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SUBMISSIONS DEADLINE
All materials (photos/articles/parish news) for the Spring issue of SOPHIA magazine are due March 1, 2015.

SHARE YOUR VOICE WITH US!
Have you ever dreamed of being a writer? Perhaps having your voice heard on the printed page? Is there a subject that you have wanted to address or a story that you are excited to tell? We would love to hear from you! SOPHIA welcomes updates and photos from all of our parishes and invites manuscripts, articles, and letters to the editor from parishioners. Submissions will be subject to review by the editorial staff and only those approved by the publisher will be published.

All submissions can be sent to:
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or
SOPHIA Letterbox
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“W e must be doing something wrong,” Fr Paul commented as we were returning from visiting one of the families of our mission community. We had just passed the Kingdom Hall, home of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. It was a Friday evening. The parking lot was packed.

The next morning we found the Mormon missionaries canvassing our neighborhood. Fr Paul said, “They’re coming here.” I said, “Go talk to them.”

I have always been impressed that these young men would dedicate two years of their lives to share what they believed in hopes of making converts to their faith. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has a phenomenal growth rate. And this is a religion which seems to have no historically verifiable basis.

Meanwhile our Melkite families continue to enroll their children in Roman (Latin) Catholic religious education programs so they can have a first communion celebration. It seems not to matter to the parents that all of these children have already made their first communion at the time of their baptism.

The Roman Church, pseudo-Christian sects, and the secularism of our society continue to eat away at our authentic Eastern Christian tradition and spirituality.

The Nativity Fast? Replaced with Christmas parties and visits from Santa Claus. Feast days? Move them to Sunday, because no one wants to come to church during the week. Religious Education programs on Saturday? No way; the kids have soccer and basketball (Sunday too!).

Of course, the problem here is not the children, but the parents. The truth is that if we don’t know our own tradition and do not practice it, it will slowly fade away.

Liturgy on Sunday? Well, if we don’t have anything else on the calendar that day, we go to church. Which means only sporadic attendance and sporadic support, forcing our churches into spiritual and financial chaos.

We need to correct the course our ship is traveling. St John Climacus said, “A sure sign of the deadening of the soul is the avoidance of church services.”

Father Deacon Sabatino in the last issue and again in this issue quotes extensively from Father Alexander Schmemann about wandering from Christ. If you didn’t read this in the last issue, you can find it online at Melkite.org.

Essentially, he makes the following suggestions: Rebirth the Concept of Church; Experience the Church; Create an Authentic Eastern Christian Atmosphere at Home. These are some of the first steps we need to take to restore an authentic Eastern Christian approach to living our faith.

If our parents are not living our authentic Melkite Eastern Christian faith, then how can we ever expect our children to do so?

In fact, year after year, they wander away, searching, search-

We Must be Doing Something Wrong

Archimandrite James Babcock is Editor-in-Chief of SOPHIA and Pastor of St Jacob Mission, San Diego, CA, and Virgin Mary Mission, Temecula, CA.
The Vatican has lifted its ban on the ordination of married men to the priesthood in Eastern Catholic churches outside their traditional territories, including in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Pope Francis approved lifting the ban, also doing away with the provision that, in exceptional cases, Eastern Catholic bishops in the diaspora could receive Vatican approval to ordain married men. In recent years, however, some Eastern Catholic bishops went ahead with such ordinations discreetly without Vatican approval.

Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, signed the decree on 14 June 2014. It was published later online in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, the official periodical through which Vatican laws and decisions are published.

The new law says the pope concedes to Eastern Catholic bishops outside their traditional territory the faculties to “allow pastoral service of Eastern married clergy” and “to ordain Eastern married candidates” in their eparchies or dioceses, although they must inform the local Latin-rite bishop in writing “in order to have his opinion and any relevant information.”

“We are overjoyed with the lifting of the ban,” Melkite Bishop Nicholas Samra of Newton, MA, told Catholic News Service in a 15 November email.

The Vatican decree explained that in response to the “protests” of the Latin-rite bishops in the United States, in 1890 the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples prohibited married Ruthenian priests from living in the United States. And in 1929-30, the Congregation for Eastern Churches extended the ban to all Eastern-rite priests throughout North America, South America, and Australia.

The 1929 prohibition, known as *Cum data fuerit*, had significant repercussions for the Eastern Catholic churches in the United States. Sandri’s decree noted that soon after the law was promulgated, “an estimated 200,000 Ruthenian faithful became Orthodox.”

Ruthenian Bishop John Kudrick of Parma, Ohio, said on 16 November that he sees the end to imposed celibacy for Eastern priests in the diaspora as an acknowledgement of the Eastern churches’ “obligation to maintain their integrity” and “of the right of the various churches to equal responsibility of evangelization throughout the world.”

“The world needs the church in its fullness,” he said, adding he believes the “change of policy results from the long-standing experience of married priests in the Western world, especially the Orthodox, but also Eastern Catholic.”

Kudrick said Eastern churches in the diaspora have a responsibility to minister to new immigrants, who are accustomed to married priests.

Fr Alexander Laschuk, a canon lawyer, said the new decree also “regularizes a situation” in which some Eastern married men were being ordained despite the 1929 law. Father Laschuk is a Ukrainian Catholic married priest and university lecturer, who also works for the regional tribunal of the Toronto archdiocese.

In the 1970s and 1980s, in an attempt to circumvent the Vatican restriction, some Eastern Catholic married men were ordained clandestinely outside North America. Many of them received suspension notices from the Holy See, he said.

By the mid-1990s, Ukrainian Catholic bishops were ordaining married men in Canada, he said, and the suspension notices eventually stopped coming. Such ordinations, though few, were even less frequent in the United States.

Still, Laschuk said, the ordinations did not represent a “regular” situation in the church. “It was something that was happening. I wouldn’t even say that it was tolerated,” he said.

“It was happening underground. The Holy See and the Latin bishops were being informed after the fact because I think it was understood that if they were told before, permission would not be coming and it would be stopped.”

The modus operandi was that “it was better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission,” he said.

Continued on page 7
Inaccurate and Unacceptable

Dear Editor:

The article entitled “Eighteenth Orientale Lumen Conference Studies Ecumenical Dimensions of Marriage” by Robert Greenwell, in SOPHIA (Fall 2014), contains an unacceptable description of my parents, their marriage, and my own family life, as well as a completely inaccurate account of my lecture.

As an Orthodox canonist with a PhD from The Catholic University of America, the author of four books in the field, and a member of the North American Orthodox-Roman Catholic Theological Consultation, I was invited to deliver a lecture on marriage at the Orientale Lumen Conference. My lecture can be heard in its entirety on Ancient Faith Radio at www.ancientfaith.com/specials/orientale_lumen_conference_xviii/fr._patrick_viscuso.

My lecture focused on the development of Orthodox-Roman Catholic relations regarding marriage, particularly concentrating on the agreed statements of the North American Theological Consultation. I recalled my own parents’ marriage—the active role that my Roman Catholic father took in giving his children the gift of faith and the understanding my parents shared regarding their unity in Christ throughout their marriage.

My father made a promise to my Greek grandmother to raise his children in the Greek Orthodox Church and honored his word by faithfully bringing us to church every Sunday. Without his devotion to the church and honoring of his promise, I would not be a priest today.

The article by Robert Greenwell states that I “spoke about being raised by a very religious Greek Orthodox mother and a lax Roman Catholic father, as well as the pressures of being both a priest and a married father of children.”

Not one word of any such thing was contained in my lecture.

Unlike his descriptions of the other presenters, Greenwell’s description of me, besides my name and denominational affiliation, was focused on my status as a “married priest.” This definitely leaves an impression that my only qualifications for speaking were my parents’ mixed marriage and my own marriage, even though my qualifications were clearly contained in Fr Ronald Roberson’s introduction to my lecture.

Sincerely,
Rev Dr Patrick Viscuso

The Truth of the Matter

Dear Editor:

I was stupefied to find myself described in Mr Greenwell’s account of the 18th Orientale Lumen Conference as “a Jesuit priest with bi-ritual faculties in the Byzantine Catholic tradition” (SOPHIA, Fall 2014).

The truth of the matter is that I was born into and baptized in the Roman Rite but requested as a young Jesuit seminarian to be assigned to the Jesuit Russian Apostolate, received permission, requested and received a change of rite indult from Rome on 6 December 1962, and was ordained subdeacon (15 December 1962), deacon (16 December 1962), and priest (6 July 1963), all in the Byzantine-Slavonic Rite, by Carpatho-Russian Catholic Bishop Nicholas T. Elko, and thereafter served in the Russian Catholic Church of St Anthony the Abbot in Rome until failing health led to my leaving Rome for retirement in the New England Jesuit Retirement and Health Center in 2012.

Rt Rev Archimandrite Robert Taft, SJ

Clarifications and Corrections

I apologize that I did not research Father Robert Taft’s correct title before I wrote the recent article on the Orientale Lumen XVIII Conference.

At the request of the editor of Light of the East, in mid-August of 2014 I prepared an article consisting of my recollections of the conference. I was asked to do so for the fall edition, which came out in September 2014. I explained to the editor that I had not taken any notes, but the editor encouraged me to write a summary of the conference as best as I could remember, which I did.

I regret that I did not have the correct details of Father Patrick Viscuso’s excellent presentation. It was not my intention to defame Father Patrick’s beloved father, and I regret any anguish it may have caused Father Patrick Viscuso, his family, or anyone who knew his pious father.

May the memory of Father Patrick’s father, who was a good practicing Roman Catholic, be eternal.

Sincerely,
Robert J. Greenwell
Peter, the Rock, goes to his brother Andrew, the First-called. We could use these expressions from the Gospels and the Liturgy to describe the recent fifth encounter, in Istanbul, between Pope Francis, successor of Peter, and Patriarch Bartholomew, successor of Andrew.

The two Shepherds had already met three times in Rome and once in Jerusalem, and from these meetings their longing for unity is strengthened, their evangelical tuning refined, and their impetus to facing difficulties renewed. At each encounter the memory of yesterday’s and today’s martyrs evokes the ecumenism of blood John Paul II had already seen as an inescapable appeal.

After every encounter, their fraternal embrace asks the question, “What will be the next step?” and more forcefully, “How long will the churches will be divided?” Yes, how long will the scandal of division disfigure the Christian testimony in the world?

An attentive audience, inside and outside the church, reads the signs showing that theological committees and common declarations are important in revisiting the past and forging the future, but for those responsible for guidance it is more decisive to think and work in friendship. Walking together and working “collegially” is a daily hard task everyone must face according to the ministry with which he/she is entrusted.

Glancing at a recent interview with the Ecumenical Patriarch, one can see how Patriarch Bartholomew is in sync with Pope Francis on many topics: the refusal to consider enemies those who attack Christians—“the enemy par excellence is he who slyly divided the churches and tries to delay their unity”; the idea that “suffering does not ask to which confession martyrs belong,” and that “the martyrs do not ask revenge”; the awareness that “the ecumenism of blood today makes the churches more sensitive to a common journey”; the fight against “the worldly spirit” which also has entered Christian society.

Patriarch Bartholomew has quickly seized what many observers, even Catholic, have hardly perceived or recognized: “the new direction Pope Francis is giving to the role of the Bishop of Rome, direction purified by the Gospel and the tradition of the church.”

