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On the Eastern Churches and Ecumenism

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The Resignations of the Heads of the Maronite and Ukrainian Greek Catholic Churches

A LETTER FROM POPE BENEDICT XVI TO HIS BEATITUDE CARDINAL NASRALLAH PIERRE SFEIR ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RESIGNATION FROM THE OFFICE OF PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH OF THE MARONITES was made public on February 26. The full text follows.

The year dedicated to the 1,600th anniversary of St Maron's death is drawing to a close; a time of grace has been granted to the Maronite Church during this exceptional Jubilee. It is also the crowning point of your service for the greater glory of God and for the good of all his faithful.

In his immense love God fashioned you and impressed upon you an indelible trace of himself, choosing you in particular to serve him. Your free and enthusiastic response, after the example of the Mother of God: "let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38) corresponded to this mysterious choice.

Last year you were able to celebrate the 60th anniversary of your ordination to the priesthood: proof of your fidelity and love for Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Priest. Next July you will have another opportunity to raise your thanksgiving to the Blessed Trinity for having served in the episcopate for 50 years.

For almost 25 years you collaborated with your two predecessors in the See of Antioch before being selected by the Synod on 19 April 1986 to succeed them: an important event which today places you on the threshold of your silver jubilee in this office.

You began your noble ministry as Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites during the nightmare of the war that bathed Lebanon in blood for too long. You have led this Church with an ardent desire for peace in your country and have travelled the world in order to comfort your people who were obliged to emigrate. Peace has returned at last, fragile as always but ever timely.

Pope John Paul II, whom I shall have the joy of beatifying on 1 May, called you to become a member of the College of Cardinals on 26 November 1994, in order to integrate you into deeper communion with the universal Church. My venerable Predecessor's arrival in Beirut in 1997, to sign the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *A New Hope for Lebanon*, once again emphasized the bond your country has always had with the Successor of Peter.

When I convoked the Extraordinary Synod for the Middle East in September 2009, I appointed you President Delegate *ad honorem* in order to stress the value of the ecclesial service you have carried out in Christ's name.

A few days ago, at the end of the Jubilee, I blessed the statue of St Maron at St Peter's Basilica and I was able to greet you, together with the President of the Lebanese Republic and numerous bishops and faithful.

You have chosen to resign from your office as Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites on this very special occasion. I now accept your free and magnanimous decision, which is the expression of a great humility and deep detachment. I am sure that you will always accompany the Maronite Church with your prayers, your wise advice and your sacrifices.

I ask Almighty God, through the intercession of St Maron and of Our Lady of Lebanon, to fill you with his blessings. I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, as well as to the bishops, priests, consecrated people and all the faithful of the Maronite Church and to the beloved Lebanese Nation.

From the Vatican, 26 February 2011.
BENEDICTUS P P. XVI
-- Vatican website

BISHOP GREGORY JOHN MANSOUR OF THE EPARCHY OF SAINT MARON OF BROOKLYN OFFERED THIS PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE MINISTRY OF PATRIARCH NASRALLAH SFEIR:

Maronite Patriarch, Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir, is one of those unique lead-

ers who come on history's stage, make a difference, and then fade away without much fanfare. On March 5, 2011 the Church will honor him for his service as Bishop and Patriarch, but, in fact, there are no words to express the gratitude that is due to him.

Patriarch Sfeir has stood before world leaders and powerful interests and proclaimed the truth with a disarming love and a peaceful spirit that is truly beautiful to behold. He is deep down a monk, a simple son of Saint Maron. He has spent almost his entire life in the monastery of Bkerke. He lives soberly, eats sparingly, maintains a balance of prayer and work, and attends attentively to all that his burden of office asks of him. I have seen him get off a plane from South Africa to New York and after a 17 hour flight endure a full day of meetings with United Nations officials, Lebanese embassy officials and guests, and then lead an evening Lenten prayer service at our Cathedral.

The Patriarch is a free man who wants others to live in freedom. In this way he imitates the free man, Saint Maron, who by living in the truth of Christ, became the inspiration for a Church as well as a nation. Our Patriarch's recent pastoral letter on Saint Maron is a treasure chest of inspiration for anyone who loves the Maronites, loves Lebanon, and loves that true spiritual freedom that enables us to love God and our fellow man.

With the Maronite Bishops at his side in 2000, Patriarch Sfeir asked the government to the east of Lebanon to withdraw their troops and military personnel from Lebanon and to do so as a friend. He had also called upon the government to the south of Lebanon to leave southern Lebanon, to honor the dignity and territorial sovereignty of Lebanon. He stood before American Presidents (Bishop Shaheen and I had the joy to witness this twice) and urged them to do all they could to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which continues to cause tragic consequences to the entire region. We are still waiting, hoping. He has stood before his own beloved Leba-

nese citizens - Sunni, Shiite, Druze and Christians - and asked that all parties disarm and respect Lebanon's special mission as a refuge for minorities and a pluralistic society. Some ignore him and some ridicule him. This is his present lot of suffering, for the sake of a Lebanon he believes in and loves. Nonetheless, by the grace of God, he suffers well, as throughout history Maronite Patriarchs before him have suffered well and triumphed.

Patriarch Sfeir has two life passions: the Maronite Church and Lebanon. Each has become for him a treasure worth living and dying for. History will look kindly upon him, as it did other historical figures such as Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi who both espoused a non-violent, strong yet loving, militancy, like that of our Lord's, that has confounded the powerful with an innate logic of love and a simple goodness that has produced amazing spiritual fruits without measure.

Your Eminence and Beatitude, Father and Head of the Maronite Church throughout the world, Patriarch and Cardinal Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir, thank you for your visionary leadership and your love for the Church you serve and the country you love.

ON FEBRUARY 10TH AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN KYIV HIS BEATITUDE LUBOMYR (HUSAR) ANNOUNCED THAT TODAY POPE BENEDICT XVI ACCEPTED HIS RESIGNATION FROM THE OFFICE OF MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH (UGCC). A request regarding this matter had been sent to the Holy Father by the Head of the UGCC when he turned 75 years of age.

"Today, when I do not have as much strength, I would like to hand over the office to my successor, who will continue to work in a very efficient way. For it is not my work and I am not the key. The key is the Church, the goal of our work is service to the Church, and we try to do it as long as we can do it effectively," declared His Beatitude Lubomyr, explaining his decision.

After relinquishing the guidance of the Church, His Beatitude does not intend to completely remove himself from the life of the Church and society. "I will be doing what I am still able to do. I will pray for the Church, contemplate the past, and ensure that nothing of our Church's past is lost. I would also like to meet with youth and with different professional groups," says His Beatitude Lubomyr. Later this month His Beatitude will meet with students of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and will start work on his

second audio trilogy titled "Society" which will include audio books: "Society and Government," "Society and Business," "Society and Law."

"According to canon law, the new Administrator of the UGCC will be Archbishop of Lviv, Most Rev. Ihor (Voznyak), until a new Head of the Church is elected. Within the next two months the Synod of Bishops will meet to elect a new Head of the Church. His Beatitude will maintain all titles and honors due to his office," said the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Bishop of the Curia, Most Rev. Bohdan (Dziurakh).

His Beatitude became the Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church ten years ago after the death of his predecessor Myroslav Ivan (Lubachivskyi). He was the first head of the Church to be elected by a special Synod of Bishops following the emergence of the Church from the underground and the independence of Ukraine. During the time of his leadership of the Church, the seat of the Head of the UGCC was returned to Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, from St. George's Cathedral in Lviv. The Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ and the Patriarchal Center of the UGCC are currently completing construction in Kyiv. – Press Release, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Feb. 10.

ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, THERE WAS HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE IN KYIV ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONVOCATION OF THE ELECTIVE SYNOD OF THE BISHOPS OF THE UGCC WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE UGCC MOST REV. IHOR VOZNYAK, Secretary of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC Most Rev. Bohdan Dziurakh and chief of the Legal department of the Patriarchal Curia Rev. Dr. Vitalij Tokar.

The Synod of the Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church to elect the Major Archbishop will begin on Mar. 21st in Patriarch Josyf Slipyj Retreat center in Lviv-Briuchovychi. The corresponding decree was signed by Administrator of the UGCC Archbishop Ihor Vozniak on Feb. 11th in Kyiv at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection.

"To participate in the Synod are convened all the bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, members of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC, especially those who have a hard duty to participate in it" - announced Reverend Archbishop Igor (Voznyak).

According to the Administrator of the UGCC, the Elective Synod of the UGCC

has been convoked on the basis of the norms of canon 128, paragraph 3 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. Members of the Synod of Bishops are to remain in the place of the Synod until the elections are confirmed on behalf of the Holy Father and until a new Head of the UGCC is officially proclaimed.

"Today the Synod of Bishops is made up of 50 bishops from Ukraine as well as from abroad, says Secretary of the Synod of Bishops Most Rev. Bohdan (Dziurakh). The Synod is the legislative body of the Church, consisting exclusively of bishops. It determines the internal and external policy of the Church, takes care of building up church structures, and makes decisions on pastoral, ecumenical and educational issues. The Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is usually held once a year," the curial bishop explained. – Press Release, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Feb. 18.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW ON FEBRUARY 17 RECEIVED THE NEW US AMBASSADOR TO TURKEY, FRANCIS RICCIARDONE at the Patriarchate seat in the Phanar district of Istanbul.

"It was a very great honor to come here on my first day back in Istanbul after being away from Turkey for many years. It was very moving, of course, to meet His All Holiness (Bartholomew). The last time I had yet him had been with Mrs. Clinton in 1996. We discussed issues of concern to the Church and also to the United States, the concern to support religious freedom everywhere in the world," Ricciardone said, adding:

"We both discussed with great pleasure modern Turkey's ambition to serve as an example of freedom and democracy. As always I conveyed the greetings of Secretary Clinton, the good-wishes of the United States, the people and government of the United States and my respect for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and for its community." – ANA, Feb. 18.

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW EXTENDED WISHES FOR A SUCCESSFUL TENURE IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF THESSALONIKI TO THE NEW MAYOR Yiannis Boutaris who visited him at the Phanar.

"We wish a good tenure for the benefit of the people of Thessaloniki," the Patriarch said, while Boutaris termed the meeting "yet another small stone in the very close

relations that the municipality wants to develop with the Ecumenical Patriarchate." – A. Kourkoulas for ANA, Feb. 18.

HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW OF CONSTANTINOPLE RECEIVED THE RUSSIAN DELEGATION TO THE RUSSIAN-TURKISH CIVIL FORUM ON FEBRUARY 19, 2011, AT THE PHANAR. The delegation was headed by Mr. K. Kosachev, chairman of the State Duma committee for international affairs

Welcoming the guests, His Holiness spoke about the fraternal cooperation between the Orthodox Church of Constantinople and Russia in dealing with various issues important for both pan-Orthodox unity and solution of topical problems facing all humanity. The Primate of the Church of Constantinople also introduced his Russian guests to the present situation of Orthodox Christians in Turkey, emphasizing that in recent years a constructive dialogue was developing between the Turkish authorities and the Islamic community in the country.

Mr. Kosachev thanked His Holiness for the warm welcome on behalf of the Russian participants in the meeting and informed His Holiness about the Russian-Turkish Civil Forum. Father Philip Riabykh informed the Patriarch about the work of the working group for interreligious dialogue, noting that the Russian delegation asked the Turkish side to invite representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to the bilateral dialogue since among its participants there will be representatives of the Muslim communities in Russia.

The delegation presented His Holiness with an icon of Sts. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom painted by Russian masters.

After the audience, the Russian delegation was taken on a tour of St. George's and visited the church of St. Sophia and the building of the Russian general consulate, which used to accommodate the embassy of the Russian Empire. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Feb. 21.

ON FEBRUARY 14, 2011, ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH AND THE GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA FILED A LAWSUIT IN FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT IN MANHATTAN AGAINST THE PORT AUTHORITY OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY as well as other agencies and individuals, in order to foster the rebuilding at Ground Zero of the only house of worship destroyed by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The Parish and the Archdiocese would

have preferred to rebuild the Church without litigation. However, they have been unable to do so since the Port Authority renounced a long-standing agreement with the Church to rebuild at Ground Zero, seized the Church's land, barred the Church from access to it, and has refused to talk or meet with the Church or the Archdiocese. This legal action has been taken not only as a last resort to restore the property and rebuilding rights of St. Nicholas Church, but also to fulfill the common vision of civil and church authorities that the Church be rebuilt as a place of prayer and meditation at Ground Zero for all people.

While the Port Authority has claimed publicly that it is currently in discussions with the Archdiocese in order to foster the rebuilding effort, in fact, in March of 2009 it summarily disavowed its agreement with the Archdiocese to rebuild St. Nicholas at 130 Liberty Street, a site chosen by the Port Authority, which is adjacent to the original location. Since that time, the Port Authority has rebuffed all efforts by the Church to work with it regarding the rebuilding.

Contrary to working cooperatively with the Archdiocese and the Parish, a posture which had prevailed between 9/11 and the Port Authority's abrupt turnabout in March 2009, the Port Authority—without permission, notice, or any legal justification whatsoever—has sent its bulldozers onto both the land still owned by the Church at its original site at 155 Cedar Street, and the land provided to the Church at 130 Liberty Street pursuant to its agreement with the Port Authority. The Port Authority has conducted extensive excavation and other construction work that has kept the Church off of its own property, and has rendered both sites unbuildable by the Church without substantial remedial work.

The Parish and the Archdiocese hope that through this lawsuit, just and fair rulings will be made allowing for the prompt re-construction of St. Nicholas at Ground Zero, not only as a church serving its flock, but also as a greater ministry bringing peace, reconciliation and a sacred space of recollection and remembrance for all people visiting Ground Zero. – Press Release, Greek Archdiocese, Feb. 14.

