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THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) CONGRATULATES ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I OF CONSTANTINOPLE FOR RECEIVING THE FREEDOM OF WORSHIP AWARD OF THE FRANKLIN AND ELEANOR ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE which acknowledges his efforts in promoting religious freedom, dialogue and environmental concerns.

Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands and prime minister Mark Rutte will present this award to him in a ceremony on 12 May in Middelburg, the Netherlands.

Bartholomew I was nominated for this award for his immense contribution to dialogues between Christianity, Islam and Judaism in his native Turkey, and elsewhere. His call to the churches to work for environmental progress has earned him the title of “the green Patriarch.”

The Four Freedoms Awards are presented to personalities whose achievements have demonstrated a commitment to the principles which United States president Franklin Roosevelt proclaimed as essential to democracy in his historic speech to Congress on 6 January 1941: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear.

Bartholomew I has been engaged with the WCC in the promotion of unity among churches and in addressing many concerns of the ecumenical movement. This relationship has deep historical roots, as the Ecumenical Patriarchate is a founding member of the WCC.

While congratulating Bartholomew I on his award, the WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit said, “We appreciate the recognition His All Holiness Bartholomew I is being given through the ‘Freedom Award’ for his contribution to inter-religious dialogue and his efforts to promote ecological and environmental justice.”

“His All Holiness Bartholomew I’s engagement with these ecumenical con-

cerns is vital. We hope that they will continue to inspire churches around the world, especially as we prepare our own 10th Assembly that will focus precisely on these dimensions under the theme ‘God of life, lead us to justice and peace’,” added Tveit.

The renowned Dutch theologian Willem A. Visser ‘t Hooft, who took up office in the WCC as its first general secretary in 1948, also received the Freedom of Worship Award in 1982.

This year along with Bartholomew I, other recipients of the Four Freedoms Awards include Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, former president of Brazil, Ela Ramesh Bhatt, human rights worker from India, Hussain Al-Shahristani, deputy prime minister for energy in Iraq and the Al-Jazeera Television Network. – WCC Press Release, May 9.

THIS IS THE FULL TEXT OF THE REMARKS OFFERED BY PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW UPON RECEPTION OF THE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT FREEDOM OF WORSHIP MEDAL in the Netherlands on May 12:

To worship freely is to breathe.

In the fourth century, our venerable predecessor on the Throne of Constantinople, St. Gregory the Theologian, identified the capacity to remember God in prayer with the ability to breathe.

Your Majesty, Esteemed Mrs. Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, Honorable board members of the Roosevelt Foundation, Beloved fellow laureates, Distinguished brothers and sisters:

It is a profound privilege and sincere delight to stand beside other esteemed recipients of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Freedom Awards in order to accept the Freedom of Worship Medal. Three dimensions of our life and ministry have inspired us over the years to pursue with sacred passion the goal of religious freedom.

The first dimension is the experience and expression of the Orthodox Christian faith and spirituality under difficult condi-

tions on our native island of Imvros, where so many of our properties were unfairly confiscated over the last century, and, later, in the historical Theological School of Halki in Turkey, which was forcibly closed forty years ago. Over the last two decades, we have consistently – albeit humbly and respectfully – defended the fundamental rights of our Church to train its leaders and educate its clergy in order to maintain the spiritual legacy of the Church of Constantinople for over seventeen centuries.

Our childhood reminiscences of discussions in our parents’ village coffee shop and our memorable formation through worship and study in our alma mater on the mountaintop of the quaint island of Halki, instilled in us the desire and advocacy for religious tolerance and freedom. This is much more than simply a theory or ideology; it is a conviction and a way of life, learned through conversation and deliberation as a small minority in a predominantly Muslim nation. And we know that such an exchange can bear fruit precisely because we have lived the results of good will and moral integrity, which can sometimes silently accomplish far more than political pressure or legal coercion.

The second dimension that shaped our ministry with regard to freedom of worship is the mission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate through the centuries. Søren Kierkegaard once said: “The most tremendous thing granted to the human being is choice, freedom.” Indeed, authentic humanity is only realized through the free act of relationship with others. Freedom is a natural and inherent trait; however, it is also a divine gift and an ongoing task acquired through much effort and dialogue. Freedom is never solitary but always social. As we stated after the tragedy of September 11 on the site of “ground zero” in New York City: “On this planet created by God for us all, there is room for us all.”

The Ecumenical Patriarchate has historically assumed a pioneering role in establishing and encouraging theological

dialogues with other Christian confessions and religious deliberations with other faith communities. We consider it true to the Orthodox tradition – despite the fact that we often face severe criticism and slander – diligently and deliberately to avoid any form of propaganda or proselytism. What we seek at all times is honest encounter and humble engagement with every human being as our neighbor. After all, the identity of our Church as “ecumenical” implies an opening of windows to other churches and religions. Surely this is an essential feature of relating “free worship” to “breathing.”

Finally, the third dimension that has guided our tenure is the appreciation of the beauty of God’s creation. This is why we have perceived and proclaimed the intimate connection between the natural environment and freedom of worship; for “the heavens declare the glory of God.” (LXX Psalms 18.1) Our inter-relationship as human beings not only embraces all our fellow humans but also extends to the entire created order. Humankind and the natural world comprise a seamless garment, which we can perceive when we open the eyes of our heart to the beauty of the world as created by God, who “saw everything that He had made and, behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1.31), altogether beautiful. There is a cosmic aspect to freedom of worship; in the seventh century, St. Maximus the Confessor spoke of “cosmic liturgy.”

We have persistently emphasized that the roots of the so-called “ecological crisis” are not primarily economic or technological, but spiritual and ethical. The crisis lies not so much in the environment itself, but in our awareness and treatment of our planet’s resources. Therefore, there is a direct link between the way we relate to the creation and the way we worship God. The world is nothing less than a gift of God and a sacrament of divine presence.

Dear friends, none of us has the right to withhold the fundamental birthright and innate prerogative of every human being to worship freely. To stifle religious freedom is to deny human life. For, to worship freely is to breathe. May God bless you all. – Website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate May 12.

THE HOLY COMMUNITY OF MOUNT ATHOS, THE MONASTIC REPUBLIC IN NORTHERN GREECE, COMPLAINED ON MAY 15 ABOUT THE “UNBEARABLE” TAXATION OF ITS PROPERTIES ACROSS Greece and said that some monasteries

might be forced to close down if authorities continue to impose higher taxes.

The monks’ revenue “is just about sufficient to cover repairs to buildings, their basic daily needs and food and lodgings for visitors,” the community said in a statement issued after its members convened to discuss the matter.

The taxation of the properties owned by the monastic community repeals the “special institutional treatment” that had been reserved for it, the monks said. They argued that this special status should continue to apply otherwise several monasteries will be unable to keep operating, adding that the monks had made a significant contribution to society over the years, by accommodating refugees displaced following the expulsion of the Greek population from Asia Minor in 1922, for example. – *KED*, May 15.

IN PREPARATION FOR THE 16TH SESSION OF THE LUTHERAN-ORTHODOX JOINT COMMISSION, THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE MET IN LONDON, GREAT BRITAIN, FROM 5-10 MAY 2012, under the auspices of His Eminence Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain (Ecumenical Patriarchate). This meeting begins a new phase in the work of this Commission, dealing with the issue of Ministry/Priesthood in the Church.

At its 15th plenary meeting in Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Germany, in June 2011, the Commission decided as the topic for its next preparatory meeting, “The Understanding of Ministry/Priesthood in the light of Holy Scriptures and the early Church.” The meeting in London was to explore this issue and to prepare a draft for the next plenary session.

Representing the Lutheran World Federation at this meeting were: Bishop Dr. Donald McCoid (Co-President), USA; Bishop Prof. Dr. Christoph Klein, Romania; Prof. Dr. Kenneth G. Appold, USA; Prof. Dr. Turid Karlsen Seim, Norway; Rev. Prof. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, France (Consultant); Dr. Jennifer Wasmuth, Germany; Prof. Dr. Joachim Track, Germany (Acting Co-Secretary); and from the Orthodox Church: H. E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima (Co-President); V. Rev. Tertiary Patriarchal Deacon Dr. Theodoros Meimaris (Co-Secretary) and Prof. Dr. Miltiadis Konstantinou (Consultant), from the Ecumenical Patriarchate; V. Rev. Protosyner Prof. Dr. George Dion Dragas, from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem; V. Rev. Archimandrite Dr. Cyril Hovorun, from the

Patriarchate of Moscow; V. Rev. Protosyner Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita, from the Patriarchate of Romania; H.E. Metropolitan Dr. Isaiaos of Tamassos and Oreini and Prof. Dr. Nikolaos Nikolaidis (Consultant), from the Church of Cyprus. V.Rev. Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita and Dr. Jennifer Wasmuth were not able to attend.

First the Committee discussed the understanding of Ministry/Priesthood in the Holy Scriptures. Papers were presented by Prof. Dr. Turid Karlsen Seim and Prof. Dr. Miltiadis Konstantinou. Attention then turned to the Patristic approach to Ministry/Priesthood in the early Church, introduced by papers from H. E. Metropolitan Dr. Isaiaos of Tamassos and Oreini and Prof. Dr. Nikolaos Nikolaidis and Dr. Jennifer Wasmuth (read in absentia).

Discussion of these papers identified areas of agreement between the two traditions on these topics and also a considerable number of open questions and differences. A Statement was drafted which will help the plenary meeting in 2014. In this draft Statement the Committee discussed the approach to Ministry/Priesthood from a Lutheran and an Orthodox understanding.

On Sunday 6 May the Committee attended a Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Kentish Town (London) celebrated by His Grace Bishop Chrysostomos of Kyanea. On Tuesday 8 May the Committee visited the Orthodox Cathedral Church of Agia Sophia, Bayswater. On Wednesday 9 May the members of the Committee were entertained to lunch by His Eminence Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain at the Archbishopric residence. Archbishop Gregorios addressed the Committee, very warmly welcoming the participants and bestowing upon them the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. In his address he referred to the history of the Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Lutherans which goes back to the theological conversations between the Lutheran Theologians of Tübingen and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the 16th century. He emphasized that this is the oldest dialogue between Protestant Churches and the Orthodox Church and expressed his wishes for the good continuation of the Dialogue. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima expressed his profound gratitude to His Eminence Gregorios for his gracious and rich hospitality, wishing that God may grant him many years in his arch-episcopate in good health

servicing with devotion and faithfulness the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Committee, during its stay in London, experienced the warm hospitality of several Orthodox parishes in London, such as those of St. Nicholas in Shepherds Bush, of the Mother of God in Camberwell and of the Mother of God in Wood Green, warmly welcomed by His Grace Bishop Athanasios of Tropaeou.

It was announced that Bishop Donald McCoid will be retiring from the Dialogue. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima expressed on behalf of the whole Committee his gratitude and great appreciation to Bishop McCoid for the long years of close collaboration, friendship and Christian fellowship.

The next preparatory meeting will be hosted by the Lutheran World Federation between 24 and 29 May 2013 in a place to be determined at a later stage and will deal with a) the Lutheran understanding of Ministry/Priesthood during the period of the Reformation and b) apostolic succession and ordination from a historical, patristic and canonical point of view. -- London, 9 May 2012. Website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

ON FEBRUARY 21, ARCHBISHOP DEMETRIOS, CHAIRMAN OF THE ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS OF NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA, SENT A LETTER TO THE US SECRETARY OF STATE, MS. HILLARY CLINTON, REQUESTING THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF JOVAN, the Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje, who has been imprisoned under false accusations by the schismatic organization in F.Y.R. Macedonia.

On December 12, 2011, while attempting to enter the F.Y.R. Macedonia, Archbishop Jovan was arrested on the border in Medzitlija and taken to the "Idrizovo" prison near Skopje. He was sentenced on false charges in 2010 to a prison term, but since the court process was performed in his absence, he has a legal right to request a repeat of the procedure and to be granted a new court hearing in which he can defend himself. He was also arrested on November 16, 2010, at the Bulgarian border, at the request of the Macedonian bureau of Interpol, with regard to this same court sentence, but the court in Bulgaria released him, holding that the court verdict of F.Y.R. Macedonia was not on account of any guilt in accordance with criminal law, but rather on account of persecution for religious reasons,

a persecution which the Archbishop has undergone for nine years.

Archbishop Demetrios of America, addressing the Secretary of State "in the name of the 65 Hierarchs who are part of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America," mentioned the unfortunate situation of the Archbishop of Ohrid and added that "his arrest has a history of several years, from the time the schismatic church of FYROM (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) started persecuting Jovan, the canonical Archbishop of Ohrid." Moreover, he pointed out that "the church of the FYROM is not recognized by any of the canonical Orthodox Churches throughout the world."

As Jovan was unjustly imprisoned while attempting to fulfill his religious obligations, Archbishop Demetrios has asked the United States government, in accordance with its long history of protecting religious freedom, to intercede for him and thereby secure his release. -- Assembly of Bishops Press Release, May 1.

HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP DEMETRIOS OF AMERICA NOTED WITH GREAT SADNESS THE FALLING ASLEEP IN THE LORD OF METROPOLITAN CONSTANTINE OF IRINOUPOLIS, PRIMATE OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE USA, today, May 21, 2012, at the age of 76.