Many believe that to patiently look, in obedience to the word of God, for different forms of exercise of the papal ministry, means to diminish the Petrine office and consequently do not feel the urgency of a visible unity among the Catholic Church and other Christians. They do not want to recognize that, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote once, “Rome does not have to expect more from the Christian East than what has been lived and formulated in the first millennium.”

**PETER AND ANDREW:**

*A Brother’s Embrace*

*By Papas Giorgios*
For every Catholic, the pope is the Bishop of Rome, the “Church that presides in charity,” and as such exercises an unavoidable primacy that Jesus Christ entrusted to Peter and his successors. As the “servant of the servants of God”—according to the happy expression of Pope Gregory the Great—the pope must strengthen his brethren in the faith when Satan (the adversary) tests them (Luke 22: 31-32), preside over the college of bishops, and firmly guide the journey of the entire Christian community. But this indispensable ministry throughout history has assumed the most various forms—not always coherent with the Gospel—from the poor fisherman of Galilee, Simon Peter, a martyr under Nero, to the kingly Pope of the Renaissance papal state, but without betraying the promise made by Jesus to build up on that “rock,” His Church.

As for visible unity with the Orthodox Church, it is not a matter of culturally returning to the first millennium, but of finding therein inspiration for acknowledgment of a protos in the entire synodality. There is no synodality without a protos and there is no protos without synodality. This conviction comes from the 2007 agreement reached in Ravenna, Italy, between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. No one should forget John Paul II’s encyclical Ut unum sint (That all may be one), which asks the Christian churches to search for new forms for the exercise of the Petrine office to be accepted by all for the sake of unity.

Certainly, for diplomatic reasons, the pilgrimage of Pope Francis in Turkey also had some implications related to politics, the defense of the rights of religious freedom, the search for peace, and the end of all violence, especially in the tormented Middle East. But we should not forget that the main reason of this pilgrimage was the Pope’s desire to pay a visit to the Phanar, to celebrate the feast of Saint Andrew with the patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, and to write another chapter of the Tomos Agapis (the Book of Love) begun fifty years earlier by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras.

Two Christians, two Bishops, two Patriarchs—in the strict sense of the word—continue their journey of fraternity, friendship, and mutual awareness that the Spirit is at work. The future will tell us not which “destiny” Christianity waits for, but which response to the Lord and His Gospel the Churches of the East and West will be able to accomplish under the guidance of their shepherds.

Next year, 2016, will see the celebration of the long-awaited Pan-Orthodox Holy Synod, but a few months earlier, in December of 2015, will take place the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican II and of the mutual abolition of the 1054 excommunications. Is it too daring to dream that on that occasion the protagonists of the gesture of reconciliation and peace—Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras—may be proclaimed saints by the respective Churches they shepherdet with care animated by that love of Christ we see in their successors, Francis and Bartholomew?

“From a canonical point of view, the new legislation puts into universal law the possibility of (Eastern Catholic) married men being ordained throughout the world,” Laschuk said, with the full faculty to ordain granted to each Eastern Catholic ordinary within his diocese.

Jesuit Fr Brian Daley, a longtime member of the North American Catholic-Orthodox Theological Consultation, said he expects the new legislation will have a “very positive” impact on ecumenical relations. For many Eastern Catholics and Orthodox, he said, the ban “has been a wound and a source of resentment.”

Consultation members had issued a statement on 6 June urging an end to the ban, which was experienced as an injustice among Eastern Catholics. Among the Orthodox, the ban created mistrust toward the Catholic church and a sense that their tradition would not be respected in the event of full communion between the two churches, he explained.

“It’s really important that this has finally been cleared up. It is one more divisive issue that has been taken away,” said Daley, a theology professor at Notre Dame University in Indiana.

“It’s good news for everybody in the Catholic church, both East and West,” he added. “Vatican II called for the church to respect the ancient traditions of the Eastern churches. It was true in principle but not in practice.”

Laschuk said he also hopes the new legislation will create a culture in the church in North America in which married clergy are more welcome.

“Previously, there were cases where married priests were not treated fully as priests, as if they were somewhat less,” he said. “I hope this will grant them greater respect, now that the Holy Father has approved it.”

Reprinted from the website of the National Catholic Reporter; http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-lifts-ban-married-priests-eastern-catholics-diaspora

**PAPAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Holy See announced on 16 January 2015 that His Grace, The Most Reverend Nicholas J. Samra, in addition to his office as Bishop of Newton, has been named Apostolic Administrator sede vacante et nutum Sanctae Sedis for the Eparchy of Nuestra Senora del Paraiso in Mexico.

May Christ, the High Priest, prosper the works of Sayidna’s hands in his new ministry of service to the Church.
The fact that before the year A.D. 325, synods were held everywhere in the church demonstrates that the bishops realized, as the author Msgr. Michael Magee put it, that “no bishop was entitled to exercise his office in isolation from the common good of all the Churches, or from his brothers in the episcopacy.” Bishops understood that their judgments and acts were not the private acts of an autocrat. They were the judgments and acts of a bishop in communion. The monarchical episcopate—in the sense of a single bishop in each church—had become universal during the second century. And with this development, synods provided a counterweight to excesses in the exercise of episcopal authority by an individual bishop in his local church.

The Council of Nicaea, however, shows that there was still a further development underway. A structure that would include more than one metropolitan province was taking shape. And so we read in Canon 6 of Nicaea I, “The ancient customs of Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis shall be maintained, according to which the bishop of Alexandria has authority over all these places, since a similar custom exists with reference to the bishop of Rome. Similarly in Antioch and the other provinces the prerogatives of the churches are to be preserved.” Two things should be noted, however: The Council of Nicaea does not use the term patriarch, which was later known as the patriarchal office was making its appearance proper to the metropolitan,” but it is not clear that the bishop of Jerusalem did not have “the dignity proper to the metropolitan,” but it is not clear that the authority of the bishops of Rome and Antioch extended at that time to a whole civil diocese. Nevertheless, the reality later known as the patriarchal office was making its appearance in the case of Alexandria. In the case of Rome, the bishop of Rome did exercise authority in central and southern Italy and the Italian islands. This was comparable to the authority exercised by the bishops of Alexandria and Antioch.

At this point (the early fourth century), what role did the protos, called the archbishop, play in these groupings comprising several provinces? He presided at the regional synods and ordained all the metropolitans. But what principle lay behind this structural development?

It was not a drive toward conformity within civil territorial boundaries. We know this because Alexandria, which had authority over several metropolitan provinces, belonged to the civil jurisdiction of Antioch. What lay behind this whole development was a movement toward ever-increasing unity, unifying the churches around a center. And the center was determined not so much by its civil prominence as by the fact that the center had been the origin of the other churches that shared its theology, spirituality and liturgy. Unity and communion lay behind the development of these larger groupings.

Canon 6 of the Council of Nicaea, then, is a recapitulation and a description of church order. The council did not create or originate that order. It affirms that what would later be called the “patriarchal” ordering of the church was an “ancient” tradition in regard to Alexandria. Msgr. Michael Magee maintains that it was the liturgical and spiritual traditions that gave rise to the patriarchates and that these, therefore, belong to the very definition of the patriarchate.

However, other scholars see the origins of the patriarchates also in the recognition that, in larger territories, there had to be a protos (a head or first bishop) to serve the needs of order and communion among the churches. In fact, the first prerogative of the protos mentioned in the Council of Nicaea is the administrative act of confirming the election of bishops in the province.

The patriarchal ordering of the church has endured in the Eastern Orthodox churches and in six of the Eastern Catholic churches, namely the Coptic, Melkite, Syrian, Maronite, Armenian, and Chaldean churches.

In the Latin Catholic Church, the only patriarchate has been Rome. There were, in the first-millennium West, great metropolitan churches, like Carthage in Africa or Arles in France. But the gathering of several metropolitan churches into a larger structure, a patriarchate, did not develop in the Western church. The only see functioning as a patriarchate was Rome.

For many centuries, the pope had the title “Patriarch of the West.” But Pope Benedict suppressed that title in 2006.
While it is not entirely clear why he did this, we do know that both Joseph Ratzinger, as a theology professor, and Yves Congar, O.P., had raised serious questions about whether the pope could function in any really effective way as patriarch of the West in the modern world.

EXERCISING PAPAL AUTHORITY
As we have seen, the Council of Nicaea affirmed that the bishop of Rome did have authority extending beyond the limits of his province; and over the course of the first millennium, this authority of the pope came to be recognized as extending over the whole western half of the Roman Empire. But in the first millennium, there was a distinct difference between the way the popes exercised authority in the western half of the Empire and the way they exercised it in the eastern half. For instance, the popes appointed the bishops of Thessalonica as their vicars in the easternmost part of the western empire but never attempted anything like that in the eastern patriarchates. This fact is one of the reasons for describing the exercise of authority by the bishop of Rome as patriarchal in the western half of the empire, as distinguished from his exercise of truly papal authority in matters concerning the whole church, like essential questions of doctrine.

But after the separation between the East and the West—usually placed around the year 1054—the popes exercised authority only in the West. Consequently, there was no longer any basis for a distinction between the patriarchal and the papal exercise of authority. The result was that the exercise of papal authority in the whole Latin Catholic Church had the characteristics of patriarchal administration; in the second millennium, this developed into a centralized papal monarchy.

With the discovery of the New World in the 15th century and the missionary expansion of the Latin Catholic Church in the 16th century and later, the patriarchal kind of papal government was gradually extended over the worldwide Catholic Church, bringing with it uniformity of liturgical language and practice, the choice and appointment of all bishops by the pope and the appointment of papal delegates in all countries where the Catholic Church had been planted. So in practice there was no longer any distinction between the patriarchal and the papal functions of the bishops of Rome.

While the separation between the East and the West, and the missionary expansion beyond Europe, increasingly blurred the distinction between patriarchal and papal roles of the pope, another development was taking place that served to underline the difference between these roles of the bishop of Rome. Since the 12th century, when a group of Eastern Christians called Maronites formally reconfirmed their communion with Rome, there have been communities of Eastern Catholics who have continued to use their traditional liturgy and language and have continued to have a certain autonomy in the election of their patriarchs.

The number and variety of such relatively autonomousContinued on page 16
For Christians in the Middle East, 2014 has been a catastrophe. The most wrenching stories have come from Iraq, where the nascent Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL in news reports) has savagely persecuted ancient Christian communities, including Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syrian Orthodox. Iraqi Christians have declined rapidly in number since the first Gulf War in 1991, but survivors long believed they could maintain a foothold around Mosul.

This past summer, that hope collapsed. In a ghastly reminder of Nazi savagery against Jews, Christian homes were marked with the Arabic letter ن for Nazarenes—Christ followers—or R for Rwafidh, a term for Protestants, and inhabitants were targets for abuse or murder. Islamist militants have controlled Mosul since June 10. Even if the total extermination of each and every believer is not the goal, those ancient communities and churches face the prospect of utter ruin. To that extent, the end of Christianity in Iraq is within sight.

The current battles are part of a lengthy story. Islam gained power over the Middle East in the seventh century, but it was several centuries before Muslims became an overwhelming majority. Christians operated under Muslims’ political rule, but the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria, Egypt, and the Baghdad-based Church of the East remained mighty forces of global Christianity. They retained that position for more than 500 years. Not until the 14th century did persecution become systematic and violent.

Long after that date, though, minorities survived and even thrived in substantial numbers. As recently as 1914, Christians still made up 10 percent of the whole region from Egypt to Persia (Iran), and most large cities were homes to multiple faiths and denominations. That did not mean that the Ottoman rulers were tolerant in principle; rather, they accepted what seemed like the natural order of things.

