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ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW, IN A MESSAGE JUNE 3 TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, STRESSES "RELIGION'S UNIQUE PROSPECT to provide a balance to the world of globalization, to combat fundamentalism and racism and to develop religious tolerance in a world of conflicts, as well as the preservation of natural balance."

The conference completed its three-day session in Budapest on Friday evening, in the framework of the Hungarian presidency in the European Union in the first half of 2011.

Bartholomew underlines in his message that the Ecumenical Patriarchate since 1994, with a series of international events, has promoted and deepened interreligious dialogue, believing that the religious communities can contribute to the handling of global challenges, such as racism, intolerance, extremism and terrorism, realizing at the same time that they belong to humanity, live in the same world and are the creations of the same God. -- D. Dimitrakoudis for ANA-MPA, June 4.

GREEK FOREIGN MINISTER DIMITRIS DROUTSAS ARRIVED ON MOUNT ATHOS ON JUNE 4 FOR A TWO-DAY VISIT. The semi-autonomous monastic territory located on a northern Greece promontory falls under the foreign ministry's jurisdiction.

Droutsas also chairs an inter-ministerial committee established to study and promote Mount Athos and to focus on the issues pertinent to the renowned Orthodox all-male monastic community.

The FM was accompanied by top ministry officials and the state-appointed governor of Mount Athos, A. Kasmiroglou. ó ANA-MPA, June 6.

THE FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF ANTIOCH MET ON THE GROUNDS OF THE PATRIARCHAL MONASTERY OF OUR LADY OF BALAMAND

FROM THE 21ST TO THE 23RD OF JUNE, 2011, PRESIDED BY HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH IGNATIUS IV (HAZIM) with the attendance of their eminences, the fathers of the Holy Synod of Antioch, the metropolitans:

Spiridon (Khoury) of Zahleh and Baalbek, Georges (Khodr) of Jbeil, Batroun and their dependencies, Yuhanna (Mansour) of Lattakia, Elias (Audi) of Beirut, Iliya (Saliba) of Hama, Elias (Kfoury) of Tyre, Sidon, and Marjayoun, Antonio (Chedraoui) of Mexico, Venezuela, and the Caribbean Islands, Sergio (Abad) of Santiago and Chile, Damaskinos (Mansour) of Sao Paulo and Brazil, Saba (Esber) of Bosra, Jebel al-Arab, and Hawran, Paul (Saliba) of Australia and New Zealand, George (Abu Zakhm) of Homs, Boulos (Yazigi) of Aleppo and Alexandretta, Silouan (Mousa) of Argentina, Youhanna (Yazigi) of Europe, Basil (Mansour) of Akkar, Ephrem (Kyriakos) of Tripoli and al-Koura, as well as Archbishop Niphon (Saikali), Patriarchal representative in Moscow, Bishop Ghattas (Hazim), abbot of the Patriarchal Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand and dean of the St. John of Damascus Theological Institute, and Ekonomos Georges Dimas, secretary of the Synod.

Metropolitan Philip (Saliba) of New York and North America gave his regrets and Metropolitan Constantine (Papastephanou) of Baghdad and Kuwait was unable to attend.

After prayer and calling upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, especially because we are still in the atmosphere of Glorious Pentecost, and asking the blessing of Our Lady the Virgin, protectress of the monastery, the fathers of the Synod began discussion of the agenda covering various ecclesial, local, national, and ecumenical topics.

The fathers gave their attention to all the issues that concern the faithful from spiritual, pastoral, social, and national perspectives. Together they carefully studied pastoral needs in the home countries and the diaspora in order for the Church to have an effective presence in serving her children, paying heed to their needs and con-

cerns.

The fathers saw that the service of the Church in all its aspects and especially in the countries of the diaspora is in need of a living witness and an effective revival that would embrace all aspects of pastoral, social, and humanitarian work. They praised the effective revival of the Church working within the societies in which her children live in the countries of the diaspora, which causes them to rejoice with their brother bishops wherever they are found renewing the announcement of the Gospel with a spirit of faith and modernity that is attuned to new generations.

During an extensive and profound inquiry into the concept of pastoral and evangelical work, the fathers of the Synod paused over the topic of communications and its importance in all media. They found that this matter is in need of an extensive inquiry with reliance on experts in that field. His Eminence Metropolitan Boulos of Aleppo was asked to review his study offered at the October session of the Holy Synod in 2010, with the consultation of concerned media specialists in order to submit it again at the regular session of the Synod this coming October.

The fathers also decided to congratulate their brother bishop Ghattas (Hazim) in his new responsibility as abbot of the Patriarchal Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand and dean of the St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology and they wished him God-granted success in his work. Then His Grace gave a detailed report about the academic year 2010-2011.

When the fathers of the Synod examined several archdioceses and their expansiveness both in the home country and abroad, they decided to elect new bishops, each of which will be an auxiliary to the metropolitan of the archdiocese in all pastoral, educational, and administrative matters. Each of them is well-educated in theological and worldly affairs.

The Synod elected these bishops to be entrusted with the service and pastoring of souls in the Patriarchal residence and the archdioceses of the home country and the

diaspora. Those elected are:

Archimandrite Doctor Nicholas (Baalbaki)-the Patriarchal residence in Damascus

Archimandrite Constantine (Kayal)-the Patriarchal residence in Damascus

Archimandrite Isaac (Barakat)-the Patriarchal residence in Damascus

Archimandrite Antonius (Fahd)-Archdiocese of Akkar- Tartous

Archimandrite Demitrius (Sharbak)-Archdiocese of Akkar- Safayta

Archimandrite Iliya (Tohme)-Archdiocese of Akkar- Marmarita

Archimandrite Ignatius (Samaan)-Archdiocese of Mexico

Archimandrite Ignatius (al-Hoshi)-Archdiocese of Western Europe- Berlin, Germany

Archimandrite Ephrem (Maalouli)-Archdiocese of Western Europe- London, UK

Archimandrite Romanos (Daoud)-Archdiocese of Brazil- Sao Paulo

Archimandrite Morcos (Khoury)-Archdiocese of Brazil- Sao Paulo

Each of them will be attached to the archdiocese to which they were appointed after they receive episcopal consecration from the hand of Patriarch Ignatius IV.

At the closing of the session, the bishops-elect present in the home country were invited to attend. They offered their obedience and thanks to His Beatitude the Patriarch and to the fathers of the Synod. The Synod closed its work with prayer for His Beatitude our father Ignatius IV. -- Released by the secretariat of the Holy Synod of Antioch, Patriarchal Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand, June 23, 2011.

-- Translation by Notes on Arab Orthodoxy.

ON JUNE 1, 2011, DURING HIS TRIP TO POLAND, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, HEAD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, VISITED THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN POLAND TO MEET WITH SOME LEADERS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THAT COUNTRY. The Polish side included Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio to Poland, Archbishop Henryk Muszynski, Honorary Primate of Poland, Bishop Stanislaw Budzik, general secretary of the Polish Bishops' Conference, and Bishop Tadeusz Pikus, head of the Bishops' Conference council for inter-Christian unity.

Metropolitan Hilarion was accompa-

nied by Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations.

The sides discussed the preparation of a joint statement of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Poland on reconciliation of the nations in their pastoral care. The decision to work at such a document was made in February 2010.

The DECR chairman stressed that the history of relations between the two nations saw many tragic events, and approaches to their assessment should be sensitive and as well-considered as possible. According to Metropolitan Hilarion, in preparing the document, special attention should be given to today's problems so that common challenges facing the two Churches could be identified and a common response to them could be found.

After the meeting a dinner was given in honour of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. ó Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, June 2.

DECR CHAIRMAN METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK ARRIVED IN HUNGARY ON JUNE 1, 2011, TO PARTICIPATE, WITH THE BLESSING OF HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA, IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COOPERATION BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM AND JUDAISM.

The conference was initiated and organized by the Hungarian Government. It gathered Christian, Islamic and Jewish leaders, Hungarian statesmen, ambassadors and representatives of international organizations. It was opened on June 2 at the Royal Godollo palace near Budapest.

Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the theme "The problem of religious intolerance. What can we do together?" He emphasized the relevance of the conference due to the aggravating problem of discrimination against Christians in the world. "Now as never before it is important to enter into intensive interreligious dialogue for enabling each community to bear witness to its faith and tradition and to strengthen good-neighborly relations and mutual understanding. I believe this dialogue should not be limited to general statements and calls not committing anyone to anything but should become a real contribution to relieving the situation of believers. Religious leaders should oppose intolerance towards the persecution of Christians, Muslims and Jews. No such case should remain unnoticed in the flow of daily news and events. We all in our places are called to do all that depends on us. Only in

this case the voice of people of faith will become a convincing and powerful voice of truth," he said.

Metropolitan Hilarion noted that Hungary was one of the countries which had repeatedly drawn the attention of the European community to the act of aggression against the Copts committed on January 1, 2011, in Egypt. "It was during the chairmanship of Hungary in the European Union that the EU Committee of Ministers instructed the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Catherine Ashton, to report on the steps taken by the EU for protecting the freedom of faith. It is my conviction that Hungary will continue to initiate and support the adoption of documents for protecting Christians on European and global levels. Among the already adopted documents is the European Parliament's Resolution of January 20, 2011, on the Situation of Christians in the Context of Freedom of Religion and the similar resolution adopted by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly." ó Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, June 2.

ON 3 JUNE 2011, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, CHAIRMAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS (DECR), TOOK PART IN THE PANEL DISCUSSION ON A JUST PEACE AT THE 33RD DEUTSCHER EVANGELISCHER KIRCHENTAG HELD IN DRESDEN.

In his presentation, Metropolitan Hilarion said that peacemaking begins in the human soul and in the family.

In reply to the question why a just war is mentioned in the Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church, the DECR chairman expressed his confidence that the concepts of just war and just peace are not mutually exclusive, but rather supplement each other.

Speaking about the nature of the present-day peacemaking, Metropolitan Hilarion said that the declared good intentions often run counter to the methods of achievement and final results and reminded the listeners that two thirds of Iraqi Christians have fled the country since the beginning of military operations.

The DECR chairman underscored that Christians throughout the world were called to demonstrate solidarity with their discriminated and persecuted fellow believers in certain regions of the world, while the followers of other religions should join the process in order to overcome xenophobia,

Islamophobia and other negative phenomena based on misconceptions and artificially stirred misunderstanding.

Metropolitan Hilarion also spoke of pacifism. He said that radical pacifism was uncharacteristic of Christian tradition, illustrating this by the views of Leo Tolstoy who actually put himself out of the Church. Inherent in Orthodox tradition are anthropological views according to which evil abides inside rather than outside the human person. People can serve justice even fighting the enemy with weapons, in which case the motivation and objectives of each concrete person are extremely important, the DECR chairman emphasized. *6* Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, June 4.

ON JUNE 2, 2011, THE ASCENSION DAY, THE CUPOLAS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH DEDICATED TO ST. PHILIP IN SHARJAH, OAE, WERE CROWNED WITH GOLDEN CROSSES. IT IS THE FIRST RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH TO BE BUILT NOT ONLY IN THE OAE BUT IN THE WHOLE OF ARABIA. IT IS ALSO THE ONLY CHURCH IN THE PENINSULA TO BE CROWNED WITH CROSSES.

Before installation, the crosses were blessed by the rector of the Russian parish, Hegumen Alexander Zarkeshev.

The five crosses and nine decorative stars covered with golden nitrite-titanic spattering were designed by architect Yuri Krista in Russia and brought to Sharjah by air.

This important event in the life of the Orthodox community in the OAE has become possible thanks to a special personal order of the emirate's ruler, Sheikh Sultan III bin Mohammed al-Qasimi. Thus the final stage in the decoration of the Orthodox compound under construction has been completed. Along with the five-domed church of St. Philip, it includes a three-storey building of the Russian cultural and educational center.

The foundation stone for the future Russian religious and cultural compound in Sharjah was blessed, with the consent of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East, on September 9, 2007, by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad (now Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia).

The Parish of St. Philip was established by mutual agreement between the Primate of the Russian Church and the Church of Antioch. It is under the canonical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Antioch which embraces Arabia. As is agreed, the church and the Russian community in Sharjah are served by a cleric of the Moscow

Patriarchate. *6* Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, June 6.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IS EXPANDING ITS PASTORAL WORK AND SETTING UP FIVE NEW DIOCESES. THE DECISION WAS TAKEN ON 31 MAY AT A SESSION OF THE HOLY SYNOD, the Patriarchate's highest administrative authority, chaired by Patriarch Kirill. According to some analysts, in addition to improving the Church's local administration, the new framework will strengthen the Patriarch's authority. Last year, the head of the Church had already begun a more centralised reorganisation of the Church and its activities, including in the field of mission.

“We must make important decisions on how to reorganise some dioceses,” Kirill said opening the session. “We must think about steps to take so that the life of the Church, in a number of regions, can become more intense and coherent with the guidelines of the Council of Bishops.”

The restructuring of the canonical territory had already begun in the previous session of the synod in March, when new dioceses were established in the northern Caucasus (Pyatigorsk and Circassia, Vladikavkaz and Makhachkalinsk), which were previously part of the dioceses of Stavropol and Vladikavkaz and Baku and Prikaspiisk.

The most recent dioceses are those of Narva (which becomes the second diocese of the Estonian Orthodox Church), Krasnoslobodsk and Ardatov, Khanty-Mansiysk and Surgut, Salekhard and Novy Urengoy and finally that of Yeniseysk and Norilsk.

“In Greece, there is a bishop per city, whilst we have inherited a structure from soviet times, so that cities a thousand kilometers from one another are in the same diocese, and parishioners do not even know who their bishop is,” Vladimir Vigilanski, director of the Moscow Patriarchate Press Office, told the daily *Kommersant*. “By reducing the size of dioceses, it will be easier to run them,” he added.