Archbishop Demetrios in his letter of condolence to Archbishop Antony of Ierapolis, Bishop Daniel of Pamphilon and to the clergy and faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, wrote:

"As the Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and on behalf of the Holy Eparchial Synod and the Clergy and Lay Faithful of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, I am offering our profound condolences on the falling asleep in the Lord of the most blessed First Hierarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, the deeply beloved and respected late Metropolitan Constantine of Irinoupolis. The passing of the Metropolitan is a deeply felt wound not only for the pious Ukrainian people, but for all Orthodox Christians who have admired his saintly and wise pastoral stewardship of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. His lifetime of exceptional leadership will live on in the hearts and minds of all Orthodox who were privileged to know his ministry.

As we, and all the members of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops

of North and Central America, remember you in this time of grief and mourning, we shall also offer our fervent supplications to God for His great servant Metropolitan Constantine of Irinoupolis, that he may find the reward of "the faithful and wise steward" that he most surely was, having fought the good fight for the forty years of his archpastoral ministry, and that he may rest in the blessed hope of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the memory of Metropolitan Constantine, this exceptional leader of the Church, be eternal."

According to a Press Release from the Office of Public Relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, Metropolitan Constantine was stricken with a serious illness just a few weeks ago and was released only three days ago from a local Pittsburgh hospital, which enabled him to participate in the celebration of his 40th anniversary of Archpastoral ministry among the faithful of the Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA. This celebration took place at the Dormition of the Mother of God Ukrainian Orthodox Church in McKees Rocks, Pa. with the presence of his brother Ukrainian Orthodox hierarchs and visiting bishops of other Orthodox jurisdictions, his family from the United States and his beloved spiritual children, the clergy and faithful of the UOC of the USA, South America and Europe. -- Press Release, Greek Archdiocese, May 21.

A HISTORIC FACE-TO-FACE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN OF THE ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS OF NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA was organized by the Secretariat's Coordinator for Committees, Bishop Maxim, and was held on May 30 at the Metropolia Center of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, South Bound Brook, N.J. It was hosted by Archbishop Antony. Since much of the work of the Assembly of Bishops falls within the purview of its thirteen committees, the success of these committees is essential for the success of the Assembly as a whole.

Ten bishops were present at this meeting, including the Assembly Chairman, Archbishop Demetrios, Archbishop Antony, Archbishop Nicolae, Metropolitan Joseph, Metropolitan Methodius, Bishop Andonios, Bishop Daniel, Bishop George, Bishop Maxim, and Bishop Thomas. Also in attendance were liaisons from the Secretariat to the committees: Fr

Mark Arey, Fr Nicholas Ceko, Protodeacon Peter Danilchick, and Attorney Eric Namee.

Opening remarks were offered by Archbishop Demetrios. His Eminence thanked all present for the diligent work of the Committees and the Secretariat. He mentioned the significant differences between the Assembly of Bishops and SCOBA – especially the involvement of all the bishops in the Assembly’s work. The critical and important fact of the work of the committees is that all bishops are working together, assisted by the clergy and lay consultants, with cooperation being number one on the agenda. His Eminence encouraged all to start in a pragmatic way, examining admittedly thorny and difficult issues, but being productive and taking a proper perspective on the future.

The major task of the day was the review of reports for each of the committees. Most of the committees have met in person and/or via teleconference among the hierarchical members and with their consultants. Considerable progress has been made on many fronts, ranging from development of a sound financial base for the Assembly’s work, through the creation of a canonical registry of all parishes and clergy, the documenting of clergy issues and pastoral practices, the initiation of canonical regional planning, to the examination of different approaches to youth work and monastic communities. Particular emphasis was placed by His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios, upon the importance of this foundational work that will be absolutely necessary to develop a plan for the canonical organization of the Orthodox Church in this country.

Plans for the upcoming Assembly III to be held in Chicago in September 2012 were discussed. The work of the committees, together with their proposed action items and associated issues, will be presented to the Assembly at that time. – Assembly Press Release, May 30.

WITH ALL CEREMONY, ON THURSDAY 31ST MAY 2012, HIS HOLINESS THEODOROS II, POPE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA, ARRIVED IN BOTSWANA, on a visit in the framework of which he will also officiate at the official Enthronement of the first Orthodox Bishop of the newly-established Holy Diocese of Botswana, His Eminence Gennadios.

His Holiness was welcomed at the airport in the capital Gaborone, by His Eminence Gennadios, the Director of Pro-

tolocol and International Co-operation Europe and the Americas, Mrs C. Tshenolo Modise, the Honorary Consul of Botswana in Athens Mr Nektarios Polychroniou, clergy and other dignitaries. His Holiness was accompanied by His Eminence George, Metropolitan of Accra, representative of His Holiness in Athens.

On the afternoon of the same day, His Beatitude met with His Excellency the President of the Republic of Botswana Lieutenant General Seretse Khama Ian Khama. His Holiness awarded the President the Great Cross of St Mark with a Star, as is usual for leaders of countries and great personalities. He spoke with him about the work of the Patriarchate and at the same time asked for special recognition of the Orthodox Church by the Government, as one of the most ancient churches, so that they will not need the renewal of their legal status in the country.

He also asked for state land in the capital Gaborone, in order to erect an International Cultural Centre, which will unite Botswana, the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa and Greece. He then thanked His Excellency the President for the support of his Government both for the newly-established Diocese as well as for His Eminence Gennadios, and asked the President to continue to support the work being done.

After the meeting, His Holiness spoke to the media of Botswana where, in answering questions, he spoke particularly of the humanistic efforts of the Patriarchate and the activities it has undertaken.

That night, he met with His Excellency the Minister of Health of the Republic of Botswana and they discussed issues regarding cooperation between Botswana, the Patriarchate and Greece on health matters. – Press Release, Patriarchate of Alexandria, May 31.

THEIR HOLINESSES AND BEATITUDES THE PATRIARCHS OF SYRIA ISSUED THIS STATEMENT IN DAMASCUS ON MAY 18:

We: Ignatius IV Hazim, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, and Gregorios III Laham, Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, of Alexandria and Jerusalem, condemn the cowardly criminal act that took place in the Qazaz district of Damascus on the morning of Thursday, 10 May 2012, and condemn all acts of terrorism that have targeted different regions of the be-

loved Syrian land, claiming the lives of many innocent victims and wounding both civilians and military personnel, the children of this great nation.

In view of this grievous loss, we pray to God to heal the wounds of Syria and Syrians, and to restore the children of the one homeland to one another in love, openness and reconciliation, tolerance, mutual assistance and wisdom, preferring always the interest of the country to any other interest, distancing themselves from violence in all its forms, aiming for the good of our beloved country and building it again on the basis of civilized, humane, firm justice and good citizenship, co-existence and peaceful freedom of expression; all things that are related to serving the nation and its citizens.

With one mouth and one heart we raise our prayer to Almighty God to give rest to the souls of the homeland’s martyrs, comfort the hearts of the bereaved, preserve Syria and bring it to a haven of safety, peace, sovereignty and prosperity. In a spirit of pastoral responsibility we call on all the children of this country, both Muslims and Christians, to join us in prayer to Almighty God to protect Syrians from all danger and harm, trusting in the Lord’s saying to us: “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

May the name of the Lord be forever blessed. Amen.

ON 7 MAY 2012, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA CELEBRATED A PRAYER SERVICE ON THE OCCASION OF VLADIMIR PUTIN’S INAUGURATION AS PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church met the Russian President and his wife at the entrance to the Cathedral of the Annunciation.

After the litany, during which a special prayer was lifted up for Russian President Vladimir Putin, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill said a prayer for the head of the Russian state to govern the country in peace and lead it to prosperity.

The text of the prayer service on the occasion of a Russian President’s inauguration was written in the years of His Holiness Patriarch Aleksy II’s primatial ministry. The ever-memorable Primate of the Russian Church led the prayer service three times – in 2000, 2004, and 2008.

After the service, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill addressed Vladimir Putin with the greeting speech, saying in particular: “Vladimir Vladimirovich, I would

like to wholeheartedly congratulate you on the election, as the majority of our people have elected you the President of the Russian Federation consciously, rationally, and according to their free will. Today in this old Kremlin, where many of your pious predecessors heard prayerful exhortations to serve the Motherland, we prayed zealously to God to grant His grace to you and to our country, to give you spiritual and physical strength, wisdom, and all that a man who is in charge of the life and well-being of millions of people needs.

The legitimacy of a president is based on people's confidence, and you enjoy this confidence. It means that the president's paramount goal is to serve people. To make the service a success one ought to hear the voice of the people. It is not easy. The people's voice can be drowned. It can be stifled by the voices of some well organized groups or individuals who are often willing to identify their own opinion with the people's opinion. The ability to distinguish between spirits (1 Cor 12:10) and to hear the voice of the people guarantees successful service by the head of state. Today we have been praying for your ability in hearing the voice of the people to grow day by day for the indubitable benefit of our Motherland and of all our people.

Any success is made up of many factors. These are personal qualities, education, and experience. But there is something else, what people for the lack of rational explanation call "luck," word we do not use in the Church. Nobody knows what luck is. There is no rational description of this word. It is a kind of a gap between the efforts a man makes and an actual result. We use another word for describing this unknown space. We call it God's help. And today we have been praying to God to grant you His gracious and almighty help. We believe that Divine grace combined with human effort will enable you to do much good in your service to the people."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church presented the President with the old "Lovingkindness" icon of the Mother of God.

Praying at the service were Metropolitan Juvenaly of Krutitsy and Kolomna; Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; and Archbishop Yevgeny of Vereya, chairman of the Synodal Education Committee.

Concelebrating with His Holiness

Patriarch Kirill were Archpriest Vladimir Divakov, the Patriarch's secretary for Moscow, and Archpriest Mikhail Ryzantsev, a sacristan of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Singing at the prayer service was the Choir of the Moscow Sretensky Stavropegic Monastery, conducted by Nikon Zhila.

Earlier that day His Holiness Patriarch Kirill attended the solemn ceremony of Vladimir Putin's inauguration as President of the Russian Federation in the Grand Kremlin Palace. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, May 7.

ON 8 MAY 2012, THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH HELD ITS REGULAR SESSION IN THE SYNODAL HALL OF THE KIEV METROPOLIA UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF HIS BEATITUDE METROPOLITAN VLADIMIR OF KIEV AND ALL UKRAINE.

The members of the Synod thanked God for the recovery of Metropolitan Vladimir who returned to his post of chairman of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. A number of decisions of the Holy Synod, taken while His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir was ill, were suspended.

The Holy Synod appointed Archbishop Antony of Borispol chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and a permanent member of the Holy Synod. Archbishop Antony was released from his duties as chairman of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's Department for External Church Relations. Metropolitan Lazar of Simferopol and Crimea was also appointed a permanent member of the Synod.

Archbishop Mitrofan of Belaya Tserkov and Boguslav was released from his duties as the chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and appointed chairman of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's Department for External Church Relations. He remains a permanent member of the Holy Synod.

Approved at the session was a program for the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Kharkov Bishops' Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the 20th anniversary of His Beatitude Vladimir's ministry as Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine. The decision was also made to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the finding of the holy relics of Hieromartyr Vladimir (Bogoyavlensky, died in 1918) and the 20th anniversary of the celebration of the Synaxis of the New Martyrs and Confessors who had suffered for Christ under the ungodly regime in the

20th century.

The Holy Synod entrusted an ad hoc commission with working out a document which would express the position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on various problems of social life in Ukraine, for instance, on the implementation of the principles of juvenile justice and on the propagation of homosexual relationships. The members of the Synod requested His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir to inform the Ukrainian authorities about the concern of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on these matters.

The decision was taken to support a draft law on amendments to certain laws of Ukraine, relating to the transfer of cultural heritage sites to religious organizations.

The Holy Synod canonized hegumeness Smaragda (Onishchenko, died in 1935) and schema-monk Ilia (Ganzhi, died in 1946) as locally venerated saints, and fixed the day of the celebration of the Podolsk icon of the Mother of God and the commemoration day of St Feofan of Rykhly.

The Holy Synod has also taken decisions on the life of dioceses and monasteries of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, May 10.

ON 8 MAY 2012, THE FIRST JOINT MEETING OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF SWITZERLAND (ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH) AND THE ASSEMBLY OF ORTHODOX BISHOPS IN SWITZERLAND (OBAS) TOOK PLACE IN FRIBOURG.

This meeting is a milestone event in the dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in the territory of the Swiss Confederation. The Orthodox and Catholic hierarchs used the opportunity to share their opinions on topical problems and to develop constructive relations.

Among the participants in the meeting were Bishop Nestor of Korsun, administrator of the Russian Orthodox Church's parishes in Switzerland, and Archbishop Michael of Geneva and Western Europe (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia), website of the Korsun diocese reports.

After the meeting, Archbishop Antonio Mennini, the Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain and the former Apostolic Nuncio to the Russian Federation, was presented with the high "Silver Rose of St Nicholas" award for his contribution to ecclesial communion. – Press Release,

Moscow Patriarchate, May 16.