IN A RELIGIOUS CULTURE PLAGUED BY IN-FIGHTING AND SCHISM, METROPOLITAN NICHOLAS OF THE AMERICAN CARPATHO-RUSSIAN ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE U.S.A. HAS WORKED TO HEAL RIFTS BETWEEN ORTHODOX AND CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS.

On Tuesday, some Byzantine Catholics will join a 5 p.m. celebration of his 75th

birthday at Christ the Savior Cathedral in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

"He has a passion for church unity," said the Rev. John Petro, rector of SS. Cyril & Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary, North Side. "It's not about giving academic lectures on ecumenism, but a living experience of coming together to pray and work on common projects."

Metropolitan Nicholas has worked for reconciliation while supporting missionary outreach to a secular world. He is battling cancer and was unable to give an interview but will be at Tuesday's service.

He was born in New Jersey, to Eastern Catholic immigrants from Carpathian mountain villages of Europe. Eastern Catholics are loyal to the Pope, but follow the practices of Orthodoxy, which always included a married priesthood.

In 1929, the Pope banned married Eastern Catholic priests from America. Eastern Catholics here felt betrayed. Thousands left the Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh and in 1938 formed the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese.

"It was a very bitter and painful experience in those days," said the Rev. Michael Rosco, who edits the Carpatho-Russian news. "It caused splits in families and certainly splits in churches. It took a long time for that to begin to heal, and it took a person like Bishop Nicholas to get the process of healing going."

As a student at Christ the Savior Seminary in Johnstown, the future bishop helped out at the East Pittsburgh parish of the future Father Rosco, who was 5 years old.

"Even then I remember his very warm personality," Father Rosco said. "He was a wonderful role model, and probably one of the reasons that I became interested in the priesthood."

Ordained in 1959, he served for three years at SS. Peter & Paul in Windber, Somerset County.

In 1962 he went to study at the prestigious Halki Orthodox seminary -- since closed by the Turkish government -- at the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. He spent time on Mount Athos, the monastic center on a remote peninsula in Greece.

He returned to Johnstown as prefect of Christ the Savior Seminary, where Father Rosco became a student.

"He emphasized that first and foremost we should be men of prayer," he said. "He said we must remember that it is our duty, above all others, to preach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and to be the example of Christ that a priest is supposed to be."

A parish assignment took him to New York, where in 1979 he became abbot of a new monastery. In 1983 he was elected an auxiliary bishop in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. But the next year Bishop John of the Carpatho-Russian diocese died unexpectedly. Bishop Nicholas was chosen to succeed him.

He immediately embarked on renewal. That included translation of services into English while preserving the unique Carpathian tunes to which the lyrics were chanted.

"He has a great love for Carpatho-Russian plain chant," said Father Frank Miloro, the chancellor. "He understands that unless we preserved it in the English language, the chant would disappear."

Today the diocese has 10,000 members in about 80 parishes. He championed mission parishes in the south and west, which have drawn new converts.

His work to heal relationships with Byzantine Catholics began with an invitation from the late Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Judson Procyk to participate in a 1999 celebration of the Catholic jurisdiction's 75th anniversary. Metropolitan Nicholas, along with Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Maximos, was given a place of honor. During the service Metropolitan Procyk offered them the kiss of peace. It was a gesture, Metropolitan Nicholas said later, that would have been unimaginable 50 years earlier.

"Christ is in our midst. Do not let this moment pass away," he reported telling his Catholic counterpart.

He soon wrote an editorial for his diocesan newspaper, saying that the experience was "like two brothers who had been estranged coming together and embracing again," said the Rev. John Petro, rector of SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary on the North Side.

Subsequent exchanges have included Father Petro preaching in the Orthodox cathedral and a Carpatho-Russian priest joining the Catholic seminary's faculty.

While sacramental unity is far off and beyond local control, "he has been able to put aside the church politics and recognize the fact that we are one people," Father Rosco said.

In October, during what has become an annual address to students of both seminaries, he made several proposals: joining for prayer, pilgrimage and works of charity; a common studies program for their seminaries; and supporting an international proposal for calculating the date of Easter by a strictly astronomical formula so that all Christian churches celebrate together.

"Let us ask a question about unity that needs to be asked, especially now. Why have we tolerated its absence? Why has the perversion of unity -- why has disunity achieved so much acceptance and respectability?" he asked.

"It is time to stop going alone in disunity. Let us go together once again ... joined together in the unity of the mountain of Zion, under the headship of Jesus Christ." – Ann Rodgers for *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Feb. 21.

THE ANNUAL ENCOUNTER OF UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC AND ORTHODOX HIERARCHS OF NORTH AMERICA MET IN CLEARWATER, FLORIDA, ON JANUARY 27 AND 28, 2011. The hierarchs have been gathering since 2001 to discuss the issues relevant to their respective dioceses and eparchies and to consider the steps that might be taken to draw the Churches closer together, setting an example for ecclesiastical life in Ukraine.

The theme for this year's encounter was: "Possibilities on the Path to Unity – What We Hold in Common and Where We Differ." To broaden discussion on this topic, the hierarchs invited one priest from each Church to make presentations reflecting on this theme. Rev. Fr. Stephen Wojcichowsky, Director of the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies at the University of St. Paul in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada presented from the Ukrainian Catholic perspective. V. Rev. Dr. Jaroslav Buciora, Pastor of the Protection of the Mother of God Cathedral (Sobor) and Professor of Theology at St. Andrew College/Seminary, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada presented from the Ukrainian Orthodox perspective.

Fr. Stephen summarized some of the existing dialogues that have taken place between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches on a broader horizon – The North American Orthodox-Catholic Consultation, founded in 1965 and the Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops, founded in 1981 – both of which have issued numerous "agreed statements" concerning the many elements of faith that the two sides have in common, concerning the Sacraments, Theology, Dogma, etc. They have also discussed the most vexing problems about which agreement is difficult to establish and Fr. Stephen presented the thoughts of various modern Eastern Catholic theologians about these problems. Fr. Stephen expressed his joy at being asked to participate in the Encounter and proposed a Theological Consultation, which would be able to produce more in-depth and specific doc-

uments for dialogue.

Fr. Jaroslav offered his reflection "Towards the Future Dialogue of the Churches" suggesting that the participants in any such dialogue must be prepared to answer in depth questions about themselves and their own ecclesiology prior to the initiation of a serious dialogue and must be prepared to abandon any prejudice held toward theologians from the "other" side. Further, Ukrainian theologians must be included in the broader dialogues rather than permit others to speak in their behalf. The present "Encounters" and other discussions between the Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox Churches could become "the catalyst for the resurgence of our own religious identity, imperative at the present time." The participants "must be consistent and theologically mature in their quest for unity... must listen to one another... be patient about what has taken place in history... and not afraid to look into each other's eyes with love, where they will see each other as brothers... in Christ."

In their discussion on the theme, the hierarchs at the Encounter pointed to the development of their relationship, which has not gone unnoticed by the various ecclesiastical bodies throughout the world. When the Encounters began a decade ago, the intent was to create an opportunity for the bishops to become more familiar with one another and to counter the incomprehensible conflicts that were deeply damaging Christ's Church in newly independent Ukraine. The bishops, in 2011, have seen the need to move toward the creation of a permanent Ukrainian Orthodox – Catholic Theological Consultation, which will consist of both hierarchs and theologians from both Churches to prepare in-depth analyses for consideration at future Encounters. Each of the four jurisdictions – two in the USA and two in Canada – will soon make their appointments to this Consultation.

The hierarchs decided to continue this year with their effort to speak with a common voice to the faithful of the Churches through Epistles on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster, Ukrainian Independence and the Holodomor. They will also address in the very near future a common letter to the Canadian and USA Ambassadors to Ukraine and to the State Departments of the two nations expressing their concerns about the extreme danger the nation of Ukraine faces if the actions of the present government continue to align the nation with Russia and turn away from the Western orientation of previous governments. Great concern will also be expressed about the interference of

the present government in ecclesiastical life – in particular the unmasked favoritism shown for the Moscow Patriarchal Church of Ukraine.

Plans are now being developed for a Symposium to be sponsored by the Encounter in 2013 at the 1025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Ukraine. Decisions about the location and extent of the Symposium and events surrounding it, will be concluded by the next Encounter. In preparation for this Symposium there is a desire on the part of the bishops to travel to both Constantinople and Rome to visit with both Pope Benedict XVI and Patriarch Bartholomew I to inform them about the Encounters and to express the deep desire to resolve the issues that divide the Body of Christ, as well as to seek their support for united ecclesiastical life in Ukraine.

The next Encounter is tentatively scheduled to be held in Colona, British Columbia, Canada in the Spring of 2012. – Press Release, Feb. 9.

"THE PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA IS ON THE SIDE OF ALL THE PEOPLE THAT ARE IN PAIN REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY ARE GREEK, EGYPTIAN, ARAB OR ANY OTHER ETHNICITY," PATRIARCH THEODOROS II OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA stressed on February 1.

Speaking to the ANA-MPA, the Patriarch made the statement in response to the dramatic situation in the Mideast country and hours before a scheduled demonstration in the center of Cairo.

"The latest incidents, with more than 100 people dead and thousands injured, have caused immense sorrow, because we share brotherly relations with the Egyptians going back thousands of years," the Patriarch said.

"We hope that Egypt will find its way and continue to be the most important gateway to Africa. We are aware of the problems faced by its people, a beautiful and tormented people. We are aware of the historic significance of the country we live in and the Patriarchate of Alexandria, which has existed in the land of the Nile for 2,000 years will continue to be part of the history of Egypt ... I pray that there will be no more victims amongst our innocent fellow human beings," the Patriarch concluded. – N. Katsikas for ANA, Feb. 2.

DURING THE RECENT PERIOD OF POLITICAL AND COMMUNITY UNREST IN EGYPT, HIS BEATITUDE THEODOROS II, POPE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA, WAS IN

CAIRO in order to in every way support the Greek and Arab Orthodox brothers and sisters who live in the Egyptian capital.

Despite the difficulties and the dangers of travelling, the strict controls and the restriction of movement after sunset, His Beatitude, accompanied by His Grace Nikodimos of Nitria, Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo and Very Reverend Archimandrite Panteleimon Arathymos, Director of his private office, visited the Holy Monastery of St George, thereby supporting His Grace the Hegumen, Bishop Niphon of Babylonos and the fathers, the Holy Churches, institutions and the suffering faithful who chose to remain in the country. We must confess that, despite the tense atmosphere, His Beatitude was treated with respect and was facilitated by the Egyptian army and the civil defence during his travels.

On 4th February 2011 His Beatitude returned to Alexandria where he repeated the visits to the holy churches and institutions of the Great City, strengthening the faithful there too; he showed particular concern for those at the Kaniskerion Old Age Home of the Hellenic Community.

It is to be noted that during this difficult period concern and support was expressed by the Venerable Primates of Orthodox Churches by telephone to His Beatitude the Patriarch of Alexandria. Also, the concern of the Hellenic State and Diplomatic officials was ceaseless, and similar concern was expressed by influential figures of the political and business world, hierarchs and priests who were worried about the safety of the Patriarchate. Expressly noted was the concern of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Dimitris Droutsas, who spoke with His Beatitude.

The Media addressed His Beatitude constantly, who through them heard of the anxiety of all regarding the goings on. – Press Release, Patriarchate of Alexandria, Feb. 7.

DURING THE MORNING PROGRAM "EVERY DAY A NEW DAY" BROADCAST TODAY ON THE RADIO STATION OF THE CHURCH OF GREECE, THE REPORTERS KATERINA HOUZOURI AND KOSTAS PAPPAS SPOKE WITH HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III both about the recent convocation of the Council of Churches of the Middle East and about the current events concerning the uprisings in the Arab world. His Beatitude, questioned about the latest events in the Arab world and on the possibility of a chain reaction of uprisings replied "The domino effect of uprisings worries us all; however, regarding Jordan I can

assure you that what applies to the other countries does not apply to Jordan given that the situation there is completely different. This apprehension does not exist in Jordan, nevertheless this upheaval is being fueled by different situations and that is something that preoccupies everyone."

Responding to another question with regard to whether these political uprisings can assume another character His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem replied: "To be frank, it was an unforeseeable situation upon which you hear a variety of opinions and views from various analysts, but the essence is the same, that the situation is unpredictable."

Finally, following a question regarding the meeting of the Leaders of the Council of the Churches of the Middle East, His Beatitude pointed out that: "At this moment in time, the Council of Churches of the Middle East, the Orthodox Church with its Patriarchates, and the Church of Cyprus, all play a leading role since they have assumed the Presidency and, moreover, myself as the representative of the Orthodox Church, on behalf of the Orthodox Family, as the current President. This Council went through a major crisis for a variety of reasons including the fact that financial support did not exist anymore and also that the Orthodox Patriarchates, for different reasons, ceased to show substantial interest. However, the political situation that has been forming in the region, and all these recent events have required us to become proactive and, thus, we have taken the initiative in re-establishing the Middle East Council of Churches since it is an institution that possesses many capabilities and can convey the problems and the voice of the Christian world in the Middle East." – Press Release, Jerusalem Patriarchate, Feb. 22.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH HAS RULED THAT HIERARCHS (CHURCH LEADERS) AND CLERGY CAN RUN FOR OFFICE IN EXCEPTIONAL CASES when their presence is needed to fight "forces striving to use electoral power to fight the Orthodox Church."

A document passed on 2 February by the Bishops' Council, which was meeting in Moscow, describes potential opponents of the church as forces "including schismatics and those of other religions," without naming any specifically, and says the church has the right to pass moral judgment on political programs and statements when they touch on issues including moral relativism, family values, historical monuments and the environment.