According to Roman Lunkin, director of the Institute of Religion and the Law, “reforming the Church administration will strengthen the authority of the Patriarch in the provinces, because the new bishops will be beholden to him.”

The Church Russian Orthodox has 164 dioceses, 217 bishops, 30,675 parishes, 29,324 priests and 3,850 deacons. It also has 805 monasteries, 398 for men and 407 for women.

Last year, Kirill took personal control of the Mission Department of the Central Bureau of the Patriarchate, ordering its

expansion.

Some observers suggest the Patriarch wants to apply to the religious field the vertical organisation of power imposed on the state by Vladimir Putin during his first presidential mandate. *6* *Asia News*, June 6.

ON 13 JUNE 2011, IN THE COURSE OF HIS WORKING VISIT TO EGYPT, METROPOLITAN HILARION, CHAIRMAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, VISITED AL-AZHAR, THE LARGEST UNIVERSITY IN THE MUSLIM WORLD.

Metropolitan Hilarion was met at the University by the President of the World Association for Al-Azhar Graduates, Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Fadil al-Qusi, and Sheikh Ali Abdel Baki. Metropolitan Hilarion met with the faculty and students at the conference hall.

Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Fadil al-Qusi opened the meeting, saying, “The correct understanding of religion can give the world that what it lacks and can also open the eyes of humanity and revive moral sentiments. The role of religion in society should be clearly defined.”

In his address, “Muslims and Christians in the modern world” translated into Arabic, Metropolitan Hilarion expressed his hope that his visit to Al-Azhar will continue a dialogue that was begun by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia during his visit to the University in April 2010.

Metropolitan Hilarion pointed out that fomenting of interreligious conflicts is of artificial nature and expressed his wish to think, together with the audience, about an answer of the people of faith to challenges of the secular world and about rebuffing attempts to foment interreligious conflicts made by those trying to distort old foundations. Among them are representatives of certain pseudo-Christian sects opposing interreligious dialogue or committing blasphemous assaults upon that what is sacred for Islam. Metropolitan Hilarion explained that these people should not be identified with the Orthodox and the Copts “who respect Islam and never ever offended anything sacred for the Muslims.” The DECR chairman pointed out the danger of extremism for both Christians and Muslims. As to the social teaching of Islam and Christianity, he mentioned the necessity of “opposing the destructive secular ideology and upholding family values and traditional morality.”

The audience showed profound interest

in the lecture. Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Fadil al-Qusi said that the listeners have found many points of common ground and called for joining efforts to oppose the vices of contemporary society. ó Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, June 14.

ON JUNE 13, 2011, IN THE COURSE OF HIS WORKING VISIT TO CAIRO, METROPOLITAN HILARION, HEAD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, MET WITH THE GRAND IMAM OF THE AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY, SHEIKH AHMAD AL TAYEB.

During their talk, Metropolitan Hilarion reminded his interlocutor that the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia visited the university and met with Sheikh al Tayeb a year ago. He also emphasized the importance of developing dialogue between Al-Azhar's scholars and Orthodox theologians in Russia.

He also expressed concern over a surge of anti-Christian attitudes in a part of the Egyptian society and cited the tragic events of May 2011 when Christian churches were set on fire and people were injured in Giza. Metropolitan Hilarion said that anti-Christian sentiments were artificially fanned by those forces who are interested in destabilizing the socio-political situation in Egypt.

The DECR chairman gave a high assessment to prospects for establishing an organization called "Egypt is Our Home" to include both Muslim and Christian members. This idea has been recently set forth by Sheikh al Tayeb. This organization is expected to work for strengthening interreligious relations, to struggle with the spread of radical views and to call Egyptians to national unity regardless of their confessional affiliation.

His Eminence said that Russia is a country where the principles of religious solidarity are rooted in centuries of peaceful coexistence between Christianity and Islam. But Russia knows from her own experience what terrorism is.

According to the DECR chairman, traditional religions are called to play a special role in overcoming the crisis of modern civilization, raising their voice against disregard for moral norms, injustice, vice and violence. "Muslims and Christians are called to oppose together the propaganda of vice, sin and all-permissiveness," he emphasized.

Sheikh al Tayeb, on his part, gave a high value to the visit of Patriarch Kirill to

Egypt and pointed to the importance of his visit to the world's largest Islamic university. The president of the university informed the high guest about Al-Azhar's work and its effort to promote interreligious dialogue and accord in Egyptian society.

After their talk, Metropolitan Hilarion met with the faculty and students of the university at its conference hall. ó Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, June 14.

ON JUNE 17, 2011, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA RECEIVED IN AUDIENCE THE NEW APOSTOLIC NUNCIO IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, ARCHBISHOP IVAN JURKOVIC, AT HIS WORKING RESIDENCE IN CHISTY PEREULOK, MOSCOW. Participating in the meeting were also Hegenumen Philaret Bulekov, vice-chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, and Rev. Dimitry Sizonenko, DECR acting secretary for inter-Christian relations. The high guest was accompanied by Mgr Visvaldas Kulbokas, first secretary of the Apostolic Nunciature in the Russian Federation.

Welcoming Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic, Patriarch Kirill said he kept good memories of and gave a high value to the archbishop's contribution to the settlement of inter-confessional relations in the 1990s in Moscow and later in Ukraine. He also wished his guest successful tenure in Moscow as apostolic nuncio.

Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic in his turn conveyed greetings from the Primate of the Roman Catholic Church. Remembering the years of his service in Moscow as secretary of the Holy See representation in the period from 1992-1996, he noted in particular, "I am coming back to Moscow in the knowledge that I am coming back to a country which appears quite different today. I thank God that His Providence has brought me here in a new context of inter-confessional relations, at a new stage in the development of Orthodox-Catholic relations in Russia."

During their talk, both sides expressed satisfaction at the constructive development of inter-confessional relations and expressed hope for successful cooperation between the two Churches in the face of challenges brought about by the modern world. ó Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, June 17.

METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, HEAD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH

RELATIONS, WITH THE BLESSING OF HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA, ATTENDED A MEETING OF THE DRAFTING COMMITTEE OF THE JOINT THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, which took place from June 15 to 17, 2011, in Rethymnon in the Island of Crete, Greece. The committee discussed theological and ecclesiological aspects of primacy and conciliarity in the Church.

The drafting committee is co-chaired by Metropolitan John of Pergamon (Patriarchate of Constantinople) and Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

The Local Orthodox Churches were represented by Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima (Patriarchate of Constantinople), Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Bishop Ignatije of Branicevo (Serbian Orthodox Church), and Metropolitan Vasilios of Constantia-Ammochostos (Orthodox Church of Cyprus).

During his stay in Crete, the DECR chairman had talks with Metropolitan John of Pergamon, Archbishop Irenaios of Crete and Cardinal Kurt Koch.

On June 17, Metropolitan Hilarion and some other members of the drafting committee visited the Archdiocese of Crete in Heraklion and prayed at the shrines of the Cathedral of St. Minas. ó Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, June 17.

PATRIARCH KIRILL I OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, OPENING ON 21 JUNE THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS, said that the only way they can serve a real need in contemporary consumer society is to avoid playing by secular rules and to never lose sight of their larger purpose and moral foundation.

Kirill said that as the host, the Russian Orthodox Church was allowed to choose the theme of the meeting, "Human Rights and Traditional Values in Europe." It is the first time the meeting, which runs from 21 to 23 June, has been held in Moscow. The council, which was founded in Oslo, Norway in 2002, is part of the Religions for Peace Network, and brings together Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders with Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians.

"The loss of the organic unity between law and morality can be explained by the moral crisis that has in our day affected all spheres of the life of society, both in Europe, and in the entire world," Kirill said in his opening address.

"As religious leaders, we must not take the position of moral neutrality," he said. "Attempts to adapt our religious teachings to the demands of modern political correctness, which turns people into soulless machines of consumption ruled by passions, are inadmissible. Often at interfaith and inter-Christian forums I have heard calls to reevaluate the understanding of sin, which has already for all practical purposes been re-examined by some religious communities, in essence revoking the ethical norms that have ruled the lives of believers for centuries."

Bishop Gunnar Stalsett, the former Bishop of Oslo and the council's moderator praised the Russian Orthodox Church for its ecumenical leadership during the "harsh atheistic communist winter." ó Sophia Kishkovsky for *ENI*, June 21.

IN A TALK TO A CORRESPONDENT OF THE *KOMMERSANT DAILY*, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS SPOKE, AMONG OTHER THINGS, ABOUT THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN VARIOUS REGIONS OF THE WORLD.

Q. Recently representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church have regularly made statements about signs of Christianophobia emerging in the Middle East. Is this problem a real threat?

A. Two weeks ago in Hungary I attended an international interreligious conference on Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue. I remember the remarks made by Massimo Introvigne, a well-known Italian sociologist and scholar of religion and OSCE representative. He cited statistics based on a thorough research into the problem, saying, "One Christian dies for the faith every five minutes in the world." He also reported that annually 105 thousand Christians die a violent death during interreligious conflicts.

In October 2010, the European Union Commission of Bishops' Conferences made a conclusion that "at least 75 percent of all acts of religious persecution in the world were directed at Christians. According to experts, annually about 170 thousand Christians suffer for their faith."

In addition, early this year the Open Doors human rights charitable organization, which has been engaged in monitoring the situation of Christians in the world since 1978, published its statistics showing that some 100 million Christians are subjected to persecution today in various countries. So, we have to acknowledge the obvious

fact that Christians are the most persecuted religious community in the world. Some even compare this situation to the persecution that took place in the first three centuries of Christianity.

Q. Why have Christians proved to be vulnerable to persecution and what are its consequences?

A. Countries where Christians are a minority are lacking a really effective system of their protection. Events happening today in Egypt are only a part of a more global process affecting the life of Christians in a number of countries. If the authorities in the Middle East states do not take special measures to protect Christians, their exodus from these countries will continue.

Q. In what countries other than Egypt does the situation of Christians cause concern?

A. Reports about persecution against Christians are coming from Sudan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and several countries in South-East Asia. The notorious law "On Blasphemy" enforced in Pakistan is used not only to defend the sacred symbols and names of Islam but also to persecute Christians. I will remind you that about a million and a half Christians used to live in Iraq until 2003. Now there is no more than half of that number, while those who stayed fear for their lives every day.

Q. How can persecuted Christians be protected against Christianophobia?

A. The intensified persecution of Christians has already compelled international organizations to make a number of appropriate statements. The European Parliament adopted on January 20 a resolution "On the Situation of Christians in the Context of Religious Freedom." A similar resolution was adopted by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. However, we have to take concrete and effective actions as well. It is necessary to organize urgently a system for protecting Christians against persecution. In the first place, it is necessary to set up information structures to monitor crimes committed on the grounds of religious hatred. Each case of violence and persecution against Christians should become a case for trial by both national and international judicial bodies.

Very important today is interreligious solidarity, for extremism and radicalism present a threat to all the traditional religions which seek a peaceful coexistence among people. It is also important that the phenomenon of persecution against Christians should not be hushed up but discussed actively and that representatives of traditional religions make joint efforts to im-

prove the situation of Christians in the world. It is necessary that governmental and international organizations should join these efforts.

I believe the mechanism for protecting Christians can be as follows: economic and other aid in exchange for guarantees of the rights of religious minorities. If this policy is carried out efficiently we may change the situation for the better and stop the wave of persecution against Christians that has engulfed various countries today. ó Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, June 27.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND AMERICAN EVANGELICALS HAVE ALLIED TO DEFEND A TRADITIONAL DEFINITION OF FAMILY AND FIGHT ABORTION IN RUSSIA, which has one of the highest abortion rates in the world.

On 29-30 June, the World Congress of Families, a Rockford, Illinois-based organization that defends heterosexual marriage and advocates against abortion, will be holding a conference called the "Moscow Demographic Summit: Family and the Future of Humankind," organized together with the Moscow Patriarchate and other Russian supporters of traditional concepts of family life.

Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill I is expected to speak at the conference, which will address the causes of Russia's dramatic population decline. Under Patriarch Kirill, the Russian Orthodox Church has adopted many of the social and missionary outreach methods of American evangelicals. Speakers from Russia, Europe and the United States are expected, according to organizers.

Official statistics say 1.3 million abortions were performed in 2009 in Russia, in a population of just under 143 million and falling. The population was 148.5 million in 1995. A recent influx of Muslim migrants into Moscow and other large Russian cities from the Northern Caucasus region of Russia and former Soviet republics has led many Russians to fear that Muslims, who have a high birthrate, will soon outnumber them. Russian nationalist soccer fans and Muslims from the Northern Caucasus clashed at the foot of the Kremlin wall in Moscow late last year.

For decades, American evangelicals and the Russian Orthodox Church were divided by Cold War politics and seemingly insurmountable theological differences. However, the current alliance became public earlier this year when Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of Ex-

ternal Church Relations, travelled to the U.S. to meet with American evangelicals.

The trip was arranged by John Bernbaum, an American evangelical who is founder and president of the Russian-American Institute in Moscow, a faith-based educational institution, and Bob For- esman, an American banker with strong evangelical ties who heads Barclay's Rus- sia. Family values and the fight against abortion were among the top items on the agenda.

Russia's fledgling anti-abortion move- ment, which has embraced the American tactic of picketing abortion clinics and also plans to open obstetrical clinics where abortions will not be performed, also has Kremlin support.

First Lady Svetlana Medvedeva, while avoiding strident anti-abortion terminology, has in effect become an anti-abortion activ- ist. Medvedeva was a keynote speaker at a forum last November held by Sanctity of Motherhood, an anti-abortion organization led by Natalia Yakunina, the wife of Vla- dimir Yakunin, chief of Russia's railroads, who is known for his close ties to the Rus- sian Orthodox Church.