THE 17TH OF MAY, 2012, MARKED THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ACT OF CANONICAL COMMUNION BETWEEN THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE AND THE RUSSIAN CHURCH OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA. ON THAT AUSPICIOUS DAY, Archbishop Justinian of Naro-Fominsk, administrator of the Patriarchal Parishes in the USA celebrated the Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas's in New York. Among his concelebrants were Bishops George of Mayfield and Jerome of Manhattan, vicars of the Diocese of Eastern America of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, as well as an assembly of clergy of the Patriarchal Parishes in the USA and the Russian Church Outside Russia.

During the liturgy, special prayers of thanksgiving were lifted up for the Lord's great mercy expressed in the signing of the Act of restoration of canonical communion within the Local Russian Orthodox Church. The archpastors, clergy and lay people commemorated the late Patriarch Aleksy II and Metropolitan Laurus who had signed the Act.

Father Nikodim (Balyasnikov) read out a Message from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to the Archpastors, Pastors, Deacons, Monastics and All the Faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the Act of Canonical Communion.

After the liturgy Archbishop Justinian addressed the congregation. He stressed in particular that 'for Christians it should be characteristic to love one another and to seek unity. For through this people can see how Christian we are'.

'Today we hold dear the fact that to honor the first jubilee, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion have given their blessing upon our celebration of the Liturgy in this old and prayerful cathedral. Yesterday we said the Office for the Dead at the grave of Metropolitan Laurus, and our hearts rejoiced with not noisy but quiet joy over our being together, for God has no dead', he said.

Mr. Yumashev congratulated the clergy and laity, saying in particular, 'The 5th anniversary of the reunification between the Russian Church Outside Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate, which we celebrated today, can be rightly described as historic. It is of epoch-making importance not only for the spiritual children of the Russian Orthodox Church but also

for our whole Motherland... Today's celebration would be impossible if the clergy and faithful of the Russian Church both inside and outside Russia had not found strength, wisdom and mutual love to restore canonical unity'.

The service was concluded with the singing of 'Many Years of Life' to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, Metropolitan Hilarion the First Hierarch of the Russian Church Outside Russia, to the bishops, priests and the faithful of the Russian Church who are in Russia and in diaspora.

The festive fellowship continued at the reception given at the refectory of St. Nicholas's, the website of the Patriarchal Parishes in the USA has reported. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, May 18.

ON 20 MAY 2012, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA MET WITH METROPOLITAN HILARION OF EASTERN AMERICA AND NEW YORK, HIERARCHS AND CLERICS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA (ROCOR) and with members of the working group for discussing issues of strengthening church unity.

In his address at the opening, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill underscored that the five years that had passed since the signing of the Act of Canonical Communion between the Moscow Patriarchate and the ROCOR, were very important for the Church. Many people who thought reunification was a dangerous experiment now believe in unity, and "today we can say that it is not an experiment, but the real life of our Church," His Holiness said.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church drew the attention of the audience to the fact that during the last five years the Russian Church has refrained from any hasty steps in the matter of deepening the achieved unity.

As for those who have not accepted unity and are still separated, His Holiness stated that there were a small number of them in the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church, yet it remains a problem and causes pain. He emphasized that the Russian Church is willing to do anything possible to help settle the problem thus alleviating the pain.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Eastern America and New York thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for consideration shown to the problems of the Russian Abroad. He confirmed that the separated communities constitute a small part of the

ROCOR.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, presented a report on the activities of the working group for discussion of the issues of strengthening church unity, noting the constructive and kind nature of the work.

The participants in the meeting exchanged views on the ways to further the consolidation of the Russian Orthodox diaspora. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, May 20.

ON MAY 7, 2012, ON THE EVE OF THE NAME DAY OF HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA, THE PRIMATE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW SENT A MESSAGE notifying that he was sending an official delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople for the celebrations to be held on the occasion and expressed support for the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church over the attacks of anti-church forces, which have become more frequent. Below is the text of the message.

Your Beatitude and Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia,

Very Beloved and Cherished Brother and Concelebrant of our Humbleness:

Embracing Your honorable Beatitude in a brotherly spirit, we greet you with greatest pleasure.

Mentally coming up to your very beloved and cherished Beatitude on the occasion of your forthcoming Name Day, by this fraternal letter we extend our warm congratulations on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and on our own behalf and inform you that His Eminence Metropolitan Nikitas of Dardanelles, the great ierokirikis of the Holy Great Church Archimandrite Vissarion (Komzias) and Sister Alexia, abbess of the holy Patriarchal stauropegial Ikosifinissa Convent on Pangeo Mountain (northern Greece) have been instructed to represent us at the celebrations on the occasion of this feast of yours.

At the same time, having learnt about the inappropriate and offensive attacks which have been perpetrated against you these days by those who are outside of the church fold and who thus wish to cause troubles in your primatial ministry and to wound the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church that you have served since your youth, we express sympathy to you

and support of our Humbleness and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, ardently praying that the Lord God, through the intercession of your patrons Sts Cyril and Methodius, may strengthen and protect your love, delivering you from the arrows of the evil one, from everything taking place in darkness, from every confusion coming from the one who hates goodness, ordaining you to go through your life and service not tempted by the evil ones.

Hereafter, praying for the good health and long life of Your Beatitude at the helm of the Holy Russian Church, we once again embrace you with the holy kiss and remain with love in the Lord and special respect,

You honorable Beatitude's loving brother in Christ,

+Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, May 21.

A SENIOR RUSSIAN ORTHODOX PRIEST HAS BEEN ATTACKED BY LEFT-WING POLITICIANS AFTER HE CRITICIZED OPPOSITION PARTIES AND CALLED FOR A "STRONG PERSONIFIED CENTRAL POWER" TO GOVERN THE COUNTRY.

"It is increasingly evident from our television screens that Orthodox Christianity is being used to justify the current regime," a Communist Party secretary, Valery Rashkin, told Russia's *Interfax* news agency on 25 May.

"According to its constitution, Russia is a secular state. But the lukewarm attitude shown to our country's basic law by our two leaders is apparently infectious. It is prompting Russian Orthodox hierarchs to claim a key role in the socio-political life of our country, which is both multi-ethnic and multi-faith, and contains many atheists too," he said.

Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, chair of the church's department for church-society relations, told Russia's *Sobesednik* weekly on 24 May that opposition groups had "nothing to offer" and would not persuade ordinary people to "accept their principles."

Chaplin was also criticized by Sergei Udaltsov, leader of Russia's Left Front party, who accused him of joining a propaganda campaign by President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party.

"Chaplin is working ... to discredit and smear the civil movement and opposition," Udaltsov told *Interfax* on 25 May.

The Orthodox Church has been widely criticized this year for alleged close

links with Putin, whose 4 March election to a third term as head of state, after four years as Russian premier, was contested in nationwide street protests.

It was the latest of many controversial statements by the 44-year-old archpriest, who last November defended his country's right to control "negative tendencies" from abroad by restricting religious freedom.

Speaking on 17 May at Moscow's St. Tikhon Orthodox University, he said Western society was dominated by "material benefits, pride, supercilious self-fulfillment and pluralism," which contradicted Gospel ideals, and vowed his own church would "open doors to a better life" for Europe.

Messages of congratulation from Patriarch Kirill I to new members of the Russian government were posted on 25 May on the Moscow Patriarchate's website.

In a 24 May telegram, Putin paid tribute to Kirill's "high reputation in Russia and abroad," and praised the Orthodox church for performing an "educational and social mission" with the state for the "moral status and development of society." – Jonathan Luxmoore for *ENI*, May 25.

ON MAY 25, 2012, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA MET WITH HIS BEATITUDE ARCHBISHOP IERONYMOS OF ATHENS AND ALL GREECE AND HIS DELEGATION AT THE PATRIARCHAL RESIDENCE IN ST. DANIEL'S MONASTERY IN MOSCOW.

Addressing the guests, Patriarch Kirill said he was glad to welcome His Beatitude Ieronymos and his retinue to the administrative and spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox Church with its official residence of the Patriarch and the Synod. His Holiness related to the Greek delegation the graphic and dramatic history of the Monastery of St. Daniel, the oldest cloister in Moscow, which was closed in the 20th century during the persecution for faith and re-opened before the celebrations on the occasion of the Millennium of the Baptism of Russia.

'I rejoice in the opportunity to discuss with you and the most reverend bishops who accompany you our bilateral cooperation and interaction', Patriarch Kirill said and dwelt upon cooperation in social service as one of the aspects of these relations.

'We take close to our hearts the mis-

fortune that has fallen upon the lot of the Greek people and believe that the Church should live up to the principle clearly stated by St Paul: 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it' (1 Cor. 12:26). The Orthodox solidarity should also be extended to difficult circumstances. Our country, throughout her history including in the 20th century, has experienced great many a hardship. We know what a deep economic crisis and complete collapse of the economy are. In the 90s we went through this trial and know that crises involve not only a decline in people's living conditions but often also illnesses and deaths, loss of jobs and houses and disintegration of families. We experienced all this in the recent past', he said.

His Holiness Kirill noted that thanks to the timely efforts made by the Russian leaders during the crisis which affected the whole world and could affect Russia as well, it became possible to maintain people's standards of life. 'We managed to avoid such tragic consequences as happened in many other countries, though the rate of economic development decreased of course and the problem of poverty remained as acute as it was before. And today the Russian Orthodox Church seeks to develop her social service in order to support those in need, especially the homeless, the elderly and orphans and those whose salary or allowance is below the subsistence level. Our Church has no such sources of income as other Churches in Europe have: we have no real estate that could bring in return or capital stock. The Russian Church carries out her work using the donations of the flock alone. Of course, the size of funds thus received cannot be guaranteed as it is very much dependent on people's wellbeing and their readiness to donate for a good cause. But by God's mercy we can see that people do respond to an appeal for aid in carrying out social programs', he stated.

Patriarch Kirill recalled that the Russian Church announced a fund-raising drive for those who were most affected by the economic crisis in fraternal Greece and gave a high appraisal of the efforts taken by the Church of Greece to help those in need. 'You are feeding the hungry and supporting those who have lost their homes and all this happens at a time when the Orthodox Church of Greece herself is in straitened financial circumstances. I have called upon our faithful to share a part of the burden that oppresses your Church today; a fund-raising campaign has been held to support your social work

to help victims of the crisis. We have raised 17 million rubles. We will transfer these funds to you and will continue supporting your social programs as much as we can', he said.

His Holiness Kirill also spoke about the importance of joint efforts in the area of pilgrimage as more and more Russians and people from other countries under the canonical jurisdiction of the Russian Church, including Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, come to Greece and her holy places today and an increasing number of Greeks come to Russia to venerate the shrines of the Russian Church.

His Beatitude Ieronymos thanked Patriarch Kirill for the warm welcome and fraternal hospitality, making a special mention of the deep impression he received from the celebrations held on the eve of the Day of Slavic Literature and Culture including the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of the Assumption, procession with the cross and thanksgiving in Red Square in the presence of thousands of people and from his meeting with the leaders of the country as well as from the festive concert given at the State Kremlin Palace.

'Your country has experienced many troubles in her history. The same can be said about us. You have told us how your people endured the hardships of the 90s. Today, it seems to be our turn. I would like to note that we keep presence of mind and hold our own for we are strengthened by our Orthodox faith and trust in God. Thanks to this, we can survive the crisis', he said.

His Beatitude Ieronymos also noted that spiritual kinship and mutual understanding was a characteristic feature of relations between the Russian and Greek nations. 'Respect and love for your people was manifested by the fact that many representatives of our country, both clergy and ordinary people used to come to Russia to serve her', he said, adding that the memory of the Russians' assistance to the Greeks in their struggle for freedom is alive to this day.

The primate of the Church of Greece, in solidarity with Patriarch Kirill, expressed the conviction that the words of St. Paul 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it' are especially relevant today for the Orthodox world. 'We are very much moved by the news that a fundraising campaign has been announced in Russia for the suffering brothers in Greece. We will report it to the next session of the Greek Church's Synod and to

all the Greeks', he said.

In the course of the talk, a broad range of issues was discussed concerning further development of bilateral church relations in various areas including social service, pilgrimage, the bringing of shrines for veneration, theological education, dialogue on church-society and church-state relations and information work, as well as topical issues of pan-Orthodox cooperation.

In the conclusion of the meeting, Patriarch Kirill presented the members of the Greek delegation with decorations of the Russian Orthodox Church. His Beatitude Ieronymos was awarded the Order of St. Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles.

Patriarch Kirill also presented Archbishop Ieronymos with a bishop's crozier as a token of the meeting. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, May 25.

ON MAY 26, 2012, DURING HIS TRIP TO ST. PETERSBURG, HIS BEATITUDE ARCHBISHOP IERONYMOS OF ATHENS AND ALL GREECE AND HIS RETINUE VISITED ST. PETERSBURG THEOLOGICAL ACADEMY AND SEMINARY.

At the academy entrance, His Beatitude was welcomed by the rector, Bishop Ambrose of Gatchina, with professors and students. His Beatitude came to the academy's Chapel of St. John the Theologian in which he venerated the revered Icon of the Sign of the Theotokos of the imperial village.