Disappearing Faith
Matters changed swiftly during World War I. Massacres and expulsions all but removed the once very large Armenian and Greek communities in Anatolia (now Turkey). Counting Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks together, murder and starvation killed more than two million Christians between 1915 and 1922.
Emerging Arab nations also targeted Christians. Iraq’s slaughter of Assyrians in 1933 gave lawyer Raphael Lemkin a basis upon which he defined the concept of genocide. The partition of Palestine and subsequent crises in the region massively shrunk other ancient Christian groups. The modern story of the Christian Middle East is one of contraction and collapse.

By the end of the past century, Christianity in the Middle East had two great centers: Coptic Egypt, and the closely interrelated lands of Syria and Lebanon. They are now home to many refugee churches.

Today, Syria’s continuing civil war threatens to extend Islamist power still further. Islamic State flags have appeared in Lebanon. Lebanese politician Walid Jumblatt has warned that both Christians and his own Druze people stand “on the edge of extinction.”

How bad could this get? All local Christians know the answer. They look back at the experience of Jews, who flourished across the region just a century ago but have now vanished from virtually every Mideast nation outside Israel. Since 1950, Egypt’s Jewish population has shrunk from 100,000 to perhaps 50; Iraq’s, from 90,000 to a mere handful. Christian Aleppo or Damascus could easily go the way of Jewish Baghdad. In 2013, Iraq’s Chaldean (Eastern-rite Catholic) patriarch Raphael Sako warned, “If emigration continues, God forbid, there will be no more Christians in the Middle East.”

The only Christian community that seems secure is the Copts, perhaps eight million strong, and a solid majority in some of Egypt’s southern districts. Even so, after the crisis there of the past two years, the potential remains for imminent conflict and Islamist violence.

KILLING CHURCHES

If the vision of a Christian-free Middle East is too pessimistic, the scale of the disasters that have overtaken some countries is beyond doubt. That experience offers many lessons for us in the West.

It is obscene to complain about a “war on Christmas” in the United States when there are Syrian cities without Christians to commemorate their holy days at all for the first time in some 1,900 years. That’s an authentic war on Christmas.

More broadly, these events teach us about the long-term trajectories of Christian history. They show how churches vanish and, more important perhaps, how they survive under the direst of circumstances.

One lesson emerges strongly: However often we talk of churches dying, they rarely do so without extraordinary external intervention. Churches don’t die because their congregations age, their pastors behave scandalously, the range of programs they offer wears thin, or their theology becomes muddled. Churches vanish when they are deliberately and efficiently killed by a determined foe.

That opponent looks different over time. The destructive enemy might represent a rival religious creed, as we now see with radical Islamism in Iraq. More commonly, the persecutor is inspired by a radical secular ideology that exalts the state and condemns any group that pledges loyalty to some other absolute, whether on earth or in heaven. That was the defining attitude of Soviet and Chinese communism. Similarly, the murderous Ottoman regime during the Great War acted as it did because of ferocious nationalism rather than any Islamic belief.

The Church of the East, the ancestor of the Assyrians and Chaldeans, perfectly illustrates that long survival—and profound current crisis. The disasters of the 14th century reduced that once transcontinental body to a much smaller remnant. That vestige continued within Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia for seven centuries. Throughout that latter period, hard-line Muslim jurists and demagogues competed to invent new humiliations to inflict on Christians: limits on what those believers could wear, the houses they could own, and the horses they could ride. At the worst of times, Christians wore rags to avoid giving any impression of wealth, which invited others to take their property.

If there was a single penalty that stung more than any, it was losing control of the soundscape. In a Muslim-ruled land, the only public voice of religion was the cry of the muezzin from the minaret; ringing church bells were utterly forbidden. The starkest division between Christian and Muslim societies was literally in the air.

But Christians endured century through century. They maintained their faithful witness while recognizing their severe limits. Through bitter experience, they learned to identify the irreducible core of their faith while setting aside additional practices. They abandoned the bells and whistles, literally. Christians could not evangelize, but they kept up the worship that stood at the heart of their spiritual life.

Critically too, they could support monasteries where spiritual warriors maintained prayer and study. As long as monks prayed and priests said the liturgy, the church was intact, and that situation could last, in theory, until Judgment Day. Surviving monasteries tended to be in remote and highly defensible places, and their fortifications were formidable. Egypt still has such legendary fortresses of prayer, such as St Antony’s monastery and St Catherine’s in Sinai. Until our own times, Iraqi Christians clustered around Mar Mattai (St Matthew) and Rabban Hormizd, both dating from late Roman times.

Some believers hoped that powerful Western churches would send aid, although foreign Protestants in particular could rarely grasp the distinct patterns of local religious practice. Worse, Westerners aroused the suspicion of local nationalists.

No less dangerous was the temptation to support secular nationalist parties that promised to govern regardless of faith or denomination. Such alliances were always something of a trap, as they intertwined local churches with dubious regimes, most notoriously the Ba’athists of Iraq or Syria. At least for some years, though, these policies removed the danger of active persecution.

The church persisted stubbornly until modern times, when new militants emerged to tear it up, root and branch. Believers were killed en masse, leaving survivors to flee the country for a time or altogether. Only at that point did churches cease to function. That is what happened to the Armenians during the Great War, and has started to happen to Iraq’s Syriac Christians over the past two decades.

Continued on page 12
THE GREATER PLAN?
In the darkest years of the Middle Ages, when European Christians fled from barbarian invaders, their obvious refuge was the neighboring monastery. This past summer, that was exactly the course taken by the Christians of northern Iraq to escape the Islamic State.

Some of the remnants of Mosul’s Christian community took shelter in the ancient cloisters of Mar Mattai. As the Islamic State has recently demonstrated, the practical logistics of destroying a church are not terribly difficult: You occupy a region militarily, and kill or expel all its inhabitants who practice the offending faith. Quite separate, though, is the question of how those persecuted believers understand that destruction.

Over the past thousand years, Christians have repeatedly had to ask: Why would God allow his followers to suffer defeat, subjection, exile, and enslavement? They find some answers in biblical precedent, looking to the Hebrew prophets who saw their own kingdom defeated for lacking faith and betraying the national covenant. Seen in this light, even the worst disasters can be seen as God’s scourge on his sinful people, although no clear evidence suggests that the churches in question are any worse than others that have enjoyed far greater success and safety.

But deeply embedded in Jewish and Christian thought is the idea of the righteous remnant, the community that survives tribulations only to follow God’s commands still more exactly. Perhaps the exile that initially seems a nightmare might form part of this greater plan, as dispossessed believers carry their witness to other lands. You cannot read the Bible without realizing how the Exile and Diaspora experience could powerfully spread faith into distant corners of the world. Around the Western world, growing communities of Christians from the Middle East are quite prepared to sing their song in a strange land.

Far more challenging is the question of why God would permit Christianity in a particular land to vanish altogether. Yes, churches move to new pastures where they might prosper. But what about their homelands? What about churches that are altogether destroyed, no remnant remaining? This theological dilemma might well be much discussed in 2015, when the long-awaited film version of Shusaku Endo’s 1966 novel, Silence, is set to release.

Endo was exploring the fate of the Catholic Church in 17th-century Japan as vicious persecution was snuffing it out. While the Catholic Church commemorates 200 named martyrs, tens of thousands more ordinary believers were beheaded, burned, and crucified. The Japanese used a singularly cruel tactic of water crucifixion at the seashore. Nailed to a cross at low tide, a priest would almost be wholly submerged as the tides came in over several days, finally drowning him.

As the last living priest in Silence muses over all the persecution and terror, he notes one fact: “In the face of this terrible and merciless sacrifice offered up to him, God has remained silent.” No, says the priest, God never intervened miraculously to protect his flock. No angels descended to conceal and protect fleeing victims; no persecutors were struck blind as they proclaimed their sentences or erected their crosses; the persecutors suffered neither plague nor military defeat as punishment for their actions. As in modern Iraq, the persecutors carried on their path unchecked until they achieved their monstrous goal.

Did God care so little for his faithful? Was there simply no God to care?

ETERNAL TIMEFRAME
God may seem silent on occasion. At other times, people simply don’t trouble to hear his voice. Those previous cases of church extinctions are dreadful enough, but rarely are they as total as they initially appear. So much depends on our perception of time.

What to us may seem like a definitive act of annihilation seems quite different when located upon a divine timescale. As we are often told, extinction is forever; but humans should be very cautious about using the language of eternity. Forever changes.

As an example, we might look at the experience of China, which over the past two millennia has remained the world’s most populous nation. The story of Chinese Christianity is a recurrent cycle of mighty boom years followed by what seemed like total annihilation at the time, an obliteration so absolute that on each occasion, it was quite clear that the church could never rise again. That cycle has occurred five times to date since the ninth century. On each occasion, the Chinese church has reemerged far more powerful than at its previous peak. Each successive “nevermore” proved to be strictly temporary.

Of course, individuals and communities suffered horrifically during those intervening centuries of disaster. We can’t minimize the atrocities. But if communities perished, the church endured. Viewed in the timeframe of eternity, those years of seeming annihilation should more properly be understood as fallow times of gestation.

Even when institutional churches vanish, believers persist in many different forms. One of the most understudied facts in Christian history is that of crypto-believers, those hidden remnants who hold on to truth while superficially accepting the prevailing regime. As Anatoly Lunacharsky, the frustrated Soviet minister of education, complained in 1928, “Religion is like a nail: The harder you hit it, the deeper it goes into the wood.” Sometimes it goes in so deep, you can’t even see it.

In Japan, for instance, the brutal destruction of the Catholic Church described in Silence did not prevent large groups of Kakure Kirishitan (“Hidden Christians”) from maintaining the faith underground. In fact, some survived four centuries and a few elderly hang on today. We see the same phenomenon in China and, most relevant to this article, all across the Middle East. In Syria, estimates of the size of the Christian population before the present crisis commonly varied between 5 and 15 percent, with crypto-Christians
accounting for much of the difference. Underground belief and practice will be much more difficult under an extreme Islamist regime than under the secular Ba’athists, but “cryptos” have often endured for astonishingly long periods, until gentler times return.

Shall we talk about the extinction of Middle Eastern Christianity? Come back in 500 years. We’ll see then.

UNCOUNTED CHRISTIANS

Even at this worst of times, Christians survive. But dare we say that, even in an increasingly intolerant Middle East, Christians as a whole are not just remaining but in places actually swelling in number?

This gets us into sensitive territory. Over the past decade, we have heard amazing claims about new Christian evangelization in Muslim countries, usually accompanied by incredible conversion statistics.

Having said that, some specific accounts are much more believable. David Garrison’s recent book, A Wind in the House of Islam, describes the Christian appeal in diverse Muslim societies. Remarkably, Syria offers some of the most convincing examples of this trend. Garrison is a responsible and critical reporter. The problem, though, is that all such activity is clandestine, for fear of arousing persecution.

For the sake of argument, let us adopt a sweeping skepticism and dismiss all such stories. Even so, we are still witnessing a striking upsurge of Christian numbers in some of the most unlikely settings, almost entirely as a result of immigration. Look at Saudi Arabia, a land of 28 million people where Islam is the only permitted religion. Consequently, official sources list the country as 100 percent Muslim.