The document stresses that each case

would be considered individually, that candidates must be chosen by church hierarchs, and that even if they are running for office, candidates cannot violate the Russian Orthodox Church's rule against clergy joining political parties.

It also makes clear that it is referring not just to clergy within Russia's borders. The jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church extends across the former Soviet Union. Ukraine, which has seen a volatile political situation, also accounts for a significant part of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In another document, passed on 4 February, the Bishops' Council, led by Patriarch Kirill I, said clergy and lay people must use all legal means to fight "blasphemy and slander" against the church in modern society.

The Russian Orthodox Church is playing an increasingly prominent role in Russian society, but is also facing growing criticism. According to the document, "slander should be differentiated from criticism of negative phenomena in the life of the earthly church that need to be corrected and overcome from the point of view of Christian teaching."

Some Russian Orthodox clergy were involved in politics in the late 1980s and 1990s, as the Soviet Union disintegrated, and there were priests in Parliament under the tsar and in politics after the February Revolution of 1917 that brought down the tsar.

President Dmitri Medvedev, whose wife, Svetlana, is a prominent patron of the Russian Orthodox Church, received the Archbishops' Council in the Kremlin on 3 February. Medvedev told the bishops that the church is essential to overcoming the ethnic strife that has shaken Russia recently, pitting young Russians against Muslim migrants from the Northern Caucasus. "Today, a great deal depends on your views, your sermons, your teaching, the pastor's word directly addressed to young people," said Medvedev.

Some Muslim leaders in Russia have said Muslim clergy might follow the example of the Russian Orthodox Church and run for office as well. – Sophia Kishkovsky for *ENI*, Feb. 8.

AN INTERVIEW OF METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, HEAD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, APPEARED IN THE *NATIONAL CATHOLIC REGISTER* IN EARLY FEBRUARY. This is a transcript of the conversation with John Burger:

Q: How important is Christian unity to the Orthodox Church?

A: The notion of Christian unity is essentially linked to the last words of Jesus Christ, which he pronounced at the Last Supper and, notably, those which were addressed to his father, when he preached about the unity of his disciples. It is a tragedy that Christ's disciples throughout the world were unable to preserve this unity and that many schisms and divisions arose in the Church, and the call to Christian unity is the ultimate goal of our exposure to inter-Christian activities and to various dialogues which we lead with the Roman Catholic Church and with other Christian traditions.

So I think for an Orthodox Christian, it is essential to participate in inter-Christian exchanges in order to bring different Christian traditions closer to mutual understanding in order to overcome centuries of prejudices with the ultimate goal of the restoration of the full Eucharistic communion between various Christian denominations.

Of course, the Orthodox and the Catholic are the closest ones. We have certain differences in dogma, certain differences in ecclesiology, but we have the same teaching in the apostolic succession of the hierarchy, on the sacraments and on the Church in general.

Therefore, though there are obstacles to unity, they are, I believe, in no way insurmountable.

Q: What in the Orthodox view constitutes full Christian unity? What does it look like?

A: Full Christian unity is Eucharistic communion. We do not need to reshape our Church administration, our local traditions. We can live with our differences within one Church, participating in one bread and one cup. We need, however, to rediscover what united us and what brought us to disunity, particularly in the 11th century.

So the basis for the restoration of the full communion would be, I believe, the faith of the Church east and west in the first millennium.

Q: And you are quite involved in these talks personally.

A: Yes.

Q: Has Catholic-Orthodox unity become more of a possibility in recent years? If so, since when, or because of what?

A: I think certain feasible positive changes came with the beginning of the pontificate of Benedict XVI. He is a man of the Church. He is very traditional in his understanding of dogma and of morality and he is very close to the Orthodox Church. He highly respects Orthodox tradi-

tions. He knows Orthodox theology, and as he indicated in his latest book, Orthodox concerns are very close to his heart. He speaks very highly about the Ecumenical Patriarch (Bartholomew I). He speaks very highly and also very personally about his encounters with the current Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill. And it is clear that, for him, the relationship with the Orthodox Church is one of the primary tasks on his agenda.

Q: Do you think complete union between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches is a possibility in our lifetime? What do you think would have to happen before it could come about?

A: I would respond by quoting the Pope: it depends on how long we will live. But I believe that the Eucharistic unity between the Orthodox and the Catholics is not something easily achievable within a few years because even if we look at our theological dialogue, it goes very slowly, and we sometimes are unable to solve even rather insignificant problems which existed in the past for many years.

So we should not anticipate that there will be major breakthroughs in just a few years time. But we should be hopeful, and what is most important, we should work. We should be honest towards each other. We should not hide our differences. We should discuss them openly.

But I also believe that, without aspiring to solve all the theological problems that exist between the Orthodox and the Catholics, we can learn how to work together, how to act together. And without being one Church administratively we can act as members of one Christian body.

This is what I call a strategic alliance between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church. This alliance is necessary in order for us to learn how to work together, because the challenges we are facing are the same. One of the challenges is how to re-Christianize a de-Christianized world. This is what Pope Benedict XVI speaks about very often. In particular he speaks about the New Evangelization of Europe. I believe that this is a huge missionary task and even such a grand Church as the Catholic Church cannot accomplish this task alone. And the closest allies for it would be the Orthodox Church. I believe we can do many things together; we can face modern changes together, even without being one Church, even without having full Eucharistic communion.

Q: How would you describe recent dialogue on the issue of primacy? What is each side saying? Has either side shown any sign of possibly changing?

A: Well, Pope John Paul II called on

everybody, particularly on the Orthodox to express their understanding of primacy.

Q: In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*.

A: Yes. I believe we the Orthodox are ourselves not altogether clear about what we mean by primacy and how this primacy should be exercised. We have, for example, certain differences between the primacy as it is understood by the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the primacy as it is understood by the Patriarchate of Moscow.

In any case, we do not believe that there could be a bishop above all other bishops whose decisions would be binding for the entire Church. We believe that the bishop of Rome in the first Millennium was obviously first in honor but he was first among equals. He did not have direct jurisdiction, for example, over the East. Therefore, when we come to the discussion of the primacy we would argue that the universal jurisdiction of the Pope is something that didn't exist in the first Millennium and that if we restore, for example, Eucharistic communion, we would accept his role as first among equals but not as the universal bishop

Q: So what has some of the dialogue been like in recent months? There's been a lot of talk about breakthroughs and being on the verge of unity.

A: I believe that when some people talk about breakthroughs, it is wishful thinking rather than anything close to reality. We are still at a rather early stage of the discussions. We still discuss the role of the bishop of Rome in the first millennium, and even on this issue we see clear differences between the Orthodox and the Catholics. If we come to the discussion of the second millennium, the differences will become much more obvious. Therefore we should not pretend that we are close to solving this problem.

I think, however, that we should discuss it honestly; we should describe the differences in our positions, and we should see what would be the way out. For us, as I said, the way out would be the return to what we had in the first millennium.

Q: Would you tell me about your background: where you are from originally, what was your family like when you were growing up, what kind of family you come from.

A: It would be a long story. I wonder whether I should start telling you this story.

I was born in Moscow. I studied music for many years. Then I became a monk in a small monastery in Lithuania. I spent five years there. I did my doctorate at Oxford. And then I became a bishop and served in Austria and Hungary as a Russian Ortho-

dox bishop. And when Metropolitan Kirill became Patriarch Kirill, I inherited his former chair as president of the Department of Foreign Relations.

This is to make a long story short.

Q: How did you discover that you had a vocation to the priesthood?

A: I cannot quite tell you how I discovered it but I can tell you when I discovered it. It was approximately at the age of 15 when I realized that I really wanted to serve the Church and serve as a priest. For some preceding years, as I was studying music, the choice which I had to make for myself was whether to become a professional musician or to serve the Church. I was even thinking about combining the two by, for example, becoming the choir master.

At the end I decided that I wanted to serve the Church in the full sense, to serve at the altar, i.e., to become a priest. And this was the inner voice that was repeatedly telling me this, and this is what we call a vocation.

Q: How do you find time to write music?

A: I no longer have time to write music. I didn't even have it before, but when I was a bishop in Austria, I could somehow organize my agenda in order to have some minutes to write music, but very often I did it on a plane or in the waiting area of an airport. For example, some of the pieces from St. Matthew Passion were composed literally on a plane. – John Burger for *National Catholic Register*, Feb. 7.

MUSIC CAN LEAD PEOPLE TO DISCOVER THE ASTONISHING APPEAL OF THE MAN BEHIND CHRISTIANITY -- THAT IS, OF JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF, ACCORDING TO RUSSIAN ORTHODOX METROPOLITAN HILARION ALFEYEV.

The chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate affirmed this Wednesday when he spoke at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C..

Metropolitan Hilarion is himself an accomplished composer and he spoke on "Music and Faith in My Life and Vision."

The prelate acknowledged that he is "well aware of the insignificant number of young people who listen to classical music, whereas almost everyone listens to popular music."

"This," he said, "I consider to be a real tragedy."

But, he affirmed that "secular musical art is possible within Christianity, including that which exceeds the limits of classical music which I love so much."

The metropolitan called Christianity "inclusive," saying, "it does not set strict canonical limits to art. Christianity can even inspire a secular artist who, using the means available and known to him and his milieu, will be able to convey certain sacred messages equally in the language of modern musical culture."

By way of example, Metropolitan Hilarion cited "Jesus Christ Superstar."

"No doubt," he said, "this composition is not in keeping with church criteria, but the author did not purport to present the canonical image of Christ. He achieved his objective outstandingly well by telling the story of Christ's passion in a language understandable to the youth and through the medium of contemporary music."

"I appreciate this music more emphatically than I do the works of many avant-garde composers, since the latter sometimes eschew melody, harmony, and inner content," the metropolitan reflected.

"The image of Christ can inspire not only church people, but also those who are still far from her," he added. "One should not forbid them to think, speak and write about Christ, unless they are moved by a desire deliberately to distort Christianity and to insult the Church and the faithful."

"If a composition is bright, impressive and grips the listeners, if it makes them empathize emotionally with the Gospel events and even weep, if it arouses profound feelings in them, then it deserves high praise."

Metropolitan Hilarion observed that the path to Christianity "often begins with a discovery of the living Christ, rather than recognition of the church's dogmatic truths."

"Christianity is a religion focused on the living Man, a historic person," he said. "The person of this Man appeals astonishingly. It may well be the case that a composition on a Gospel subject, though written by a non-Churchman, is imbued by a veneration of Christ. Many may begin their way to Christ and to the Church through such a composition, even if it were not altogether 'canonical.'" – *Zenit*, Feb. 11.

ON 10 FEBRUARY 2011, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, CHAIRMAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, VISITED THE US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS and met with the Librarian of Congress, James H. Billington and representatives of intellectual and religious circles of Washington, including Archbishop emeritus of Washington, Cardinal Theodore Edgar

McCarrick; President of the Russian American Christian Institute John Bernbaum; President of Georgetown University John J. DeGioia; Rector of St. John the Baptist church in Washington, the Very Rev. Victor Potapov (ROCOR); Rector of Washington National Cathedral, the Very Rev. Samuel T. Lloyd; head of the Department of Slavonic Studies Harold M. Leich; and director of the European Reading Room Grant Harris.

Metropolitan Hilarion delivered an address on the Orthodox understanding of beauty and harmony followed by a long discussion of a wide range of questions about church life in Russia at present. Special attention was paid to the role played by the Russian Orthodox Church in social processes both in Russia and other countries included in its canonical territory.

Metropolitan Hilarion underscored that the Russian Orthodox Church in these countries enjoyed a great moral authority and exerted positive influence on the life of people in all strata of society. The influence of the Church and, first and foremost, of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, is more extended than the boundaries of the Church. According to the DECR chairman, His Holiness the Patriarch is a spiritual leader capable of uniting representatives of traditional religious communities and healthy forces in society.

After the talk, Dr. Billington showed Metropolitan Hilarion and his suite copies of Russian theological literature and church periodicals kept in the Library, for instance, works by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Hilarion, as well as copies of "The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate," "The Church and the World," "Foma," and other publications issued with the blessing of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

The DECR chairman and Dr. Billington exchanged presents. Metropolitan Hilarion gave the Librarian of Congress the first volume of his new book, *Orthodoxy*, in the English language, and received Dr. Billington's books in Russian and in English. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Feb. 11.

ON 11 FEBRUARY 2011, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, CHAIRMAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, VISITED THE DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

The Seminary was founded as Evangelical Theological College in 1924 to develop research in Bible studies. At present it is a major theological school in the USA with over 2,000 students studying at the

seminary and its extension campuses in Washington, Atlanta, Houston, and other cities.

President of the Seminary, Dr. Mark Bailey, received Metropolitan Hilarion in his study. The DECR chairman spoke about the revival of theological education in the Russian Orthodox Church and presented Dr. Bailey with the first volume of his book *Orthodoxy in the English language*.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk delivered a lecture, "Have Salt among Yourselves," to the faculty and students and answered many questions. He believes that Christians should feel free to express their opinions on various social issues, also through the mass media. Christians of different confession should uphold traditional moral values together.

He said further that the Church, while fulfilling its mission, should be open to all who are not indifferent to its preaching, but it should not adapt the Gospel message to current notions of political correctness to the detriment of faithfulness to the tradition. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Feb. 13.

BISHOP NESTOR OF KORSUN MET ON FEBRUARY 15, 2011, WITH CARDINAL ANDRE VINGT-TROIS, ARCHBISHOP OF PARIS, PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE. It was the first meeting of the new head of the Moscow Patriarchate's diocese of Korsun with the Catholic archbishop of Paris.