Then a solemn act took place at the academy grand hall on the occasion of the visit of the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church. Speaking on behalf of professors and students, Bishop Ambrose greeted His Beatitude Ieronymos and his delegation, saying, 'Since the re-opening of the Leningrad theological schools in 1946 and especially under Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov), delegations of the Church of Greece have become frequent guests of the Academy. During the visit of your predecessor, His Beatitude Archbishop Christodoulos, in May 2001, he met with our professors and students. Prof. Christos Yannaras, a famous philosopher and theologian, delivered a lecture here in May 2010'.

Bishop Ambrose focused on the problem of students' exchanges for in-depth training. 'In recent years, there have been regular arrivals of Greek students for a study course in the Academy', he stated.

Then Archbishop Ieronymos addressed the faculty and students. 'Thinking about the incredible influence of the

Holy Russian Church on all spheres of national, political, religious and social life in Great Russia, I as Primate of the apostolic autocephalous Church of Greece and simply a person feel strong excitement. This excitement grows ever stronger now as I am in the sacred walls of St. Petersburg Theological Academy, which in the 19th century and the early 20th century became alma mater for many outstanding Greek theologians and left an indelible imprint on the destiny of Orthodox theology in the period of dangerous ideological and religious upheavals in the life of Orthodox nations. In this sense, I consider it my highest duty to speak with appropriate respect about the tireless and manifold service of the Holy and Great Church of Christ both for the spiritual re-birth of the great Russian people and for the consolidation of indissoluble spiritual kinship which determined the spiritual relations between our nations arising from the sacred baptismal waters and continuing for some ten centuries from 860 to 2012 not only in happy but also in hard times'.

Reflecting on the importance of theology for the historical development of the Church's mission among Orthodox nations, His Beatitude Ieronymos spoke in detail about the close interconnectedness of ecclesiology and mysteriology including the teaching on the Eucharist in Orthodox theology. He pointed to a weakening of this link in the West, which led to grave consequences for the Western Church.

'It is generally recognized that Orthodox theology of the new time is indebted in many ways to the Theological Academies in Russia, especially the one in St. Petersburg, since, on one hand, they have manifested an incredible research zeal in the situation of new realities by putting in the forefront in all areas of the Church's spiritual mission the fundamental theological principles of patristic theology, while, on the other, assuming the heavy burden of promoting constructive dialogue between Orthodox theology and major philosophical schools of the Western Christendom; this dialogue is important for the reduction of extreme tendencies in ideology and modernism', he added.

According to His Beatitude, the present task of Orthodox theology is not limited to the resumption of patristic tradition. It extends beyond it to include the use of this tradition for giving a more authoritative answer to today's problems of humanity.

After his address, His Beatitude Ier-

onymos answered questions from the audience.

In continuation of the remarkable event, the male and mixed choirs of St. Petersburg Theological Schools sang hymns in Greek and Russian. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, May 27.

ON MAY 29, 2012, UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN KAZAKHSTAN'S CAPITAL ASTANA, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA PROCEEDED TO THE PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE 'AK-ORDA' FOR A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT N. NAZARBAEV.

Warmly welcoming His Holiness, President Nazarbaev said that Patriarch Kirill's first official visit to his country in January 2010 was very memorable for him. It was a special honor for him to be decorated with the Russian Orthodox Order of Glory and Honor.

Mr. Nazarbaev expressed the conviction that the participation of the Primate of the Russian Church in the 4th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions to take place next day in Astana raised the authority of the forum and its importance as a unique platform for dialogue.

'The lofty mission of Orthodoxy for strengthening traditional moral values is extremely important for us', he said. Today it is very important to preserve traditions in society and this can be done only by the religions which have strengthened people's faith and spirituality for centuries.

Patriarch Kirill said in response that his visits to Kazakhstan always were a great joy for him and he had good memories of the liturgies he celebrated in Alma-Ata and Astana during his first visit to the country as Primate of the Russian Church.

'I am glad that our agreements to establish a Metropolia have been realized. Now with the establishment of a Metropolia the face of Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan has changed. This gives a greater authority to the presence of Orthodoxy and, most importantly, corresponds to the historical role of Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan because the two traditional religions, Islam and Orthodoxy, have always been peaceful neighbors in this land', Patriarch Kirill said.

They discussed various aspects of the life of Orthodox believers in Kazakhstan in the light of the fact that a Metropolia has been established in the country. Patriarch Kirill thanked President Nazarbaev for the support the state gave to the Rus-

sian Orthodox Church including in constructing a building of the Synod of Kazakhstan Metropolia and the Sts Cyril and Methodius Religious and Cultural Center.

Patriarch Kirill and President Nazarbaev also dealt with the agenda of the forthcoming 4th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. According to His Holiness, the Russian Orthodox Church attached special importance to the opportunities for dialogue opening up for religious leaders and representatives of world religious traditions by the international forum, which has been conducted under the aegis of the President of Kazakhstan for many years.

After the meeting Patriarch Kirill answered questions from journalists, the Patriarchal Press Service reported. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, May 29.

THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY OF BISHOPS OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH TOOK PLACE AT THE SERBIAN PATRIARCHATE IN BELGRADE MAY 15-23, UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF HIS HOLINESS SERBIAN PATRIARCH IRINEJ. Participating in the Assembly were all the diocesan hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, with the exception of His Beatitude Archbishop of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skopje Jovan who is unjustly imprisoned in the Skoplje prison of Idrizovo and His Grace Bishop Chrysostom of Bihac and Petrovac.

The Assembly began its work with the joint serving of the hierarchical Divine Liturgy in the Holy Archangel Michael Cathedral in Belgrade, led by Serbian Patriarch Irinej, and invoked the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and wisdom, in Whom the Church lives and always works, especially in the assemblies of its bishops. During the liturgy Bishop Irinej of Backa, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Irinej, addressed the faithful and explained the institution of the assembly of bishops as an expression of the essential conciliar nature of the Church. After the Divine Liturgy, at the beginning of the first session, the president of the Assembly, His Holiness Patriarch Irinej, addressed some of the current issues in the life and mission of the Church in our time, a time of great temptation here and throughout the world, but also a time of hope and opportunity for spiritual renewal.

During this year's Assembly of Bishops a concelebration of the hierarchical Divine Liturgy again took place on Saturday, May 19th, the feast day of the Trans-

lation of the Relics of St. Sava, at the St. Sava Church in Vracar. The liturgical and spiritual life of the Church was enriched by the addition of two Hieromartyrs and forty student-martyrs who suffered in 1688 in Momisici (Podgorica). Their feast day has been designated to be the day the Church commemorates the Holy Martyrs of Sebaste from Asia Minor (a feast day commonly known as Mladenci) of which the Holy Synod will officially inform all the local Orthodox Churches so that they might enter their names in their service books and calendars. The Assembly also determined that the feast day of St. Nikodim, Archbishop of Pec, will be on May 12/25 and not 11/24 as it has thus far been.

The Assembly confirmed the determination of our local Church to honor and celebrate during next year with church services and appropriate spiritual-cultural manifestations a momentous anniversary of Christianity and culture – 1700-year anniversary of the Edict of Milan of Emperor Constantine (313-2013), a document of freedom of faith and conscience of outstanding significance, relevant even today not only from an historical but also an existential aspect. The anniversary will be commemorated in all dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church, while the central celebration will be held in Nis, the birthplace of Emperor Constantine, and in Belgrade. All Patriarchs from the Orthodox Churches and other representatives of the Orthodox Churches will be invited to take part in the commemoration of this jubilee, as will other distinguished individuals from world Orthodoxy (bishops, theologians, artists...), a delegation of heterodox Christian churches and church communities, Christian and inter-Christian institutions and organizations, as well as monotheistic faith groups, also representatives from the sciences, arts and culture as well as Serbian and foreign distinguished public figures. All preparations and the program itself will be coordinated by the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church and a Sabor committee which will be formed for this purpose.

The Assembly, in the same spirit and direction, confirmed once again its unchanged position regarding the need to intensify, heighten and theologically enrich the current process of preparation for a Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church, to once again call for a pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar consultation, and additional such consultations if the need arises, and to summon this general Coun-

cil at a foreseeable appropriate time with due responsibility, being of course faithful to the divinely-inspired principles of operation of the ecumenical and major local councils of the Church.

The Assembly heard the report of the work of the Holy Synod and the reports of the work of the diocesan bishops and the state of affairs in their dioceses in the past year, and made appropriate decisions. At the joint meeting of the members of the Assembly and the central bodies for the completion of the St. Sava Church on Vracar a discussion ensued and decisions were rendered, having analyzed the reports, regarding everything thus far completed and the forthcoming great task of completing the interior of the church, including the mosaic and fresco work. Having been informed of the relevant facts, the Assembly postponed for a time the restructuring of the largest diocese by population of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Archdiocese of Belgrade-Karlovci, until the necessary preparations and basic infrastructure for the future dioceses on that territory can be completed. For the same reason the Assembly postponed the filling of the newly established diocese of Austria-Switzerland and Buenos Aires with diocesan bishops and extended the mandate of their current administrators. Also, the Assembly requested of Bishop Grigorije of Zahum-Hercegovina that he continue in his position as assistant to Metropolitan Nikolaj of Dabrobosna, in performing archpastoral duties.

The Assembly once again expressed its deep sadness and protested the violations of human rights and religious freedom of the faithful of the Autonomous Archdiocese of Ohrid in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which peaked in the unlawful harassment and arrests of innocent people, with persecutions and acts of violence escalating to such a point that the Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje Jovan has been imprisoned for the sixth time under fabricated charges and was sentenced to two and a half years in prison. The troubling and alarming fact is that all this is occurring at the request of the local schismatic organization which calls itself "The Macedonian Orthodox Church." The schismatic hierarchy is publicly and maliciously, without any repercussions, rejoicing at the judicial-police persecution of the only canonical and generally accepted Church in Macedonia, especially over the re-imprisonment of its first hierarch. Thus she demonstrates how little she cares

about the basic truths and ethical principles of the Christian faith, much less about the sanctity of the unity of the Church. Instead of considering all the protests and appeals that have thus far come from the Orthodox and other Christian churches throughout the world and the criticism they have received from international institutions and organizations because of the political ties and corruption of their judiciary system and the continued violations of human rights and religious freedom in their country, the authorities of the Republic of Macedonia, unfortunately, are only increasing their terrorism against the Church in a manner without precedent in the modern world.

The Assembly has followed with particular care and not a little concern the actions of the government of Montenegro which similarly—with somewhat less direct and damaging force, but with a similar course of damaging the mission of the canonical Church in Montenegro and of state sponsorship of Dedic's minor and completely baseless sect—is trampling on the fundamental human rights of Orthodox clergy and faithful. It has not restrained itself even from the completely uncivilized and from a European understanding unprecedented deportation of certain priests only because, allegedly, the Orthodox Church, which is centuries older than either Montenegro or Serbia or any existing state in the Balkans, is not "registered" with the police according to laws dating back to the time of Broz's "democracy." The denial of the very right of the Serbian Orthodox Church to exist in Montenegro, the ambition of certain Montenegrin politicians, although they think like atheists, to decide church matters, to regulate the inner life, structure and relationships within the Orthodox Church, to manipulate through pressure or even outright force the identity of the Church in Montenegro, their open aspiration to make it an instrument of their political way of thinking and to aggressively shape the content of the Church life of Orthodox Christians in Montenegro—all this demonstrates a violation of basic human rights and religious freedom, an active repudiation of the secular, and that means religiously neutral, character of a contemporary state and the abandoning of the democratic principle of separation of church and state, as well as a reintroduction of the historically long-rejected discrimination between first and second-class citizens based on religion or ethnicity. Therefore the Assembly expects the state organs of Montenegro to respect

the existing constitution and laws, including the rights of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other churches and religious associations, inasmuch as this represents their obligations before the international community.

The Assembly is particularly concerned that even so many years after the exodus of the Serbian people from Kosovo and Metohija in 1999 and the March pogrom of 2004, and despite the presence of international forces and the guarantees of the great powers, there is still no agreement on the return and free life of the displaced and refugees. Moreover, they continue to violate Serbian Orthodox shrines, home and property, and the rights of the Serbian community, especially south of the Ibar River. In the context of domestic and international dialogue on the status of the southern Serbian territory, the Assembly believes that the imposition of solutions contrary to United Nations Resolution 1244, the Constitution of Serbia and the norms of international law would only bring about a lasting—and perhaps permanent—crisis and instability, which means human suffering, in an area which has already long been a symbol of division, conflict and suffering. One of the few bright points there is the life and work of the reconstituted Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Prizren, whose citizens, now overwhelmingly of Albanian nationality and Islamic faith, make possible the unmolested work of this significant establishment of the Orthodox Church and the Serbian people. This attitude deserves our respect and gratitude.

The Assembly considers the Church's relations with the governments of Serbia and of Republika Srpska to be generally good, but it expects that the new government of Serbia will correct the mistakes of the outgoing administration concerning the restitution of expropriated property and the status of religious education, that is, catechism and religious instruction as a subject in the public schools, and to expedite the process of including military chaplains in the Serbian Army.