In reality, Saudi Arabia is only one of many Middle Eastern countries that have imported millions of poor foreigners to perform menial jobs over the years. Many of those immigrants are African and Asian Christians, including many Filipinos. As they do not officially exist as Christians, they have zero right to practice their faith, even in private. But exist they do. By some estimates, Saudi Arabia’s Christian population is about 5 percent of the whole, perhaps 1.5 million people.

Other Gulf nations are more honest about just how religiously diverse they have become. Christians—mainly guest workers—probably make up 7 percent of the population of the United Arab Emirates, and 10 percent of Bahrain or Kuwait. Those are nations where Christianity scarcely existed 100 years ago.

No less surprising is Israel. Together with Palestine and the Occupied Territories, the State of Israel now includes thousands of adherents of ancient Christian denominations. Those older churches have fallen sharply in their numbers in the past half-century, but newer Christians have more than replaced them. There are thousands of Global South guest workers. Also, many Russian Christians invoked Jewish ancestry to enter Israel in the 1990s. Some were Orthodox Christians, others Baptists and Pentecostals. Israel’s Russian Christian community today is perhaps 80,000 strong.

Israel and Palestine combined have a population of some 10 million, of whom perhaps 5 percent are Christians—Arab, Armenian, Russian, African, and Filipino. Together with the Arab Gulf, these are the region’s new and growing centers of Christian belief and practice.

SUFFERING, YES. EXTINCTION, NO.

Not for a second should such signs of growth distract our attention from the dreadful situation facing Christians elsewhere in the Middle East. Individuals are being murdered, raped, enslaved, and turned into refugees, and Western governments have no option but to intervene on their behalf—only how is a matter for debate.

Armed intervention might actually succeed in crushing the most aggressive jihadi campaigns. In the longer term, Western churches undoubtedly have their role to play in assisting fellow believers, whether in their homelands or in their new diasporas. Even with vigorous activism, though, whether military or humanitarian, it is difficult to imagine the churches of Syria and Iraq returning to the flourishing condition they enjoyed even half a century ago.

But that is quite different from saying that Christianity as such faces extinction in the region, or that the church might cease to exist.

Looking at this story, we might adapt the famous remark about Russia, typically attributed to Otto von Bismarck: “Christianity is never as strong as it appears; but nor is it ever as weak as it appears.” In God’s terms, words like strength and weakness can have surprising meanings. We must be very cautious indeed about making statements that claim to understand the goals or directions of history.

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Philip Jenkins, author of The Lost History of Christianity (HarperOne), is distinguished professor of history at Baylor University.
It is a truly unique cultural heritage site, the hamlet of Ma’aloula, with Christian sanctuaries and monuments stretching back for more than 16 centuries into the past, yet it has been scarred, traumatized, desecrated, and deeply wounded by the war in Syria.

Situated some 40 miles northeast of Damascus, Ma’aloula is one of the few places in the world where Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus Christ, is still spoken, but its Christian inhabitants feel they have been betrayed, not once but twice in the past year.

The first betrayal came from some of their Muslim neighbors who have shared the hamlet as good neighbors for 14 centuries. Until now, only ten percent of the pre-conflict population of approximately 4,000 (approximately 3,200 Christians and 600 Sunni Muslims) have dared to return, and there is little potable water and not much electricity.

Many of the Christians, mainly Antiochian Orthodox and Melkite Greek Catholics, fled to the Christian quarter of the Bab Touma neighborhood in the Old City of Damascus, and most remain there. Syrian forces retook the area on 13 April 2014, four months after al-Nusra and other Islamist rebels overran it. This was after the jihadists had kidnapped 13 Ma’aloula nuns and three maids on 3 December 2013, transporting them to the nearby town of Yabrud, until their release was negotiated and they were freed last March.

In May 2014, a couple of days after the liberation of Homs, this observer visited the Um al-Zennar Church, also known as the “Church of the Holy Belt,” located in the Old City. What he witnessed and photographed at the time was the immediate aftermath of a rampage of desecration that had been inflicted on the church. This included the smashing of the altar and pews, the gouging out of the eyes of religious icons, the smashing of religious statues and destruction of paintings of saints, including Mary the mother of Jesus. Other damage included the burning of the nave and sanctuary as well as a still smoldering pile of bibles and religious documents in the courtyard.

It was the worst desecration of a place of reverence and worship I had ever seen—until I came to Ma’aloula.

The churches and monasteries here had attracted both Christian and Muslim pilgrims before the conflict. The monastery of Mar Thecla in fact has a reputation among believers for miraculous cures. This observer and his companion were given drops of holy water to splash in our eyes for good health and happiness.

One can also drink water from the crack in the massive rock cliff that St Thecla was said to have parted while fleeing the wrath of her family for turning from paganism to Christianity. Some religious scholars claim, and indeed a legend in the early church has it, that Thecla was a chaste and devoted follower of St Paul. In any event, townspeople claim the water, which flows from the huge split rock, offers a cure for a variety of ailments.

Syrian Tourism Minister Bachir Yazigi has reported that damage and theft to antiquities in Syria, including during the fighting in Ma’aloula, has amounted to “billions of Syrian pounds” in losses. Included in his calculations are the following examples:

- Many of the old town houses and alleys have been destroyed. Roofs and walls of houses built of stone, in some cases three stories high, have collapsed.
A large number of caves and archaeological cemeteries have been vandalized, sabotaged, and drilled, their doors smashed and turned into fortified barricades. One of the most damaged caves was on the site of Mar Sarkis, or the Monastery of SS Sergius and Bacchus.

The Monastery of St Thecla, including her tomb, has been completely burned, and its holy relics and icons looted, some already surfacing for illicit sale.

One lady from Ma’aloula, now living in Damascus, explained to this observer how al-Nusra militants handed citizens “certificates of death” and threatened to harm women and children should the men fail to comply with whatever orders were given to them. She recalled how Christians were told to pay tributes to al-Nusra in order to stay alive.

Al-Nusra militants, by the way, are being identified as some of the most active dealers of black market antiquities of the Middle East. Lebanese media have reported that a great number of ancient icons, crosses, reliquaries, and statues have been smuggled from Syria into Lebanon and then sent abroad. Local smugglers are said by INTERPOL to be moving hundreds of Ma’aloula’s antiquities, transporting Christian antiquities to European countries, with the main destinations being Italy and Turkey.

The main entrance to St Thecla’s Monastery and its main corridor have also been badly damaged and burnt. A fire was set in the Church of St John the Baptist, located inside the monastery, and its contents—those which were not stolen—have been smashed, including the altar, the crosses, icons, and frescos. Extremist phrases were written on the walls of the church, and many of the wall icons were painted over (in the ideology of some extremist groups the icons are forbidden to be seen).

At the nearby Monastery of SS Sergius and Bacchus—constructed in the early fourth century and one of the oldest monasteries in Syria—parts of the western and eastern walls have been substantially damaged by mortar shells. Additionally, the massive dome of the building has been destroyed, apparently hit by shells from different directions, and the bell removed.

On the inside, the main marble altar lies destroyed, its wooden cross smashed. Drilling operations were carried out underneath the altar, apparently in search of treasure. All of the movable antiquities and holy items inside the monastery have been stolen, including the most important Ma’aloula icons.

And at the nearby Church of St Leontius, the southern wall, the roof, and the dome of the building have been damaged by shelling. Inside, the marble tabernacle is destroyed and Holy items have been stolen, including the ancient church bell, which is claimed by locals to have been one of the most beautiful-sounding church bells in the world, second only perhaps to the bell at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

The crosses have been removed from above the domes of the church, and some of the valuable icons have been stolen, while others were burned. Wooden pews were piled high in the nave and set ablaze, an act of destruction which not only caused the incineration of the pews but also set alight the wooden ceiling of the church.

No less tragic were the fates of two other world-famous monuments of Ma’aloula. Extremists blew up the statue of Christ the Savior, which had adorned the entrance of St Thecla Convent, as well as the statue of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, which stood on a cliff near the Safir Hotel, a domicile that was commandeered and ended up serving as al-Nusra’s main shelter for many months.

The Church of SS Cosmas and Damian was also destroyed, its altar and wooden iconostasis smashed and its valuable icons stolen. Elsewhere in the hamlet, the Church of St Barbara was extensively damaged, with whatever valuables not carted off being burned. Even the more modern churches and shrines in the town have been completely looted and destroyed, including the shrines of Mar Saba and St Thomas and the Church of St Sherbin.

Throughout the community, what was inflicted by the invaders was wanton, mindless desecration.

Ma’aloula is—and was—a beautiful ancient town, renowned for its religious tolerance. Its majority Christian population tried hard to resist the centrifugal pressures of a vicious, sectarian conflict. It failed through no want of trying. The day this observer visited the town, 23 September 2014, was by coincidence a religious holiday, and the Sisters returned with the orphans for a few hours.

There was much joy, even among the ruins, and a bishop explained to me that solace and hope are still extended to the small number of townspeople remaining. As the voices of the few parishioners of St Thecla flowed for a short while, filling the winding paths and alleys with praises to God and humanity, it seemed almost that even the hundreds of opened and vandalized burial caves on the mountainsides were touched, momentarily, by a sense of majesty and solemnity.

And then the Sisters and orphans were parishioners were gone, returning to their hopefully safe quarters in Homs. It is hoped that those quarters will be only temporary, for Ma’aloula sorely needs these residents to return to erase the ghost-town feeling of emptiness.

Ma’aloula and its citizens urgently need governmental and international solidarity and assistance so as to begin the daunting task of resurrecting this formerly peaceful place of spirituality. A town motto that used to be cherished by the residents was (but is no more): “Everyone is a Christian and everyone is Muslim.”

A couple of local residents who still remain and who seemed to be looking after the town, helpfully supplied much information to this observer during his visit, and after I had spent a wonderful but solemn day in their presence, both gentlemen swore to me that they would never forget, or forgive, the extreme Islamists who had desecrated and substantially gutted their village, along with its sacred sites, or the local Muslims who had been their neighbors but who had joined the rebels and helped destroy the town.

They insisted that Ma’aloula had been betrayed twice—one by their neighbors and a second time by the government, which shortly after town was liberated granted the criminals amnesty. Much bitterness remains over both of these perceived betrayals.

The two gentlemen also made a request of me: that as an American I take their story home and tell President Obama and American politicians about what happened here—and...
A Forgotten People

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ask for help rebuilding this Christian village. This report is in response to their request, and to honor my pledge to them that I would. May God protect them.

It was getting late and time to return to Damascus. A warning came from nearby soldiers stationed not far from a Hezbollah camp to be careful using the roads after dark. At this same moment, the five-year-old daughter of one of the townsmen who had toured some of the ruins and church buildings with us looked up at her father with love and pride—this as the embittered gentleman, who had fought the al-Nusra invaders, shook hands and gazed into my eyes. And for a moment, both of our eyes filled with tears.

“No,” he said, “—no, we ask others to forgive our trespassers, and we must forgive those who trespassed against us. Christ Jesus taught us this. And we must turn the other cheek.”

His is a minority view in the town, I was told, but with those words from the Lord’s Prayer, I watched as this noble man wiped his eyes, and then he squeezed his young daughter’s hand. The five-year-old looked up at her baba and appeared to understand him, as he gazed high up into the surrounding mountains, and directly at the mountain-top remains of the As Safir Hotel where al Nusra had its headquarters and from which it had rained mortars and rockets down on the defenseless village.