They discussed prospects for the development of contacts and cooperation between Orthodox and Catholic Christians in France as well as a project for bringing the relics of the Holy Empress Helena over to Russia, the Korsun diocesan press service has reported. An agreement for an exchange of relics was made by Cardinal Andre Vingt-Trois and the late Patriarch Alexy II during their meeting in 2008. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Feb. 18.

ON 18 FEBRUARY 2011, THE PRIMATE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH MET WITH H. E. VICTOR G. GARCIA III, AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION.

His Holiness the Patriarch greeted the guest, saying: "I would like to express my high appreciation with your mission in Moscow. You are an outstanding representative of the diplomatic community and bring a great contribution to the development of relations between Russia and the

Philippines."

Ambassador Victor G. Garcia thanked the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for receiving him and congratulated the Patriarch on the second anniversary of his enthronement. He reminded His Holiness Kirill of his visit to the Philippines in 2002 as Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad and head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations and his meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Blas F. Ople and other representatives of state authority, Christian confessions and traditional religions.

His Holiness Kirill mentioned the dialogue that Russia and the Philippines maintain, saying that it is a very good dialogue as both countries have strong Christian traditions that exert a real influence on people's lives.

Patriarch Kirill noted a complicated situation with religion on the southern islands of the Philippine Archipelago, for instance, the cases of violence against Christians, and expressed his solidarity with the Philippine authorities in their seeking peaceful and good-neighborly relations between people of different religious traditions. His Holiness spoke about interreligious dialogue in Russia and about the work of the Interreligious Council of Russia. The participants in the meeting understood the necessity of developing interreligious and intercultural dialogue, also on the international level.

His Holiness reminded Ambassador Victor G. Garcia of the historical presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Philippines and told him about the first migrants from China who settled in the Philippines in the late 1940s. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill added: "We are grateful to the people of the Philippines for giving shelter to our brothers and sisters under difficult circumstances."

Towards the end of the meeting, His Holiness and Ambassador Victor G. Garcia exchanged presents. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Feb. 18.

ON 23 FEBRUARY 2011, IN GENEVA, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, HEAD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, MET WITH REV. DR. OLAV FYKSE TVEIT, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC).

In the beginning of the talk, Metropolitan Hilarion shared his assessment of the WCC Central Committee session ended the day before. He expressed his concern over

the representation of the Protestant Churches by extremely liberal delegates thus not reflecting the true situation in the Protestant world.

Rev. Dr. Tveit thanked Metropolitan Hilarion for hospitality accorded to him by the Russian Orthodox Church during his visit last June. He highly appreciated the activities and social ministry of the ROC. He added that he would remember forever the feelings he experienced at the Butovo shooting range and the Church of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia built near the Russian Golgotha. He underscored that the Russian Orthodox Church had an invaluable experience of survival in the state with militant atheism as its prevailing ideology. Dr. Tveit noted the importance of sharing this experience with other Christian Churches.

Plans of possible cooperation were discussed; particular attention was paid to the support of Christian Churches in the Middle East and the minority communities in the zones of conflict. Metropolitan Hilarion and the WCC General Secretary emphasized that common efforts made in this regard and active participation in the work for the sake of peace and justice could bring representatives of various traditions of Christianity close together.

Archpriest Mikhail Gundyayev, representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate at the WCC and international organization in Geneva, took part in the meeting. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Feb. 24.

ON 26 FEBRUARY 2011, THE INTER-ORTHODOX PREPARATORY COMMISSION FOR THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH COMPLETED ITS WORK at the Orthodox Center of the Patriarchate of Constantinople near Geneva.

Representatives of the fourteen Autocephalous Orthodox Churches took part in the meeting chaired by Metropolitan John of Pergamon, Patriarchate of Constantinople. The delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, led by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), included archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia); archpriest Nikolai Balashov, DECR deputy chairman; and interpreter Anatoly Churiakov.

The Commission, whose task was to elaborate questions for the agenda of the Pan-Orthodox Council, continued to consider the issue of signing the Tomos of autocephaly. As a long discussion did not lead

to a unanimous decision, the necessity of further study of the issue of autocephaly was recognized.

The Commission discussed the issue of diptychs, considered canonical and ecclesiological aspects, described the current practice of the Orthodox Churches and the criteria of including the Churches into diptychs and the order of the Primates' names in them and also noted the necessity of compiling the uniform diptychs of the Orthodox Church.

Also considered was a wish of the Polish and Albanian Orthodox Churches to reach uniformity in regard to the place of their Primates in the diptychs of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches. The Commission suggested to take these requests into account and to consider proper changes in the diptychs.

The requests of the Georgian Orthodox Church concerning its sixth place in the diptychs of all Orthodox Churches and of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus concerning a higher place of its Primate in holy diptychs were presented at the meeting. Consent has not been reached either on this issue, or on the differences in holy diptychs of some Churches due to the lack of Pan-Orthodox agreement on the number of the recognized autocephalous Churches.

Under Art. 16 of the Rules of the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences, documents on all issues on the agenda shall be approved unanimously. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Feb. 26.

ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2011, HIS HOLINESS SERBIAN PATRIARCH IRINEJ SERVED A MEMORIAL LITURGY FOR THE REPOSE OF METROPOLITAN CHRISTOPHER OF BLESSED MEMORY AT ST. SAVA MONASTERY IN LIBERTYVILLE, ILLINOIS.

Following the Divine Liturgy, a Memorial Service (Parastos) was served for Metropolitan Christopher of blessed memory. His Holiness addressed the faithful present with warm words. The Patriarch stated that it was his intention to be present at the funeral of Metropolitan Christopher, but since he could not get a visa in time, he was not able to attend. Therefore, he made a promise to come for the Six-Month Parastos for Metropolitan Christopher.

His Holiness spoke of the good deeds and efforts of Metropolitan Christopher during his tenure as a hierarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the North American continent, stating that Metropolitan Christopher sincerely strove to maintain the connection between the Fatherland and America, and always worked for church

unity in North America, a goal that should be pursued by all Serbian Orthodox Christians.

After the Parastos, the Patriarch served a Pomen (Short Memorial Service) at the graves of Metropolitan Christopher, Bishop Firmilian and Bishop Dionisije. A memorial luncheon was prepared in the Monastery Hall for all present by the Women's Auxiliary Organization of St. Sava Monastery.

In the evening hours, His Holiness visited New Gracanica Monastery, where he attended a folklore festival with several hundred dancers plus parents and visitors in attendance. The Patriarch was overjoyed at the number of youth and people present at the event. He greeted all present with kind words of support and encouragement, reiterating the importance of preserving our Serbian cultural and language, so that future generations in North America and in all other countries of the Diaspora never forget their heritage. – Press Release, Serbian Patriarchate, Feb. 21.

ON SUNDAY, HIS HOLINESS SERBIAN PATRIARCH IRINEJ SERVED PATRIARCHAL DIVINE LITURGY AT ST. SIMEON MIROTOCIVI CHURCH IN SOUTH CHICAGO IN HONOR OF THE UPCOMING CHURCH SLAVA ON FEBRUARY 26.

His Holiness was greeted at the entrance of the church property with the traditional bread and salt, brought to the Patriarch by the youth of the parish, who were dressed in traditional Serbian clothing. A Parastos (Memorial Service) was also held for all the departed members of the parish before the Dismissal of the Liturgy. In his sermon, the Patriarch spoke of the importance of St. Simeon Mirotocivi to the Serbian people, in that he was the founder of the Serbian nation and glorified God by his good works and holy life, and became even more diligent after he left the throne, was tonsured, and fully dedicated his life to the service of God.

The Patriarch said that for the sake of St. Simeon, the Serbian Orthodox Christians on the North American continent and everywhere in the Diaspora cannot forget their Serbian Orthodox faith, their Serbian language or their Serbian culture and must keep a strong unity, just as St. Simeon encouraged in the forming of the State of Serbia. His Holiness also mentioned the importance of holding on to the true Orthodox Faith as the One, Holy, Ecumenical and Apostolic Church. After the sermon, His Holiness awarded Mr. Petar Samardzija, a member of St. Simeon Mirotocivi Church, with the Order of St. Sava (III Degree). His Grace Bishop Longin had nominated

Mr. Samardzija for the Order to the Holy Synod for his efforts in striving for church unity, his material donations over the years to the Church, and his model Orthodox family. A festive Slava banquet followed in the church hall after the cutting of the Slava Kolach, which was served by His Holiness. – Press Release, Serbian Patriarchate, Feb. 21.

TODAY, 3 FEBRUARY 2011, THE FUNERAL SERVICE OF HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP AND METROPOLITAN BARTOLOMEU ANANIA WAS CELEBRATED IN THE METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL OF CLUJ. The religious service was officiated by His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan locum tenens of Cluj, Alba, Crişana and Maramureş, together with a group of hierarchs, members of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

At the end of the service, the Primate of the Romanian Orthodox Church delivered a homily entitled “Light of man’s life – a never-dying legacy,” in which he evoked the personality of the late hierarch, His Eminence Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania. There followed the speech of His Grace Irineu Bistriţeanul, Assistant Bishop to the Archdiocese of Cluj on behalf of the Eparchial Council of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj and of the faithful of this Eparchy.

Bishop Florentin Crihălmeanu of the Greek Catholic Diocese of Cluj-Gherla was present on behalf of the Greek Catholic Church. Many government officials were also present.

Thousands of faithful attended the funeral service of Metropolitan Bartolomeu, which began at 12.00 o’clock, both in the Cathedral and on the esplanade in front of the Metropolitan Cathedral.

The procession of the coffin around the Metropolitan Cathedral took place according to the church tradition. Only the priests who participated in the religious service took part in the procession, while all the other faithful accompanied them at a certain distance in the street. The order was the following: the wooden plate first, then the cross, the flags, ripides and the cross, the miter and omophorion, the pillows with the decorations carried by the counselors of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, the hierarchs and servant clergy.

The coffin was carried by the assigned priests, surrounded by six nuns carrying censers. There followed the members of Metropolitan Bartolomeu’s family, the representatives of the state institutions, the employees of the administration of the

Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, the clergy and faithful present. During the procession the funeral chant “Holy God” was sung.

Military honors were given before entering the crypt below the Cathedral. His Beatitude made a cross of wine and oil over the body of the metropolitan.

After the coffin was laid in the crypt, the Patriarch of Romania took a handful of earth and threw it cross-like over the coffin saying: “The earth and its fulfillment are the Lord’s, the world and all those who live in it.”

When the funeral stone was laid and the grave sealed, they said: “This grave is sealed till the second coming of Jesus Christ, our Lord. It was with the sign of your cross, lover of people, that death was killed, hell was looted and the dead raised up to praise you. This is why we say, give rest, Christ, our Lord, to the one who has left us and gone to the place of all those who are happy in you so that we may glorify your divinity.” – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Feb. 3

FROM 16 – 17 FEBRUARY 2011, THE FIRST WORKING SESSION OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THIS YEAR WAS HELD IN THE SYNODAL ROOM OF THE PATRIARCHAL RESIDENCE, UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH DANIEL. We mention some of the decisions taken:

- Following the proposal of the Romanian Patriarchate, the Holy Synod declared the year 2012 as Homage Year of Extreme Unction and care for sick people;

- The procedure of national fund raising for continuing the construction of the Cathedral for the Nation’s Salvation in the parishes and monasteries within the eparchies of the Romanian Patriarchate was approved;

- The hierarchs who will be members of the Preparatory Commission for establishing the principles, themes, and methodology of the Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Church United with Rome (Greek-Catholic) were appointed as a result of the positive answer of the Greek-Catholic hierarchs to the Appeal of the Holy Synod for resuming the bilateral dialogue of 7 July 2010;

- The delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the dialogue with the Serbian Orthodox Church was established;

- A course on the pastoral care of alcohol addicts will be introduced into the curricula of Pastoral Theology, which is taught

in the pre-academic educational system and in the theological academic system;

The hierarchs of the Holy Synod evaluated the results of the effort to raise funds and material goods in Romanian Orthodox parishes and monasteries in the country and abroad resulting from the Appeal of the Romanian Patriarchate to prayer and Christian solidarity with the families affected by the floods in the North-West of the country in the summer of 2010. So, the Romanian Orthodox Church helped the victims of the floods in the areas affected with about 6.000.000 lei, as well as with food, cereals, clothes, construction materials, medicines and other material goods amounting to about 5.400.000 lei. – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Feb. 17.

BULGARIA'S HOLY SYNOD APPEALS TO ALL CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX TO ANSWER TWO OF THE NON-MANDATORY QUESTIONS IN THE ONGOING CENSUS IN ORDER TO DECLARE THEIR ADHERENCE TO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH.

In a statement sent to the media on Tuesday, the Holy Synod asks Bulgarians to answer question 12 - Are You Religious? with “Yes” and question 13 – What is Your Religion? with “Eastern Orthodox,” saying even though not mandatory, these questions are of prime importance for the “national, religious and cultural identity of the Bulgarian nation.”

This is the first direct intervention of an official institution in the Census. Political parties based on ethnic and religious principles and nationalists have restrained from such advice.

Currently, Bulgaria is conducting the online Census. It would end at midnight on Wednesday, while on the next day (February 9) counters will start visiting people's homes.

According to data of the National Statistics Institute (NSI), 2 million Bulgarians have taken part in the online Census so far. *Sophia News Agency*, Feb. 8.