"The state must help women keep their babies," said Medvedeva at the forum. ó Sophia Kishkovsky for *ENI*, June 28.

THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (SPC) MOST LIKELY SHALL NOT INVITE POPE BENEDICT XVI TO ATTEND THE CELEBRATION OF THE 1,700TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EDICT OF MILAN IN THE TOWN OF NIS IN 2013 SINCE THE SYNOD HAS NOT AGREED TO THIS, Tanjug was told at the Patriarchate in Belgrade.

As stated by the Patriarchate, the Pope perhaps would have been invited had he during visit to Croatia this weekend visited Jasenovac and paid his respects to the vic- tims of the concentration camp in which 700,000 Serbs and about 100,000 Jews and Roma were killed during World War II.

That did not happen but the Pope did visit the grave of Croatian Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac who was on trial after World War II for cooperation with the Nazis.

The Pope's questionable praise for Stepinac showed that the Catholic and Or- thodox churches have very different views about Stepinac.

Jovan Mirkovic, Director of the Muse- ums of Victims of Genocide does not agree with the Pope who said that Stepinac saved Jews, Serbs and Roma. "There is simply no proof for such claims but there are proofs about the Cardinal's responsibility for the ustashi crimes" he says.

The Pope said in Croatia that Stepinac was a humanist who suffered under two totalitarian regimes ó of the ustashis and of the communists. Like his predecessor John Paul II, Benedict XVI paid his respects to Stepinac at his grave in the Zagreb Cath- edral.

In a statement to "Blic" Federico Lom- bardi, Director of Vatican's Office for me- dia claims that there are testimonies that Stepinac did not support Ante Pavelic's regime, that he saved as many as he could, and that serious historians have proved this.

There is evidence that he saved Jews, ó Lombardi said.

Jovan Mirkovic, former Director of Jasenovac Monument Park says that "the Vatican's thesis that Stepinac saved Jews is without foundation."

"Had he saved the life of a single Jew, Israel would have proclaimed Stepinac a righteous among nations. I think there were certain proposals to do this, but they all failed" Mirkovic says.

As regards Stepinac's relations with the Serbs, everything is clear according to Mirkovic.

"It is certain that he was responsible for the forced conversion of Serbs to Ca- tholicism. Secondly, a large number of his priests were ustashis committing crimes together with others. Thirdly, he was the superior of military priest and all military priests delegated to ustashi units were un- der his authority. Stepinac knew about Jasenovac and all horrible things that were going on there" Mirkovic says. ó N. Vlaco for *Tanjug*, June 7.

IN THE CHURCH OF ASCENSION OF CHRIST IN VIENNA, AUSTRIA, ON SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, ON JUNE 26, 2011 THE DIVINE LITURGY WAS SERVED BY HIS GRACE KONSTANTIN OF MIDDLE EUROPE with the concelebra- tion of His Grace Bishop Irinej of Backa, priests and lots of faithful people of the newly founded Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Austria and Switzerland.

After the Divine Liturgy, Bishop Kon- stantin read the decisions of the Holy As- sembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the foundation of the Diocese of Austria -Switzerland, which would be ad- ministrated by Bishop Dr Irinej of Backa until the election of a new Bishop.

Bishop Irinej at the Holy Eucharist conveyed the greetings from His Holiness Irinej, Serbian Patriarch and the Holy Syn- od of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

After the vesper service, on the prem- ises of the church of St. Sava in Vienna, a

session was held during which the Bishops signed a document on the handover of the new Diocese.

HIS HOLINESS IRINEJ, SERBIAN PATRIARCH AND MINISTER SUTANOVAC SIGNED YESTERDAY AT THE ARMY CLUB IN NIS AN "AGREE- MENT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF RELIGIOUS SERVICES IN THE ARMY OF SERBIA WITH THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH." The agreement regulates the mutual relations between the Ministry of Defense and the Serbian Orthodox Church in connection with the conduct of religious services in the Serbian Army. The signing of the Agree- ment was attended by Their Graces Bishops Irinej of Backa and Vicar Porfirije of Jegar.

Sutanovac said that this document in- troduced the first Army officer priests, which is in line with the Serbian tradition and experience of modern armies. He re- called that the Serbian Orthodox Church already has officer-priests in the armies of other countries - the Netherlands, the Unit- ed States and Great Britain.

Patriarch Irinej blessed the Agreement and pointed out that the signing is "histori- cally significant" not only for the SPC, but also for the Army of Serbia. Along with the introduction of chaplains the traditional culture and spirituality in our army will be allowed and the chaplains will bring a higher quality of life and military service as well as patriotism and spirituality. "May it be fortunate and blessed," said Patriarch Irinej and pointed to the symbolism of the Agreement which was signed exactly on St. Vitus Day - the national holiday of the peo- ple and the church.

Sutanovac said the religious service had been established as a need of the Serbi- an Army and that the priests will have to be highly educated and undergo officer train- ing. According to his words, the members of the Army of Serbia will address repre- sentatives of the SOC according to their priestly title. Minister of defense also said that an initial rank for priests was captain, and that theoretically they could get a rank of colonel. He announced that in forthcom- ing months he would sign similar agree- ments with representatives of six traditional churches and religious communities.

Sutanovac also attended a meeting of St. Vitus Academy in the Nis Cathedral last night. On that occasion, Serbian Patri- arch Irinej presented the Minister the high- est honor of Nis Eparchy of the Serbian Orthodox Church - The Order of Saint Constantine for his attitude towards the Church and its people.

Expressing thanks for the medal, Sutanovac said that it was a great honor for him and that he came to Nis "to finish this historical work" with the Patriarch - the signing of the agreement on religious services in the Army of Serbia. ó Press Release, Serbian Patriarcahte, June 29.

ON 21 JUNE 2011, HIS BEATITUDE DANIEL, PATRIARCH OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, RECEIVED HIS EMINENCE TEFAN, ARCHBISHOP OF TSAGHERI AND LENTEKHI FROM THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF GEORGIA, IN AN AUDIENCE.

His Eminence tefan thanked Patriarch Daniel for receiving him, and presented the patriarch with a brotherly message on from His Beatitude Ilia II, Catholicos Patriarch of Georgia.

His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel mentioned the historical relationships between the two sister Orthodox Churches and appreciated the dynamism of the church life of the Patriarchate of Georgia, where churches and monasteries were restored and new places of worship were built, in spite of the hard period the Georgian people has passed through of late.

The Patriarch of Romania underlined the need to intensify the co-operation between the two sister Orthodox Churches, through the implementation of certain common spiritual missionary and cultural programs, theological conferences and pilgrimages in the two countries, especially since the relics of Saint Maxim the Confessor are kept in the Eparchy of Tsagheri and Lentekhi served by His Eminence tefan.

His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel also proposed the Georgian guest to present news and other documentary materials concerning the Church Georgian life at Trinitas radio and television stations and at Lumina publications of the Romanian Patriarchate, in order to inform the faithful and make them acquainted with the life and activity of the Orthodox Church of Georgia. ó Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, June 21.

ORTHODOX CHURCHES REMAIN "FULLY COMMITTED" TO ECUMENICAL COOPERATION, DESPITE RECENT DISAGREEMENTS WITH PROTESTANTS, ACCORDING TO A SENIOR ORTHODOX THEOLOGIAN.

"It may appear that some Orthodox churches aren't satisfied over moral and ethical issues, and this may bring them closer as a family of churches. But we shouldn't necessarily see this as a form of competition. Although we should argue for

cohesion within the ecumenical movement, we shouldn't see our disagreements as a danger to unity. The Orthodox churches are more fully committed than ever to CEC and will be working to strengthen the Orthodox presence," said Viorel Ionita, interim general secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC).

The 65-year-old Romanian theologian was speaking after chairing a Budapest consultation of CEC's Churches in Dialogue Commission, which identified "eight points of convergence in the conception of the unity of the Church as the main goal of the ecumenical movement," according to a 27 June report.

In an ENInews interview on 27 June, he said he had been concerned that recent meetings between Orthodox and Roman Catholic representatives on moral and ethical issues could create a "parallel to CEC."

However, he added that the Budapest consultation, which was addressed by Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox and Roman Catholic representatives, had elaborated a common understanding of key elements of church unity, and served as a reminder of the continued Orthodox commitment to ecumenical co-operation.

"The respective church traditions - Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant, Free Church - all have clear visions of church unity, but these are confessional visions and not very compatible," said the Orthodox archpriest, who teaches church history at Bucharest University.

"Our purpose with this consultation was to gather the reflections of all European churches, looking at where we agree and where we differ. It was a useful first step - but the task is far from complete."

Some Orthodox leaders have criticized aspects of moral and social teaching by Western Protestant denominations, leading to warnings of a possible downgrading of ties with CEC, after the withdrawal of Georgia's Orthodox church in 1997 and a suspension of participation by the Russian Orthodox church in 2008.

However, CEC said convergence had been agreed on eight issues, including viewing church unity as a "gift of the Holy Spirit" demanding "expression in life and mission," on the organic link "between ecclesial and Eucharistic community" and the sharing of Christian identities as "rich gifts from God," and on the requirement of "conciliar fellowship and mutual reception of conciliar decisions" in the search for unity.

"We are Christians from a wide range of church traditions and yet we see the importance of holding together the church's

liturgy and ministry with its witness and service in the world," said the document from CEC, which includes 120 Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant and Old Catholic churches, and 40 associated organizations.

A separate CEC statement on 27 June said the Churches in Dialogue Commission had drawn up further plans for implementing the 2001 Ecumenical Charter in Europe, as well as for "the promotion of dialogue between Orthodox churches and the other member-churches of CEC," and for the strengthening of "ecumenical formation in Europe." ó Jonathan Luxmoore for ENI, June 27.

HIS BEATITUDE DANIEL, PATRIARCH OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ADDRESSED THIS MESSAGE OF CONGRATULATION TO HIS HOLINESS, POPE BENEDICT XVI, ON THE OCCASION of the anniversary of sixty years since his ordination as priest and of six years since his enthronement as Bishop of Rome:

Your Holiness,

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Your Holiness' ordination to priesthood and the 6th anniversary of Your enthronement as the Bishop of Rome, we send You warm wishes for everything that is good and much help from God in the pastoral work that You unfold for the wellbeing of the Roman Catholic Church and in promoting the values of the Christian faith in the world of today.

As spiritual shepherds of the Christian Church, we are called - especially in this time of crisis, which generates uncertainty, confusion and material shortages for many of our fellow human beings - to defend and promote the spiritual values coming out of the Gospel of Christ's love for all humanity.

We pray Christ our Lord, óthe Chief Shepherdō (1 Peter 5:4), to keep Your Holiness in good health and give You peace and joy.

Many and blessed years!

With deep esteem and brotherly embrace in Christ the Lord,

ĂDANIEL

Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. ó Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, June 29.

BULGARIA'S PRIME MINISTER, BOYKO BORISOV, DECLARED ON JUNE 25 THAT HE SUPPORTS MAKING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS MANDATORY.

Borisov spoke in the Black Sea capital Varna, during a Mass at the newly built St.

Prokopi Varnenski temple, saying the process of aligning religious curriculum and preparing teachers would be long and complex.

The Mass was served by the Varna Bishop Kiril in the presence of guests from the Romanian and US Orthodox churches. He said the biggest threat for Bulgaria was atheism and only faith can rescue Bulgarian people.

The cabinet of the ruling, center-right Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria, GERB, party made a donation of BGN 15 000 for the temple. Kiril gave Borisov an icon and an honorary certificate.

A Ukrainian family donated a gold plated cross.

Borisov promised that the temple's crypt will be finished by June next year and that BGN 150 000 for it will be slated in the 2012 State budget.

"I believe that our tactics of not counting mosques, but how many new churches we have built is the only right one," the PM said.

He further commented for the media that it was very important for mayors of the country's largest cities to have good connections with the cabinet in order to benefit the local municipalities and announced that 35 million euros have been secured from the World Bank to be invested in Varna and the Varna Region. *ó* Sofia News Agency, June 25.

THE CHURCH HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN NATIONAL ISSUES DESPITE THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE, SAID CYPRUS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES PRESIDENT YIANNAKIS OMIROU ON JUNE 15 AFTER MEETING WITH ARCHBISHOP CHRYSOSTOMOS II.

Omirou said he considered it his duty to visit the archbishop after his election as house president to express the wish for close cooperation to promote *ó*freedom and justice for our country.*ó*

While acknowledging the separation of church and state in Cyprus, Omirou added, *ó*but when Cypriot Hellenism goes through hardships, a church with a history of 2,000 years...cannot be absent from national struggles.*ó*

*ó*That is the message we give, that of course, we want the church to be present and alert on the national struggle,*ó* he said.

Speaking from the archbishopric, Chrysostomos was quick to offer any help he could give to the parliamentary head.

*ó*The church and I personally are at his disposal. Wherever we can help, be useful, we shall do so with great love,*ó* said the

archbishop.

*ó*We always had close cooperation with Mr Omirou, more so because we are connected by a personal friendship of decades,*ó* he added.

The archbishop was reluctant to comment on insinuations made by coalition partner DIKO that the church head had worked behind the scenes to support Omirou's candidacy as house president over the then incumbent, DIKO's Marios Garoyian.

*ó*I don't think it's sensible to tackle these issues. They belong in the past. We always want to look ahead,*ó* said the primate.

*ó*The election of house president was a transparent democratic process held before all the Cypriot people. This issue is closed,*ó* said Omirou. *ó*Now, we have before us problems like the national issue, the economy, and we are obliged through a spirit of understanding and wide consensus to deal with the problems of the people.*ó*

The socialist EDEK leader's clear support for church involvement in efforts to end the division of Cyprus will certainly not be music to the ears of government which has come to blows with the primate ever since President Demetris Christofias came to power in February 2008.