In the library of the Mar Sarkis monastery, just before leaving, I found a book where visitors can write comments. One comment, signed by a lady from Boise, Idaho, and still legible, reads, “This is a very beautiful place to visit and also very inspirational to know that Christians have existed in this area continuously for so many years. May the work here in God’s name continue and help to bring peace and understanding to all people in the Middle East and the world, regardless of who or by what means they choose to worship God.”

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CLOSER TO COMMUNION

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churches in communion with the See of Peter increased as a result of the efforts of Latin Catholic missionaries to bring groups of Eastern Orthodox Christians into communion with Rome. Others, like the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, on their own initiative entered into visible communion with Rome. The presence of all these Eastern churches in the Catholic Church shows clearly that there is indeed a difference between the pope’s exercise of patriarchal authority over the Latin Church, where he appoints all the bishops and exercises other administrative authority, and his exercise of papal authority over the Eastern Catholic churches in communion with Rome. This distinction has been made even more explicit by the promulgation of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, in which the relative autonomy of these churches is upheld.

It is not surprising, then, that Father Ratzinger would write, “Unity of faith is the pope’s function; this does not prohibit independent administrative agencies like the ancient patriarchates.” And he went on to say: “The extreme centralization of the Catholic Church is due not simply to the Petrine office but to its being confused with the patriarchal function which the bishop of Rome gradually assumed over the whole of Latin Christianity. Uniformity of church law and liturgy and the appointment of bishops by Rome arose from a close union of these two offices. In the future they should be more clearly distinguished.”

It is evident, then, that both Father Congar and Father Ratzinger included the administrative dimension in their understanding of the patriarchal office. What is to be said, then, regarding their observations about the need for new patriarchates on the basis of the fact that the present Latin Catholic Church, which comprises such a large portion of the globe, is increasingly unmanageable as a single patriarchal division? Both these theologians saw the weaknesses of what Father Ratzinger called “extreme centralization” when such a vast and diverse territory is involved.

It is an administrative problem because it is self-evident that a central authority cannot, in fact, adequately know and understand such vast and diverse cultures and territories. Cardinal Stephen Fumio Hamao of Japan, who had studied in Rome and later (after being bishop of Yokohama) served for some years in the Roman Curia, pointed out in an interview that “most people in the Roman Curia are European- and American-minded. They cannot understand the mentality of East Asia and the Far East.” Having had the experience of teaching Latin to the crown prince of Japan, the cardinal said, speaking of Rome’s encouraging of the use of Latin, “It is impossible for Asians... That is European-centered. It is too much!”

There is no principle or doctrine of Catholic faith, nor any canonical provision, that prevents the establishment of new patriarchal structures in the Latin Catholic Church along the lines of the Eastern Catholic patriarchal churches. Creation of such structures could be a way of solving “extreme centralization.” This would not only promote the inculturation of the Gospel but would, as well, open up a more effective way for evangelization. The bishops of Japan, for instance, have said for many decades that their inability to attract many converts is due to the fact that they are made to present Christ with a Western face.

The Second Vatican Council explicitly noted the link between the modern episcopal conference and the ancient patriarchates. How such structures might function in practice and what safeguards would be necessary to ensure Catholic unity not only with Rome but among such different countries and cultures themselves could fruitfully be the subject of a carefully prepared deliberative papal synod. This might include not only an examination of the history of patriarchal structures in the church, their strengths and weaknesses, but would necessarily envision how bishops would need to be prepared for such new structures in order to function effectively in them.†

The Most Rev. John R. Quinn, now retired, was Archbishop of Oklahoma City and of San Francisco. He served as president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and taught at Santa Clara University, the University of San Diego, and the University of San Francisco. This article is adapted from his book Ever Ancient, Ever New: Structures of Communion in the Church (Paulist Press).

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Orthodox Churches
in Symphony:
Hopes for the 2016 Pan-Orthodox Synod

By Abouna Dimitry

It is by no means an overstatement to call “historical” the recent decision to hold the long-awaited Pan-Orthodox Synod in Constantinople (Istanbul) in 2016. Meeting in Istanbul, all the heads—Patriarchs and Archbishops—of the Orthodox Churches set the date and place.

More than twelve centuries have elapsed since the Second Council of Nicaea (787 AD) when all the Eastern Churches got together in a synod to reflect and deliberate on matters of common concern. It has also been more than 50 years—since the early sixties of the last century—since the “preparatory” work for such a Synod was started by Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople (+1972).

In those fifty years many things have changed in our society and also in those nations where historically the Christian faith was lived, celebrated, and handed down according to the great Eastern tradition. The collapse of communism brought the new-found freedom of confessing Christ in His Church, and then the phenomenon of large-scale migrations followed. These changes also brought some shifts within the Churches, such as the Second Vatican Council in the Catholic Church, new and unfamiliar dealings with other ecclesial communities, new relationships with civil society, and encounters with other religions, just to mention some.

The Orthodox Churches, lacking a center of authority such as the Pope in the Church of Rome, have worked hard to reach a *symphonic* agreement—a way of “playing” together without losing their individual voices. There was fear that the synod could have been delayed or even cancelled, because of new tensions among some Church members.

Moreover, Christian Churches, including the Orthodox, are experiencing a season of weakness and minority within the societies in which they live, like the Middle East. But, paradoxically, this weakness has contributed to the “miracle” of the announcement of the 2016 Pan-Orthodox Synod. Christians feel the need to find unity again, to build up communion without which the future of their presence in some areas of the globe becomes precarious.

We have followed the laborious journey of this synodical project, and seen Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople’s pastoral solicitude for the Churches. He has been and untiring supporter of this cause, notwithstanding all the difficulties. When the Turkish government allowed the use of St Irene Church in 2016 for the opening session of the forthcoming Pan-Orthodox Synod, Patriarch Bartholomew and his bishops were highly elated and heartily thanked the Lord.

It is fitting then to expect signs of hope from these two years of final preparation and from the assembly that will get together under the presidency of the Ecumenical Patriarch. In the first place there will be a confirmation of faith and at the same time a renewal of ways to witness this faith in a secularized world where Christians have become a minority.

The next challenge will be to find paths of a more visible communion. Within the rich symphony of the autonomous Eastern Churches, each assembled around its patriarch and synod, these Churches need to find new ways of communion beyond their national or regional borders. It is not a matter of renouncing the “local” traditions, or of constituting a kind of “federation” with delegates, but rather to really live the unity between the local and the universal, the one and the many, and “to think big,” breathing with full lungs.

This forthcoming synod could also prove to be—as was the case with Vatican II—a blessed event for other Churches, beginning with the Catholic Church. Orthodoxy has always asserted its “synodality” and the Catholic West has emphasized “primacy.” A Pan-Orthodox synod, presided by the *prima inter pares* (first among equals), could promote reflection among Catholics that “primacy” is weak without “synodality” and among Orthodox that “synodality” is as well weak without “primacy.” It goes without saying that the journey is difficult due to historic rifts and recurrent ambitions and expectations. Let us not forget that even the apostles discussed “who was the first among them.”

Agreement on the date of the Pan-Orthodox Synod is a further sign of the new ecclesial spring we are living in. Many of us experienced an earlier spring in the 1960s with Vatican II and Pope St John XXIII, but we also came to realize that in history these springs are often interrupted by sudden frosts. Today something new and yet ancient is blooming, the freshness of the Gospel. Our brothers and sisters look again to Jesus Christ and to the Churches that announce Him because they need direction in their lives.

Indeed we live a favorable time for the Church and the Gospel. The Church always lives a favorable season when it returns to its Lord, opens its doors to the needy, and accepts Christ’s poverty. Perhaps this condition of poverty and service constitutes the great opportunity of believable proclamation of the Gospel.

†
A showing of the documentary film “Voices Across the Divide” by Dr Alice Rothchild and Sharon Mullally at St Joseph parish in Lansing, MI, almost filled the church hall with old and young parishioners and some guests on 12 September 2014.

The evening began with dinner presented by the Al-Bassa Community of Lansing. A short discussion followed the film. “Voices Across the Divide” tackles one of the most prominent and hotly-debated issues in the US today—the Israeli Occupation of the Palestinian Territories—from the perspective of a Jewish-American peace activist.

That peace activist, Dr Alice Rothchild, is an Assistant Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Biology at Harvard Medical School.

In 1997, Dr Rothchild turned much of her non-medical focus to understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its relationship to US foreign policy and American Jewry. She traveled frequently to Israel and the Occupied Territories to experience for herself the tragic situation in the Holy Land.

In 2007, her first book, Broken Promises and Broken Dreams, was published. In it, she highlights the struggles of some Israelis who reject their government’s policies of occupation and the hardships Palestinians endure in the West Bank and Gaza.

In 2008, Dr Rothchild got more involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and started working on her documentary film. She chose the University of Detroit as the place where she would interview Palestinian-American eyewitnesses to the tragic events of the Nakba in 1948.

When approached by the coordinator, George Khoury, about my willingness to participate in this project, I definitely responded positively. I suggested to Dr Rothchild showing the first sequence of my own documentary film “Jews of Tomorrow” that deals with the persecution of Jews during World War II. I produced this film in 1974 as a thesis for my graduation from the Photographic Engineering College in Cologne, Germany.

Dr Rothchild welcomed my proposal and I had the chance to show my film during the interview that took place at the University of Detroit in the fall of 2008. In the narration of that sequence, I expressed sympathy with the Jews, stated that persecution of Jews by the Nazis was unacceptable, and condemned their inhuman treatment.

The narration was accompanied by horrible photos from the concentration camps in Poland. It ironically comments, “We close our eyes and refuse to recognize that something similar is happening today in Palestine.”

After completing the interviews, Dr Rothchild planned a trip to Israel and the Occupied Territories to gather further data for her film. I offered her the possibility of meeting friends of mine from Miliyia village in western Galilee. She welcomed the idea and as soon as she arrived in Naharyia in Galilee, she met a group of displaced Palestinian Israelis including two attorneys, Wakim Wakim and Salim Wakim, who received her at the train station.

The group accompanied her to several destroyed villages, including my own birthplace, Al-Bassa village. They also discussed the discrimination against the Palestinian minority in Israel.

When she returned to the States, she wrote an article about her impressions of visiting several demolished Palestinian villages from 1948, and the significant dialogue she had with a group of Palestinians who are legal citizens of the State of Israel.

In 2009, Dr Rothchild invited all interviewees to Detroit to watch a rough edit of the film and to collect money to finance the production of the film. I informed Fr Lawrence Gosselin, then pastor of St Joseph parish, about the invitation. He showed interest in driving to Detroit to watch the film together. Fr Lawrence expressed his sympathy for the Palestinian people who had been enduring injustice and discrimination for a long time.

The present pastor of St Joseph parish, Fr James Graham, is also supportive and sympathetic and realized the significance of screening the film for parishioners and guests.

Showing “Voices Across the Divide” enabled them to see and hear from eyewitnesses how the systematic ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians from their homeland occurred. They also noticed how young interviewees were able to establish friendships with Israeli Jewish girls, a demonstration that coexistence and living together, either in a two-state solution or in one democratic state with equal rights, is the only path for peace with justice in the Holy Land.

Peace based on justice for the Palestinians and security for all residents of Israel requires that Americans and the citizens of other Western nations must be informed about the truth of history.

In conclusion, let me quote Albert Einstein: “The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.”

Visit www.voicesacrossthdivide.com to learn more about the film, view a trailer, and read the transcripts of the interviews.