HIS HOLINESS AND BEATITUDE CATHOLICOS PATRIARCH ILIA II OF GEORGIA VISITED LONDON TO CONSECRATE A NEW CATHEDRAL FOR THE 30,000 STRONG COMMUNITY OF GEORGIAN ORTHODOX LIVING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM. Having established a Diocese of Great Britain and Ireland with Bishop Zenon of Dmanisi as its first hierarch, the Catholicos – assisted by several bishops of the Georgian Orthodox Church and His Eminence Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira - consecrated the Cathedral of the Nativity of our Lord at Rookwood Road, Clap-

ton, London, N16 on Sunday, 6 February. The newly designated Cathedral was formerly known as The Ark of the Covenant and was built in 1892-5 to a design by Joseph Morris & Sons of Reading for the long extinct millenarian sect, the Apapemonites. Neglected after the war it was rented out to other church groups and at one time in the 1960s the British Orthodox Church used it on a monthly basis.

The same evening the Georgian Orthodox community held a reception at the Dorchester Hotel in London for the Catholicos, to which a number of ecumenical guests were invited. The Oriental Orthodox Churches were represented by Archbishop Athanasius of the Syriac Church, Abba Seraphim of the British Orthodox Church within the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate and Father Snork Bagdassarion of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Representing the hierarchs of the Eastern Orthodox Churches were Archbishop Gregorios and Metropolitan Kallistos whilst the Right Rev'd Geoffrey Rowell represented the Archbishop of Canterbury. In his short address Catholicos Iliia spoke movingly of the hospitality of the British people and expressed his respect and admiration for H.M. Queen Elizabeth II. He also touched on the difficulties of living next to a powerful nation and the pain of having Georgia's territorial integrity compromised.

Abba Seraphim presented Bishop Zenon, who had been raised to archiepiscopal rank that morning, with a copy of a rare booklet from the library of the British Orthodox Church, which marked the opening of the Ark of the Covenant in 1894 and described the symbolism of the building. Abba Seraphim spoke of the beauty of the church and its personal significance to him as he had himself been ordained there as a reader in 1965 and a subdeacon and deacon in 1967. He expressed his delight to know that this fine building was now consecrated as an Orthodox cathedral. – *British Orthodox Church*, Feb. 7.

CHURCHES IN THE MIDDLE EAST MUST WORK TOGETHER TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEMS FACING THE REGION IN ORDER THAT "PEACE CAN PREVAIL," ARCHBISHOP CHRYSOSTOMOS OF CYPRUS SAID IN AN ADDRESS ON 18 FEBRUARY AT AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING IN CYPRUS of the Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches.

"We believe strongly that the time has come for all of us -- all the churches of the Middle East -- to join forces and work consciously towards a solution of the many

serious problems that exist in our region, and above all so that peace can prevail in our countries and among our peoples, far from religious fanaticism and bigotry," the archbishop told the gathering.

However, he noted, in order to be effective the MECC must overcome its own internal disagreements and he reiterated his proposal that the Church of Cyprus undertake the secretariat support of the council's offices.

"As can be easily understood, in order for us, the Middle East Council of Churches, to be able to exercise our role and make an active and fruitful contribution to the desired objective of establishing a better and happier world in our region, without wars and bloodshed, we must focus with Christian love and in a spirit of good will and mutual understanding, on the task of examining the problems we are facing, in order to give answers and achieve solutions," he said.

All four church groups -- including the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical churches -- were represented by their presidents and five additional representatives from each church. One of the objectives of the meeting was to prepare for the general assembly scheduled to take place in Cyprus in August.

Some representatives from churches in Egypt were unable to attend because of the political situation in their country, said the Rev. Munib A. Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and president of the Evangelical family of churches.

The current situation in the Middle East was discussed at the executive committee meeting, said Younan in a telephone interview on 21 February.

"We are all for political and economic reforms but at the same time our message is very clear that we have to let the grassroots (movements) that are supporting (the protests) know they should always be moderate, promote human rights, freedom of religion and speech," he said. "We hear the cries of the people and we tell the people to use their good sense and not only their frustrations, (in order to build) a moderate civil society."

He added that the Cyprus meeting had served to "strengthen and re-invigorate" the unity amongst the MECC member churches despite any "moments of disagreements."

"Ecumenism is always in our discussions, seeing how we can improve our unity in a situation we are living in with such political upheaval, in a situation where extremism and fanaticism is growing in the

whole Middle East including our country," said Younan.

Christians are an integral part of Middle Eastern societies, he added, and so far the demonstrations in the region have not been against any religious groups but have remained protests against authoritarian political regimes. "We are still monitoring and watching what is happening," he said.

In his address, Chrysostomos also noted that the executive committee meeting was taking place during "critical times for the region." In particular, he noted "the regrettable phenomena of the rise of religious fanaticism and the serious violation of religious freedoms." He said that in the northern part of Turkish-occupied Cyprus, Turkish security officials are preventing priests from carrying out their religious duties. – *Judith Sudilovsky for ENI*, Feb. 22.

FROM FEBRUARY 22-24, 2011, THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA PARTICIPATED IN A RETREAT IN SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah, led the hierarchs in a review of matters affecting the life of the Orthodox Church in America, including the OCA strategic plan, preparations for the upcoming Assembly of Bishops and plans for the 16th All American Council in Seattle.

During their retreat, His Beatitude presented a request to the Holy Synod for a time of personal retreat and spiritual renewal. The Holy Synod granted His Beatitude's request for a period of 60 days and appointed the senior Hierarch, His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel, of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate to assist in the temporary administration of the OCA during His Beatitude's retreat.

As an additional means of assistance to His Beatitude, the Holy Synod relieved him from his responsibilities as *Locum Tenens* for the dioceses of the South and of the Midwest. The Holy Synod appointed Bishop Nikon as *Locum Tenens* of the Diocese of the South, with Bishop Mark of Baltimore continuing as Administrator. The Holy Synod also appointed Bishop Tikhon *Locum Tenens* of the Diocese of the Midwest with Bishop-elect Archimandrite Matthias continuing as Administrator.

In other matters, the Holy Synod accepted the resignation of Archpriest Alexander Garklavs as Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America and appointed His Grace, Bishop Melchisedek of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania as interim Chancellor.

At the conclusion of their retreat, the

members of the Holy Synod of Bishops expressed their joy at the upcoming Bright Week consecration of Archimandrite Matthias as Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest. The consecration will take place over the weekend of April 29 to May 1 and will be concelebrated by His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah, the hierarchs of the OCA and other guests.

The Holy Synod also bestowed its pastoral blessing on the clergy and faithful of the OCA and wished them a profitable season of prayer and repentance during the season of Great Lent. – OCA Press Release, Feb. 25.

The Assyrian Church of the East

ST CECILIA CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, HAS INVITED THE HOLY APOSTOLIC CATHOLIC ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST DIOCESE OF WESTERN USA TO GATHER IN PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY ON A GLOBAL SCALE.

His Grace Mar Aprim Khamis, Bishop of Western USA attended the prayer meeting on 24 January, accompanied by Reverend Ashur, parish priest of St Paul's Church in Anaheim, Los Angeles and Reverend Youkhana Ajabu, parish priest of St Hurmizd's Church in San Diego.

Hymns, prayers and poems were offered by all attendees present, striving for peace and unity between all sister churches.

His Grace Mar Aprem impressed the audience with his knowledge of historical events in the Assyrian Church of the East, which he explained had been established by St Thomas, St Addai and St Mari themselves. From there the Church spread to all corners of the globe including India and China, which until today offer worship and honor to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Highlighting unity, His Grace Mar Aprem mentioned previous relations with the Catholic Church and the Vatican where His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church met with the Pope His Holiness John Paul II.

His Grace Mar Aprem then thanked the Bishop of the Diocese of Orange, His Grace Bishop Brown, and all other priests, monks and attendees for the invitation and their warm welcome at this memorable meeting. His Grace Mar Aprem stressed that all Christian Churches are one spiritually, requiring peace, love and unity in order to properly and genuinely preach and serve the Lord.

His Grace Bishop Brown of the Catholic Church warmly thanked His Grace Mar Aprem for his peaceful and loving speech

towards the Catholic Church. A memorial gift was then presented to His Grace Mar Aprem to commemorate his visit, and His Grace Mar Aprem in turn also gifted books of the liturgy of the Holy Offering in the original language, Aramaic, to His Grace Bishop Brown.

At the conclusion of the prayer meeting, a ceremonial dinner was offered for all clergy present where there was an opportunity for fellowship in the love and joy of Christ. – *Assyrian Church News*, Feb. 9.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

WITH ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS ALREADY INCREASING IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THE POPULIST UPRISING IN EGYPT HAS TRIGGERED FEARS AMONG SOME THAT THE REGION'S LARGEST NON-MUSLIM POPULATION - EGYPT'S 7 MILLION COPTIC CHRISTIANS - COULD BE AT RISK.

Copt leaders in the United States said they are terrified that a new Egyptian government with a strong Islamic fundamentalist bent would persecute Christians. They are quietly lobbying the Obama administration to do more to protect Christians in Muslim countries and are holding prayer vigils and fasts, such as one that ended Wednesday evening at Copt churches across the country, including four in the Washington area.

"The current situation for the Copts stinks, but [longtime Egyptian President Hosni] Mubarak is the best of the worst for us," said the Rev. Paul Girguis of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Fairfax County, which has about 3,000 members. "If Muslim extremists take over, the focus will be extreme persecution against Copts. Some people even predict genocide."

Some major U.S. Christian figures, including well-known evangelical leaders and representatives of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, declined to publicly discuss the situation in Egypt, saying they wanted to avoid bringing dangerous attention to the country's Christians by appearing to complain or to advocate for a particular political outcome.

Their trepidation stems from repeated attacks on churches in Iraq, where hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled in recent years, and from the New Year's Day bombing of a Coptic church in Egypt that killed almost two dozen worshipers and wounded nearly 100. The Coptic Church is one of the oldest Christian institutions in the world and is based in Egypt.

"Egypt is the bellwether because its

Christian community is so large and is the strongest in the Middle East," said Paul Marshall, a global religious freedom expert and a fellow at the conservative Hudson Institute. "What happens to Christians in Egypt is very significant. Everyone is watching."

But not all American faith leaders are bracing for the worst. Joel Hunter, an evangelical pastor of a Florida megachurch and a frequent adviser to President Obama, said he's hearing a lot of optimism from Egyptian Christians who believe the uprising will lead to more freedom and religious liberty.

Many younger Christians in the United States also see the protests as something to celebrate, Hunter said, and older, more politically conservative Christians tend to be more skeptical of Islam generally and are worried about how a new Egyptian government will treat Israel.

So far, the protests have focused on jobs, free speech and democratic elections, not religion, so it's unclear what the end of Mubarak's rule would mean for religious minorities. But in recent years, Iraq has lost about half its historical Christian population because of persecution, and Christians have been leaving Iran and Lebanon in lesser numbers.

Some U.S. Christian leaders said the situation in Egypt might put the issue of religious persecution abroad back on the radar of American Christians. A decade ago, the freedom of Christians to worship in such places as Sudan was a top agenda item for American Christians, particularly evangelicals. But this week, experts said that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have absorbed people's attention.

At a congressional hearing last month about the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, Christian leaders urged the administration to lean harder on Egypt's leaders to investigate violence against religious minorities and to lay out a clear strategy in Iraq for their protection.

A 2009 survey by the nonprofit Pew Forum that measured governmental and societal restrictions on religion found that a number of the world's least tolerant countries are Muslim-majority. The list included Iran, Egypt, Indonesia and Pakistan as well as India, which is majority Hindu. Concerns include bans on public preaching and conversion and the lack of prosecution for religion-based violence.

Some advocates for religious freedom note that moderate Muslims and non-majority Muslims also suffer attacks and that the problem is extremism, not Islam. – Michelle Boorstein for *The Washington*

Post, Feb. 2.

ON THE MORNING OF TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2011, HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III MET WITH A SMALLER COMMITTEE OF MEMBERS OF THE HOLY SYNOD AND ISSUED THE FOLLOWING COMMUNIQUÉ:

"The Coptic Church salutes the honorable youth of Egypt, the Youth of January 25, who led Egypt in a strong, white revolution, and sacrificed for this cause, precious blood, the blood of the nation's martyrs, who have been glorified by the Egyptian leadership and Armed Forces, as well as the entire population. We offer our condolences to their parents and members of their families.

Also, the Coptic Church salutes the brave Egyptian Army, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in its communiqués, for securing Egypt, internally and externally. The Church supports its position in the dissolution of the People's Assembly and the Consultative Council, and in its call for the return of security.

We believe that Egypt should be a civilian democratic state, that the members of parliament should be chosen by free and fair elections and represent all the sectors of the population.

We endorse the call of all Egyptians to combat poverty, corruption and unemployment, to resist chaos and vandalism, and to reinforce safety and security, and the principles of social justice and national unity. We also call for the eradication of the corrupt and breakers of the law.

The Coptic Church prays for great Egypt, the country of the glorious history and the ancient civilization, and hopes that God keeps her in peace and that calmness and stability, security and prosperity spread throughout the nation."

[signed] Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, and President of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church. -- Press Release, Feb. 16.

FOR THE SECOND TIME IN AS MANY DAYS, EGYPTIAN ARMED FORCES STORMED THE 5TH CENTURY ST. BISHOY MONASTERY IN WADI EL-NATROUN, 110 KILOMETERS FROM CAIRO. Live ammunition was fired, wounding two monks and six Coptic monastery workers. Several sources confirmed the army's use of RPG ammunition. Four people have been arrested including three monks and a Coptic lawyer who was at the monastery investigating yesterday's army attack.

Monk Aksios Ava Bishoy told activist

Nader Shoukry of Freecocepts the armed forces stormed the main entrance gate to the monastery in the morning using five tanks, armored vehicles and a bulldozer to demolish the fence built by the monastery last month to protect themselves and the monastery from the lawlessness which prevailed in Egypt during the January 25 Uprising.

