are convinced that it is the credibility of the Apostolic See that is at stake if this jurisdictional right is not restored to its pristine status," the bishop said.

Bishop Puthur presented five requests to Pope Benedict: the restoration of "all-India jurisdiction" to the Syro-Malabar Church; permission to establish dioceses throughout India; permission to set up archdioceses in Delhi and other large cities; the establishment of a special jurisdiction for the Persian Gulf states, in order to serve the tens of thousands of Syro-Malabar Catholics from India working in the region; action to improve the pastoral care of Syro-Malabar Catholics in Europe, Australia and other parts of the world.

The Syro-Malabar leader thanked the Latin bishops of the United States and Canada for supporting the appointment in 2001 of a Chicago-based bishop for his church's faithful in North America.

The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church has about 3.7 million members around the world, Bishop Puthur said. Currently, there are 29 dioceses served by: 32,855 women religious; 3,987 diocesan priests; 3,133 religious order priests; and 745 religious brothers, he said. – Cindy Wooden for CNS, April 8.

ON APRIL 11, THE DELEGATION OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH, WHICH IS LED BY BISHOP STEPHEN PLATTEN OF WAKEFIELD AND IS ON AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO UKRAINE, MET WITH CARDINAL LUBOMYR HUSAR.

The bishop is accompanied by two canonists of the Anglican Church, the ecumenical secretary of the primate of the Anglican Church, Archbishop of Canterbury Fr. Jonathan Gudall, and an experienced participant of the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue, Fr. Hugh Wybrew.

The participants discussed urgent questions regarding Christian life in the world. Talking about the present situation in Ukraine, Cardinal Lubomyr stressed that "the main objective of the churches, especially the churches of the Kyivan tradition, should be to seek unity among the people." The participants also touched upon the question of the future of Christian Europe and possible cooperation between the churches, especially in the social and moral areas of the society.

The guests noted that their society is becoming increasingly more secularized, especially among young people who are well-to-do and think "why trust in God if we have everything we need."

In the end, the guests expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to deepen their knowledge about cooperation between churches in Ukraine, reports ecumenism.com.ua -- *RISU*, April 12.

AT MIDDAY ON APRIL 14, BENEDICT XVI RECEIVED IN AUDIENCE THE BISHOPS AND FAITHFUL OF THE MARONITE CHURCH, ON THE OCCASION OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL COMMUNION OF THEIR NEW PATRIARCH, Bechara Peter Rai on 24 March.

The Pope emphasized at the beginning of his address that this was the first visit to the Successor of Peter by the patriarch Rai since his election to the patriarchal see of Antioch of the Maronites.

Referring to the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East (October 2010), the Pope underlined that on that occasion it was necessary "to reiterate many times the urgency of proposing the Gospel to those who do not know it well or have moved away from the Church. With all the vital force present in Lebanon and the Middle East, I know you will make efforts to announce, to bear witness to and to live in communion this Word of life in order to rediscover the enthusiasm of the first Christians".

"This region of the world which the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and Christ Himself blessed with their presence and their teaching, aspires to the lasting peace that the Word of Truth, welcomed and shared, is able to establish".

The Holy Father went on to speak about the education of young people, expressing his wish that the patriarch's "role in their formation be better recognized by society, in order that fundamental values be transmitted without discrimination, and to ensure that the youth of today become responsible men and women within their families and society at large, to build greater solidarity and fraternity between the members of the nation. Transmit to the young all my esteem and affection, reminding them that the Church and society need their enthusiasm and hope".

"Therefore", he concluded, "I invite you to intensify your efforts in the formation of priests and the many young people called to the Lord within your eparchies and in your religious congregations. By their teaching and their existence, may they be authentic witnesses to the Word of God, to help the faithful anchor their lives and their mission in Christ!" – *VIS*, April 14.

A MOMENT OF "REFLECTION WITH OUR ORTHODOX BROTHERS ON THE COMMON HERITAGE OF FAITH TO

WITNESS TOGETHER" IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO START A "NEW EVANGELIZATION" OF THE COMMUNITY, IN NEED OF "NEW IMPULSE" AND "ROOTS" IN SOCIETY. THE ARCHBISHOP OF THE MOTHER OF GOD IN MOSCOW, PAOLO PEZZI, tells AsiaNews about Easter in the small minority of Catholics in Russia, the goals of ecumenical dialogue, and the difficulties and successes of collaboration with the Moscow Patriarchate. For the second consecutive year, the holiday for the two churches – who have different calendars - coincides and the Catholic community (one million according to the most generous estimates, ndr) will celebrate Easter with the new Apostolic Nuncio to the Russian Federation, Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic, expected to arrive in the coming days, says the prelate.

Although often different Easter celebrations allow more contact and meetings between the spiritual leaders of the two communities in the period of Holy Week, the opportunity to celebrate in the same period also offers great advantages. "First of all – says Archbishop Pezzi - it is easier, even in our diversity, to understand and live the same witness. It favors the knowledge that we have a treasure of common faith and that the differences we have between us are not necessarily barriers, but a possible mutual enrichment." For this, the archbishop hopes that one day we may arrive at a "common calendar" or at least at fixing a date that is more or less in line with the major religious holidays in Russia: "The Catholic community could adapt to the Orthodox calendar and celebrate Easter and Christmas on the same day." The issue - under discussion for some time and also proposed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople - "should be discussed at the next pan-Orthodox Synod, which they are trying to organize to take place in a few years," says the archbishop of Moscow.