Nimer Haddad is a parishioner of St Joseph Melkite Greek Catholic Church, Lansing, MI, where he serves as Vice-Chair of the Parish Pastoral Council and Chairman of the Evangelization Committee.
In the last issue of SOPHIA, I offered the first part of this series, “Wandering from Christ,” in which I quoted extensive sections from Fr. Alexander Schmemann’s book Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience.

In this book, which I once again recommend, especially to our catechists and parents, Schmemann outlines the initial steps to restore an authentic Eastern Christian approach to catechesis. This Eastern Christian approach to catechesis, which he calls “liturgical catechesis,” has as its defining character the transmission of “the entire content of Christian education . . . in direct connection with liturgical services” and has as its goal the full incorporation of “the individual into the life of the Church.”

It is not, Schmemann states, “merely the communication of religious knowledge . . . but the ‘edification’—the ‘building-up’—of a member of the Body of Christ, a member of that new ‘chosen race’ and ‘holy nation’ (1 Peter 2:9). . . . Religious education is nothing else but the disclosing of that which happened to man when he was born again through water and Spirit, and was made a member of the Church.”

Following these general theoretical considerations, Fr. Alexander turns his attention to application. He outlines a number of “first steps” to restore liturgical catechesis in our churches. It is the first of these steps that I would like to focus on in this second article in this series.

“First of all,” Schmemann states, “we must recognize that we cannot artificially separate the problem of the religious upbringing of our children from that of a renewal of the entire Orthodox community. . . . The rebirth of ‘liturgical catechesis’ requires first of all a rebirth of the liturgical life of the Church, its better understanding by the faithful, a more responsible attitude to it, a more active participation in it. . . . We need a liturgical catechesis for adults, and in the clergy itself.” (Emphasis added.)

Catechesis for adults?

If there is one concern that we all hold in common, it is the religious upbringing of our children. What will happen when our children come of age? Will they continue to identify with our Melkite Church and live as vibrant and engaged members of our Church? Will they continue to follow Christ and seek a life of holiness?

While we continue to worry about the next generation, most adults forget that our children receive the gift of faith through their parents and the adults who make up the fabric of our church. It is all too easy to point the finger at the next generation as the real problem and never look in the mirror at ourselves.

For the past ten years or so, I have been working in the realm of adult faith formation. As I often remind those with whom I work, it is not the children who are the future of the Church, it is the Church that is the future of our children—and our church is made up of you and me – parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, adults from all walks and stages of life.

If our churches (our people) are not strong in the faith, if our churches are not vibrant centers of renewal in Christ, the children will certainly seek spiritual renewal somewhere else as they mature into their adult years. And this is Schmemann’s first point—the first step to renewing our churches is authentic catechesis—“We cannot teach what we do not practice ourselves.”

Certainly these are strong and challenging words, but they are true nonetheless. Holiness, authentic piety, friendship with Jesus—these are not ideas only for children. Certainly, they are for children, but only as an invitation into the fullness of the life of faith that our children will discover as they grow into adult faith and a real, mature relationship with God.

Therefore, we must begin by asking ourselves some difficult questions—are we living the Christian life that we encourage our children to live? Are we asking our children to enter into a friendship with Jesus in which we ourselves are engaged? Is Jesus the center of our life in the way that we want him to be the center of our children’s lives? Are we growing and drawing closer to Christ in the way we want our children growing in their love for God?

It is at this point, with these questions and desires in our heart, that Fr. Alexander lays out for us a plan of renewal for ourselves and for our entire community. And this renewal, as he states, must begin with and in the Divine Liturgy, where we come to experience the revelation of God’s love.

This first step in renewal, however, reveals within itself a fundamental challenge to our entire church today, and this fundamental challenge revolves around the issue of language. “The language of the Church, the language of worship, is the language of the Bible, not only literally (more than half of the liturgical texts are Biblical), but also in the sense that the entire structure of worship . . . and the whole spirit of worship are intimately linked with the Scriptures and deeply rooted in them.”

And this is the fundamental and first problem—we, the people of God, have lost our ability to understand the “language of the Church,” which is the language of God. We, as the people of God, are, for the most part, biblically illiterate. We no longer speak and understand the “language” which God uses to reveal God’s self to us, and as such we are losing our ability to understand and receive God’s revelation of love through its primary conduit, which is the Divine Liturgy.

Our first step, then, is to renew ourselves and our communities in our basic knowledge of the Bible, in its stories, in its themes, and in its underlying message. We must once again become biblically literate so that we can understand the “language of the Church” in the Divine Liturgy and once again begin to converse with God.

So find your Bible and dust it off. It is time to allow God to speak to us once again.

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Recently, I came into possession of the following evangelical note. The gentleman that gave this note to me was clearly in love with Jesus Christ, and desired the salvation of all who came into contact with him. Here is the message:

Dear Friend,

We thought you might like to know how to become a Born Again Christian.

In the Bible (Romans 10:9-10), it says, “If you confess with your lips the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, YOU WILL BE SAVED.” Take time now to confess that Jesus is Lord, believe that God raised him from the dead, and be saved. You can say this prayer:

Lord Jesus, I am a sinner and I repent of my sins. I believe that Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead. I ask You, Lord Jesus, to come into my heart, take charge of my life, and give me eternal salvation so that I may live with You forever. Amen.

If you said this prayer and meant it, then, according to the Bible, you are Born Again and will live with the Lord Jesus Christ forever in Heaven when you leave this earth. Now that you are a new creation in Christ, you should read the Bible every day. And, remember, Friends don’t let Friends die without Jesus.

May God Always Bless You,
A Friend

Before commenting on the theological content of this message, I would like to note the sincere spirit in which it was written, and the simple love of Christ which must have inspired passing it on. In no way do I seek to question the good intentions of the author.

However, I believe that the message itself does warrant some consideration. Is this message the authentic message of the Bible, inspired by the words of Jesus Himself, or is it in some way a corruption of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Does the theological content of this message stand up to the scrutiny of the Bible itself?

First, let us deal with a preliminary challenge that might be worded like this:

“Why does the Catholic Church insist on things like the truth of theological content? Why can’t the Catholic Church be content with the simple message of the Good News?”

The answer to this challenge is clear, and yet, faced with such a challenge, many Catholics cower in embarrassment. Therefore, let us state clearly that the Catholic Church believes that Jesus is “The way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Truth has content, and that content is determined not by “how I feel about it,” but by the way things really are.

Truth has content, and it is my duty as a rational person to conform my mind to it. If Jesus is the Truth, as He claimed, then our belief in Him and our discipleship is formed by this truth. This truth will determine everything about the way in which we follow Him and everything about what we are to believe.

We who profess the Orthodox Faith can never be satisfied with only a small part of the truth, or a version of the truth. We who confess Jesus as Lord must always be concerned with the entire message of Christ. It is our duty as followers of Him Who is truth Himself, to conform ourselves to His whole person, to the whole Gospel message.

Therefore, let us examine the content of the message that was handed to me, and seek to determine its value in light of the whole Gospel.

First we must consider the idea of a “born again Christian.” As the note states, in order to be “born again,” one must confess that Jesus is Lord and that He has been raised from the dead. With this confession, says the argument, the sinner is saved and will live with the Lord Jesus forever in heaven after leaving this earth.

Please note that the author of this evangelical message made a connection between confession of the Lord and being “born again,” a connection that is not explicitly stated in the passage from the Epistle to the Romans on which the author bases his assertion. In fact, nowhere in St Paul’s writ-
ings do we find the phrase “born again.”

This phrase, so loved by our born-again brethren, is first found in the Gospel of John, and though St Paul uses similar imagery in other places, he in no way identifies those who confess the Lord as “born again Christians.” Thus, to accurately identify someone who has been “born again,” we must turn to the Gospel of John and discover what St John means by this unusual phrase.

In his conversation with Nicodemus in the Gospel of John, our Lord says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). To this dramatic claim of Christ, Nicodemus responds in confusion, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born again?” (John 3:4).

Answering Nicodemus, our Lord clarifies his earlier statement—“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). By changing his terms, Jesus explains “born again” as being “born of water and the Spirit.”

Second we must ask what it means to be born of water and the Spirit if being “born again” is the same as being “born of water and the Spirit.” And to answer this question, we must recall one of the most important principles of Biblical interpretation: A text without a context is no text at all!

In the Gospel of John, the themes of water and spirit appear together only once before our Lord’s statement to Nicodemus, at the occasion of Jesus’ baptism when St John witnesses the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove (John 1:32).

Our Lord refers to baptism as a rebirth in his conversation with Nicodemus, St Basil the Great explains, because “water fulfils the image of death, and Spirit gives us the earnest of life . . . The water receiving the body, as in a tomb, figures death, while the Spirit pours in the quickening power, renewing our souls from the deadness of sin unto their original life” (Treatise on the Holy Spirit). A person coming forth from the baptismal waters was likened by the early Christians to a child coming forth from the mother’s womb. From this image came the ancient name for the baptismal font as the “womb of the Church.”

Though our evangelical friends correctly believe in the need for “rebirth” in order to attain salvation, considering the context of the Gospel of John reveals the first error in their argument. Far from identifying being “born again” with our act of faith, Jesus’ statement to Nicodemus that one must be “born again” has always been interpreted in the Church as referring to baptismal rebirth by “water and the Spirit.”

Let us be clear, the Catholic Church does not teach that Baptism is the only necessary component in our salvation. Rather, by taking these biblical passages in their proper context, we have discovered a more complete interpretation. Rather than dividing faith and Baptism, to the detriment of both, the Catholic Church believes that both are necessary components of our salvation.

In taking our Lord’s words to Nicodemus that we must be “born again” as synonymous with St Paul’s teaching that we must “confess with our lips” and thus “be saved,” Protestant theology has lost sight of the fullness of the Christian teaching on salvation. Once again, Jesus’ words to Nicodemus must be taken in the context in which they were written, and as such can only refer to baptism by “water and the spirit” (John 3:3-5, John 1:29-34).

Confirming this interpretation regarding the necessity of baptism in our salvation, we read our Lord’s farewell command to His disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16).

Again, on Pentecost, after St Peter preached to those in Jerusalem that they had crucified the Christ of God, those that believed asked, “Brethren, what shall we do?” To this, Peter answered, “Repent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:37-38).

Clearly then, what St Paul teaches in his epistle to the Romans—as quoted out of context in the evangelical note given to me—is only part of the story.

In our quest to understand salvation, let us push our inquiry further, and test this evangelical assertion against other biblical texts. In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, in the midst of our Lord’s discourse on the bread of life, we hear His famous teaching on the Eucharist, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:53-54).

Again, in the Acts of the Apostles we read, “We believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11). In the book of Revelation, we read that “nothing unclean” shall enter into the presence of God. In order to be saved, we must be “perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Again in the Gospel of Matthew, our Lord teaches that we must feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and visit the sick in order to receive “eternal life” (Matthew 25). In other words, we will be judged worthy of heaven or hell based upon “what [we] have done” (Revelation 20:12).

Thus, when we read the Sacred Scriptures in context, instead of taking just one verse out of context, we must conclude that, in addition to “confessing with our lips,” we must also repent and be “born again” in the waters of Baptism and receive the Holy and Life-giving Mysteries to partake of eternal life. In order to be saved, we must receive Christ’s gift of grace, and live out that gift through acts of charity to those in need. In order to be found worthy of heaven, we must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Far from being saved by faith alone, as our Protestant brethren believe, Apostolic Christianity teaches, in accord with Sacred Scripture, that salvation consists in a total transformation of our lives. This transformation is so radical that it calls for a new birth in water and the Spirit, through the Mystery of Baptism; it calls for a new life in the Spirit of God, and it calls for a new way of acting for the love of God.