With satisfaction and thanks to God, the Assembly observes that the Serbian Orthodox Church maintains liturgical and canonical relations and cooperation with the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches, but that in this regard there is, unfortunately, one exception. This concerns the uncanonical activity of the episcopate and clergy of the Romanian Orthodox Church on the canonical territory of other Orthodox Churches, including our

own. In our case, certain bishops and clergy from neighboring Romania continue to come to certain cities and towns in Eastern Serbia, that is, the Dioceses of Timok and Branicevo, and carry out priestly activities there without the knowledge or permission of the responsible bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, thus violating the very foundations of Orthodox ecclesiology and canonical order. Because of similar unauthorized activities by representatives of the Romanian Church, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem repeatedly objected most energetically, and eventually broke liturgical and canonical relations with that Church, which is still in effect. The Assembly once again, for who knows how many times, sent a protest to Romanian Patriarch Daniel and his Synod over the uncanonical intrusions into areas under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church and with regret informed them that, to the extent that individuals from the sister Romanian Church do not cease their unbrotherly and uncanonical activities, regardless of whether they are tolerated or sent by her Patriarch or Synod, we will take all appropriate canonical and legal measures to preserve the ancient canonical order and stop the irresponsible disruption of the holy unity between Orthodox Churches and between fraternal peoples, which the Serbian and Romanian peoples have undoubtedly been over the centuries. If these measures do not help, the Assembly will be forced, with deep regret, to follow the example of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. The Assembly Fathers are aware that there are many among the Romanian bishops, clergy and theologians who do not follow the aggressive ethnophyletic course which has occasioned no small disruption in the entire Orthodox world in recent years. Similarly, the Assembly is, as it has been earlier, grateful to the Romanian Church for its correct relations with the administrator of the Temisvar diocese, its clergy and faithful, just as the Serbian Orthodox Church enjoys brotherly relations with the clergy and faithful of the Romanian Church who live in the Serbian part of Banat.

The peace and unity of the Serbian Orthodox Church is being disturbed, in the evaluation of the Assembly, by the monk Artemije, deposed bishop of Raska-Prizren, and his adherents, who are creating a real parasynagogue (unlawful assembly) with all the expressed tendencies of developing into a pure schism and sect. Therefore the Assembly resolved to again call upon the monk Artemije (Radosvalje-

vic) and the former hieromonks, monks and nuns who follow him to return to the Church through repentance from the way of schism, which he himself said he realizes "is a great wound upon the body of the Church, a great sin before God, a sin which even the blood of martyrs cannot wash away," and to give the Holy Synod of Bishops authority to explain this decision by the new canonical offenses of the above named and his ever-deeper plunge into schism: the establishing of "parasynagogues" in the Church by uncanonical, ineffective ordinations and monastic tonsures, by the opening of monasteries and houses of prayer in the dioceses of our Church, and by open slander, lies, curses and accusations against the Holy Assembly of Bishops and the episcopate of the Serbian Orthodox Church of heresy, false ecumenism, rigging of trials, the pronouncing of verdicts without trials, and so forth. If the monk Artemije, former bishop of Raska-Prizren, does not respond to this invitation to return to the Church through repentance and obedience to the decisions of the Holy Assembly of Bishops and the ancient canonical order of the Orthodox Church as quickly as possible, the Assembly will be obliged to take additional canonical measures.

As in all previous years, the Assembly gave great attention to church schools and education. Detailed consideration was given to problems such as seminaries, some of which need to fulfill the standards set for their entry into the Serbian educational system, as well as to institutions of higher education, especially those in the area and in the diaspora. In this context the Assembly learned of a project which may contribute greatly to the quality of theological education of Serbs in America: this is a project called Serbian House at St. Vladimir's Academy, for which the means and conditions for its functioning already exist, so that the process of final agreement and realization of the project is imminent. The Assembly again considered the question of the adequate temporary housing of the Patriarchal archives, a precious treasure of documents, as well as the question of the building of structures for the Archives, Treasury (Museum) and Library of the Patriarchate. A new statute for Covekoljulje [Philanthropy], the charitable foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church, was approved.

The Assembly again supported the House of Karadjordjevic's initiative to bring the earthly remains of the deceased members of the Serbian royal family lo-

cated abroad back and give them an honorable burial in the Karadjordjevic votive church at Oplenac. The Assembly again appealed to the City of Belgrade to consider the possibility of keeping the bones of the Serbian, American and world giant of science, Nikola Tesla, on the St. Sava plateau or, eventually, in the crypt of the St. Sava Church on Vracar.

The makeup of the Holy Synod remains the same by decision of the Assembly.

The Assembly expresses its concern over the fact that the Serbian people is experiencing more deaths than births, and that each year it loses the equivalent of the population of a medium-sized city, which testifies to a deep moral failure, to a serious crisis in the family and to a lack of true faith in God among many, although a majority of our people consider themselves believers and are believers, at least in the most basic meaning of the word. Therefore the Assembly appeals to the conscience of parents, educators, government officials and all those who can influence society to do everything possible, despite material shortages, to exalt life among us as the greatest of God's gifts which stands as an alternative to the unconscionable cult of death which has taken root in contemporary western civilization. At the same time the Assembly recommends that all the dioceses of the Serbian Orthodox Church and their affiliated church organizations establish funds for the support of families who have several children, that, in the first place, pastorally and therapeutically, they might prevent the scourge of immorality, drug abuse, pornography and other pathogenic occurrences which threaten from the very core the being, soul and future of the Serbian people and all Christian people who are exposed to the destructive influence of secularism, consumerism, hedonism, individualism, a pseudo-religion which has no concept of a personal God, a false Christianity without Christ as a God-man community, as well as various other ideologies, meaninglessness and hopelessness. The Assembly, for its part, calls all to life and action, through faith, hope and love, for God is Love. — Press Release, Serbian Patriarchate, May 30.

REV. DR OLAV FYKSE TVEIT, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC), BEGAN A FIVE-DAY VISIT TO THE WCC MEMBER CHURCHES IN ROMANIA WITH A CONSULTATION ON 16 MAY AT THE

PATRIARCHAL RESIDENCE IN BUCHAREST. He met with Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church and other leaders from the Orthodox churches.

On 18 and 19 May, Tveit continued his trip with visits to Sibiu, where he met leaders of the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, and to Cluj, where he was received by leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania and the Reformed Church in Romania.

"The position of the churches in Romania is a very strong one. They play an important role in many dimensions of daily life," said Tveit.

"There are many inspiring dimensions of church life in Romania, which are also influencing other trends in Europe. However, a huge problem for the whole society is the migration of highly qualified people to other European countries, which has a deep impact on the churches as well," added Tveit.

A common theme in the various meetings was the solidarity and practical cooperation necessary among WCC member churches for the adequate support of Christian mission and social ministry throughout the nation.

While in Bucharest, the general secretary was formally introduced to Romanian president Traian Basescu.

During his meeting with the president, Tveit spoke about state-church relationships, churches in Romania and the role of the WCC in promoting ecumenical concerns.

Basescu expressed his appreciation for the visit and stressed the significance of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which has always "known how to have good relations with the other churches in Romania."

Tveit also appeared on a theological panel discussion broadcast by Trinitas-TV, the television network of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. – WCC Press Release, May 21.

THE PATRIARCH OF THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH PRESIDED OVER THE BAPTISM OF HUNDREDS OF BABIES IN THE TBILISI CATHEDRAL ON SUNDAY AS PART OF AN EFFORT CREDITED WITH HELPING RAISE THE BIRTH RATE IN THIS FORMER SOVIET NATION.

Patriarch Ilia II has promised to become the godfather of all babies born into Orthodox Christian families who already have two or more children. Since he began the mass baptisms in 2008, he has gained

nearly 11,000 godchildren.

Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili has said the Patriarch deserves much of the credit for the rising birth rate, which in 2010 was 25 percent higher than in 2005. The number of abortions also declined by nearly 50 percent over the same five-year period.

Parents of the 400 babies baptized by an array of priests Sunday said the Patriarch was instrumental in their decision to have a third or fourth child.

"This is a wonderful day for my family," said Tamar Kapanadze, a 33-year-old father of four. "Our fourth son, Lashko, was baptized by the Patriarch himself, and before this he baptized our daughter Liziko. This is why we decided to have a fourth child."

Lamara Georgadze, whose fourth child was among those baptized on Sunday, said she and her husband also answered the Patriarch's call to have more children.

"The Holy Father reminded us all of the importance of increasing the birth rate," she said. "There are too few of us Georgians and therefore this is very important."

Saakashvili has set a goal of increasing Georgia's population from 4.5 million to 5 million by 2015.

Since coming to power in 2004, Saakashvili has focused on modernizing and expanding the economy, attracting foreign investment and pushing for closer ties with the United States and Europe. With Georgia's population aging, he is eager to see a new generation born that could help secure the country's future.

In his annual address to parliament in February, he said the government would give parents a one-time payment the equivalent of about \$600 for a third child and double that amount for a fourth child.

"This will help raise the birth rate," Saakashvili said. "The Patriarch has already taken steps in this direction. We should be thankful to him for continually reminding the Georgian people that we should multiply."

The president and his Dutch wife have two children. -- Misha Dzhindzhikhashvili for AP, May 7.

FOLLOWING TALKS BETWEEN THE AZERBAIJANI AND GEORGIAN PRESIDENTS IN CHICAGO, HEADS OF THE BORDER GUARD SERVICES OF THE TWO COUNTRIES MET ON MAY 20 AND AGREED THAT THE STATUS QUO WOULD BE RESTORED IN THE DISPUTED SECTION OF

THE BORDER IN THE AREA OF DAVID GAREJI MONASTERY COMPLEX, meaning that visitors from Georgia will be able to access all parts of the complex, according to Georgian officials.

Zaza Gogava, head of the Georgian border police, met his Azerbaijani counterpart Elchin Guliyev on the border between the two countries on May 20 to discuss the recent controversy, which was caused after the repositioning of Azerbaijani border guards on May 6 in a disputed border section running through the monastery complex, no longer allowing visitors from Georgia to access some of the sites of the complex.

"The agreement has been reached, that before the complete resolution of [the border] issue, everyone will have access to this part of Davit Gareji without any restrictions. The Georgian side takes a commitment that no one, going to that part of the Gareji complex, will access Azerbaijani territory from this part of [the monastery complex]," Giga Bokeria, secretary of the Georgian National Security Council, told the Georgian public broadcaster's weekly program Accents on Sunday.

A portion of the Davit Gareji complex with its cave monasteries is one of the major stumbling blocks in border demarcation talks ongoing for many years already between Georgia and Azerbaijan. During the Soviet times the monastery complex was split by an administrative border with a major part of the complex falling within Georgia and another portion within Azerbaijan. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the two countries have been trying in vain to agree on the border demarcation.

The monastery complex, construction of which started in the 6th century, is located in the Gareji semi-desert about 70 kilometers southeast of Tbilisi. It is one of Georgia's important cultural and religious heritage sites and the home of Georgian Orthodox monks.

Until May 6, 2012 visitors from Georgia were able to freely access part of complex, including the Udabno monastery, made up of caves cut into the rocks across the ridge, which has strategic importance since both Georgian and Azerbaijani territories can be easily monitored from that high ground.

From May 6 Azerbaijani border guards redeployed, no longer allowing visitors to access the area. Local Orthodox monks, however, were still able to move unhindered.

After the news about it first broke in the Georgian media on May 11, the issue was picked up on by opposition coalition Georgian Dream, one of whose members, Zviad Dzidziguri of the Conservative Party, traveled to the area on May 13. Next day he alleged that the move by the Azerbaijani border guards was probably not a unilateral decision and accused the Georgian authorities of having a “secret” deal with Azerbaijan.

The issue drew more controversy internally in Georgia after its Deputy Foreign Minister, Nino Kalandadze, said that the portion of the monastery complex in question was not in fact “a disputed territory,” because during the Soviet times it was within the Azerbaijani borders. Similar remarks were made by Minister of Culture and Monuments Protection Nikoloz Rurua. The remarks came as a surprise, triggering wave of criticism, including from the Georgian Orthodox Church. Later Kalandadze said she was misunderstood; she, however, also acknowledged that misunderstanding could have possibly been partly caused by her failure to articulate position properly.

National Security Council Secretary, Giga Bokeria, said in a televised interview on May 20 that 66% of the border between Georgia and Azerbaijan was agreed and expressed hope for the completion of negotiations on the border delimitation and demarcation soon. Bokeria said that it was the goal of the Georgian side to have the entire David Gareji monastery complex within the Georgian territories. – *Civil Georgia*, May 20.

ARCHIMANDRITE ALEXANDER [GOLITZIN] WAS CONSECRATED BISHOP OF TOLEDO AND THE BULGARIAN DIOCESE DURING A HIERARCHICAL DIVINE LITURGY PRESIDED OVER BY METROPOLITAN JONAH AT SAINT GEORGE ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL IN ROSSFORD, OHIO, on Saturday, May 5, 2012.

On the evening of Friday, May 4, prior to celebrating Great Vespers, Bishop-elect Alexander made his public acceptance of his election. In his address he stated that, “when standing before the holy altar at the anaphora, the bishop images the one and unique High Priest, Christ, Who acts through His celebrant.” He then added that, “while it is true that our Lord Jesus is true God and true King, it is also true that He did not come to us, His creatures, with the pomp and splendor of the King, attended by the legions of heaven,

but rather in humility He emptied Himself and was found in the likeness of a servant.”