Christofias was the first president to appoint an education minister without getting the archbishopric's approval first, an unwritten custom since the creation of the Republic.

Last Sunday, in an interview with a local paper, Chrysostomos called Christofias as the *ó*president of dissolution.*ó*

He said Christofias was making unacceptable concessions in negotiations towards a solution to the Cyprus problem, instead of following the correct course. *ó* Stefanos Evripidou for the Cyprus Mail, June 16.

MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF GREECE'S HOLY SYNOD, IN A MESSAGE ADDRESSED TO THE GREEK PEOPLE ON JUNE 15, UNDERLINED ITS MEMBERS ARE WATCHING "WITH GREAT CONCERN THE DEVELOPMENTS ON NATIONAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LEVEL THAT HAVE WORN OUT THE PEOPLE.*ó*

The hierarchs of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece stressed that "at this moment of responsibility, the Holy Synod feels obligated to address the Greek people with fatherly love.*ó*

They underlined that the "love to the country is amongst the highest values in life" and stressed that "the Holy Synod con-

demns all those who acted against the country's interests, the prosperity of its people and national dignity.*ó*

"Our people have acted with admirable maturity in the past and have displayed social solidarity in difficult times in our history. Today, more than ever before, we need the solidarity to support the vulnerable, relieve the jobless and all those affected by the crisis, mainly the young," the hierarchs stressed. *ó* ANA, June 16.

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW, SPEAKING AT A SPECIAL CEREMONY HELD IN THE ATHENS SUBURB OF MAROUSSI IN HONOR OF EUNICE KENNEDY SHRIVER (1921-2009), who inspired and implemented the idea of the Special Olympic Games, said "we shall continue all together to stand by our fellow men, to care and to do what we can to support them and to give them comfort in the difficulties of life."

The Ecumenical Patriarch added that "the difficulties are not only for the handicapped, but for the healthy as well. The church teaches us to work for the good struggle of life, always with love for all our fellow men."

He expressed his joy and satisfaction over the fact that "last (Saturday) night's great and historic event of the inauguration of the Special Olympics is continuing."

Referring to Eunice Shriver, he said "she was interested in people with mental problems. Whatever one does for people who offered so much to humanity is little."

The event was also attended by the wife of the US Vice-President, Jill Biden, as well as Tim Shriver, president of the World movement of the Special Olympics and son of the person being honored. *ó* ANA, June 27.

óA S A NATION, WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH WORSE TIMES, UNDER MORE DIFFICULT CONDITIONS, BUT WE MANAGED. I HOPE THAT THIS TIME, TOO, with national unanimity, under the leadership of your government, it will be able to cross over the river as the saying goes. We will always be at your side, with our prayer,*ó* said the Ecumenical Patriarch, who is in Athens for the Special Olympics.

Greeting Bartholomew at his office in parliament, the Greek premier said that in these difficult times the country is going through *ó*the Ecumenical Patriarchate gives us strength,*ó* while he also expressed appreciation for the Ecumenical Patriarch's efforts for Orthodoxy.

ōWe are inspired by your own struggle, a hard and perpetual struggle not only for the Ecumenical Patriarchate but for all of Orthodoxy and its just rights. A struggle you are waging with the cooperation among cultures and, of course, for the great cause of climate change,ō Papandreou told Bartholomew, who is known as the ōgreen Patriarchō for his environmental activities.

ōWe are at your side, and your presence here in Greece gives us the strength we need for Greece to get out of the crisis and for the Greek people to be able to prosper,ō Papandreou told the Ecumenical Patriarch.

Immediately after the meeting, Bartholomew and Papandreou went to parliament where they addressed a special session devoted to the Special Olympics, which are being hosted in Athens. ó ANA, June 27.

THE LESSER SYNOD OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA MET AT THE CHANCERY OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA IN SYOSSET, NEW YORK, ON TUESDAY, JUNE 21, 2011.

Lesser Synod members present were His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah; His Grace, Bishop Nikon of Boston and New England and the Albanian Archdiocese; His Grace, Bishop Tikhon of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania, Secretary of the Holy Synod of Bishops; and His Grace, Bishop Benjamin of San Francisco and the West.

Also present were His Grace, Bishop Melchisedek of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, Interim OCA Chancellor, and His Grace, Bishop Michael of New York and New Jersey.

During the meeting, the hierarchs -- discussed various clergy cases and other pastoral issues.

-- interviewed a candidate for the episcopacy.

-- were updated on the search for a new OCA Chancellor.

-- considered an update on the Episcopal search process in the Diocese of the South.

-- reviewed Metropolitan Jonah's travel schedule.

-- discussed issues affecting chaplaincies.

-- received the report of the OCA Treasurer, Melanie Ringa, and discussed issues related to the funding of the Orthodox Church in America. ó OCA Press Release, June 22.

The Assyrian Church of the East

HIS BEATITUDE DR. MAR APREM, METROPOLITAN OF MALABAR AND INDIA, HAS LAID THE FOUNDATION STONE FOR THE SITE OF THE FUTURE CONVENT OF THE HOLY APOSTOLIC CATHOLIC ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST IN KERALA, INDIA.

In attendance at the groundbreaking ceremony presided over by His Beatitude the Metropolitan, were their Graces Mar Yohannan Yoseph and Mar Awgin Kuria-kose, Bishops of India, clergy of the Church of the East in India and other local dignitaries.

Presently, the order of Marth Maryam Sisters of the Assyrian Church of the East in India is comprised of three sisters. The order was established by His Beatitude Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan in 1998 with the welcoming of Sister Jincy Othottil into the order as the first sister of the Assyrian Church of the East in India in many centuries.

Sister Jincy received her first dedication on 15 August, 1998. Her permanent vow was administered by His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos Patriarch, on 22 January, 2000 during his third Apostolic sojourn to India. Sister Jincy was awarded a PhD in Syriac Studies by Mahatma Gandhi University in 2011.

The other two Sisters of the order, Susie and Annie received their first dedication on 4 May, 2003. Their permanent vow was administered on 26 December, 2004. Both Sisters presently work in the care of orphans at the Mar Timotheus Memorial Orphanage in Kalathode, Kerala.

The new headquarters for the Marth Maryam Sisters will be entitled the Assyrian Convent. Construction of the two-story convent will commence later this year with the initial construction of four bedrooms and other necessary facilities. The Assyrian Convent will be constructed on 1.5 acres of land adjacent to the Mar Timotheus Memorial Orphanage with the project to cost approximately 6 million rupees.

The land on which the convent will be constructed was generously donated to the Assyrian Church of the East by the tireless and selfless servant of the church, the late Mrs. J.D. Mookan (mother of the present Metropolitan of Malabar and India).

It is hoped that through the grace of Almighty God and the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ, that the number of sisters working in the service of the Lord and His faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East in India shall increase in the coming years. ó Assyrian Church News,

June 14.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

THE SECURITY SITUATION IN EGYPT HAS "DETERIORATED CONSIDERABLY" SINCE FORMER PRESIDENT HOSNI MUBARAK STEPPED DOWN ON 11 FEBRUARY, LEAVING A SECURITY VACUUM AND CHRISTIANS FEELING "THREATENED MORE THAN EVER," according to aid workers.

"Security is still not where it needs to be to give people a greater sense of personal safety. Undoubtedly, there has been an increase in the tensions between Muslims and Christians since Mubarak stepped down ... All Egyptians, not just [Coptic Christians], feel more insecure these days," said Jason Belanger of Catholic Relief. Christians make up about 10 percent of Egypt's 80 million people. Copts are a branch of the Orthodox church.

Since Mubarak's overthrow, violence in Cairo has left 24 dead, more than 200 wounded, and three churches destroyed. Media reports are rife with descriptions of the tense sectarian violence that has increased since the winter. Belanger said the interim government was taking a "hands-off" approach to dealing with the attacks against Christians and was "not doing enough to ensure it immediately responds to these attacks."

Christians seem to feel the interim government's approach is no different than that of Mubarak's government, he said. A New York Times article noted that prior to his overthrow, most Christian and sectarian-related issues were handled directly between Mubarak and Coptic Pope Shenouda III.

"There are initiatives from some Christian and Muslim leaders to work on reducing tensions between both sides, but the number of people engaged in such discussions is very small, and the high percentage of illiteracy in many parts of Egypt leads people to follow their leaders and do what they say," Belanger said.

There is also a "significant fear" among Christians about an increase in power of the Muslim Brotherhood, a political group that espouses an Islamic state. Christians fear there will be a push to have Islamic law prevail in Egypt if the Brotherhood receives at least 50 percent of the seats in parliament after elections this September, according to Belanger.

"Several of my Christian colleagues tell me that if Islamic law prevails, they will leave Egypt for other countries," he said.

There has been reportedly an increase in the number of people seeking visas at the U.S., Canadian and British embassies. ó Judith Sudilovsky for *ENI*, June 8.

THE HEAD OF THE RULING MILITARY COUNCIL IN EGYPT, FIELD MARSHAL HUSSEIN TANTAWI, MET WITH POPE SHENOUDA ON SUNDAY TO DISCUSS THE UNIFIED DRAFT LAW ON PLACES OF WORSHIP, according to a church source.

The three Egyptian churches ó Coptic Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican ó have expressed reservations about the draft law proposed by the government earlier this month. It has also been rejected by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR).

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the source said the meeting was attended by Sami Anan, the armed forces chief of staff, and Mourad Mowafy, head of the Egyptian intelligence service.

The source added that other issues were also discussed in the meeting, including the economic and political situation, the right of Egyptian expatriates to vote in elections, and the law criminalizing discrimination, which Prime Minister Essam Sharaf had promised to issue in order to combat sectarian strife between Muslims and Copts, which erupts from time to time.

It also said Tantawi reassured the Pope that the military council would not allow sectarian strife in future, as there is no difference between Christians and Muslims, and that national unity is a line not to be crossed.

Tantawi recently dispatched a representative to the Cleveland Clinic, USA, where the Pope was being treated, and gave him the shield of the military council. ó US Copts Association, June 20.

THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH SAYS ITS SUPREME HEAD, CATHOLICOS KAREKIN II, HAS REACHED AGREEMENTS WITH GEORGIA'S POLITICAL AND SPIRITUAL LEADERS THAT WILL HELP RESOLVE ITS LONG-RUNNING DISPUTES WITH THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

Karekin met with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II at the start of a weeklong visit to Georgia on June 10. The two pontiffs held a more detailed discussion in the presence of high-ranking Armenian and Georgian clerics the following day.

Karekin expressed satisfaction with the meetings as he and Ilia made public state-

ments at the Georgian Patriarch's official residence in Tbilisi.

In a separate statement on June 12, Karekin's press office said the two sides agreed that Georgian authorities should finally grant "legal status" to the local diocese of the Armenian Church.

Like Georgia's other minority denominations, the diocese has no official registration and is therefore not treated by the Georgian authorities as a single legal entity.

The statement said the parties also agreed on the need to grant official status to "the Georgian religious community in Armenia."

It was not clear if this referred to Armenia's small ethnic Georgian community or Armenian adherents of the Greek Orthodox faith who were subordinate to the Georgian Church during the Middle Ages.

Ilia quoted Saakashvili as saying that the Armenian Church should have the same status in Georgia as the Georgian Church in Armenia. He said he backed the president's position.

According to Karekin's office, the Georgian side also pledged to preserve several medieval churches previously used by the Georgian-Armenian community "until their return to the diocese."

The statement added that "the issue of the return of the churches will be discussed at the next stage."

Karekin visited two of those churches located in Tbilisi on June 11. One of them partly collapsed last year, while the other was severely damaged by a fire in 2001.

Karekin did not go to another, more famous Tbilisi church built in the 15th century and known as Norashen. It has been the largest source of tensions between the two ancient Christian institutions.

Ilia, meanwhile, pressed Georgian claims to several medieval and mostly abandoned churches located in Armenia's northern Lori Province.

The area was controlled for centuries by Georgian kings through their Armenian vassals. Some of those noble families were members of the Georgian Church.

"When talking about churches, one must not forget that both sides have demands," said Ilia. "Both sides have facts and documents regarding Armenian churches in Georgia and Georgian churches in Armenia."

Ilia proposed that the two sides set up a joint commission of scholars who would look into the matter and propose solutions. Karekin said the Armenian Church supports the idea in principle.

Both the Armenian and Georgian

Churches stressed that these disputes should not damage relations between the two neighboring states.

"Our peoples are bound by numerous spiritual, cultural, and historical links contrary to theological differences between our churches that emerged as a result of historical developments," Karekin said. ó RFE/RL, June 15.

ARCHBISHOP VICKEN AYKAZIAN, LEGATE OF THE EASTERN DIOCESE AND ITS DIRECTOR OF ECUMENICAL RELATIONS, ADDRESSED THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA on Tuesday, June 14, in Grand Rapids, Mich.

During the gathering, the Reformed Church in America welcomed its newly-installed General-Secretary, Tom De Vries, and honored its outgoing leader, Wes Granberg-Michaelson. Some 500 people were present for the proceedings.

Archbishop Aykazian conveyed the blessings and congratulations of the Eastern Diocese and Diocesan Primate Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, and went on to speak on the mission of the ecumenical movement.

While the modern ecumenical movement was born in the mid 20th century, Archbishop Aykazian explained, the Armenian Church has played a significant role in inter-church gatherings and communications throughout its history.

He noted by way of example the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, which resulted in the Nicene Creed, "one of the deepest points of contact between our two churches," in Archbishop Aykazian's words.