The Easter season brings with it, by definition, the concept of rebirth, even if we talk about a new climate in relations between the two churches for the Catholics of Russia "change does not reside so much in the new conditions of life of the community", as in a renewal of faith linked to the Resurrection itself, "not just a memory of someone who was alive only to die again, but of the One who has risen to enter into such a dimension where you can meet him and have a relationship with Him that is life-changing."

The imminent arrival of the new Nuncio is also an opportunity to reflect on the future - "I do not want to talk about challenges, I do not like that term" – regarding

the Catholic Church in the country. Archbishop Pezzi identifies three areas in which they must continue to work, picking up the legacy of the past 'Vatican ambassadors': "The care and organization, in terms of structures, of the Catholic Church throughout the territory; the essential relationship with the Orthodox in first place and then with other denominations and religions and finally relations with civil society and the state...The Catholic community," says the archbishop, "on the one hand needs to be re-evangelized and on the other rooted in a faith with a constructive presence of men of faith in society in which we live." The new Nuncio will be of real help in this direction, particularly in relations with the Moscow Patriarchate and the need to "increase a common witness in society. In this, paradoxically, "Catholics can make a bigger contribution" because they are a small minority, so it is "more obvious that what moves us is not merely the witness of an event." In a Russia still recovering from decades of state atheism, and which is only experiencing a spiritual rebirth since the 90's, the actions of the Orthodox Church in the social sphere are denounced as "interference" and regarded with suspicion by those who consider it a mere propaganda tool of political power. "For now there is a general tolerance of public opinion, but when and if the Orthodox Church becomes a real presence, and not just a superficial one in society, the attacks will increase in vigor," warns Archbishop Pezzi.

Even so, a common witness meets the needs of both Churches. The archbishop confirms an increasingly collaborative climate with the Orthodox, which "is most fruitful in the cultural field and increasingly in that of charity and the family." "There are exchanges of students between the Catholic University of Milan and the San Tikon of Moscow," says the archbishop, "collaboration between the Catholic seminary and the Orthodox Academy of St. Petersburg." The pastoral care of the family is also another area where joint efforts are well coordinated between the Orthodox and Catholic parishes: "We discuss how to help families with problems of drugs or alcohol, and offer material support through family centers, such as those in Moscow and Kaliningrad." "Charitable initiatives that benefit a more just society, street children, AIDS patients or the homeless are another area in which we can boost joint projects."

Children's education however remains a delicate subject: "Here," says Archbishop Pezzi, "we are still experiencing difficulties due to misunderstandings and a mutual understanding that needs to be deepened."

But the time of the accusations of proselytism "is now behind us and in Russia there are examples of popular Catholic primary schools and kindergartens, such as in Novosibirsk and Tomsk," says Archbishop Pezzi. What is more, not excluding the possibility that one day Russian schools may also teach Catholicism, "given our small presence in the area," he explains, "the Catholic religion was not included directly in the projects (still experimental) of teaching the basics of religious culture. But if you present a reasonable number of pupils who like the idea of an alternative education to that provided today, then it is a question we will have to ask." – *Asia News*, April 20.

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“I THINK WE SHOULD NOT POISON OUR RELATIONS TODAY WITH THE PHANTOM PAINS OF THE PAST,” HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH (UGCC), MAJOR ARCHBISHOP SVIATOSLAV, SAID IN AN INTERVIEW to *Focus* magazine in response to a question

about relations with the Moscow Patriarchate.

According to the head of the UGCC, our churches have had many wounds inflicted in the past: “I read about phantom pains felt by someone who lost his arm. It is a psychological illusion,” noted Major Archbishop Sviatoslav.

“I am convinced that we will be able to heal the wounds when we heal our memory with mutual forgiveness. We are now ready for it and, moreover, our faithful demand it. We, as the pastors, should hear the voice of the people, which is the voice of God,” said the head of the UGCC.

In answer to the question of what he would like to discuss with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, the head of UGCC noted that the very fact of such a meeting will be a manifestation of mutual recognition and will establish a dialogue. “The Moscow Patriarch showed that he is ready for it. This is indicated by the presence of Bishop Ilarii at my enthronement, the greeting of Metropolitan Volodymyr and his invitation to a meeting,” said Major Archbishop Sviatoslav.

In answer to the question in what way the hierarch is going to build relations with the authorities, in view of the fact that the president and his entourage favor the Moscow Patriarchate, the major archbishop responded that it will be a constructive dialogue regardless of which church or government officials attend. According to the hierarch, there are other more serious challenges in Ukraine today.

“For instance, all the churches are in a great danger to become political parties,” noted the major archbishop, referring to the words of his spiritual mentor who said back at the time of the underground church that if the church becomes a political party, it will take the side of Herod or Pilate whereas it should be on the side of the Crucified One.

“It has become a guideline to me. I believe that the church can be neither pro-regime nor in opposition; it should unite people,” said Major Archbishop Sviatoslav in the interview, the Information Department of the UGCC reports. – *RISU*, April 29.



His Eminence Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church (1927-2011)

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Edited by Ronald G. Roberson, CSP
 Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs
 3211 Fourth Street, NE
 Washington, DC 20017-1194
 Tel: (202) 541-3020 Fax: (202) 541-3183