Bishop-elect Alexander continued by saying, “They are very different images, the first set revelatory of the splendor of heaven, and the second of the humility, long-suffering, and charity of our Lord’s life and ministry. My first conclusion is that I must keep this difference firmly in mind throughout my life as bishop, by which I mean the glory of the liturgical iconography should have no place in my office and day-to-day demeanor. My actions, my patterns of speech, my service in short, is to be determined by the example given us by God the Word Himself.”

Raised at Saint Innocent Church, Tarzana, CA, Bishop Alexander received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of California at Berkeley and a Master of Divinity degree from Saint Vladimir’s Seminary. He spent seven years pursuing doctoral studies at Oxford University in England under His Eminence, Metropolitan Kallistos [Ware]. During this time, he also spent two years in Greece, including one year at Simonos Petras Monastery on Mount Athos.

After receiving his D.Phil. in 1980, Bishop Alexander returned to the US. He was ordained to the diaconate in January 1982 and to the priesthood two years later. In 1986, he was tonsured to monastic orders. He served OCA missions in northern California and headed the Diocese of the West’s mission committee.

In 1989, Bishop Alexander took a teaching position with the Theology Department at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI, a position which he left at the end of April this year. While teaching at Marquette University, he had been attached to Saints Cyril and Methodius Church, Milwaukee, WI. For 22 years he preached, taught and served at Saints Cyril and Methodius Church, and witnessed to the Gospel and to Orthodox Christian theology at Marquette University. He helped attract a dozen Orthodox Christian students to doctoral work in theology at Marquette.

Bishop Alexander becomes the second Bishop of Toledo and the Bulgarian Diocese. He succeeds His Eminence, the late Archbishop Kirill [Yonchev]. Archbishop Kirill had overseen the diocese from 1964 to 2007; in 1976, Archbishop Kirill brought the diocese under the omophorion of the Orthodox Church in America.

The Bulgarian Diocese includes 19

parishes and missions and one monastery. – OCA Press Release, May 5.

HOLY DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD IN RIVES JUNCTION, MICHIGAN, PROVIDED THE SETTING FOR THE SPRING SESSION OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA May 7-10, 2012.

In addition to reviewing a variety of matters affecting the life of the Church, the hierarchs participated in the daily cycle of services at the monastery, including the Divine Liturgy, which provided an essential spiritual dimension to their undertakings. They also visited the Ascension of the Lord Monastery, Clinton, MI, and the Vatra, the headquarters of the OCA’s Romanian Episcopate, Grass Lake, MI.

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah, presided at the opening Divine Liturgy and the sessions. In his address to his fellow hierarchs, he offered a comprehensive overview of his activities and ministries. The members of the Holy Synod also approved his travel schedule, as presented.

Highlights of the session include the following.

* In his report to the Holy Synod, Archpriest John Jillions, Chancellor, reviewed his work at the Chancery, spoke of the good working relationship he maintains with Metropolitan Jonah, and cited the professionalism of the other officers and members of the Chancery staff. He summarized the work of a number of committees and updated the hierarchs on a number of other current issues.

* Archpriest Eric G. Tosi, Secretary, updated the hierarchs on staff changes and the development of job descriptions for department chairs. He also reported on the Orthodox Health Plan.

* In her comprehensive report, Ms. Melanie Ringa, Treasurer, noted that a surplus was realized at the conclusion of the first quarter of 2012. She also reported that, with the approval of the Metropolitan Council, a bequest has been used to pay down the Honesdale National Bank loan. Further, she updated the hierarchs with regard to an estate that had been left to the OCA.

* Archpriest Leonid Kishkovsky of the Department of External Affairs updated the hierarchs on a number of recent developments throughout the Orthodox world. In related news, the members of the Holy Synod appointed His Grace, Bishop Alexander of Toledo and the Bulgarian Diocese chair of the Department of External

Affairs.

* In other episcopal appointments, the hierarchs confirmed His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel as Chair of the Holy Synod Canonical Commission and the Holy Synod Canonization Commission.

* In response to questions presented by Father Tosi concerning the Procedures for Petitioning for Ordination and the logistics of conducting psychological evaluations, the members of the Holy Synod reaffirmed that all candidates for ordination — as well as clergy wishing to transfer into the OCA — must undergo the approved battery of psychological evaluations. They further recommended that any Bishop who does not have direct access to the services offered at the seminaries should retain the services of a local psychologist. Each bishop is also encouraged to solicit mental health professionals to assist in interpreting test results.

* The hierarchs requested that the OCA Clergy Guidelines and Policies, Standards and Procedures for Sexual Misconduct be translated into Spanish, Russian and French.

* With regard to OCA clergy being placed “on loan” to serve in other jurisdictions, the hierarchs reaffirmed their previous decision that, especially in long-term cases, this should be discouraged.

* Protodeacon Peter Danilchick and Eric Namee, members of the Secretariat of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America, offered a presentation on the Assembly’s work. They emphasized the importance of inter-Orthodox efforts on the grass roots level while fielding a number of questions ranging from organizational concerns to the endorsement of Orthodox military chaplains. In a related matter, Thaddeus Wojcik, OCA General Counsel, offered comments on the Assembly’s articles of incorporation and by-laws.

* In response to questions of a pastoral nature vis-à-vis non-Chalcedonian Christians, the members of the Holy Synod reaffirmed that they are received into the Church through the sacraments of Confession and Communion. However, should they later return to their own Church, they no longer would be admitted to communion in the Orthodox Church.

* Protocols associated with the Sacred Antimensia were reviewed. The hierarchs reaffirmed that Antimensia should contain relics of martyrs, although relics of Holy Confessors are acceptable. Antimensia may be replaced by a new bishop, who may also update them by placing his sig-

nature under that of the previous bishop.

* In response to a proposal of Metropolitan Jonah, diocesan bishops with five years’ tenure will be elevated to the dignity of Archbishop. Hence, His Grace, Bishop Nikon; His Grace, Bishop Tikhon; His Grace, Bishop Benjamin; and His Grace, Bishop Alejo were congratulated on their elevations. Statements will be issued to their respective dioceses concerning this decision.

* The hierarchs formally noted that Sunday, May 6, 2012 marked the 10th anniversary of the late Bishop Innocent [Gula]. May his memory be eternal!

Each diocesan hierarch offered a report on the life of his respective diocese. In closed sessions, the hierarchs addressed a number of legal and related matters.

The members of the Holy Synod expressed their deep gratitude to Archbishop Nathaniel for his hospitality in hosting the meeting and to Abbess Gabriella and the nuns of Holy Dormition Monastery. His Grace, Bishop Ireneu, the monks of Holy Ascension Monastery, and the Vatra staff also were thanked for hosting the hierarchs’ visits.. — OCA Press Release, May 11.

The Assyrian Church of the East

HIS HOLINESS MAR DINKHA IV, CATHOLICOS PATRIARCH OF THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST, HAS WELCOMED TO THE CHICAGO PATRIARCHATE, BOTH HIS EXCELLENCY DR HAMID AL-BAYATI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AND DR WILLIAM ESHAYA, THE DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ.

It is noteworthy that Dr Eshaya is a member of the Assyrian Church of the East.

During the meeting, on 6 May, the general political and social condition of Iraq was discussed, as well as general human rights concerns of the Assyrian people and their status as the indigenous people of Iraq.

The visiting delegation expressed the hope that greater political and social stability in Iraq will stem the exodus of Assyrian Christians from their ancestral homeland and that they may live in safety and security.

Terrorism targeting the Assyrian people in Iraq and their persecution in recent years was a point of particular importance in the discussions.

His Holiness briefed the delegation

on the current construction of a Patriarchal complex in northern Iraq which is intended to be the centre of the Assyrian Church of the East following its completion.

His Holiness put to His Excellency the Permanent Representative, the desire of the Assyrian Church of the East to see Iraq become a model of peace and security in the Middle East region.

At the conclusion of the meeting, His Excellency Dr Al-Bayati presented a gift to the Catholicos Patriarch. In turn, the Catholicos Patriarch presented His Excellency with a commemorative memento bearing an image of the Holy Cross and the insignia of the Assyrian Church of the East.

Also present during the meeting was the Rev. Archdeacon Shlemon Khazqiel as well as Dr Odisho Khoshaba Primo, Sheba Mando, Yonadam Youkhana and Bobby Youkhana. — *Assyrian Church of the East News*, May 14.

HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI SENT THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO HIS HOLINESS MAR DINKHA IV, CATHOLICOS PATRIARCH OF THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS CONSECRATION AS A BISHOP:

The Golden Jubilee of the episcopal consecration of Your Holiness, which has culminated in your distinguished ministry as Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, offers me the opportunity to extend my congratulations and prayerful good wishes to you.

I thank the Lord for the many blessings he has bestowed on the Assyrian Church of the East through your ministry, and I am grateful for your commitment to promoting constructive dialogue, fruitful cooperation and growing friendship between our Churches. I recall your presence at the funeral of John Paul II and, previously, your 1994 visit to Rome to sign a Common Declaration on Christology. The subsequent Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East has borne many fruits. I renew the hope which I expressed during your visit to Rome in June 2007, that “the fruitful labor which the Commission has accomplished over the years can continue, while never losing sight of the ultimate goal of our common journey towards the re-establishment of full communion.”

I wish also to reiterate my solidarity with the Christian communities in Iraq and

throughout the Middle East, praying that effective forms of common witness to the Gospel and pastoral collaboration in the service of peace, reconciliation and unity may be deepened between the Catholic and Assyrian faithful.

Your Holiness, on this significant anniversary, I pray that the love of God the Father may enfold you, the wisdom of the Son enlighten you and the fire of the Holy Spirit continue to inspire you.

With sentiments of respect, I extend to Your Holiness a fraternal embrace in Jesus Christ our Savior. BENEDICTUS PP. XVI. – Vatican website.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

THIS IS A STATEMENT BY THE CLERGY SYNOD OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES AND HAWAII REGARDING THE NON-CANONICAL ACTION OF CHOOSING THE PATRIARCH FROM AMONG THE DIOCESAN BISHOPS:

Under the auspices of His Grace Bishop Serapion, the bishop of the Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California, and Hawaii, we, the clergy, have researched and studied the canons pertaining to the selection of the Patriarch from among the diocesan bishops or metropolitans. This occurred at two consecutive clergy meetings, one on Thursday, May 3, followed by another on Tuesday, May 8, 2012, whereupon, after fervent prayers, research, and discussions, we came to the following resolutions:

First, the Patriarch is the Archbishop of Alexandria. Thus, all of the church canons pertaining to the moving of a diocesan bishop to another are applicable to his enthronement.

Second, the tradition and canons of the Holy Church forbid the selection of the Patriarch from among the Metropolitans and Diocesan Bishops. [...]

Third, the history of our Coptic Orthodox Church testifies to our steadfast commitment to these canons. In recent history, between the years 1928-1956, within a span of less than thirty years, an exception was made to these Canons when three diocesan metropolitans were enthroned on the See of St. Mark. Thus, among the previous one hundred and seventeen Patriarchs of greatly diversified backgrounds, only three diocesan metropolitans were enthroned.

In light of the preceding concise study, we, the clergy, conclude:

1. All the Canons and the Tradition of the Church forbid the transfer of a met-

ropolitan or a diocesan bishop from his diocese to another. Consequently, it is a violation of the Canons to choose the Patriarch from among the metropolitans or diocesan bishops.

2. Throughout its history, our Coptic Church has abided by Her Canons and Tradition. Moreover, as we explained above, Her Holy Synod excommunicated the seekers of this position from the diocesan bishops, or anyone who may assist them in this endeavor, in 1865. We recite the supporting wording here: "Everyone who requests this rank, from the ordained bishops or metropolitans 'of the Sees,' tried to seek it, or has accepted it, or if anyone helped him to obtain it, priest, an archpriest, or a lay person, let him be excommunicated."

3. When the Church did not follow these Canons and Tradition, which She kept since Her inception, we have learned from the failed outcome of these attempts, which is the wisdom of the Church and Her canons in forbidding the choice of the Patriarch from among the metropolitans and diocesan bishops.

We pray for the peace of the Church and that the Lord may repose the soul of our beloved father, the thrice-blessed Pope Abba Shenouda III, with His saints, and to appoint for us a shepherd who will attend to His people in purity and righteousness. – Website of the Coptic Diocese of Los Angeles.

AT THE CLERGY SYNOD OF THE BRITISH ORTHODOX CHURCH HELD ON WEDNESDAY 30TH MAY 2012, AT THE CHURCH SECRETARIAT IN LONDON, UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN SERAPHIM OF GLASTONBURY, the members of the Synod considered with great care and attention the statement issued by His Grace Bishop Serapion, of the Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California and Hawaii, together with his Clergy Synod, meeting on Thursday 3rd May and Tuesday 8th May, 2012 and concerning the selection of diocesan bishops as candidates for election as the Patriarch of Alexandria.

The Synod, finding itself in complete agreement with the explanation of the canons and traditions of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate found in the statement issued by the Diocese of Los Angeles, wishes to express its own view that the canons and traditions lead us to understand that the translation of a diocesan bishop to the Patriarchate of Alexandria should be avoided outside of the most

serious circumstances, and that the present election does not represent such a serious circumstance.