"When we tried to address them, the army fired live bullets, wounding Father Feltaows in the leg and Father Barnabas in the abdomen," said Monk Ava Bishoy. "Six Coptic workers in the monastery were also injured, some with serious injuries to the chest."

The injured were rushed to the nearby Sadat Hospital, the ones in serious condition were transferred to the Anglo-Egyptian Hospital in Cairo.

Father Hemanot Ava Bishoy said the army fired live ammunition and RPGs continuously for 30 minutes, which hit part of the ancient fence inside the monastery. "The army was shocked to see the monks standing there praying 'Lord have mercy' without running away. This is what really upset them," he said. "As the soldiers were demolishing the gate and the fence they were chanting 'Allahu Akbar' and 'Victory, Victory'."

He also added that the army prevented the monastery's car from taking the injured to hospital.

The army also attacked the Monastery of St. Makarios of Alexandria in Wady el-Rayyan, Fayoum, 100 km from Cairo. It stormed the monastery and fired live ammunition on the monks. Father Mina said that one monk was shot and more than ten have injuries caused by being beaten with batons. The army demolished the newly erected fence and one room from the actual monastery and confiscated building materials. The monastery had also built a fence to protect itself after January 25 and after being attacked by armed Arabs and robbers leading to the injury of six monks, including one monk in critical condition who is still hospitalized.

The army had given on February 21 an ultimatum to this monastery that if the fence was not demolished within 48 hours by the monks, the army would remove it themselves.

The Egyptian Armed Forces issued a statement on their Facebook page denying that any attack took place on St. Bishoy Monastery in Wady el-Natroun, "Reflecting our belief in the freedom and chastity of places of worship of all Egyptians." The statement went on to say that the army just demolished some fences built on State

property and that it has no intention of demolishing the monastery itself.

Father Hedra Ava Bishoy said they are in possession of whole carton of empty bullet shells besides the people who are presently in hospital to prove otherwise.

The army attack came after the monks built a fence to protect themselves after the police guards left their posts and fled during the January 25th uprising, and after they had been attacked by prisoners who had escaped during that period.

"We contacted state security and they said that no police were available to protect us," said Father Bemwa, "So we called the Egyptian TV dozens of times to appeal for help and then we were put in touch with the military personnel who told us to protect ourselves until they reach us." He added that the monks have built a low fence on the borders of one side of the monastery which is vulnerable to attacks, on land which belongs to the monastery, with the monks and monastery laborers keeping watch over it 24 hours a day.

The monks of St. Bishoy are now holding a sit-in in front of monastery to protest the army abuse and the use of live bullets against civilians

Nearly 7,000 Copts staged a peaceful rally in front of the Coptic Cathedral in Cairo, where Pope Shenouda III was giving his weekly lecture, after which they marched towards Tahrir Square to protest the armed forces' attacks on Coptic monasteries. -- Mary Abdelmassih for AINA, Feb. 23.

NOT EVEN THE MONGOLS OF THE 14TH CENTURY, WHEN THEY KILLED 40 MONKS AND SOME 400 FAITHFUL, SUCCEEDED IN MAKING ONE OF THE MOST ANCIENT CHRISTIAN CONVENTS IN THE WORLD DISAPPEAR, but perhaps Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey can.

This appears to be the case of the Syro-Orthodox monastery of Mor Gabriel or "Dayro d-Mor Gabriel," called "Deyrulmur" in Turkish. It is located in the region of Turabdin in the southeast of Anatolia. The convent bears the name of Mor Gabriel (634-668), bishop of Turabdin, known for his witness of holiness and miracles.

The foundation of the monastery, which is situated southeast of the city of Midyat, in the province of Mardin, near the border with Syria, dates back to the year 397 A.D. and was the initiative of two monks, Mor Samuel and Mor Simon, who died in 409 and 433, respectively. The complex, which boasts elements built with the help of Byzantine emperors such as

Arcadius (395-408) and Theodosius II (408-450), today houses a small community of three monks and 14 sisters.

Mor Gabriel, known also as the "second Jerusalem," is not only a monastery. Mor Gabriel is in fact the See of the Metropolitan Mor Timotheus Samuel Aktas and the cultural and spiritual center of the dwindling Syro-Orthodox community of Turkey and of numerous Syriacs who've emigrated to the West. Just 50 years ago, some 130,000 Syriacs lived in the region of Turabdin -- the name means "mountain of the servants of God" -- but today their number has decreased to just a few thousand.

The monastery is at the center of a harsh battle initiated in 2008 by the leaders of three Kurdish villages dominated by a tribe supported in Parliament by one of their leaders, Suleyman Celebi, who is a Parliamentarian with the pro-Islamic ruling party of Erdogan (the AKP or Party of Justice and Development).

Several accusations have been leveled against the monastic community, including proselytism, which is based on the fact that young men study Eastern or Syrian Aramaic at the monastery. There are also claims that the monastery was built on a place where a mosque once stood -- an unfounded and even absurd accusation, given that Mor Gabriel well precedes the birth of Islam. The accusation that sticks -- at least in the eyes of Turkish officials -- is the one upheld by the Treasury Ministry: undue appropriation of land. Even this accusation is not very comprehensible, given that the community of Mor Gabriel regularly pays the taxes on the land in question.

The affair has recently met with, perhaps, its definitive conclusion. With a decision made public on Jan. 27 (but that actually dates to Dec. 7), the "Yargitay" or Ankara Court of Appeals -- Turkey's highest appeals court -- overturned a verdict issued on June 24, 2009, by the court of Midyat. According to the Yargitay decision reported by Forum 18 News Agency, 12 plots of monastery land with a total area of 99 hectares (244 acres) are to be considered "forests" and hence belong "ipso facto" to the Turkish state.

For Mor Gabriel, the decision is a hard blow. To lose the lands means to lose the means of sustenance necessary for survival. While sources close to the Forum 18 agency described the decision as "highly political and ideological," the whole affair was described from the beginning as "a spectacle trial" or "farce."

"The purpose of the threats and the lawsuit seems to be to repress this minority

and expel it from Turkey, as if it were a foreign object," the head of the Aramaic Federation, David Gelen, told AsiaNews back in 2009. "Turkey must decide whether it wants to preserve a 1,600-year-old culture, or annihilate the last remains of a non-Muslim tradition. What is at stake is the multiculturalism that has always characterized this nation, since the time of the Ottoman Empire."

The decision caused little upheaval in European environments, with the exception of Germany, where several parties, including the Social Democratic fraction in the Bundestag (Lower Chamber) and even Die Linke (the Left), denounced it.

"The fraction of the SPD expressly condemns the expropriation because the surrounding land is fundamental for the life of the monastery. The Mor Gabriel monastery deserves our protection," stated a Feb. 1 communiqué signed by Christoph Strasser and Angelika Graf. Strong words were also used by Erika Steinbach, spokeswoman of the German parliamentary group for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, who called it a decision that symbolizes "the repression of Christianity in Turkey."

"The negative trend in religious freedom in Turkey is incompatible with human rights," said Steinbach, according to the Assyrian International News Agency.

In an article published Feb. 7 by the Norwegian Forum 18 agency, Otmar Oehring, director of the Human Rights Office of the German Catholic organization Missio, analyzed the situation of various religious communities in Turkey, including the Mor Gabriel affair. According to Oehring, the basic problem is simple: no religious community exists or has ever existed for Turkish law.

"They don't have a legal personality, but they exist," admitted Turkish Vice Premier Bulent Arinc on Jan. 17, commenting on a legal battle over the Buyukada orphanage. (In 2008 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Turkey had to return to the ecumenical Patriarchate the Buyukada orphanage it had confiscated.)

For now, representatives of many religions prefer to stay silent. They fear -- as the case of Mor Gabriel demonstrates -- attracting the hostility of the authorities and having to face long and above all costly legal battles, only to lose their "de facto" liberty, Oehring surmised. For the author, the only solution to undo this knot that is "completely incompatible" with the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, is a change in the Constitution and criminal code of Turkey.

This was also admitted last October by

the then head of the "Diyanet" (Directorate for Religious Affairs), professor Ali Bardakoglu. "The solution is to allow a religious institution to be autonomous. Turkey is ready for this," he said, according to the daily Radikal. The following month, Bardakoglu lost his post.

For the monks of Mor Gabriel, the only way not to lose their land is, therefore, to follow the example of the ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and turn to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Metropolitan Samuel Aktas told the Economist that is just what he's going to do: "I have remained silent in the face of these injustices; but no longer so." -- *Zenit*, Feb. 18.

IT IS WITH PROFOUND SORROW THAT THE MOTHER SEE OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN INFORMS OUR FAITHFUL THAT ON FEBRUARY 1, HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP HUSIK SANTURIAN, ENTERED HIS ETERNAL REST. He was the senior member of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin. He was 91. His Eminence Archbishop has been under the compassionate care of doctors and the nuns from the Monastery of St. Gayane until the time of his death.

Archbishop Husik Santourian (baptismal name Azat) was born in 1920 in the city of Sebastia (Turkey). He lost his parents when he was 5 years old and grew up in Jebale (Lebanon) under the care of the "Trtchnots Buyn" children's home of Miss Yagobson. He completed his education and stayed at the Jebale's children's home in 1935 and moved to the German Children's home in Jerusalem to take courses in mechanical arts. He graduated from there in 1938.

He worked as a teacher and a clerk in Jerusalem from 1939 until 1945.

In 1947 he immigrated to Armenia and in 1953 he entered the Gevorkian Theological Seminary of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. He graduated from the Seminary in 1955 and was ordained to the diaconate.

He was ordained as a celibate priest in February of 1956 and given the priestly name of Husik. After his ordination, he was appointed to serve as the director of the art collections of the Mother See.

In 1959 he received the rank of Archimandrite (Vardapet).

In 1961 he left Armenia to serve as the Armenian Primate of the Diocese of Baku, Azerbaijan.

In October, 1962 he was consecrated as a Bishop by His Holiness Vasken I. He was elevated to the rank of Archbishop by the Pontifical Encyclical of His Holiness

Vasken I.

In 1965 he was appointed to serve as the assistant of the Grand Sacristan of the Mother Cathedral.

Since 1972, he served at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin as the Grand Sacristan of the Mother Cathedral until 2000.

For his devoted service, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians granted him the Order of St. Gregory the Illuminator of the Armenian Church.

His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and the members of the Brotherhood deeply mourn the loss of the merited Archbishop.

Blessed be the memory of the righteous. – Press Release, Holy Etchmiadzin, Feb. 1.

AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (MECC) TOOK PLACE 17-20 FEBRUARY 2011 IN CYPRUS. Participants discussed the current situation in the Middle East and the forthcoming General Assembly.

The Opening Session was devoted to speeches from the Heads of Churches. The current primate of Cyprus, Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Nea Justiniana and All Cyprus, was the first speaker. The archbishop spoke of the demolition, closure and vandalization of churches in Northern Cyprus under Turkish occupation.

His Holiness Aram I, who is one of the presidents of the MECC, spoke of the current popular uprisings in the region and their implications for both the region and the western world. He then spoke of the challenges to the local churches, which are part of the history and culture. He emphasized the importance of Christian Unity, irrespective of disagreements, and he closed by noting the importance of restructuring the Middle East Council of Churches to meet the new reality created by these new issues.

The other three presidents of the MECC, Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Boulos Matar, Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, and Bishop Muneeb Yunan of the Lutheran Church in Jerusalem, also emphasized the importance of Christian Unity in view of the current situation in the region.

After discussing the forthcoming Assembly and the restructuring of the MECC in its deliberative sessions, the Executive Committee decided to hold the next Assembly in August 2011 in Cyprus. – Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, Feb. 23.

ON 23 FEBRUARY 2011, HIS HOLINESS ARAM I MET WITH THE EMIR OF THE STATE OF QATAR, HAMAD BIN KHALIFA AL THANI. The Catholics thanked the Emir for the invitation and conveyed the greetings of the President of Lebanon, General Michel Suleiman. He then described Qatar as a country of moderation, dialogue and development, and said, “We appreciate the role of Qatar in the Arab and Muslim Worlds and its impact on the international community.”

Referring to the Doha Agreement of May 21, 2008, between rival Lebanese factions, the Emir said that he appreciated the role played by the Armenian community in Lebanon. In response, MP Hagop Pakradouni thanked the Sheikh for his support of the Armenians at that meeting. The Emir also spoke highly of the Armenian community in Qatar. At the end of the meeting, the Emir stated that he was donating a plot of land to the Armenian community in Qatar to build a Church and a Center. – Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, Feb. 25.

ON WEDNESDAY 23 FEBRUARY, CATHOLICOS ARAM I LECTURED AT THE GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN DOHA, QATAR, ON THE TOPIC “THE RESPONSE OF RELIGIONS TO CURRENT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES.”

In his lecture he spoke of how religion, when it moves from the private to the public sphere, shapes people’s self-understanding. With this changing perspective, he noted, interreligious dialogue becomes imperative. This dialogue is easier between the three monotheistic religions, because they have common roots and share common values, which should enable them to work together on issues of human rights, global warming and other social concerns.

According to His Holiness, interreligious dialogue, however, should not only be a dialogue on theological precepts; rather, it should primarily be a dialogue of life and lead to cooperation among people. The Catholicos said that globalization, which has brought people closer to one another and exposed them to each other’s religions, may open the way to interreligious dialogue’s becoming a way of life and leading to peaceful coexistence among people. “After all,” Aram I ended, “peace is at the heart of all religious life.” – Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, Feb. 25.

THE MALANKARA MANAGING COMMITTEE MET ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2011, AND PROPOSED THAT THE HOLY EPISCOPAL SYNOD APPOINT ZACHARIAH MAR NICHOLAVOS AS

METROPOLITAN OF NORTH-EAST AMERICAN DIOCESE.