Archbishop Aykazian went on to describe the "spirit of ecumenism" encapsulated in the words of the 12th-century Armenian Catholicos St. Nersess the Graceful: "Unity in essential matters. Diversity in secondary matters. Love over all."

He expanded on each element by citing examples from the Bible. On the theme of unity, he stressed the importance of cohesiveness among Christians.

Regarding diversity, he spoke about the uniqueness of national churches, such as the Armenian Church, a "church whose mission is framed for a particular people. In the deepest sense, a national church is an expression of humility: it sets a natural limit on the church's aspiration and therefore does not promote an appetite to dominate, centralize, or cause disorder on a universal scale."

He continued, "The flip side of this is that a certain diversity and difference among other Christian churches is ex-

pected, tolerated, and even welcomed."

As an example, Archbishop Aykazian spoke about the work of Armenian Christians in China. Having arrived there in the 5th century, Armenians preached the gospel and established a broad Christian Church, welcoming all to embrace Christ's message.

On love, Archbishop Aykazian discussed the importance of the consciousness of God's love for his children and the intensity of love for God, the "most precious things we hold in common."

"By the very nature of that love, we are drawn together into something greater than our individual communities."

The Reformed Church in America has about 250,000 members in the U.S. and Canada. It originated in 1628 as the North American branch of the Dutch Reformed Church. It is a founding member of several ecumenical groups including the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and Christian Churches Together. ó Press Release, Armenian Eastern Diocese, June 22.

ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 29, HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II, SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS, ON THE FINAL DAY OF HIS PONTIFICAL VISIT TO SAINT PETERSBURG, RUSSIA, TRAVELED TO THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF THE HOLY RESURRECTION ON VASILYEVSKY ISLAND.

Following a prayer service held in the Cathedral, His Holiness placed flower wreaths at the tombs of renowned Armenians who had made significant contributions to the welfare of the Armenian nation and Armenian community in Saint Petersburg.

After the visit, the Armenian Pontiff and his delegation traveled to the Vsevolzsk region, where His Holiness visited the Armenian Church of St. Mary, built through the benefaction of Mr. Samvel Movsisian. At the entrance of the Church the Armenian Pontiff, Diocesan Primate and the Pontifical retinue were met by Rev. Fr. Arshak Nazarian, Spiritual pastor of the Church; Mr. Movsisian; Mr. Alexander Sobolenco, Head of the Vsevolzhsk region; and Mr. Eduard Chirko, Head of the Koltushy region.

Under the singing of "Hrashapar," His Holiness entered the Church, where he gave his Pontifical message and blessings to the Armenian faithful and local representatives.

The Armenian Pontiff expressed his appreciation to the benefactor of the Church, whose patronage had provided for all the necessities to carry out the spiritual

mission of the parish. In his message, the Armenian Pontiff encouraged the Armenian descendants to remain loyal to the faith of their forefathers, and their traditions; to preserve their language and culture; and to continue contributing to the development of the country as worthy citizens of Russia. The spiritual message was followed by the singing of the hymn "Ter Voghormia" by Komitas, and by the Pontifical prayer. His Holiness was also informed about the construction projects at the Armenian public school, being built through the benefaction of Mr. Samvel Movsisian. In the region of Koltushy His Holiness placed a wreath at the monument dedicated to the victims of the Great Patriotic War and prayed for the repose of their souls.

Upon the conclusion of the Pontifical visit to Saint Petersburg, His Holiness Karekin II and his delegation left for the Republic of Latvia. ó Press Release, Holy Etchmiadzin, June 30.

IN A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENTS OF THE WORLD JUSTICE FORUM III, HIS HOLINESS ARMENIAN CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA ARAM I EMPHASIZED THE CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF GLOBAL PLATFORMS. According to Aram I, such international gatherings provide excellent opportunities and challenges for people of different cultures, nations and professions to interact and seek together efficient ways and concrete means of building a global community of justice, peace and reconciled diversities. Speaking about the rule of law, which is the theme of the World Justice Forum III, His Holiness considered it a critical topic that deserves a serious discussion and a common understanding. Aram I was invited to take part in the World Justice Forum III which will be held from June 20-23, 2011 in Barcelona, Spain. But due to his prior commitment he will not be able to attend this major global gathering, which will bring together politicians, lawyers, scientists, and players of civil society.

His Holiness was also invited as a keynote speaker to the pre-G8 Inter-religious Summit in France last month. He could not make it because of his heavy schedule. ó Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, June 7.

ON FRIDAY 24 JUNE 2011, REV. DR FYKSE TVEIT ACCOMPANIED BY TWO STAFF MEMBERS MR. MICHEL NSEIR AND MS. CARLA KHIJOYAN MET WITH HIS HOLINESS ARAM I. Archbishop

Nareg Alemezian, the Ecumenical Officer and Dr. Nora Bayraktarian Chairperson of the Ecumenical Relations Committee of the Catholicosate of Cilicia were also present at the meeting.

The purpose of General Secretary's visit was to consult the Heads of Churches in the region on WCC's approach to the current situation. In His response to the questions of Rev. Olav Gykse Tveit, Catholicos Aram I first said that the west should support internal reforms and strengthen civil society institutions.

Addressing the question of the Christian presence in the Middle East, His Holiness said that although in some countries such as Egypt and Iraq tensions between Christians and Muslims still persist, the Christian-Muslim peaceful coexistence is of crucial importance for the whole region. Catholicos Aram I recalled that Christians are not newcomers to the Middle East, they are deeply rooted in the history, culture and traditions of the region and as such they are challenged to play an active role in the reformation processes.

The General Secretary and His Holiness Aram I also spoke of the importance of strengthening the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). In his capacity as one of the Presidents of the MECC, His Holiness Aram I suggested that the WCC sends a pastoral letter to the local churches, expressing its solidarity with them and promising to support them in their peace-building effort and in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

At the end of the evening, His Holiness Aram I appreciated the decision of the General Secretary to listen to the churches and the General Secretary thanked His Holiness for his role in the ecumenical movement and the WCC, and the contribution of the Catholicosate of Cilicia through its representatives. ó Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, June 28.

The Catholic Churches

A YEAR AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF ARCHBISHOP LUIGI PADOVESE, APOSTOLIC VICAR OF ANATOLIA, THE SMALL TURKISH CHURCH IS STILL "MARKED BY PAIN," BUT IS ALSO WITNESSING SIGNS OF INTEREST TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY AND IS "HOPEFUL." The key point is the guarantee of religious freedom. So says Mgr. Antonio Lucibello, Apostolic Nuncio in the country. On the afternoon of June 4 the Vatican diplomat left for Iskenderun, where there was a Mass in memory of the sacrifice of the bishop, who was

killed by his driver 3 June 2010. The Mass, celebrated by Mgr. Ruggero Franceschini, Archbishop of Izmir (Smyrna), was also attended by representatives of other Churches, Catholic, Orthodox and Armenian.

"Our presence here in Turkey - said Mgr. Lucibello - is inconsistent from the numerical point of view: in all we are like a small parish in a small village in the West. Yet our discreet witness bears fruit and there is respect and a following. "

During this year, marked by the martyrdom of Archbishop Padovese and other signs of violence, the Nuncio said the Church has been able to further its mission. "The Church is experiencing a shift 'from presence to witness'. This slogan was used in a church conference in Turkey in the late '80s and remains important. "

"There is no need for a noisy presence, announced by 'beating drums. Instead it is essential to have a living witness, a discreet witness, one that is not imposed through theatrics.ö

Humble witness, the nuncio continued, corrects the existing impression here of the Catholic Church as a powerful organization. Taking account of these feelings is crucial. "

Mgr. Lucibello is hopeful for Turkey's progress towards Europe. But he also points out that a fundamental issue is religious freedom. "That freedom means not only freedom of worship but also of conscience. Importantly, a person must be able to believe or not believe, or even to change religion. " He explains that at a meeting organized by the Marmara Foundation a few months ago, he emphasized these elements and received the praise and support from young people working in hospitality and some businessmen.

The nuncio also expressed a desire among Catholics in Turkey for more opportunities for interaction and mixed education. "Being a minority often leads us to live in isolation. Instead, it is important to have opportunities to perceive that we are part of a whole. ö ö Asia News, June 6.

THE HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH (UGCC), MAJOR ARCHBISHOP SVIATOSLAV, SAID IN AN INTERVIEW TO THE MAGAZINE KORRESPONDENT THAT HE BELIEVES IN THE POSSIBILITY OF CREATING ONE UKRAINIAN CHURCH.

According to the publication, the Major Archbishop asserts the possibility of communion of the UGCC with all the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches. Then jour-

nalists Anna Morozova and Iryna Solomko asked him whether he is adherent to the idea of the church's unity.

öHe (His Beatitude Lubomyr ó ed.) stated more than once that the one Ukrainian Church is a real possibility. First of all, because it has already existed in such state, but due to different factors it was divided into different confessions. Because there is a common ground, there are also chances that this unity will be regained. But we must step on this path of unity,ö said the UGCC primate.

öBack in 2005 His Beatitude Lubomyr said that we had to move from denominational confrontation to the primacy in love. Very often today many of the churches that stemmed from Kyivan Church present themselves as the sole heir of this tradition. They consider the other churches as less worthy or even negate their right for existence. It is impossible to return to the original unity with this kind of thinking,ö added the head of the UGCC.

He also answered the question of whether he communicates with the heads of the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, particularly with the head of the UOC-MP Metropolitan Volodymyr. öBishop Ilariy, the representative of Metropolitan Volodymyr, was at my enthronement. Not only did he greet me but he also invited me to a meeting with the metropolitan. It was supposed to take place in the next few days, but due to the health problems of the metropolitan, the meeting was postponed. Nonetheless we are preparing for the meeting and I am looking forward to it,ö said the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics.

Besides, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav noted that the UGCC actively cooperates with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate (UOC-KP): öWe are actively cooperating with them within the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. We have agreed to create the Council of Churches from churches that stemmed from St. Volodymyr's Baptism, which would help us to accomplish many good things together.ö ö RISU, June 8.

ON JUNE 9, POPE BENEDICT XVI RECEIVED IN AUDIENCE THE NEW MOLDOVAN AMBASSADOR TO THE HOLY SEE, STEFAN GORDA. THIS IS THE SPEECH THE HOLY FATHER DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION:

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to receive you this morning, at the moment when you are presenting the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador

Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Moldova to the Holy See. I thank you for your kind words. To reciprocate I would be grateful if you would kindly express to Mr Marian Lupu, President *ad interim* of the Republic of Moldova, my cordial wishes for himself and for all the people of Moldova.

The year 2011 is the 20th anniversary of your country's Independence. It is now possible to see what has been done and what has yet to be built. In your discourse you very rightly emphasized the trials your nation has had to face and the intense hope that prevails among the population for settling the financial problems and those of national unity. It is clear that unity in peace and serenity is a factor that encourages economic and social development but this development also serves to achieve unity.

Finally I pray that lasting solutions may be found for the good of all through proper political mediation and the preservation of the different identities. Your people have written glorious pages in the history of the European continent. May this past inspire your present!

Your country wishes to move forward. It has set very understandable and necessary economic priorities. However, these must also respect the interests of national sovereignty and contribute to the well-being of all the members of your society, seeking to avoid trends that favour some to the detriment of others. To help achieve this goal your country hopes to establish close relations with the European Union. It is right and fitting that Moldova wishes to return to the common European home, but this legitimate aspiration can only take place with respect for the positive values of your country and must not be determined solely by the economy and material well-being.

The fact that these two elements were ideologized in the past is an indication of the pitfalls to be avoided for they can lead to a unilateral abdication from the age-old values of your culture. This adherence, an important element, will be authentic only if the European Union recognizes the specific contribution that Moldova can make, so as to be able to move on together towards a future enriched by the identity of each nation.

Because of its tradition and its Christian faith, Moldova can courageously help the European Union rediscover what it no longer wishes to see and even denies. Moreover, the peace, justice and prosperity of Moldova that are bound to result from the realization of its European aspirations

will only be effective if they are experienced by each one of our fellow citizens in the quest for the common good and with an ongoing concern for ethics. Among these essential values the religious values are to be found.

The harmonious diplomatic relations between Moldova and the Holy See, established 18 years ago, give me great pleasure. This harmony is due to the Christian faith that dwells in your nation and its inhabitants and I pay a tribute to the Orthodox Church as a whole. She has always shared with the Catholic Church the need to defend the religious and cultural values against the surrounding materialism and relativism which calls into question the Christian contribution to life and to society. May the brotherly relations between the Orthodox and the Catholic faithful grow deeper. These relations of reciprocal respect and friendship are a witness of love that over and above divisions and their consequences points out that hearts can be opened to reconciliation, solidarity and brotherhood.

The faithful of the Catholic Church in Moldova are not very numerous. I greet them through you, and especially the Bishop of Chişinău. I give thanks for the juridical recognition which the Catholic Church enjoys in Moldova, for her gradual organization and for the construction of new churches, including the cathedral. These facts show the excellency of the dialogue and collaboration between the civil institutions and the Catholic Church.

We all know that certain problems inherited from a recent past have yet to be resolved. The effort to care for and heal these wounds is another way of making a positive contribution to the unity of the country and to its development. May the civil authorities have the courage to find satisfactory solutions that are right and fair concerning the confiscated ecclesiastical patrimony, in order to allow the Catholic Church the means to fulfill her mission, not only in the religious domain but also in the educational, health-care and charitable sectors.

The Church does not ask to be granted special privileges. She wishes to be faithful to her own goal and to serve everyone, without distinction, in accordance with the mission entrusted to her by Christ. The successful integration of Catholics into your country and the excellence of relations with the Orthodox Church show her good will. Moreover many Moldovans have moved to European nations of Catholic tradition. They seek there financial stability of course, but they also weave bonds with Catholics,

thereby further deepening the good relations between both Churches. These two factors are encouraging in order to find other solutions to reinforce increasingly the harmony between the Moldovan State and the Catholic Church.