It is therefore our humble and respectful opinion that a diocesan bishop should not be considered for election to the Patriarchate of Alexandria at this time.

We pray for the peace of the Church and that the Lord may repose the soul of our beloved father, the thrice-blessed Pope Abba Shenouda III, with his saints, and to appoint for us a shepherd who will attend to His people in purity and righteousness. – Website of the British Orthodox Church, May 31.

ON MAY 15, UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II, SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS, A SUPREME SPIRITUAL COUNCIL MEETING WAS HELD IN MOTHER SEE OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN. The meeting was attended by Diocesan Primate from Armenia, bishops and lay members. During the meeting, diocesan, liturgical and disciplinary issues were discussed.

At the opening of the meeting, a review was made of the recent tragic events of an earthquake and flood in Georgia, during which citizens of Georgia were killed. Members of the council expressed their condolences to the people of Georgia, Georgian authorities and to the Georgian Orthodox Church.

The council also noted, with deep regret, the collapse of the bell tower on the St. Nshan Armenian Church of Tbilisi. His Grace Bishop Vazgen Mirzakahnian, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Georgian, provided information to the members on the emergency situation, and the steps taken in reaction to the situation at the St. Nshan Church.

The Primate was advised to continue working with relevant Georgian authorities to speed up the repair efforts to the St. Nshan Church, as well as to carry on his efforts in securing the return of the collapsed Shamkhoretsots Red Gospel and Mughnetsots St. Gevork churches.

The Supreme Spiritual Council also expressed hope that the Georgian authorities would respond to the applications, and restore the rights of the Armenian Diocese of Georgia to administer to the Armenian historical sanctuaries, thus enabling the diocese and her faithful brave sons to provide them with proper care, sparing further damage and collapse.

During the meeting a number of problems related to Diocesan activities were

discussed, in regards to church property and grounds. A recommendation was made to the Diocesan Primates to: undertake high-quality work; compile a comprehensive inventory of church properties in each diocese; and take measures to ensure their maintenance and protection for proper use. They were also assigned the task of hastening the listing and submission process for historical-cultural monument churches and sanctuaries, which are not legally registered to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. The council stressed that this was a necessary process for effective management and upkeep of properties within each Diocese.

The Supreme Spiritual Council was informed that His Eminence Archbishop Yeznik Petrosian, General Secretary of the Bible Society of Armenia, was appointed by Pontifical Order to serve as the Vicar in the Tavush Province. – Press Release, Holy Etchmiadzin, May 15.

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) GENERAL SECRETARY REV. DR OLAV FYKSE TVEIT WAS HONORED WITH THE “FRIEND OF THE ARMENIANS” AWARD BY THE DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF AMERICA (EASTERN) in the United States, as an acknowledgement of his efforts to support Armenian churches throughout the world.

Tveit was presented with the award in a ceremony that took place on 4 May in Springfield, Massachusetts as part of the Annual Assembly of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

The diocese has periodically honored selected public figures with the “Friend of the Armenians” award. They are recognized as having shown special concern and support for the Armenian community. Past recipients of this distinction included US ambassadors Harry Gilmore and John Evans, John Cardinal O’Connor, Rabbi Arthur Schneier, US senators Edward Kennedy, Robert Dole and Robert Menedez, and Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick.

During the event, Tveit spoke about the strong ecumenical engagement of the Armenian Church in the United States and reflected upon his visit to Armenia last year when he stayed at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin at the invitation of the Catholicos of All Armenians, Supreme Patriarch Karekin II.

Tveit introduced the audience to the theme of the WCC upcoming 10th Assembly “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.” The assembly will take place in

Busan, Korea in 2013. He invited participants to consider what the theme means for the Armenian Church, both in Armenia and in the United States.

“A church like yours, which knows so much about the longing for justice and peace, has much to offer others who need the WCC to support their efforts towards just peace,” said Tveit.

“Friendship is a biblical quality. We are called to a unity of friendship, sharing our gifts and our challenges,” he added.

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern), said in a letter to Tveit, “We feel that your presence among us is an excellent opportunity to express our gratitude to the WCC as an ecumenical organization and to call attention to your own singular efforts to acknowledge the Armenian Church’s place within the large worldwide ecumenical movement – as shown in your recent trip to our homeland.” – WCC Press Release, May 8.

ON FRIDAY 4 MAY 2012, HIS HOLINESS CATHOLICOS ARAM I OF CILICIA PRESIDED OVER THE HOLY LITURGY AT THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH IN ABU DHABI TEMPORARILY OFFERED TO THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY. In his sermon he spoke of the three moments of the Holy Liturgy: remembering the Last Supper of Jesus, participating in the Holy Eucharist and witnessing for the faith by living the Gospel message and serving the community.

At the end of the Liturgy, His Holiness greeted and blessed the faithful individually and then moved with his entourage to the location of the future Church. The Catholicos was accompanied by the Catholicos Vicar of the Diocese of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates Bishop Shahe Panossian, the Ambassador of Armenia to the Gulf Region, the Honorary Ambassador of Armenia to Der Zor, and the representatives of the Armenian communities in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar. The Scout’s band of the pan-Armenian Sports Organization (HOMENETMEN) from Lebanon also came for the occasion.

According to the tradition of the Armenian Orthodox Church, Catholicos Aram I blessed the 16 stones of the 16 columns of the church’s foundation that were carried by 16 benefactors and witnesses. His Holiness named the Church The Holy Martyrs to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. At the end of the ceremony, the Ca-

tholicos thanked the Emir of Abu Dhabi, the benefactors of the new church and the members of the community. -- Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, May 7.

THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, WHICH WAS INITIATED SOME 15 YEARS AGO BY HIS HOLINESS ARAM I AND AYATOLLAH TASKHIRI, WAS HELD ON MONDAY 14 MAY IN TEHRAN.

The theme of the meeting was “The role of religion in promoting ethical values in society.” The introductory remarks were made by Dr. Mohammed Reza Dehshiri, Vice president, Center of Research, Education and Academic Exchange and by Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian, the Primate of the Armenians of Tehran. Ayatollah Taskhiri as the first director of the Center greeted the conference highly appreciating the role of His Holiness Aram I in promoting interreligious dialogue on the global level. The inaugural speech was given by Dr. Mohammed Bagher Korramshed, president of the Organization of Culture and Islamic Relations. He emphasized the importance of dialogue and the centrality of moral values for Islam.

The keynote address was given by His Holiness Aram I. His Holiness considered the moral values the core of religion. He said that “Religion has its divine and human dimensions. Distinction between these two dimensions is important. Revelation as a God given reality generates human response, which is affected by time and space.” Speaking about moral values, Aram I said that they touch all aspects of life. His Holiness emphasized that “moral values should sustain and govern the life of a society, otherwise it may lose its identity and direction and disintegrate.” His Holiness identified three areas of concern: relativism of moral values, politicization of moral values, and increasing decay of moral values. According to Aram I, “Dialogue is an efficient way of creating mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among nations.” The Catholicos considered lack of mutual trust an evil force that dominates the life of many societies: “Religion should not create fear and mistrust but should generate mutual understanding, tolerance and trust.”

The keynote address of Aram I was followed by the following presentations: Dr. A. Gavahi, “Islamic ethical approach to society, politics and international relations,” Mr. R. Biglarian “A glance at the

role of ethics in resolving international crises with special reference to environmental issues," Dr. M. Merghati "Ethics-jurisprudence relations and their compatibility in today's human issues," Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian "Fundamentals of morality in Christianity," Dr. K. N. Barzegar "The ethical culture of Muslims to impact peaceful coexistence," Ms. Emilia Nersisians "An historical approach to ethics and trade with special reference to Isfahan during the Safavid era," Dr. H. Shomali "The social aspects of Islamic ethics." Each presentation was followed by discussion.

More than a hundred people attended the conference. At the end of the conference, a joint statement was issued. The statement emphasized the pivotal role of moral values and called for better relations and greater collaboration between religions in general and Christianity and Islam in particular. The statement recalled that: "The religions of the world, besides their differences, have also common values and share common perspectives and approaches with respect to global issues and challenges. Therefore, we believe that developing a common and global ethical framework could provide a firm basis for religions and particularly to divine religions for joint action." – Press Release, Great House of Cilicia, May 15.

AT AN INVITATION EXTENDED THROUGH MONSIGNOR JOHN A. RADANO OF SETON HALL UNIVERSITY'S SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, IN COOPERATION WITH THE COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK, OUR ARCHBISHOP MOR CYRIL APHREM KARIM VISITED THE CAMPUS OF SETON HALL UNIVERSITY in South Orange, New Jersey. The purpose of the invitation was intended to cultivate a continuing dialogue between the Archdiocese of Newark and our own and other members of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Following a visit and luncheon at the School of Theology where he met with the heads of various departments, and a brief tour of the campus, His Eminence presented a lecture at the University's Chapel of the Immaculate Conception entitled, "The History and Mission of the Syrian Orthodox Church." He touched on several important points in the course of his presentation, including our Church's dedication to ecumenism, our long and difficult history of persecution and oppression over the centuries, as well as the various

challenges facing our faithful in the United States. After a brief question and answer period, His Eminence and Monsignor Radano expressed their earnest desire to continue to expand their ecumenical dialogue through continuing mutual visits and forums for cooperation. – Press Release, Syrian Orthodox Eastern Diocese, May 2012.

HANI SARHAN IS A CHRISTIAN WHO SAYS NONE OF HIS RELATIVES WORKS WITH BASHAR ASSAD'S REGIME OR HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT.

"But what we heard from (the protesters) at the beginning of this revolution saying, 'Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the coffin,' started us thinking about the real aim of this revolution," he said. "So from this point of view, fearing for my life, I declared my support for President Assad."

Muslims dominate this nation of 22 million people, but Christians can be found at all levels of Syrian government, business and military, reports Religion News Service via USA Today. The 2 million Christians here trace their roots to ancient communities and have survived under many rulers as Christian enclaves in other Arab nations, such as Saudi Arabia, have withered.

The rebellion of hundreds of thousands of Muslims against Assad that began in March 2011 has not seen Christians abandon their support for the Alawites, the Muslim sect to which Assad belongs and that has controlled Syria for decades. Christians have largely remained quiet as Assad's forces pummeled rebel cities and towns with artillery, killing close to 10,000 people, according to the United Nations.

Many of Syria's Christians continue to stand by the regime not out of support for Assad but out of fear of civil war if rebels gain strength, or worse, if they win and install an Islamist government that's hostile to religious minorities.

Qatana, a town 20 miles southwest of Damascus, is home to a Christian community of several hundred families. Protests here against the Assad regime have prompted military incursions and clashes between renegade soldiers and the regular army. At checkpoints surrounding the town, some Christians chat to Alawite security officers. Others offer water and whiskey.

Christians firmly believe that the Alawite regime will keep them safe. With the town's two churches located in Sunni

Muslim neighborhoods, for months many families were too fearful to attend services, Christians here said. But a teacher at a Christian school said life is better now than before.

"The crisis is almost over," she said, asking her name be withheld because she feared retribution. "Our church was full on Easter Sunday; last year, it was practically empty. We were allowed to parade around the town, when last year we could only go in the street outside the church."

Yet Christian communities elsewhere have seen trouble.

A church in Homs, Um al-Zunnar, was badly damaged during the military's monthlong shelling of the city in February. Christians in Homs said the church was attacked by "foreign-backed armed gangs." Syrian state TV aired interviews with civilians who said the rockets were fired from the mountains dividing Syria from Lebanon, where rebels have arms-smuggling routes.

The uprising has also hurt Christians' standard of living.

Foreign visitors are nowhere to be seen in the Christian neighborhood of Bab Touma in central Damascus, a once-popular tourist attraction characterized by winding alleyways, traditional Arab-style hotels and ancient churches.

In 2010, tourists from the Persian Gulf, Europe and North America added \$8 billion to the Syrian economy. Since the revolt began, Syria's tourism sector has dropped off by 60 percent, according to the Tourism Ministry, and Christian businesses are among those suffering.

These days, many conversations in the close-knit communities turn to "the crisis," as it is called. Families watch Arab television broadcasts by the extremist Salafist sheik Adnan Arour, who from exile in Saudi Arabia calls for jihad against the Assad regime and death to those who actively support it.

Pro-regime commentators on state-run Syrian TV pounce on figures such as Arour and say Assad is all that stands between extreme Islam and stability. Christians here talk of letters sent to churches saying they are the next to go after Assad, and a mortar that struck a monastery in the Christian town of Saidnaya, north of Damascus, was blamed on rebels.

There is little evidence that the rebels are responsible for such acts, and Christians here say Arour does not appear to have a lot of support. But recent suicide bombings in Syria have the look of al-Qaida, which seeks Islamic law over all.

Many Christians simply do not want to upset their way of living in a country where their fate will always be decided by Muslims, according to Syria experts.

Christian doctors, lawyers and dentists have established successful and stable careers. Others occupy leading positions in the Syrian army, though a new constitution mandates the head of state must be Muslim.