Yes, we must have faith, but our act of faith is only one step on the road to a complete healing of our entire person. 

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Another New Melkite Priest
Fr Paul Al Khouri Fallouh

On Saturday 4 October 2014 in Holy Cross Church, Placentia, CA, Bishop Nicholas ordained to the priesthood Deacon Adham Al Khouri Fallouh, who chose to take the name “Paul,” based on his affinity for the spirituality of St Paul.

The new Fr Paul, a native of Daraa, Syria, immigrated to the United States in 2013. Fr Paul received a law degree in Syria and then felt called by God to study for the priesthood. He spent six years at St Anne Seminary in Rabweh, Lebanon, and St Paul Institute in Harissa, Lebanon.

After many years of discernment, Fr Paul requested ordination to the diaconate after he completed his course of studies in Rabweh and after receiving permission from Patriarch Gregorios III. Fr Paul had been blessed as sub-deacon before he emigrated. He requested to be ordained while attending St Philip parish in San Bernardino, CA, near his family’s home in Rialto, CA. Fr Justin Rose, pastor of St Philip’s, and the deacons and parishioners there encouraged his decision.

Bishop Nicholas agreed to ordain him to the priesthood after he served briefly in Holy Cross parish as a deacon and learned pastoral care and administrative skills. At the ordination Fr Francois Beyrouti, pastor of Holy Cross, and Fr Justin Rose served as presenters, as did Deacon Elias Kashou and Protodeacon Habib Khasho. Also attending were Archimandrite James Babcock, pastor of the communities of the Virgin Mary in Temecula and St Jacob in San Diego; Archimandrite Fouad Sayegh, pastor of St Anne parish in North Hollywood; Fr George Bisharat, pastor of Annunciation mission in Covina; Fr Antoine Bakh, pastor of St John Maron parish in Orange; Fr James Barrand, pastor of Annunciation parish in Anaheim; Protodeacons George Sayegh and Steven Ghandour; Deacons George Karout and Tareq Nasrallah; and other clergy from various churches.

A huge outdoor reception was held on the grounds of Holy Cross Parish to celebrate the occasion.

Fr Paul now serves as Associate Pastor of Virgin Mary Community, which recently moved to a new location in Temecula.
The family lies at the heart of society. When families are strong, the society is strong.

In the 4th century, speaking on the Acts of the Apostles, St John Chrysostom alludes to a line in the Gospel of Matthew that says, “Let the house be a church consisting of men and women - for where two are gathered in My Name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). Preaching on Saint Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, the Golden-mouthed refers to families as “a little Church,” reminding his listeners that “it is possible for us to surpass all others in virtue by becoming good husbands and wives.”

Since Vatican II we often refer to the family as the “Domestic Church.” When families are strong, the Church is strong.

It should come as no surprise that Pope Francis has made the family a major priority and concern. He has called for a Synod on the Family in October 2015, preceded by the 8th World Day of Families in Philadelphia, September 2015.

The Philadelphia event has as its theme “Love is our mission: the family fully alive.” The theme comes from St Ireneus’ famous saying, “the glory of God is man fully alive.” As Mother Teresa often said, “[We] have been created for greater things . . . to love and to be loved.”

We can say that our glory as the people of God lies in our willingness to love as God loves. Family life is a call to live that love in everyday life. It all starts with family.

Family life is under attack today. Easy divorce; the huge number of single-parent families; the need for both parents to work, which results in “latchkey kids”; the lack of consistent family meals in the home; and poor church attendance are just a few of the causes. They are as well symptoms of problems with family life.

God is calling us as a people, as a nation, and as a Church to strengthen the family. When asked what can be done to promote world peace and eliminate world poverty, Mother Teresa answered, “Go home and love your family . . . The way you help heal the world is to start with your own family,” she explained.

St Paul, writing to the community of believers at Ephesus, unites three essential realities, relating them to the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity—“the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,” the strengthening of the inner person in the Spirit, and Christ living in our hearts through faith. All of which empower us to comprehend a most important truth—God’s love. “To know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-21).

That “love of Christ”—free, unconditional, and forever—was shown to us by Jesus’ life-giving death on the Cross (Romans 5:6-11). Love is the sign of a Christian disciple (John 13:34-35). Love is the sign of a Christian family. Love is the sign of a Christian home.

Some fundamental disciplines and basic virtues foster a healthy family. Having regular family meals, encouraging open and loving communication, limiting television and social media, loving and serving each other, and loving and serving others are great disciplines for strong Christian family life. In support of love, which is the foundational family virtue, other bedrock virtues for healthy family life include sacrifice, respect, understanding, loyalty, forgiveness, humility, meekness, and obedience.

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Have you ever asked yourself, “Why is it that many of us sit in Church week after week, and seemingly nothing changes in our lives, or in the lives of our families or in our parish families?”

We mostly leave at the end of the Liturgy and return to our homes as if nothing just happened. What does the Church really mean to us and to our families? Does going to Church make a difference in our lives? Why do our children frequently lack interest in attending Church? Why do our daily lives reflect little of the “good news”? Why has the “gospel of success” become the trendy “creed”?

Does all of this have something to do with us and what Church means to us?

We can begin to find answers by exploring the word “extension,” used frequently with the word “cord.” An extension cord is plugged in and electrical power is transmitted from the outlet to an object in order for something to happen. For example, a light goes on or a radio plays. You plug in and something happens at the end of the extension that is in complete harmony with its source.

So, if you plug into the Church, transmitting to the family the power of the Church, what exactly is passed on to the family from the Church? Electricity was not transmitted until its power and potential were understood. The Church can only be extended to the extent that it is understood.

How many of us commit to the external form of the Church and not to its content or spirituality? Everybody can easily see the form of the Church—but what is the spirit of the Church? What is its content? What must we extend into our family life?

The spiritual reality of our Church is the vibrant, dynamic life of the Holy Spirit transforming us, changing our lives, and demanding that we live it. It is not a lofty ideology beyond our grasp.

Faith in Christ is life in Christ! It is not something one possesses. It is being possessed by Someone.

One of the big lies of modern religion is the assertion that Christ saves us, not the Church, so all we need is Jesus. Few who claim to be Christian would argue against the premise, however, because Christ, the mediator between God and mankind, established the Church, which is His Body, so when we are joined to Jesus we are joined to His Church as well.

How can we say that we love Christ and at the same time reject His Body? The Head of the Church is Christ, “from whom the whole body is joined and knit together” (Ephesians 4:18). So we become “new persons” in the Body of Christ. The Church is the “new man” (Ephesians 4:24), the “new creation,” made to be righteous and holy. We are no longer alienated from God but are being renewed together (Ephesians 4:23), “members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25).

Only in the Church do we become what we were created to be, maturing and being perfected. In worship, with the Holy Trinity present and with all the angels and saints in the room with us, we cannot be separated in the Body of Christ.

This is a reality. We cannot be separated in the Body of Christ.

We do not come together to listen to theoretical explanations put forward for the sake of intellectual knowledge; we come together to be possessed by the awesome truth Himself. We do not assemble to learn about morality or good behavior; the Christian community is where people are nourished and transformed.

How can we ever think that faith and going to church are just about “me and Jesus” and never turn to our fellow parishioners in love, seeking to help them in any way we can? How can we go from the church back to our families and our workplaces without realizing that something powerful has happened in the Liturgy?

The spirit of the Eastern Catholic Church is not individual piety. The spirit of the Church is relational and communal. The Melkite Church emphasizes the mystery of the Church rather than its earthly form. The Church is not the result of human organization, law and order and uniformity.

The Melkite mind sees the Church not as a visible society headed by Christ, but as a Theophany, the Eternal breaking into time and the unfolding of the divine life, the deifying transformation of humanity in worship. We are being transfigured—not just improved—but transformed from inside out. Our Eastern theology offers this earthly vision of a new kind of person in Christ, a new kind of society in Christ, which we call the Church.

If Jesus were speak to us today, He would say, “Wake up and be attentive to the ‘Good News’—the Kingdom of God is already in you! You have so much love within you, and yet
you are worried about possessions and money and social status. You can’t take it with you. All you have is a relationship with God and your fellow human beings.”

The greatest truth is that we cannot save ourselves and we cannot be saved outside of Christ’s Church, and when we die, we don’t go to a place marked “Heaven” with a sign—there is no place; there is only relationship and faith, hope, and love through the power of the Holy Spirit. And we must work at every moment to make them real in our lives.

When we ignore this truth and continue to define ourselves by the standards of rationality and power, we become more and more self-centered. We imprison ourselves in intellectual categories and absolutes, and refuse to abandon ourselves to light and life. What light and life are we to our families then? We lose our capacity for joy and celebration. We become inquisitors and persecutors and we wave the banners of war; we even destroy life and darken creation.

The overwhelming knowledge of being forgiven, of being re-created, of being free and being loved, will come only when we experience the goodness of creation and relationship with God. Being together with others may become a joyful, overflowing generosity of forgiveness to others. We cannot induce this transfiguration of ourselves and enter into the joyful feast unless we first recognize its spiritual Source.

Christ is the light of this world, and because of Christ dwelling in us, we are a light to the world. But even a beacon on a hill will eventually go out unless it is re-fueled.

Sustaining ourselves as lights to the world requires an ongoing relationship with the Church as a community of light, and the support of men and women willing to share themselves deeply with us.

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Pope Francis reminds us, “The perfect family doesn’t exist, nor is there a perfect husband or a perfect wife... It’s just us sinners... A healthy family life requires frequent use of three phrases: ‘May I?’ ‘Thank you.’ And ‘I’m sorry.’ And never, never, never end the day without making peace.”

In his Letter to Families, Pope Francis reflects, “In your journey as a family, you share so many beautiful moments: meals, rest, housework, leisure, prayer, trips and pilgrimages, and times of mutual support. Nevertheless, if there is no love then there is no joy, and authentic love comes to us from Jesus. He offers us His word, which illuminates our path; He gives us the Bread of life which sustains us on our journey.”

This conviction of God’s love for us, as well as a willingness to grow in the virtues critical to family development, allowed the family of St Basil the Great to become a “family of saints.” Most of us know a little about St Basil, a founder of monasticism and religious life, a lover and servant of people who are sick and poor, and a spirit-filled and spirit-led theologian and bishop of the 4th century. He wrote the first treatise on the Holy Spirit.

Less known are Basil’s brother, St Gregory of Nyssa, and his sister St Macrina. The mystical writings of St Gregory of Nyssa serve as the basis of all the mystical writings of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. St Macrina, Basil and Gregory’s older sister, was an ascetic and a nun, who greatly blessed and influenced them both. And very few people know that they had yet other family members who are saints in the Church. In addition to Peter of Sebaste and Nafkratios of Mt Nitria, two other brothers of Basil, both his father and mother as well as his grandmother were also saints—St Basil the Elder, St Emelia, and St Macrina the Elder.

If we want what they had, we must do as they did. With daily prayer, frequent Eucharist, rooting ourselves more deeply in the Word of God, and growth in Christian virtue, we can have many more “families of saints.” Good family life is the soil from which vocations to the priesthood and religious life grow.

Imagine what a gift to the Church it would be to have more “families of saints!”