My thoughts go in particular to the young Moldovans. I pray for them and I would like to encourage them. I express to you my joy in knowing that 100 of them will be able to take part for the first time in the World Youth Day next August in Madrid. And, next October the Catholic Church will be organizing the first Social Week. The prospect of these two events gives me great pleasure. They should inspire your country's pride.

At the time when you are officially beginning your mission to the Holy See, Your Excellency, I express my best wishes for its success. You may be sure, Mr Ambassador, that you will always find with my co-workers the attention and cordial understanding that your lofty office deserves, as well as the affection for your country of the Successor of Peter. As I invoke the Virgin Mary's intercession, I pray the Lord to pour out an abundance of Blessings upon you, upon your family and upon your collaborators, as well as upon the Moldovan people and their leaders. *ó* Vatican website, June 9.

ON JUNE 9, POPE BENEDICT XVI RECEIVED IN AUDIENCE HUSSAN EDIN AALA, THE NEW SYRIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE HOLY SEE, AND GAVE THIS SPEECH:

Mr Ambassador,

I receive you with pleasure this morning as you present the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Holy See. You have kindly wished to convey to me the greetings of His Excellency, the President of the Republic, and I would be grateful if you would thank him on my behalf. Through you I likewise wish to greet all the Syrian people, expressing the desire that it may live in peace and brotherhood.

As you emphasized, Mr Ambassador, Syria has been an important and beloved place for Christians from the time of the Church's origin. Since Paul, who was to become the Apostle to the Gentiles, encountered the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, a wealth of great saints has left its mark on the religious history of your country. Equally abundant is the archaeological evidence of churches, monasteries and mosaics, dating back to the early centu-

ries of the Christian era, which binds us to the Church's origins. Syria has traditionally been an example of tolerance, conviviality and harmonious relations between Christians and Muslims and today their ecumenical and interreligious relations are good. I warmly hope that this friendly coexistence of all cultural and religious members of the nation will continue to develop for the greatest good of all, thereby reinforcing a unity founded on justice and solidarity.

However, the construction of this unity can only be permanent if the centrality and dignity of the human person is recognized. Indeed, *ó*As one created in the image of God, each individual human being has the dignity of a person; he or she is not just something, but someone capable of self-knowledge, self-possession, free self-giving and entering into communion with others *ö* (Message for the World Day of Peace 2007, n. 2). The path of unity and stability for each nation therefore moves through the recognition of the inalienable dignity of every human person. The person must therefore be at the center of the institutions, laws and actions of societies. Consequently, it is also essential to give priority to the common good, setting aside personal or partisan interests. Moreover, the process of listening, dialogue and collaboration must be recognized as the means through which the various members of society may compare their points of view and thus achieve a consensus on the truth of particular values or aims. Great advantages will result from this for individuals and for communities (cf. Discourse to the United Nations, 18 April 2008).

In this perspective, the events that have occurred in recent months in which some countries surrounding the Mediterranean *ó* including Syria *ó* demonstrated the desire for a better future in the areas of economy, justice, freedom and participation in public life. These events also show the urgent need for real reforms in the country's political, economic and social life. It is nevertheless highly desirable that these developments do not take place through intolerance, discrimination or conflict, and even less through violence, but rather through absolute respect for truth, for coexistence, for the legitimate rights of individuals and groups, as well as for reconciliation. Such principles must guide leaders while taking account of the aspirations of civil society as well as of the international authorities.

Mr Ambassador, I would like to emphasize here the positive role Christians have in your country; as citizens, they are engaged in the building of a society where

all may find their place. I cannot fail to mention the Catholic Church's service in the social and educational sectors, which is appreciated by everyone. May I be permitted to offer a very special greeting to the faithful of the Catholic communities, with their bishops, and to encourage them to nourish the bonds of brotherhood with everyone? Daily relations with their Muslim compatriots shed light on the importance of interreligious dialogue and on the possibility of working together — in many ways — for the common good. May the impetus given by the recent Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops yield abundant fruit in your country, for the benefit of the entire population, and an authentic reconciliation among peoples!

A global solution must be found, if peace is to make headway in the region. It must not be harmful to the interests of any of the parties involved and must be the result of a compromise and not of unilateral decisions imposed by force. Force resolves nothing; it merely provides partial or unilateral solutions which are inadequate. Aware of the suffering of all the populations, it is necessary to proceed with a deliberately global approach that excludes no one from the quest for a negotiated solution which takes into account the aspiration and legitimate interests of the various people involved. In this manner the situation that the Middle East has been experiencing for years has led you to welcome a large number of refugees, mainly from Iraq, and among them many Christians. I warmly thank the Syrian people for their generosity.

As you embark on your noble mission as representative to the Holy See, I address to you, Mr Ambassador, my best wishes for the success of your mission. You may be sure that you will always find with my co-workers the welcome and understanding you may need. I wholeheartedly invoke upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family and upon all the inhabitants of Syria an abundance of divine blessings. — Vatican website, June 9.

ON JUNE 10, 2011, THE HOLY FATHER ERECTED THE CHALDEAN EPARCHY OF CANADA WITH THE NAME OF MAR ADDAI OF TORONTO OF THE CHALDEANS (38,000 Catholics, priests 4), Canada. He appointed Archbishop Hanna Zora, of Ahwaz of the Chaldeans, Iran, as first bishop of the new eparchy. — *VIS*, June 10.

IN THE WEEK PRECEDING PENTECOST, IN THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF HIS BEATITUDE BECHARA PETER RAI, PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST, WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF HIS BEATITUDE AND EMINENCE NASRALLAH PETER CARDINAL SFEIR, THEIR EXCELLENCIES, THE BISHOPS OF THE MARONITE CHURCH, those living in Lebanon, or in the eparchies within the Patriarchal territory or coming from abroad: Syria, Holy Land, Egypt, Cyprus, Europe, USA, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Australia, met together for their yearly Synod in the Patriarchal See in Bkerkeh from 5 June to June 11. Their spiritual retreat was preached by Father Maroun Mbarak, the Lebanese Missionary, under the title "Bishop of 2012." They began with a prayer for the repose of the souls of late Bishops Francis Zayek and Youssef Mahfouz. They studied the subjects on the agenda dealing specially with church questions, pastoral, social or administrative and national matters. At the end of the synod, they issued the following communiqué:

1 — In the opening speech, His Beatitude the Patriarch thanked the Fathers of the Synod, for electing him father and head of the Maronite Church and expressed in their name the esteem of the Synod for His Beatitude and Eminence Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir and the pride of all in his wise and loving leadership. He asked the Fathers to seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit so that they may read the signs of times properly and discern God's will and do accordingly. Then, entrusting all of them to Mary's intercession and protection, in this fragile time of the region's history, he gave the agenda of the Synod, wishing that its resolutions and recommendations would be up to the expectations and hopes set upon it.

2 — First, the Fathers applied themselves to study the report of the Patriarchal committee for liturgy. They praised its work and expressed their satisfaction for its latest achievements, the most important of which is the ritual of the Sacrament of Penance. They, hence, underlined the importance of giving this sacrament its proper place in the Church and mentioned the necessity to carry reconciliation to the parishes and wherever they can. They also requested their sons and daughters to return to the purity of the Gospel so that they may be effectively among the children of the kingdom.

The Fathers welcomed also the new translations into the local languages from the original Syriac text of the Missal, the

Sacrament and ritual books, as they help to preserve the identity and the Church unity in the countries abroad. The additional liturgical publications expected for the coming days will help the faithful to participate in the liturgical ceremonies and gain spiritual fruits.

3 — The Fathers listened to the reports presented about the Maronite seminaries which are: Saint Maron at Ghazir, Saint Antony of Padua at Karm Saddeh, Saint Augustine at Kafra and Our Lady of Lebanon in Washington. They thanked God for the seriousness and knowledge which those in charge of them enjoy and for the strong devotion in forming vocations to priesthood and the necessary preparation to join in the service of the sacraments, the word and charity. They recommended that those in charge of the schools strengthen coordination among themselves and intensify the missionary spirit, free giving of self and formation in the spirituality of the cross. Given the importance of priestly formation, His Beatitude proposed that Wednesday 15 June be consecrated to a closer study of the situation of the seminaries with all those concerned, to increase cooperation in these schools, work at implementing the charter of Maronite education in all schools, and issue recommendations on what needs to be included in the formation of future priests. Finally, the Fathers saw the necessity of establishing a center to care for preparing priests called upon to serve abroad, especially since the necessity there for generous workers is growing. All these matters were considered during the recent visit of His Beatitude to the seminaries in Lebanon and the hoped for visit to the seminary in Washington in the near future.

4 — The Fathers listened also to reports about the situation of some eparchies, among which Jbeil, Batroun, Lattakia, the Vicariates of Jebbeh and Sarba, eparchies of Haifa and the Holy Land, and Europe. They were informed about the needs of the Patriarchal curia and took the necessary resolutions about it.

Then, the Bishops of the eparchies of Mexico, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, and Europe presented the situation of their sons and daughters with the expectations of these eparchies, specifically the hopes, sufferings and most important, the achievements. They insisted upon their urgent need for priests from Lebanon to help them, because communities are growing and their needs increasing.

5 — Following that, the Fathers dwelt a long time upon the challenges of the Church abroad. They assured that the Mar-

onite expansion has become international, efficient, interactive with most cultures and an integral part of our Church identity. While the basic challenge is in preserving the identity with the inhabitants of the countries where they live in witnessing to the faith before peoples and cooperate with their Churches in reviving Christian life, we still have to improve the management of this new situation on the organizational, parochial and spiritual levels for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

6 - At the start of the service of our Father the new Patriarch, and in accordance with the recommendations of the Maronite Patriarchal Synod and the paternal instructions of His Beatitude, the Fathers reviewed the suggested plan for the administrative and pastoral cadre in Bkerkeh on the theological bases which are summed up in rendering efficient collegiality and communion.

7 ó The Fathers dwelt upon the situation of church tribunals, discussed the report presented about these tribunals during the year 2010 and remarked, with regret, that the number of cases presented each year is increasing. This requires more pastoral efforts to preserve family unity, and imposes upon the faithful more sacrifice, to be patient about the difficulties met in marital life, and deepen their faith and its requirements so that our families remain a witness of unity and love.

8 ó The Fathers received also the study of the latest developments reached by the committee in charge of reconsidering the Particular law of the Maronite Church. After praising the efforts of those working at it, they hoped that the result of these studies be implemented in the near future.

9 ó As for the national general question, the Fathers valued completely the Muslim-Christian summit held at Bkerkeh and hoped for much from the new dynamism which it created. They also hoped that much would come out of the meeting held recently by the Maronite leaders and deputies at Bkerkeh in response to the invitation of His Beatitude. They were optimistic about what resulted from the summit with the hopes to strengthen unity in the country, the consequence of which is to assure more stability, development and deeply rooted constitutional life built upon effective democracy, the preservation of man's dignity and the earnest endeavor to preserve Lebanon's message and its prosperity.

While the Fathers assume again the necessity to return to the national basics and call for working towards reaching a

united strategic view to move Lebanon forward in its efficient conciliatory democratic system, they appreciate the way the Lebanese have withstood the storms and preserved their present relationships. They are sorry for the sharp division which still imprints the country's political life and impairs the work of the constitutional institutions. This has had the consequence to multiply the daily life crises for all the groups of the Lebanese people, harming, in particular, the poor and needy. They also wonder about the reasons behind the crippling delay in forming the government and do not understand the continuation of the state of stagnation gripping the formation which increases the recession in the different economic sectors. This also harms the production sectors directly, especially since we are on the entrance of the summer season. But that which further complicates the situation are the fast developments around us. This situation affects negatively the stability of Lebanon and its prosperity. That is why the Fathers appeal to all to return to their purity of origin and reject their differences and unite their ranks out of the national basics. The country, if united, can overcome all crises and the Lebanese, if they want, can quickly find the solutions to all the problems which the small homeland is suffering from, after having eliminated all the obstacles which hinder the start in the repair shop of all institutions.

10 ó In the stage of history the region is going through, the Fathers remind everyone of what the assembly of the last Synod, special for the Middle East Churches, said that violence cannot establish democratic values. Democracy is a long way built brick after brick, so that the citizens reach, through it, a civil system built upon equality, similar opportunities and liberty of expression and creed. The Fathers of the Synod join their voice to the voice of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, raising prayer with him, so that violence stops in all its aspects, specially the bloodshed, and that the concerned authorities initiate dialogue with their citizens, to respond to the legitimate expectations of the rising young generations, which aim towards a promising and stable future.

11 ó In conclusion, on the eve of the Pentecost, the Fathers call upon all to realize their responsibilities and work with all their power to affirm security and peace. They call upon their sons and daughters to raise their faces towards heaven and thank the Heavenly Father, who granted us the spirit of the Son, the Paraclete, so that we may always follow the way of peace and

remain faithful to the witness of love and unity in spite of the pressures surrounding us. They finally request their co-citizens in the homeland, and their sons and daughters, to never give up the national unity Pact among themselves which is based upon noble spiritual values and high moral examples. For all unity, be it humanitarian, social or cultural is a gift from the Spirit who continually calls us to establish peace in our homelands and live together in love. Only love builds homelands, preserves societies, guards the good and establishes the foundations for a just and permanent peace. ó Press Release, Maronite Patriarchate, June 11.