The Holy Episcopal Synod that meets on February 25 will take a final decision upon this issue and thereafter the Malankara Metropolitan will issue necessary orders to this effect. The meeting accepted the proposal that Pulikkottil Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios, Metropolitan of Ahmedabad Diocese, has put forth.

Malankara Metropolitan and Catholicos of the East Mar Baselios Marthoma Paulose II presided over the meeting. The Malankara Metropolitan thankfully acknowledged and appreciated the efforts of Metropolitan Mathews Mar Barnabas, who had recently retired from all administrative duties of the Diocese of North-East America. “Metropolitan Mar Barnabas led the diocese for more than 18 years commendably,” observed the Pontiff. – *Indian Orthodox Herald*, Feb. 24.

THE INDIAN ORTHODOX HERALD HAS COME TO KNOW THAT THE HOLY EPISCOPAL SYNOD OF MALANKARA CHURCH HAS DECIDED TO GRANT 33% PARTICIPATION FOR WOMEN IN CHURCH ADMINISTRATION AND TO GIVE THEM FULL VOTING RIGHTS.

All women above the age of 21 who have no outstanding dues, and who have confessed at least once a year minimum, shall be considered eligible for election to the various ecclesiastical bodies.

With this land sliding decision women will be able to vote and get elected from parish general body meetings, to parish managing committees, the diocesan assembly, diocesan councils, Church managing committees, and to the Malankara Association.

Metropolitan of Trissur Diocese Yuhanon Mar Milithos presented a detailed report in the Holy Episcopal Synod on this issue. Metropolitan Mar Milithos’ report quoted from a vast number of documents including writings of Church fathers such as St. Gregory of Nazianzus.

The Holy Episcopal Synod has forwarded the issue for further study to the Rules Committee. The Rules Committee’s proposals need to be discussed in the Malankara Managing Committee and passed by the Malankara Association in order to become part of the constitution of the Church. The Rules Committee’s proposals are expected to be presented in the next Managing Committee meeting and the Managing Committee’s decision shall be ratified in the next Malankara Association. With that women will have at last complete power to exercise their services to the Ma-

lankara Church to their full potential. – *The Indian Orthodox Herald*, Feb. 26.

The Catholic Churches

THE FUTURE OF EGYPT IS NOW IN THE HANDS OF ITS PEOPLE, SAYS THE APOSTOLIC NUNCIO IN THE COUNTRY. Archbishop Michael Louis Fitzgerald, who has held the post of nuncio in Egypt since 2006, told *Zenit* that "it is for Egyptians to find the right solution to the present crisis."

After 18 days of protests that left some 300 dead, President Hosni Mubarak stepped down earlier today. Mubarak, 82, had ruled the country for 30 years.

The archbishop recalled that last Sunday, Benedict XVI "prayed that Egypt and the people of Egypt may find once more harmony and peace," and added that "apart from that, there has been no specific statement from the Holy See."

"Yet," he continued, "the teaching of the social doctrine of the Church is clear. Every human community needs an authority to govern it, but the authority does not derive its moral legitimacy from itself. It must act for the common good, using morally licit means to attain this good, and not acting in a despotic manner."

Quoting from the Catholic Catechism of the Church, he stated: "The common good consists of three essential elements: respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the human person; prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and its members" (No.1925).

"Many of the protestors' complaints about the present regime could fall under these headings, even if they would not use the same wording," Archbishop Fitzgerald noted.

When asked about the role of Egyptian Catholics in the unfolding events, he stated that they are, "as citizens of their country, to take their responsibility in moving toward a society where greater attention is paid to justice and equality."

Regarding interreligious dialogue, the prelate said "the events of recent weeks have produced a feeling of solidarity among Christians and Muslims. This should be a good basis for increased dialogue and co-operation in society." – *Zenit*, Feb. 11.

HERE IS A STATEMENT RELEASED ON FEBRUARY 13 BY CARDINAL ANTONIOS NAGUIB, THE COPTIC CATHOLIC PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA, ON THE NEW SITUATION IN EGYPT after the

youth movement that began last month resulted in the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak:

The Egyptian Catholic Church joins all Egypt's loyal citizens to thank God Almighty for the wonderful success he granted to the courageous youth of the January 25 movement in which all the loyal citizens participated, by personal presence, emotional participation, or prayer to the Almighty for the good of the Beloved Egypt, or by staying updated on the news with eagerness, anticipation and hope. It was expected to make the change gradually under the constitutional provisions, but the will of the youth and the people determined the events' course. We are sure that all expectations will be met, God willing.

Thanks are due to the crowds of patriotic youth who motivated the spark from which this movement started off and became an erupting volcano that cannot be extinguished and that gathered all the forces that refuse the wrong situation controlling the country for so long, by looking forward to a better and brighter future for the Egyptian civilization, and gathering around one cause which is the love of Egypt and the dignity of its citizens. Egypt has been making its history for 7,000 years with letters of light and fire. And it is now shining with a new radiance.

Greetings are addressed to the souls of the martyrs who offered their lives for the sunshine of this special historical day. May the Almighty have mercy on them and unite them with the loyal righteous, and may He give consolation and peace to their families, and protect them. We also pray that the wounded are recovered, and that the victims of violence and vandalism are able to reconstruct what was lost or destroyed.

Thanks are due to everyone who contributed to the protection of persons, as well as private and public property, during that critical period: the popular committees, the armed forces, and the security forces. This experience has produced a reality that was absent for so long, which is the unity of the citizens, the youth and the old, Christians and Muslims, without any distinction or discrimination, in purpose and action for the good of Egypt, and for the security and safety in the country. We are certain that these feelings that reigned in the hearts will last for the near and distant future.

Now, it is time for the serious, committed and decisive work, so that Egypt would be at the forefront on the social, economic and political levels, and shine again with its deep-rooted civilization that illumined the world over the centuries. With all the Egyptians, we are looking forward to swift steps

that bring about what was declared by the supreme council of the armed forces, which is the reconstruction of the nation on sound constitutional bases.

We want Egypt to have its position among the modern countries. A civil country, a democratic one based on laws, justice and equality, that respects one's freedom and dignity based only on the citizenship, allows participation for all categories without reducing persons and categories to one member, and achieves what the analysts, politicians and intellectuals have called for in order to prevent divisions that caused distortion in all the fields. Here they are the loyal Egyptians ready for making all efforts for the good of the dear nation. And the Catholic Church with all its institutions will work with them in reconstructing and proceeding along this path for a better future.

God protect Egypt and its leaders, and may He inspire them with the good of the country for the present and the future. – *Zenit*, Feb. 14

HERE IS A TRANSLATION OF THE ADDRESS GIVEN BY HABEEB MOHAMMED HADI ALI AL-SADR, AMBASSADOR OF IRAQ TO THE HOLY SEE, AT THE MEETING ENTITLED "CHRISTIANITY IN IRAQ," held in Velletri, Italy, on Jan. 29. The talk addresses the present situation of Christians in the country:

Christians in Iraq have been witnesses of a bitter period, that of Saddam, which resulted in wars, embargoes and disasters. Throughout this period, Christians had no voice, for years their will was paralyzed, given that the regime prohibited them from expressing their opinions, from forming parties or nongovernmental associations, which could have taken care of their problems and ensured their continuity, given that their respective leaders reside abroad. As a consequence, in the 90s of the past century, waves of emigrants left the country, fleeing from the inferno of the Iraqi regime. Coming to April 2003, with the fall of that odious "statue," Christians hoped to return to the flourishing garden of a free Iraq. A real paradise in which all hopes could flourish, which up to then had been suffocated, and where their true love for the country could be planted, which even now is full of the most beautiful Iraqi sentiments.

However, the enemies of today's Iraq are the associations of Saddam infidels who, after the capitulation of the regime, took advantage of the vacuum of power created as a consequence of the American decision to dissolve all the structures of the security services. In this way, they were

able to sow death and ruin throughout the country. They have done everything to destroy from the beginning the project of the new democratic Iraq. In all this, it is clear that Christians together with their Muslim brothers drink the bitterness of this new war, because the country is stubbornly in a new war: the war against fundamentalists and terrorists. It is the most ferocious war of all the ones engaged in by the old regime. In fact, it is a war against ghosts, shadows, which act against the people taking on different appearances that enable them to be present at pre-established times and places and commit their odious crimes without being bothered.

Undoubtedly, what has happened in Iraq has happened in other countries of the world: embargoes, wars, economic paralysis, shedding of blood, the collapse of infrastructures. This is the painful consequence of the process of democratization, including the challenges entailed in having to confront terrorism. It will be the general situation, which is particular in the true sense of the term, which consequently influences the people negatively affecting all its components.

Because of this, it is neither just nor equitable to analyze the situation of Iraqi Christians, abstracting them from the global situation and not taking into account objective data. Nor is it right to ask the government to create an exemplary climate dedicated to satisfying each component without taking the rest into account, as if the others lived in another planet.

Hence, we hope that our friends in the international community will be able to understand the truth and as a consequence that they will understand that today Iraq is in a phase of its history that might well be the most critical of its existence. It lives, in fact, in a climate of violent war waged against fundamentalist and terrorist forces prepared to use anything that is at hand, from human to economic resources, to triumph in their homicidal intents. However, if this "Iraqi dike" breaks -- God forbid -- the flood of terrorism it would produce would drown the whole world. If this should happen, each and every European would kiss good-bye to the peace and stability they enjoy. The latest attacks in Moscow are proof of what I'm saying. This situation invites us all to support with determination the Iraqi government so that it can address this danger in the best way and contain the epidemic of terror, defending this "dike" and even making it impregnable.

Deduced from this is that our present war against terrorists is not dedicated solely to defend the security of the Iraqi people,

but also to safeguard the security and future of the whole of humanity. That is why it fights in the place of the international family.

For their part, the terrorists have understood that the blood of Iraqi Muslims, which they have shed like rivers, is not so interesting in the eyes of the Western media.

And from the moment in which, pretending to impose a twisted and altogether mistaken idea of the diversity of Iraqi society, and consequently annulling the democratic experience, and striking Christians, they have attained their evil objective. Without realizing it, the media and international organizations have fallen into this mechanism, playing the game of the terrorists, being concerned about the Christians, their future and the society's lack of development. The consequence has been the abandonment by Christians of their homes and emigration.

Individual actions don't necessarily indicate that there is an Iraqi plot geared to the persecution of Christians, to the elimination of their existence, destroying their cultural patrimony as some think. In fact, these individual action don't reflect the profound and secular coexistence between Christians and Muslims, as they do not express either the tolerant essence of the Islamic faith which calls for dialogue, respect of pluralism, rejection of violence, even considering it outside the way of Islam, as is written: "to kill a soul for no reason is to kill the whole of humanity."

Moreover, "[t]he Prophet believed in what descended on him from the Lord and the believers believed in God, in his angels, books and prophets without any distinction among his envoys." In this connection, it is clear that a Muslim fails in Islam if he does not believe in the principles of his faith and in the message of Christ (about peace) and, hence, the Bible. Moreover, in its desire to preserve the Christian heritage of Iraq, the government has given life to a Christian superintendence at the ministerial level. It finances the Church with US\$15 million a year from the state budget. In addition, the government has exempted the churches and monasteries from paying the taxes for light and water, as well as restored the churches and all the institutions that the previous government had expropriated, such as schools and universities.

In reality, the Christian component is the object of respect and esteem on the part of Iraqi political and religious leaders. They are all conscious of the fact that they constitute an essential active element in the process of the country's democratization.

The official and popular position of the whole country is solidarity with the Christians brethren, especially after the recent and tremendous attack suffered by the church of Our Lady of Salvation. This incident, with all the manifestations of solidarity that it unleashed, witnesses the true essence of the close ties that characterize the national social fabric which has never lost its balance in face of these crimes but, on the contrary, reinforced them.

The electoral law gives Christians an advantage, reserving for them five parliamentary seats in addition to the ones it won in the elections. Christians in Iraq today have parties, circles, NGOs dedicated to the presence of Christians. In addition, they enjoy full liberty of worship, ensured by very rigorous protection which many mosques don't enjoy. They have televisions, radio and newspapers, whether in Syrian or Aramaic. At the political level, Christians have ministers in the new government, dozens of vice-ministers, several ambassadors and directors general.

To put an end to emigration, the government has made different facilities available in the purchase of plots of land, access to loans, in the release of occupied houses and in the reinsertion of employees in their respective jobs, lost previously in the flight from the cities and from the country itself. In addition, it has made every effort to compensate Christians for all damages suffered and to exempt them from customs taxes.

Recently, the presidency of the Republic elaborated a decree related to the establishment of an office that would be concerned with the issues of Iraqi Christians and coordinate the security measures, as well as the economic and social activities entrusted to it. Prime Minister Al Maliki himself swiftly formed a Supreme Security Council to develop the necessary security measures destined to prevent new attacks. In addition he ordered the prompt reconstruction of the church of Our Lady of Salvation, subsidized by the State. Then he himself visited the ruins of the church and met with the bishops. He took part in the prayer for love and peace organized after the attack, visited the wounded in the hospital and gave them presents from the State to express his closeness. But not only this; his government reserves other advantages for Christians, which now await the approval of the Parliament and the approval as decree of law. This calms us in regard to the future of Christians in Iraq, which will be promising and prosperous in the light of the notable improvements that there will be in the country at the level of security and

the economy which is already constantly improving. The new president of the Chamber, Al Nujaifi, organized special meetings to study "the Christian question," he also visited His Most Eminent Beatitude Cardinal Delly and expressed his support and that of the Parliament to Christian brethren, given that we are all in the same trench.