"They do support (Assad) and are feeling quite anxious," said Joshua Landis, director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma and a Syria expert. "Even so, there are plenty of Christians (in Syria) who believe that democracy in the long run is the best protection for Christians." -- Stephen Starr and S. Akminas for *ENI*, May 15.

The Catholic Churches

HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI HAS APPOINTED BISHOP ANTONI DZIEMIANKO, Auxiliary Bishop of Minsk-Mohilev. Belarus, as bishop of Pinsk (area 72,700, population 3,141,000, Catholics 50,500, priests 48, religious 78), Belarus. -- *VIS*, May 3.

ON THE MORNING OF MAY 5, THE HOLY FATHER RECEIVED IN AUDIENCE BAMIR TOPI, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA. The president subsequently went on to meet with Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B. who was accompanied by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for Relations with States.

A communique released by the Holy See Press Office states that, "during their cordial discussions the parties highlighted the good relations that exist between the Holy See and the Republic of Albania, and turned their attention to questions of mutual interest regarding relations between the ecclesial and civil communities, including inter-religious dialogue and the Church's contribution in the fields of education and social care. Consideration was also given to Albania's journey towards full integration into the European Union. Finally, the parties exchanged opinions on the current international and regional situation, with particular focus on the economic crisis." -- *VIS*, May 7.

ON MAY 12 IT WAS MADE PUBLIC THAT THE HOLY FATHER HAD APPOINTED FR. ARCHIMANDRITE DONATO OLIVERIO, DELEGATE "AD OMNIA" OF THE EPARCHY OF LUNGRO OF

THE ITALO-ALBANIANS, ITALY, AS BISHOP OF THE SAME EPARCHY (area 493, population 33,400, Catholics 32,300, priests 39, permanent deacons 1, religious 28). The bishop-elect was born in Cosenza, Italy in 1956 and ordained a priest in 1982.

Among other roles he has served as a pastor, director of the eparchial office for catechesis, bursar and secretary of Lungro's Institute for Religious Sciences. -- *VIS*, May 12.

A SENIOR GREEK PROTESTANT HAS WARNED THAT MINORITY DENOMINATIONS "FACE DISASTER" DUE TO THE COUNTRY'S WORSENING ECONOMIC CRISIS.

"Heavy taxation, high unemployment and all our other difficulties are fast-forwarding us to collapse," said Dimitrios Boukis, general secretary of the Greek Evangelical church, which has 29 congregations in two regional synods in Greece and other communities abroad.

"We receive no state support and are fully dependent on our members, and we're already short of pastors because we can't afford them. The pastors we have are having to handle everything because we can't employ staff, so some congregations will end up without any spiritual care."

The Evangelical pastor, a central committee member of the Conference of European Churches, was speaking as President Karolos Papoulias made a last-ditch attempt to persuade Greece's politicians to form an emergency government after the two main parties responsible for enforcing a harsh fiscal stability plan were trounced by smaller radical groupings in 6 May elections.

In an ENInews interview on 14 May, he said church incomes had fallen 40 percent in the last year, after dropping 30 percent in 2010-11, causing "great difficulties" in pension provisions and other areas of parish finance.

Among other church reactions, the president of Greece's Roman Catholic Bishops Conference, Bishop Fragiskos Papamanolis, told the Rome-based *Servizio Informazione Religiosa* that Greece had been "led to poverty" by austerity plans.

He added that taxes on the Catholic church had risen 48 percent in the past year, making most dioceses unable to pay.

"People are starving here, and we've nothing left to give those who knock on our doors," he said the bishop, whose church's four archdioceses have 50,000 ethnic Greek members and around

150,000 foreign adherents.

Minority churches have often complained of discrimination in Greece, where the Orthodox Church of Greece traditionally claims the loyalty of 97 percent of the population of 10.4 million. -- Jonathan Luxmoore for *ENI*, May 15.

WHILE THEIR NUMBERS ARE SMALL AND THEIR MATERIAL RESOURCES ARE FEW, MEMBERS OF THE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES HAVE MUCH TO OFFER THE COUNTRY IN TERMS OF THEIR FIDELITY TO CHRIST despite persecution and their deeply religious cultures, said Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches.

Eastern Catholics "are a bridge" supporting Catholics in their homelands with prayers, advocacy and financial support while at the same time enriching the United States with their cultural and religious identity, Cardinal Sandri told U.S. bishops from the Chaldean, Ruthenian, Maronite, Ukrainian, Armenian, Melkite, Syriac and Romanian Catholic churches.

The cardinal met with the 14 bishops May 15 to discuss a wide variety of common concerns at the beginning of the bishops' "ad limina" visits to the Vatican. Earlier in the morning, the cardinal was the main celebrant and homilist at a Mass with the bishops in St. Peter's Basilica.

The heads of every diocese or eparchy -- as the Eastern Catholic jurisdictions are known -- send detailed reports on their dioceses to the Vatican before the "ad limina" visits.

Summarizing what was common in the reports of the Eastern Catholic dioceses, Cardinal Sandri said, "Your territories are enormous, and your communities often find themselves far from each other. Some of the eparchies are young and still in need of adequate structures." Many of the dioceses -- some of which cover the entire United States or even the United States and Canada -- have few financial resources and the situation has been "exacerbated by the economic crisis," the cardinal said.

The arrival of new immigrants, many fleeing persecution in places like Iraq, have increased the size of several of the Eastern churches, like the Chaldean Catholic Church. But the cardinal said other Eastern churches, whose membership is composed largely of people who have been in the United States for several generations, "are experiencing a dramatic fall" in their numbers.

"You are not immune to the same corrosive effect on morals and family life as are your fellow Latin Catholics," Cardinal Sandri said.

All the churches are hurting for clergy, he said. Even those that have a relatively high proportion of clergy to faithful are stretched by the great distances those priests must travel to minister to the faithful.

The cardinal urged care in helping young people discern their vocation, "maintaining formation programs, integrating immigrant priests (and) embracing celibacy in respect of the ecclesial context" of the United States where mandatory celibacy is the general rule for priests.

During his homily at the morning Mass with the bishops at the tomb of St. Peter, Cardinal Sandri said, "Many people today have come to doubt that there is still holiness or honesty in the church and in the clergy. We must prove them wrong. We can be a true community of saints who shine as models of chastity and charity before a culture in great need of this witness."

The Eastern Catholic bishops formed the last group of bishops from the United States making their visits "ad limina apostolorum" (to the threshold of the apostles) to pray at the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul, to meet with Pope Benedict XVI and to visit Vatican officials to discuss issues of common concern.

As they did with the other groups, seminarians from the Pontifical North American College served as lectors, cantors and servers at the Eastern bishops' Mass, but they were joined by Eastern-rite seminarians studying at the Pontifical Russicum College.

Cardinal Sandri told the bishops that sometimes they might feel like the first apostles who, after having spent time with Jesus, were sent out on mission "into a hostile world."

"You, dear Eastern bishops, as representatives of the diverse Eastern churches in the Catholic Church, are living symbols of the apostles who set out in all directions from Jerusalem to establish Christian communities. Like them you have encountered opposition, indifference and ignorance along the way," he said.

Jesus knew the challenges his disciples would face, which is why he promised them the Holy Spirit, the cardinal said.

He urged the Eastern Catholic bishops to join their Latin-rite counterparts in the United States to "fight against the ris-

ing tide of religious intolerance. May your courage and confidence convince the multitudes that without God there is no peace, no prosperity, no salvation." – Cindy Wooden for *CNS*, May 15.

IN A TRADITIONAL ANNUAL MEETING COINCIDING WITH THE COMMEMORATION OF THE FEAST OF STS. CYRIL AND METHODIUS, THE HOLY FATHER THIS MORNING RECEIVED IN SEPARATE AUDIENCES Rosen Plevneliev, president of the Republic of Bulgaria, and Nikola Gruevski, prime minister of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, each accompanied by a delegation. The delegations 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. – *VIS*, May 24.

GREECE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH ACCUSED A LEADER OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF "INTOLERANCE AND FANATICISM" AFTER HE SUED A CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP FOR ILLEGAL PROSELYTISM.

"I hope the court rejects his petition, which has no legal or juridical basis," said Nikolaos Gasparakis, spokesman for the Greek bishops' conference. "It's a pity he doesn't say more about the plight of citizens during our grave economic crisis, rather than just attacking Catholics."

In April, Orthodox Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus filed suit against Athens Archbishop Nikolaos Foskolos, for allegedly violating the Greek constitution by running a Catholic school in Piraeus. The metropolitan cited Article 13 of Greece's constitution, which prohibits proselytism.

In a May 24 interview with *Catholic News Service*, Gasparakis said Metropolitan Seraphim's actions "infringed canonical rules" and "contradicted the Gospel," but added that he was concerned other Orthodox leaders had not reacted to his actions.

"In the 11 years since Pope John Paul II visited our country, Greek society has become more tolerant and less hostile toward Catholics," Gasparakis said. However, he said, that was not true of the Orthodox leaders.

In March, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I -- considered first among equals of the Orthodox Patriarchs -- wrote the Orthodox archbishop of Athens about an "unjustified and dangerous" sermon by Metropolitan Seraphim. In that early

March sermon, the metropolitan invoked an anathema against Pope Benedict XVI as well as against Protestants, Jews, Muslims and ecumenists.

The 200,000-member Catholic Church has often complained of discrimination in Greece, a European Union and NATO member-state whose constitution declares Orthodoxy the "prevailing religion" and prohibits Bible translations without Orthodox consent.

On May 7, the bishops' conference said it would take action in the European Court of Human Rights against Greece's failure to provide equal rights and legal status for the Catholic Church.

The statement, published a day after inconclusive May 6 elections worsened Greece's economic crisis, said the church would also protest the "unacceptable and offensive aggression" by Orthodox leaders. – Jonathan Luxmoore for *CNS*, May 25.

MAJOR ARCHBISHOP SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH SENT A GREETING LETTER TO METROPOLITAN VOLODYMYR OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH-MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of his ministry in the Kyiv cathedra.

"I would like to greet you on the 20th anniversary of the service as the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Kyiv Cathedra. I thank God for the gift of restoration of your health which allowed you to return to full-fledged service as the Head of the Church. On the eve of the Lord's great holy day of Descent of the Holy Spirit, I will pray to the One God in the Holy Trinity asking Him to fill you with all the necessary gifts for further service for the good and salvation of the flock entrusted to you," reads the letter.

On 10 March 2012, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav visited the head of the UOC-MP in the hospital on his own initiative. During the visit, he assured Metropolitan Volodymyr of his constant prayer for the metropolitan's recovery, the Information Department of the UGCC reported. – *RISU*, May 30.

ON MAY 30, 2012, THEIR EXCELLENCIES THE MARONITE BISHOPS HELD AT BKERKEH THEIR MONTHLY MEETING WHICH WAS PRESIDED OVER BY HIS BEATITUDE BECHARA PETER RAI and with the participation of His Eminence Cardinal Nasrallah Butros Sfeir. They studied church and national matters. At

the end of the meeting, they issued the following communiqué:

1. The Fathers congratulated His Beatitude for his return from his pastoral visit to the Maronite eparchies in Mexico, Canada and the USA. They praised the effort His Beatitude is exerting to consolidate the Maronites living abroad in the faith, to prompt them to be attached to Lebanon and their homelands, to share in the making of their future, and to register their marriage birth certificates in the personal statute offices, work of recovering their citizenship, link their children to their roots, exercise their right in the decision making and invest in it.

2. The Fathers express their total refusal of the attempts to drive Lebanon to a new war through ongoing violence, political and confessional feuds. They confirm again that Lebanon needs all its citizens who together make it on the basis of unity, justice and the sharing in the one destiny without making one group prevail over the other. This is not truly achieved except by holding really, not only by words, to the

common life and to the state institutions as the only option and sole reference to settle differences.

3. The Fathers look with anxiety at the economic and social situation which warns against a catastrophe with the rise of the public debit index, and the incapacity of the government to exert a sufficient intervention for the benefit of the citizen and public good. This deprives the citizen from many basic services and makes of him a prey for the lack of social justice. In view of this, the fathers call for a national economic policy built upon a more humane, more just and transparent basis.

4. The Fathers warn against any division about the activity of the military institution and the security agencies. Meddling with their unity and role is a risk which presages a great danger upon its goal and the unity of defense and security of the State. They call upon politicians to keep them apart from the political game and not push them into the political struggle, or give them a confessional color. This im-

pairs their role and distorts their credibility before the citizens.

5. In this atmosphere, the Fathers appeal to the authorities and to all those who have an influential role in the Lebanese situation, to respond to the national and humane voice of conscience. Let them put the interest of the one Lebanon above all interests, preserve its honor and the dignity of its People before any other enticement and respond to the invitation of His Excellency the President of the Republic to the table of dialogue without conditions.

6. At the start of the Pentecost season and the end of the Marian month, the Fathers ask for the protection of the Virgin Mary, Lady of Lebanon, and call the Holy Spirit to support them in shepherding the Church, especially during their yearly retreat and holy synod (11-16 June 2012), asking all their sons and daughters to accompany them with prayer for the good of their Church and homeland. – Website of the Maronite Patriarchate May 30.



The Catholic and Orthodox Bishops of Switzerland meeting in Fribourg on May 8, 2012

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