HIS BEATITUDE LUCIAN MURESAN, MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF FAGARAS AND ALBA JULIA OF THE ROMANIANS, ROMANIA, WITH THE CONSENT OF THE SYNOD OF THE ROMANIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH AND AFTER HAVING INFORMED THE APOSTOLIC SEE, has, in accordance with canon 85 para. 2 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, transferred Bishop Vasile Bizau of the Major Archbishopric Curia, to the eparchy of Maramures of the Romanians (Catholics 152,383, priests 143, religious 3), Romania. ó *VIS*, June 11.

THE SPRING ORDINARY SESSION OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE ROMANIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH UNITED WITH ROME TOOK PLACE IN THE MAJOR ARCHBISHOPAL HEADQUARTERS IN BLAJ from June 8 to 10.

The following members were present: His Beatitude Lucian Muresan, Major Archbishop of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church United with Rome, along with Bishops Virgil Bercea of Oradea, Florentin Crihalmeanu of Cluj-Gherla, Alexandru Mesian of Lugoj, Mihai Fratila Auxiliary of Alba Iulia and Fagaras, and Vasile Bizau of the Major Archbishopric Curia. Bishop John Michael Botean of St. George in Canton, Ohio (USA) was not able to be present but participated in some of the proceedings by electronic communication.

The meeting of the Synod began in the afternoon of June 8 with the celebration of a *Te Deum laudamus* in the Blaj Cathedral, during which Bishops Ioan Sisestean and George Gutiu, both having recently passed to the Lord, were commemorated.

In the first part of its work, the Synod discussed subjects of an internal administrative nature. Following this, the Synod addressed subjects relating to the ecumenical situation as well as some decisions re-

garding appointments. Thus reconfirmed in office were Bishop Virgil of Oradea as Secretary of the Holy Synod, and Father William A. Bleiziffer, Judicial Vicar of the Archepiscopate of Alba Iulia and Fagaras, as notary, as well as the membership of the Permanent Synod.

Other decisions included the approval of the Statutes for the major seminaries as a single document for all the superior institutes for the formation of future Greek Catholic priests, and also the Statutes and Regulations of the Major Archepiscopate.

In addition, it was decided to deepen the study of the possibility of modifying the boundaries of the church's eparchies, and to organize meetings of those responsible for overseeing workers in order to inform them about the new regulations in the area of labor laws.

The Synod also appointed the members that will take part in the preparatory Commission to establish working principles and methodology for the Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Greek Catholic Church United with Rome.

Also included in the Agenda were current matters in the life of the Church both domestic and foreign, as well as disciplinary and canonical issues.

It was decided that the next ordinary session of the Synod will take place October 18-20, 2011, in Blaj. ó Press Release, Romanian Greek Catholic Church, June 12. [trans. by RGR]

ON JUNE 14, THE HOLY FATHER APPOINTED BISHOP HLIB LONCHYNA M.S.U., APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR "SEDE VACANTE" of the apostolic exarchate for Ukrainian faithful of Byzantine rite resident in Great Britain, as apostolic exarch of the same apostolic exarchate (Catholics 10,000, priests 13, religious 3). ó *VIS*, June 14.

THE VATICAN HAS ANNOUNCED APPROVAL OF TWO NEW MELKITE CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOPS WHO HAD BEEN ELECTED BY THE GREEK MELKITE SYNOD OF BISHOPS.

Lebanese-born Archbishop Cyrille Bustros, 72, was confirmed as the new Melkite archbishop of Beirut and Jbeil, vacant for 13 months. Since 2004, he has headed the Eparchy of Newton, Mass.

Syrian-born Bishop Issam Darwich, 66, who has headed the Eparchy of St. Michael's of Sydney, Australia, since 1996, was confirmed as the new archbishop of Zahleh and Furzol in Lebanon.

U.S.-born Bishop Nicholas Samra, 66, who retired as an auxiliary of Newton in 2005, has been named bishop of Newton. Since his retirement, he has lived in Warren, Mich., and has, among other things, led retreats and conferences and done research.

Father Robert Rabbat, 51, rector of the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Newton, has been named bishop of St. Michael's of Sydney. The Lebanese-born priest has a degree in chemical engineering and mathematics from Ohio State University and a master's in communication from Purdue University. He was ordained a priest in Beirut in 1994 and has served at parishes in Indiana and Illinois as well as editor of *Sophia* magazine. He was named an archimandrite in 2005 and began serving as cathedral rector in Newton. ó *CNS*, June 15.

THE U.S.-BORN RECTOR OF UKRAINE'S CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY SAID HIS COUNTRY IS "LIVING IN DARK TIMES" AND ACCUSED STATE SECURITY SERVICES OF PLACING HIM UNDER SURVEILLANCE.

"Our telephones are tapped -- the stationary ones probably, the mobile ones certainly. Lists of my telephone conversations have been shown to colleagues, and an assistant was followed through the city," said Father Borys Gudziak, rector of the Lviv-based Ukrainian Catholic University.

"I have seen fundamental change -- some in hopeless situations -- from communism to an independent Ukraine, from growing authoritarianism to the Orange Revolution. Although I believe we're living in dark times, I'm convinced the spirit and human dignity will prevail," he told Austria's *Die Presse* daily June 16.

He said the university students and faculty were "not a nest of radical revolutionaries. But we do try to be free."

The priest told the daily that other university staffers had received calls from the state security services asking about his activities.

"These are the occurrences I know about -- I'm also certain some UCU colleagues are under pressure to collaborate with the security services out of fear," said Father Gudziak, whose university has around 1,400 full and part-time students.

In a May 2010 memorandum, Father Gudziak said he had identified "planned actions to circumscribe civic freedom, democracy and the basic dignity of human beings" in Ukraine, adding that he had "reliable testimony and audible evidence" of efforts to intimidate staff and students at the

Catholic university, using "methods well known in Soviet times."

However, the claim was rejected by the security services director, Valeriy Khoroshkovsky, and criticized by Bishop Marian Buczek, secretary-general of Ukraine's Catholic bishops' conference, who said two months later that there was no evidence of an anti-Catholic campaign.

In his *Die Presse* interview, Father Gudziak said current government reforms were undermining university autonomy in Ukraine, adding that he believed other rectors had received "visits" from the security services and were afraid to speak out.

"In view of these developments, one has to ask whether the Orange Revolution hasn't been ineffective," the priest said, in a reference to December 2004 mass protests that helped bring a pro-Western president, Viktor Yushchenko, to power. ó Jonathan Luxmoore for *CNS*, June 21.

A LONGTIME FRIEND OF LEADERS IN THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, CARDINAL ROGER ETCHEGARAY VISITED RUSSIA FOR PENTECOST, inviting the faithful to "walk by the Spirit" in bettering relations between the two Churches.

Cardinal Etchegaray is vice dean of the College of Cardinals. He served as president of the Pontifical Councils *Cor Unum* and for Justice and Peace.

He was in St. Petersburg June 9-15, beginning his visit with prayer at the tomb of Metropolitan Nicodemus, whom he visited in St. Petersburg more than 30 years ago.

The 88-year-old cardinal has been a pioneer in Catholic-Russian Orthodox dialogue; his visit to what was then Leningrad was made at the invitation of Metropolitan Nicodemus.

The cardinal has also been a longtime friend of Vladimir, the present metropolitan of St. Petersburg. They met in the framework of the Second Vatican Council, in which the cardinal, then a priest of the French Diocese of Bayonne, took part as an expert, and the future metropolitan as an observer of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Cardinal Etchegaray celebrated Pentecost with the Orthodox, as the feast was marked on the same date this year by both Churches.

The cardinal attended an Orthodox vigil for the feast, exchanging the kiss of peace with Metropolitan Vladimir.

The next morning, Cardinal Etchegaray gave Metropolitan Vladimir a letter from the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal

Kurt Koch. The letter recalled the importance of Vatican II in the development of relations between Catholics and Orthodox.

Bishop Ambrose, rector of the Academy of Orthodox Theology, invited the cardinal to stay at the academy during his time in St. Petersburg and organized a reception in his honor.

At the time of the cardinal's first visit to that city, the rector of the academy was the present head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill.

Cardinal Etchegaray also celebrated Mass with the Catholic community of St. Petersburg in the Church of St. Catherine, as well as visiting the seminary.

He also met with representatives of Russian culture, including Boris Borisovich Piotrovski, former director of the Hermitage Museum, which houses numerous masterpieces of Western religious art. *ó Zenit*, June 22.

THE HOLY FATHER HAS APPOINTED:

- His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, major archbishop of Kyiv-Halyc, Ukraine, as a member of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

- Bishop Daniel Kozelinski Netto, auxiliary of the eparchy of Sao Joao Batista in Curitiba of the Ukrainians, Brazil, as apostolic administrator "sede vacante" of the eparchy of Santa Maria del Patrocinio in Buenos Aires of the Ukrainians, (Catholics 160,000, priests 17, permanent deacons 1, religious 95), Argentina. *ó VIS*, June 22.

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE SYRO-MALANKARA EXARCHATE IN THE USA WAS HELD ON 22 AND 23 JUNE 2011 AT THE SEMINARY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, NEW YORK. The two-days Assembly was inaugurated by His Excellency Most Rev. William Murphy, the Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. The inauguration meeting was presided over by Most. Rev. Thomas Mar Eusebius, the Bishop of the Exarchate. Rt. Rev. Msgr. Peter Kochery welcomed the participants and Rt. Rev. Msgr. Peter I. Vaccari, the Rector of the Seminary, welcomed the members to the Seminary. The Assembly Sessions began with an ice breaker, namely, all participants introduced themselves. A representative from each parish was asked to present a small report of their respective parish. During the noon session Rev. Fr. Mathew Charthakuzhiyil presented the main paper of the Assembly, *óThe Missionary Role of the Syro-Malankara Catho-*

lic Church. *ó* This paper gave a theological framework for the subsequent discussion. Rev. Fr. Sunny Mathew (Parish priest), Mr. George James (lay person) and Dr. Jocelyn Edathil (Youth) presented their response to this paper.

During the morning session of the second day, Rev. Fr. George Oonnoony presented a paper on *óThe Pastoral and Canonical Implications of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Exarchate.* *ó* This paper gave emphasis to the canonical and pastoral dimensions of the Church's mission in the United States of America. All participants were divided into five groups namely, Mar Baselios, Mar Gregorios, Mar Theophilos, Mar Athanasios, and Mar Ephraem. Each group gathered together thrice and discussed the given questions. In addition, each group was also asked to chart a missionary plan for the Church for the next five years. The summary of the discussion was presented in the general discussion that was moderated by Rt. Rev. Msgr. Peter Kochery. Then Rev. Fr. Mathai Mannoovadakkethil, Mr. Alex John, Mrs. Thresiamma Nadavallil and Mr. Aloysius John presented their evaluations of the Assembly. All of them shared their appreciation and proposed that the momentum created by the Assembly must be continued by designing follow-up programs and implementing the proposed plans. There was active interaction from most of the participants.

During the concluding session Most Rev. Thomas Mar Eusebius offered his final comments, his deep sense of satisfaction about the fruitfulness of the Assembly and his gratitude to all the participants for their serious and committed participation in the Assembly. Besides the ex-officio members, Mr. George James, Mr. Gijo Georekutty (youth representative) and Mrs. Thresiamma Nadavallil (woman representative) and Mr. Francis Thazhamon (representing the region of Canada) were elected as the members to attend the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly which will be held from 21 to 23 September, 2011 at the Catholicate Centre, Trivandrum. Thomas Mar Eusebius and Rev. Fr. Saji Mukkootumanni, the general secretary expressed their gratitude to all who were instrumental in making this Assembly a success.

During the *ó*Sending-out Rite*ó* while playing, *ó*Go Out and Tell the Good News,*ó* Mar Eusebius handed lighted candles to each participant, who processed in two lines behind the Holy Bible carried by the Proto-Syncellus. When the procession reached the Chapel, the Bishop read out the Mission Command from the Gospel of Mat-

thew. People requested the blessing of the Bishop by singing *ó*Sloosok aman.*ó* After the Bishop's blessings, they kissed the Bishop's hand cross, singing *ó*Krolohoon Moraan.*ó* The participants left the Assembly venue with a renewed sense of being a Church and with a deepened conviction about their missionary call. *ó Malankara News*, June 23.

THE HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE RELEASED THE FOLLOWING COMMUNIQUE AT MIDDAY ON JUNE 24: "This morning the Holy Father received in audience Igor Luksic, prime minister of Montenegro. The prime minister 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 focused on the Basic Agreement between the Holy See and Montenegro, which the secretary of State and the prime minister signed at the end of their meeting. The agreement concerns, in particular, the juridical status of the Catholic Church and of her main institutions within civil society, and confirms the excellent relations between the Holy See and Montenegro which have existed since the country first gained its independence.

"The conversations between Cardinal Bertone and Mr. Luksic also provided an opportunity for a fruitful exchange of opinions on the current international situation, in the perspective of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Attention dwelt on the commitment of the Montenegrin government to promoting peace and harmony among the different peoples and religious confessions present in the country. The parties also expressed their desire to continue constructive dialogue on themes of mutual concern for Church and State. *ó ó VIS*, June 24.

THIS MORNING IN THE APOSTOLIC PALACE OF THE VATICAN, THE HOLY SEE AND MONTENEGRO SIGNED A BASIC AGREEMENT confirming and regulating certain principles in areas of shared interest.

Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B. signed for the Holy See and Igor Luksic, prime minister, signed for Montenegro.

The agreement, taking account of the independence and autonomy of Church and State and of their openness to mutual collaboration, establishes a juridical framework for their relations. Specifically, it reg-

ulates the juridical status of the Catholic Church in civil society, her liberty and independence in apostolic activity and in matters that specifically concern freedom of worship, and her activities in the fields of culture, education, pastoral care and charity. The text also concerns the administration of seminaries, as well as the provision of spiritual assistance to the armed forces and in prisons and hospitals. The agreement will come into force with the exchange of the instruments of ratification. *ó VIS*, June 24.