And we cannot forget either the posture of the president of the Kurdistan region, Masud Barzani, who has made a safe refuge of the whole region for all Christians who have felt threatened in Iraq, ensuring all the services for them: from housing and education to health. The apostolic nuncio in Baghdad, His Excellency Monsignor Giorgio Lingua, transmitted the Holy Father's greetings to President Masud Barzani for the commendable efforts made in this area and discussed with him the possibility of appealing for international support, with the agreement of the Iraqi government, to help the Kurdistan region cope with the weight of the present situation.

For his part Talabani proposed the formation of brigades of special protection, in which young Christians could enroll to collaborate in the protection of places of worship and neighborhoods inhabited by Christians. This idea is supported by Iraq's bishops.

The new Constitution guarantees Christians full equality of rights and duties, also granting them the founding of a private region suggested by them, wherever it is. Our government is also interested, for the good of the country, in reactivating Christian religious tourism and will be delighted to open its arms to Christian pilgrims who come from abroad to visit Ur, in the south of Iraq, where the Father of the Prophets was born (Abraham) peace be to him. It also wishes to develop relations of loving collaboration and understanding with the Holy See in all areas.

To carry out the general rebirth of the Christian reality, it is hoped that Christians will take steps to abandon fear and their present closure. It is also hoped that, persevering with patience in the communion of sacrifices with their fellow citizens, they will reject the idea of emigrating, thus making the plan fail to empty the country of Christians. They also have the duty to guard their apostolic zeal and make a common front to overcome internal discord and safeguard national unity, rejecting all outside protection. Contributing to reinforce the charitable activities, especially in the health and education sector, so that the Iraqi Christians are witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, peace be to him, in this good and

fertile land. It is necessary to activate every form of Muslim-Christian dialogue, to spread the culture of respect for the other to arrive at the necessary unity and address the challenges of globalization.

And, finally, believe me, friends, my people can only breathe their identity with two lungs, Muslim and Christian. An Iraq without Christians is an Iraq without identity and symbols. If the Christians of Iraq stay there, they will be fertile sources for eternity, projects of salvation, and flames of ideas, paths for the rebirth and hands that plant the good and spread love creating hope. Let us raise up hymns full of supplications for Iraq so that this country will again be a great tent that welcomes everyone. – *Zenit*, Feb. 15.

THE HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE RELEASED THE FOLLOWING COMMUNIQUÉ AT MIDDAY TODAY:

"Today, 17 February 2011, the Holy Father Benedict XVI received in audience Dimitry Medvedev, president of the Russian Federation. Subsequently the president, accompanied by Sergei Lavrov, minister for foreign affairs, went on to meet with Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B. who was accompanied by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for Relations with States.

"In the course of the cordial discussions, the parties expressed their pleasure at the good state of bilateral relations and highlighted their desire to strengthen them, also in the wake of the establishment of full diplomatic relations. The broad-ranging collaboration between the Holy See and the Russian Federation was recognised, both in the promotion of specifically human and Christian values, and in the cultural and social field. Subsequently, emphasis was given to the positive contribution inter-religious dialogue can make to society. Finally, attention turned to the international situation, with particular reference to the Middle East." – *VIS*, Feb. 17.

IN THEIR FIRST MEETING AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FULL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE VATICAN AND RUSSIA, POPE BENEDICT XVI AND PRESIDENT DIMITRY MEDVEDEV EXPRESSED THEIR DESIRE TO STRENGTHEN BILATERAL RELATIONS.

Describing the 35-minute encounter as "cordial," the Vatican said that "the broad-ranging collaboration between the Holy See and the Russian Federation was recognized, both in the promotion of specifically human and Christian values, and in the cultural and social field."

Pope Benedict and Medvedev had previously held talks leading up to the establishment of diplomatic relations on December 3, 2009.

Medvedev did not meet with journalists. There had been speculation in the Russian media that Benedict might announce a visit to Russia, something his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, had desired.

When Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989 met John Paul II in Rome, he invited the pontiff to visit Moscow. But shortly thereafter, the breakup of the Soviet Union derailed the idea. During the 50-year Cold War, Moscow's official stand of atheism prompted a chilly relationship with the Vatican.

Recently, the Vatican and the Russian Orthodox Church have been at odds over accusations that Rome is aggressively seeking converts in Russia.

Diplomatic sources said an invitation to Benedict would have to come from both the Russian government and the Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow.

However, Anatoly Krasikov, director of the Center for Religious and Social Studies of the Institute of Europe in Moscow and formerly a journalist on Vatican affairs for the Soviet Itar-Tass news agency, said Benedict and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill already know each other.

Before he was elected Patriarch in January, 2009, Kirill served for years as the chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations and met Benedict many times, both as Pope and before, when he was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Krasnikov noted. "They know each other very well. So, in this respect, what can another meeting give?" Krasnikov said.

Relations between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches, bitterly divided in the 1990s by centuries-old tensions over the Ukrainian Greek Catholic, or Uniate, church in Ukraine, which follows the Byzantine rite but is loyal to Rome, have warmed considerably under Benedict and Kirill.

There was a heated exchange of letters late last year between Catholic and Orthodox officials when the Russian church welcomed a decision by legislators in Kaliningrad, formerly the German city of Königsberg, to hand over Catholic and Lutheran churches confiscated by the Soviets after World War II to the Moscow Patriarchate.

But an overall unified front has crystallized in repeated statements by Benedict and Kirill that the two churches stand in common spiritual witness to a secular world.

An official of the Moscow Patriarchate said on 14 February that diplomatic relations have helped advance contacts between the churches. "The establishment of full diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the Holy See has given a new impulse to the development of constructive relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican," the Rev. Dmitri Sizonenko, an official of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations, told the Interfax news agency.

As Medvedev and the Russian delegation were welcomed by the Pope outside his private library, Benedict described the meeting as "very important."

Medvedev gave Benedict two books of letters written from 1996 to 1999 by former Russian president Boris Yeltsin to various chiefs of state, including John Paul II and a volume of the Orthodox Encyclopedia, written in Russian. Benedict gave Medvedev a Vatican mosaic. – Luigi Sandri and Sophia Kishkovsky for *ENI*, Feb. 17.

BENEDICT XVI IS MOVING ARCHBISHOP IVAN JURKOVIČ FROM HIS APOSTOLIC NUNCIATURE IN UKRAINE TO THE SAME POST IN RUSSIA. THE PRELATE COMES TO MOSCOW WITH BROAD EXPERIENCE IN ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC RELATIONS.

The Vatican reported Archbishop Jurkovič's appointment Saturday, just two days after the Pope was visited by the president of Russia, Dimitri Medvedev.

Archbishop Jurkovič succeeds Archbishop Antonio Mennini, who was appointed in December the nuncio to Great Britain.

During his eight-year tenure in Moscow, Archbishop Mennini played a decisive role in improving relations between Orthodox and Catholics. In fact, the day after the papal audience, President Medvedev signed an order conferring on him the honor of the "Order of Friendship," in recognition of his work to improve relations between the Holy See and Russia.

Archbishop Jurkovič is also practiced in Russian Orthodox-Catholic relations, having already worked in the nunciature of Moscow. As well, he had served in the Ukraine -- a territory included in the Russian Patriarchate -- since 2004, and from 2001 to 2004, he was apostolic nuncio in Belarus.

Ivan Jurkovič was born in Kocevje, Slovenia, on June 10, 1952, and ordained a priest in 1977. In 1980 he entered the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, where priests are instructed for papal diplomatic service. In 1988 he earned a doctorate in

canon law from the Pontifical Lateran University.

After serving in several countries, between 1992 and 1996 he worked as a counselor in the Holy See's representation in Moscow, where he was a canon law professor and published several books on law, including a Latin-Russian dictionary of canon law terms and expressions. – *Zenit*, Feb. 21.

THE IMPERATIVE FOR THE UNITY OF UKRAINIAN CHRISTIANS WAS ORIGINALLY DECLARED BY HIS BEATITUDE LUBOMYR DURING HIS INSTALLMENT AND SOLEMN DECLARATION SPEECH 10 YEARS AGO. THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN EMPHASIZED by Director of the Institute of Church History of the Ukrainian Catholic University, Rev. Dr. Andriy Mykhaleyko during the Church history webinar dedicated to the topic "His Beatitude Lubomyr Huzar on the unity of Christian Churches in Ukraine"

"To live in faith, to help believers and unbelievers, so that all of us are united in faith so that our nation and our Church will become one in Jesus Christ" - the webinar author recalled the words spoken by His Beatitude Lubomyr in January 2001 during Solemn Archiepiscopal Divine Liturgy at St. George's Cathedral in Lviv.

The Director of the Institute of Church History built his online seminar dedicated to the issue of Christian unity in Ukraine, on the materials of the sermons, epistolary texts, and Synodal Letters published when the Church was guided by His Beatitude Lubomyr. Surveying the ecumenical theology of the Head of the UGCC during the period of 2001-2011 AD, Rev. Andriy noticed that it is mainly based on awareness of belonging to the Kyiv-Christian tradition of Volodymyr's baptism. It was also based on the inclusive deeds of the Churches of Kyiv, along with thinking in the categories of the communion and restoration of the Eucharistic unity.

"If we read into the suggestions made by His Beatitude Lubomyr, we can understand that they are more spiritual and evangelical. They are hard to insert in any legal framework," - stated the author of the webinar. According to Rev. Andriy, held against the current state of Catholic-Orthodox ecumenical dialogue, the ideas of the UGCC are, unquestionably, innovative and fresh.

A better awareness of this heritage and tradition of Volodymyr's baptism was highlighted in a 2004 Letter "One People of God in the Kyiv Hill Country." In this message of His Beatitude Lubomyr we hear an

idea that none of Kyiv's churches is the only successor to the Kyiv-Christian heritage.

The Director of the Institute of Church History recalled that rejection of this approach only serves to make the existing disagreements worse.

According to Rev. Andriy, a like-minded idea could be found in an Appeal of His Beatitude Lubomyr to the Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Volodymyr, dated April 26, 2008. The document made it evident that as neither one Person of the Holy Trinity is the whole, so none of the Churches of Volodymyr's baptism is whole. Therefore, the only way towards reconciliation is acknowledgement of the common heritage of Kyiv's churches. As it was pointed out in the Appeal, the development of communion is not a reason for breaking off ties with Rome, Moscow or Constantinople.

"Patriarchate for God's people is not an end in itself and not a politically motivated goal. It focuses not only on matters of structure of the Church, but on the unity of God's people and its holiness," - quoted the webinar author in the Synodal Letter of 8 December 2009.

"Without a doubt, the suggestions made by His Beatitude Lubomyr and the Synod of the UGCC are revolutionary as they propose to go beyond a narrow confessional framework" - summed up Rev. Andriy Mykhaleyko. In his view, the communal unity being strived for by the UGCC can be realized through the initiative of all four churches of Kiev.

Answering the question from one of the participants of the webinar, whether the Head of the UOC Metropolitan Volodymyr replied to the Appeal of the Head of the UGCC in 2008, Rev. Andriy said: "Yes, he did. This, however, was not a personal reply but a collective response of the Synod of the UOC." According to the webinar author, one could hear in this response stereotypical phrases, like "UGCC does not possess the mandate from Rome to make such offers and in this situation. It is not the subject, but rather the object of the process." After all, it was said that the UGCC faithful who consider themselves supporters of the Eastern tradition, should return to the fold of Orthodoxy, and others - should remain in communion with Rome" - said the church historian

In response to the question about the dialogue with the UOC-MP, the Director of the Institute of Church History observed that the Greek Catholics are trying on the local level to keep up good relations with the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Primate of this Orthodox Church. However, on the

official level, we cannot talk about unity yet.

In the opinion of Rev. Dr. Andriy Mykhaleyko, what impedes a genuine dialogue for the unity of the Kyiv Churches of Volodymyr's baptism is unhealthy exclusivity, and narrow confessional thinking. The author of the webinar observed that His Beatitude has compared this situation with the wheel: "We are similar to those who stand in a circle, the center of which is Christ. If each of us gets closer to Christ, we will be united among ourselves."

"The truth is but one, and it is found in God alone. God wants the Church to be one. Which of the churches does not agree with this idea? I think that when everyone desires unity, God will guide us and reveal the way to accomplish it. What is required of us is the desire for, and agreement on, unity," - observed one of the participants in an open chat at the conclusion of the webi-

nar. – Press Release, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Feb. 23.

THE HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
RELEASED THE FOLLOWING
COMMUNIQUÉ AT MIDDAY TODAY:

"Today in the Apostolic Palace the Holy Father Benedict XVI received in audience Michel Sleiman, president of the Republic of Lebanon. The president subsequently went on to meet with Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B. who was accompanied by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for Relations with States.

"The cordial discussions served to highlight how Lebanon, because of the presence of various Christian and Muslim communities there, stands as a message of freedom and respectful coexistence, not only for the region but for the whole world. In this context, it is increasingly necessary

to promote collaboration and dialogue between religious confessions.

"Attention then turned to the importance of civil and religious authorities being committed to educating consciences in peace and reconciliation, and the hope was expressed that the formation of the new government may favor the desired stability of the nation, which is called to face important internal and international challenges.

"The talks then dwelt on the situation in the Middle East, with particular reference to recent events in certain Arab States, with the parties expressing their shared conviction that it is vital to resolve the ongoing conflicts in the region.

"Finally, particular attention was given to the delicate situation of Christians in the entire region, and to the contribution they can make for the good of society as a whole." – VIS, Feb. 24.



His Beatitude Cardinal Nasrallah Pierre Sfeir, Patriarch Emeritus of the Maronite Catholic Church (left) and His Beatitude Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, Major Archbishop Emeritus of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

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