POPE BENEDICT XVI HAS APPOINTED ARCHBISHOP RAPHAEL MINASSIAN ARMENIAN ORDINARY FOR EASTERN EUROPE. HE WAS ARMENIAN CATHOLIC PATRIARCHAL EXARCH OF JERUSALEM AND AMMAN PRIOR TO THIS APPOINTMENT. The Armenian Catholic Church of Beirut reported that Archbishop Minassian will now head the Catholic Armenians in Armenia, Georgia, and Eastern Europe.

Archbishop Minassian succeeds Archbishop Vahan Ohanian. The official appointment ceremony will be held at the Cathedral of Saint Gregory the Illuminator in Beirut, Lebanon.

Raphael François Minassian was born in 1946 in Beirut. He entered the Lebanese seminary in Rome in 1966 and was ordained a priest in 1973. He was pastor of the Catholic Armenians in California in 1996-2006 and was editor in chief of *Avet-ber-Verelk* for 8 years. Archbishop Minassian also founded an Armenian Television company in 2005, some segments of which have been broadcast by the Telepace channel. *ó Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem*, June 24.

AT A PRESS CONFERENCE ON JUNE 24 IN LVIV, THE HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH (UGCC), MAJOR ARCHBISHOP SVIATOSLAV, SAID HIS CHURCH IS READY TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE AND TO ORGANIZE A MEETING BETWEEN THE POPE AND PATRIARCH KIRILL.

The press conference took place after the presentation of the UGCC Catechism *ó*Christ is Our Easter.*ó* The working group, which is led by the Patriarchal Catechetical Commission, worked on the Catechism for almost 10 years. The book consists of three parts: *ó*Faith in the Church,*ó* *ó*Prayer of the Church,*ó* and *ó*Life of the Church.*ó*

According to Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, the UGCC Catechism is a testament to the intellectual maturity of the

church and a result of the order by which it lives.

The Catechism, as confirmed by the hierarchy, is both old and new: *ó*Old, for faith is eternal, and new, because we present the content in such a way so that our faithful can fully understand this tradition, so that this Catechism can speak to the modern person.*ó*

*ó*Until recently, there was a notion that to theologize in Ukrainian was *ó*uncultured*ó* *ó*we usually translated theological works. Since the Catechism is a product of a *ó*Ukrainian manufacturer,*ó* written in Ukrainian,*ó* it is, according to the Major Archbishop, a very important matter.

At the press conference, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav also talked about the mission of the church, which includes becoming a full-fledged participant in the dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholics.

*ó*We are a national church, and so we are ready to be not only a bridge of understanding between the Catholic and Orthodox churches and to organize a meeting between the Pope and Patriarch Kirill, but also to become a full-fledged member of the dialogue,*ó* the church leader told the press. *ó RISU*, June 24.

ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 24, THE HOLY FATHER RECEIVED PARTICIPANTS IN THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE REUNION OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR AID TO THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES (ROACO).

In his remarks to the group, Benedict XVI recalled how yesterday's celebration of the Solemnity of Corpus Christi "was a call to the beloved city of Rome and to the entire Catholic community to continue their journey along the difficult paths of history, amidst the world's great spiritual and material poverty, in order to bring the charity of Christ and the Church, which arises from the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of love, the gift which generates life.*ó*

"Never forget the Eucharistic dimension of your objective,*ó* the Pope went on, "so as to remain within the ambit of ecclesial charity, which particularly seeks to reach the Holy Land, but also the Middle East as a whole, in order to support the Christian presence there. I ask you to do everything possible - also be intervening with the public authorities with whom you have contacts at the international level - to ensure that the pastors and faithful of Christ can remain in the East where they were born, not as strangers but as citizens who bear witness to Jesus Christ as the saints of

the Eastern Churches did before them. The East is their earthly homeland. It is there that they are called today to promote, without distinction, the good of all mankind. Everyone professing this faith must be recognised as having equal dignity and true freedom, thus favouring more fruitful ecumenical and inter-religious collaboration.*ó*

The Holy Father then continued his remarks in English: "I thank you for your reflections on the changes that are taking place in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East, which are a source of anxiety throughout the world. Through the communications received at this time from the Coptic-Catholic Cardinal-Patriarch and from the Maronite Patriarch, as well as the pontifical representative in Jerusalem and the Franciscan Custos of the Holy Land, the Congregation and the agencies will be able to assess the situation on the ground for the Church and the peoples of that region, which is so important for world peace and stability. The Pope wishes to express his closeness, also through you, to those who are suffering and to those who are trying desperately to escape, thereby increasing the flow of migration that often remains without hope. I pray that the necessary emergency assistance will be forthcoming, but above all I pray that every possible form of mediation will be explored, so that violence may cease and social harmony and peaceful coexistence may everywhere be restored, with respect for the rights of individuals as well as communities.*ó*

Switching to German, the Pope referred to the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, which was held last October in the Vatican and which, he said, gave rise "to new signs for our age.*ó* Nonetheless, "shortly afterwards a number of defenseless people in the Syro-Catholic cathedral of Baghdad, Iraq, were victims of an act of senseless violence. ... This was followed by similar incidents some months later.*ó* The Pope expressed the hope that the suffering of so many people would be a seed to enrich the faith in those lands.

Finally he thanked all those present for their prayers for the sixtieth anniversary of his ordination as a priest which falls this year on 29 June, Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, Apostles. *ó VIS*, June 24.

HIS BEATITUDE BECHARA RAI, PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH OF THE MARONITES, WITH THE CONSENT OF THE SYNOD OF THE MARONITE CHURCH AND HAVING INFORMED THE APOSTOLIC SEE, HAS TRANSFERRED, in accordance

with canon 85 para. 2 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Archbishop Paul Nabil El-Sayah of Haifa of the Maronites, Patriarchal exarch for Jerusalem, Palestine and Jordan, to the office of bishop of the Patriarchal Curia. The Holy Father has allowed the prelate to maintain his title of archbishop "ad personam." *ó VIS*, June 25.

A CATHOLIC BISHOP FROM ROMANIA WILL BE BEATIFIED AS A MARTYR ALMOST SIX DECADES AFTER DYING FROM BEING DOUSED IN BOILING WATER IN A PRISON operated by his country's former communist regime.

Bishop Janos Scheffler "was a pastor who risked everything to sustain the faith of Catholics and safeguard his church's unity with Rome," said Archbishop Ioan Robu of Bucharest, president of the Romanian bishops' conference.

"Having him officially recognized by the Catholic Church will provide a great impulse of joy and consolation, giving us a new model and new intercessor with God," he said.

The archbishop spoke about preparations for the July 3 beatification of Bishop Scheffler (1887-1952) in the cathedral in Oradea, Romania. The bishop headed the Diocese of Oradea Mare and Satu Mare. The Mass will be celebrated by Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Saints' Causes.

In a June 28 interview with *Catholic News Service*, Archbishop Robu said the beatification was attracting considerable public interest in Romania, which has 12 Latin and Eastern Catholic dioceses serving about 5.6 percent of the population of 21.7 million, according to a 2002 census. The archbishop said the recognition of communist-era martyrs was a "point of ecumenical contact" with the country's predominant Orthodox population.

"All Romanians are sensitive to such stories of witness and suffering, and the memory of Bishop Scheffler is still very much alive here, not only among Catholics," Archbishop Robu said.

"Younger people may have trouble understanding the past epoch to which such figures belonged. But the idea of martyrdom surpasses historical periods -- it speaks of the capacity for total devotion and risk, for the offering of life itself. These are values which can be readily appreciated by today's young generation," he said.

Named Bishop of Satu Mare in 1942 and of Oradea Mare in 1948, Bishop Scheffler was noted for his support for

Catholic education and concern for social issues.

In 1950, as Romania's new communist regime attempted to break the Catholic Church's links with Rome, Bishop Scheffler was arrested and sent to Jilava prison, near the capital, Bucharest, from where he smuggled a message to local Catholics, urging them to "stay faithful unto martyrdom."

The bishop died in an underground cell Dec. 6, 1952, after he had boiling water poured on him in the prison shower. The location of his unmarked grave in the prison cemetery was recorded by an Orthodox priest and fellow inmate. In 1965, his remains were secretly exhumed and reinterred in the Oradea cathedral crypt.

In an interview with *CNS* June 27, Archbishop Gyorgy-Miklos Jakubinyi of Alba Iulia said the beatification process, launched in 1990 after communist rule was overthrown in Romania's "Winter Revolution," had been helped by a composer who had shared the bishop's cell and witnessed his violent death.

Bishop Scheffler is the second Romanian bishop to be beatified as a communist-era martyr; the first was Auxiliary Bishop Szilard Bogdanffy of Oradea Mare and Satu Mare, who died in 1953 and was beatified in October.

Archbishop Robu told *CNS* he hoped beatification processes would be completed soon for 15 other Romanian Catholic martyrs, including seven Eastern Catholic bishops.

More than 75 martyrs from communist-ruled Eastern Europe have been beatified by the Catholic Church, including 29 from Ukraine and 40 from Albania. *ó Jonathan Luxmoore for CNS*, June 29.

THE HOLY FATHER HAS APPOINTED ARCHBISHOP TADEUSZ KONDRUSIEWICZ OF MINSK-MOHILEV, BELARUS, ALSO AS APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR "ad nutum Sanctae Sedis" of the diocese of Pinsk (area 72,700, population 3,146,000, Catholics 50,620, priests 47, religious 228), Belarus. *ó VIS*, June 30.

ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 28 IN THE VATICAN, IN A TRADITIONAL MEETING FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF STS. PETER AND PAUL APOSTLES, BENEDICT XVI RECEIVED A DELEGATION SENT BY ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I. The Church of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople traditionally exchange visits for the feasts of their respective patrons.

The delegation, which delivered a message to the Holy Father on behalf of the Patriarch, was made up of His Eminence Emmanuel (Adenakis), metropolitan of France and director of the office of the Orthodox Church to the European Union; His Eminence Athenagoras (Yves Peckstadt), bishop of Sinope and auxiliary of the metropolitan of Belgium, and Archimandrite Maxime Pothos, vicar general of the metropolitan of Switzerland.

This is the full text of the speech the Holy Father delivered on the occasion:

Dear Brothers in Christ,

Welcome to Rome on the occasion of the feast of the Patrons of this Church, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul. I am particularly pleased to greet you with the words that St Paul addressed to the Christians of this city: *óThe God of peace be with you all* (Rom 15:33). I thank with all my heart my Venerable Brother, the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Bartholomew I, and the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate who have wished to send you, dear Brothers, as their representatives to take part here with us in this solemn celebration.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who appeared to his disciples after his Resurrection, gave them the mission of being witnesses of the Gospel of Salvation. The Apostles faithfully carried out this mission, witnessing to faith in Christ the Saviour and to love for God the Father until the supreme sacrifice of their lives. In this City of Rome, the Apostles Peter and Paul faced martyrdom and since then their tombs are the object of veneration. Your participation in our Feast, like the presence of our representatives in Constantinople for the Feast of the Apostle Andrew, expresses the friendship and authentic brotherhood that unites the Church of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, bonds that are solidly founded on this faith received from the witness of the Apostles. The profound spiritual closeness that we experience each time we meet is a cause of great joy and gratitude to God for me. At the same time, however, the incomplete communion which already unites us must grow until it achieves full and visible unity.

We follow with great attention the work of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church in all its parts. From the purely human viewpoint one might have the impression that the theological dialogue is progressing with difficulty. In fact, the rhythm of the dialogue is linked to the complexity of the themes discussed, which demand an extraordinary effort of reciprocal study, reflection and openness.

We are called to continue on this journey together in charity, invoking the Holy Spirit, light and inspiration, in the certainty that he wants to lead us to the full accomplishment of Christ's will: that they may all be one (Jn 17:21). I am particularly grateful to all the members of the Joint Commission, and especially to the co-Presidents, His Eminence the Metropolitan Ioannis of Pergamon, and His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, for their tireless devotion, patience and competence.

In a historical context of violence, indifference and egotism, many men and women of our time feel bewildered. It is precisely by the common witness of the truth of the Gospel that we can help the people of our time to rediscover the way that leads them to the truth. The search for the truth, in fact, is also a search for justice and peace and it is with great joy that I note

the important commitment with which His Holiness Bartholomew labors for his subjects. In our common intention and remembering the beautiful example of my Predecessor Bl. John Paul II, I have wished to invite our Christian brethren, the representatives of the other religious traditions of the world and of the important figures of the worlds of culture and of science to take part next 27 October, in the town of Assisi, in a *Day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice in the world*, which will have as its theme: "Pilgrims of truth, pilgrims of faith." This joint march through the streets of the town of St Francis will be the sign of the wish to continue on the way of dialogue and brotherhood.

Your Eminence, dear members of the Delegation, in thanking you once again for your presence in Rome in this solemn circumstance, I ask you to convey my fraternal

greeting to my venerable Brother, Patriarch Bartholomew I, to the Holy Synod, to the clergy and to all the faithful of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, assuring them of my affection and of the solidarity of the Church of Rome which today is celebrating her Holy Founders. *o* Vatican website, June 30.

THE 2011 EDITION OF "ORTHO-DOXIA," THE COMPLETE LISTING OF THE BISHOPS OF THE ORTHODOX, ORIENTAL ORTHODOX, AND ASSYRIAN CHURCHES COMPILED BY THE OSTKIRCHLICHES INSTITUT IN REGENSBURG, GERMANY, is now available. It includes contact information and biographical details of each bishop. It can be ordered from OKI Regensburg at oki.r@t-online.de The price is 20 euros, postage included.



His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI with the Delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, June 28, 2011.

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