Why not have saints from our Melkite Church in the United States? The Church is in desperate need today of holy priests and bishops and nuns. Our society is in desperate need of solid faithful families. Our world is in desperate need of saints.

How are we ever going to resolve the tensions in the Middle East and attain world peace without prayer, sacrifice, and love—Christian love? And it all starts in the home. It all starts with you. Contact our Melkite Vocation Office, which is ready to assist you on this path.

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The Synod of the Family: 
An Interview with Fr. George Gallaro

**Question:** How would you explain the opposition to the work of renewal of Pope Francis by some Synod Fathers?

**Answer:** I would like first of all to clarify one thing. Through the Special Synod of the Family [which met in Rome in October 2014 to prepare for the upcoming 2015 Ordinary Synod on the Family], the Catholic Church has just begun to reflect on the difficult situation families face in today’s world. It is important to consider this reality in order to understand what was at stake and therefore also the openness and importance of the debate. I would hope that all the other political, social, and economic institutions could do the same.

Facing the great sea of problems it was obvious that an articulate and lively debate would take place. The media speak about some opposition to Pope Francis’ work of renewal. The Pope himself warned about temptations, like that of “the do-gooders, of the fearful, and the so-called progressives and liberals.”

The synodal assembly was called in order to listen to the situation of today’s real families and to meet them not in a passive or detached way but in a realistic and compassionate one. It has not been and it did not have to be a simple repetition of prior doctrine. Pope Francis is asking for a Church that is journeying with all in need of God’s love and mercy. The Lord Himself first gave us the example.

The Synod—with all its own limitations—tried to embrace the heart of humanity’s problems and the families, wondering about how to respond to love. In my humble opinion, it is necessary to still continue listening to and looking for answers. The final text—with all its limitations—has opened a dialogue that must now continue in the local churches until this year’s Ordinary Synod which again will address the family. Like Jesus, two thousand years ago, we cannot hide behind rigid norms and precepts.

**Question:** Are all the possible innovations stopped?

**Answer:** I repeat, the journey has just started. Pope Francis is opening a path. Even if more needs to be done, he has exercised his mission as our universal shepherd.

Using an automotive image: not all the motor pistons moved harmoniously. The synodal car did not operate as expected. But the car did move and is still on its way. Not on a closed or sheltered private path, but on the roads of the world, those chosen by the Good Samaritan who, unlike the priest and the Levite, “did not walk by on the other side, but came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him,” in the many family problems of our day.

The many wounds of our time must be addressed by the followers of Christ. The Synod leaves us with issues we must prayerfully consider this coming year. And not only the bishops and priests, but all Christians. I sincerely hope that everywhere in the world there will be a kind of awakening, of debate, of discussion, on and for the families. If initially there was a questionnaire and then a Special Synod, I hope that now begins a more direct response to the issues of family life.

**Question:** Hence the logic of the wall against wall must be avoided?

**Answer:** Certainly. This does not imply, though, that the debate should be reduced. On the contrary, I would hope that the concern and the engagement be raised higher. Our task is to come out of the walls of sacristies and churches in order to encounter the real people in the street, as Pope Francis calls us to do. We should not waste time in safeguarding abstract positions. We are all called to the salvation of souls (salus animarum) more than to the preservation of mere principles. We must go out in the street with the Gospel and with that “immense sympathy” for our brothers and sisters that Blessed Paul VI called for.

**Question:** But isn’t there a cultural delay?

**Answer:** I would say that there is a cultural and a spiritual delay, a delay in loving and understanding passionately our brothers and sisters in Christ. Today’s rampant individualism risks creating a society of loners. The Synod, through re-emphasizing the family as the animator of society, asks us all to re-discover the “familial” dimension of human life means to help society to be stronger and more solid, less “fluid” and more loyal. We all, no one excluded, are in need of a stronger love, more generous, a love that allows us to spread our arms, to open wide our hearts. On the cross Jesus did not look at Himself, did not pity Himself or his own troubles. He looked at the young Disciple and the elderly Mother. He looks at every one of us: the young without hope and the elderly hardened by life.

Father George D. Gallaro is a priest of the Eparchy of Newton and Professor of Canon Law and Ecumenical Theology, at SS Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA.
BOOK REVIEW:

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE ARAB WORLD, 700-1700

By David Bertaina, PhD


The fourth century was an age of conflict between the Nicene faith (which we profess each Sunday at liturgy) and the heresy of Arianism (the belief that Jesus was a lesser deity separate from God). At one point, the Roman Emperor Valens even tried to force his citizens to follow him into Arianism. In response to his coercion, the Roman ally and Arab queen Mavia rebelled against his policies, successfully receiving an orthodox Arab monk named Moses as bishop of her people. Christian Arabic poetry even commemorated this triumph, according the fifth-century Church historian Sozomen.

Stories such as this one remind us that Arab Christianity is an ancient faith, stretching back millennia into Roman times. With this in mind, The Orthodox Church in the Arab World should be recognized as one of the most important resources published for English-speaking Melkites in recent years. The book reminds its readers that Arab Christians have remained standard bearers for Christianity and contributed to the cultural vibrancy of the Middle East in the midst of Islam. Indeed, the book reminds Melkites about the historical origins and development of their identity.

The Orthodox Church in the Arab World is aimed at non-specialists, including those interested in the history of Christianity and those seeking to increase their faith. It introduces non-Arabic speakers to the biblical studies, theology, lives of the saints, historical writings, poetry, and inter-religious writings of Arab Christians from 700-1700. In other words, it covers Arabic-speaking Christians in the Levant from the rise of Islam until the split of the Church into the Antiochian Orthodox and Melkite Greek Catholic Churches.

The introduction to the book, a real gem thanks to the editors, Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger, provides a concise historical survey of Arab Christianity from its origins to the eighteenth century. They address its origins before the rise of Islam, its significance related to Muhammad, Christian responses to the Muslim conquest, life under the Umayyads in Damascus (661-750), the height of Christian Arabic literature under the Abbasids (750-1258), Arab Christians during the Byzantine reconquest of Antioch, relations with Crusaders, Mongols, and Mamluks, and finally the situation in relation to the Ottomans.

The book comprises twelve chapters. Each chapter gives an overview of an author and his historical context; then it includes an English translation of an Arabic work. Following the chapters are notes, a bibliographic guide to Arab Christianity for those who want to read more about this topic, notes on the translators, and helpful indexes on the use of the Bible, Qur’an, and subjects within the book.

The first chapter includes selections from an anonymous defense of Christianity presented to a Muslim audience. The work covers the Christian view of salvation using both the Old and New Testaments. The author reminds his readers that Christians do not claim three gods, but that God, His Word, and His Spirit are one. For instance, he explains, we speak of the object of the sun, its rays, and its heat as one sun, not three.

The second chapter presents an excerpt from the argument for the true religion by the famous theologian Theodore Abu Qurra (d. ca. 829). He imagines himself as someone who grew up on a mountain, having no contact with other humans. Leaving his mountain, he learns about all the religions of the world, and using reason, he judges that Christians’ monotheism, ethics, doctrine of reward and punishment, and virtues reveal them to be God’s chosen people.

The third chapter comes from a disputation between the monk Abraham of Tiberias and the emir ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Hashimi in Jerusalem around 820. In this debate, Abraham defeats his opponents and even survives a trial by poison, resulting in some witnesses’ conversion to Christianity.

The fourth chapter consists of lives of saints who converted from Islam to Christianity. First, St Anthony Rawh, a Quraysh from Damascus who became a monk and was martyred in Raqqa on Christmas Day 799. Second, St ‘Abd al-Masih al-Ghassani, a Christian who joined with Muslims for some years only to repent and become a monk at Mount Sinai until he was martyred on 9 March. Finally, a certain al-Hashimi who converted from Islam to Christianity because of an Eucharistic miracle.

The fifth chapter, a selection from the historical chronicle of Agapius of Manbij (around 942), looks at his account of how the Jews translated the Bible into Greek before Christ and why this version of the Scriptures is more reliable than the Hebrew—he argues that they had not been changed to eliminate messianic references proving Jesus the Christ.

The sixth chapter translates some poetry by Sulayman al-Ghazzi (d. after 1027). The first poem praises God for the Orthodox triumph over heresy. The second piece is an auto-

Continued on page 28
biographical poem on repentance and meditation on the state of his soul.

The seventh chapter contains two selections from the deacon 'Abdallah ibn al-Fadl of Antioch (11th c.): a philosophical essay on the status of the soul, the intellect, and responses to arguments from believers, and a refutation of astrology and the belief that the motion of the stars determines one’s fate.

The eighth chapter is an anonymous ethical treatise called The Noetic Paradise. Like other ascetic spiritual works, it seeks to help its readers reach a dispassionate state of mind in order to use knowledge and reason to conform oneself to the mind of Christ. The author says this development happens by cultivating the virtues of faith, hope, love, fear, discernment, mercy, gentleness, justice, chastity, and courage.

The ninth chapter covers a letter by Agathon of Homs concerning the right practice of the ministry and some of the abuses he witnessed upon becoming a bishop. Agathon defends the priesthood as coming from the line of Melchizedek, and discusses the necessary criteria for someone to be considered for the episcopacy.

The tenth chapter is a selection from Paul of Antioch’s Letter to a Muslim Friend (ca. 1200). The letter makes ample use of the Qur’an along with the Bible to invite his friend to become Christian.

The eleventh chapter is a collection of four writings of Patriarch Macarius Ibn al-Za'im (d. 1672). The readings include an Arabic explanation of saints’ names, a discussion of how to make the sign of the cross and its theological meaning, an explanation of the way that priests and bishops bless the congregation, and a letter to Louis XIV, King of France, asking for French aid to Arab Christians suffering under Ottoman rule.

The twelfth chapter includes several selections from the travelogue of Paul of Aleppo (d. 1669), describing his journey from Damascus to Constantinople to Moldavia and ultimately to Moscow. Paul’s detailed descriptions teach us much about the churches, liturgy, and practices of the seventeenth century.

History is one of the most profitable ways of understanding Melkite identity. It enables us to imagine a world greater than the one we presently experience and to empathize with the peoples who have walked the same earth and contributed to its present state. The introductions to each chapter and the quality translations in this book provide moments of entertainment, suspense, historical insight, and a reason to believe in the faith that has been preserved and shared by Arab Christians.

I strongly recommend The Orthodox Church in the Arab World as a way to learn more the Melkite Church, its history, its identity, and what that means for us today. The Orthodox Church in the Arab World is a treasure to be read and shared widely.

Dr. David Bertaina is an Associate Professor of Comparative Religions in the History Department at the University of Illinois, Springfield. His research interests are Syriac and Arab Christianity and the history of Christian-Muslim encounters in the late Antique and Mediaeval Middle East. He earned his doctorate in Semitic Languages and Literature from the Catholic University of America in 2007.

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On 6 December 2014, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All of the East, John X, enthroned Metropolitan Joseph as new head of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in North America at that Church’s national St Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn, NY.

Metropolitan Joseph, formerly Bishop of the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West, was selected by the Holy Synod of Antioch on 3 July 2014 to succeed Metropolitan Philip, who died 19 March 2014 and headed the Antiochian Church in North America for more than 48 years.

He now heads the entire Antiochian Orthodox Church in America, with nine bishops, more than 400 clergy, 266 parishes and missions, and about 100,000 faithful throughout the United States and Canada. Over the past 40 years, the Church has received a sizable number of converts to Orthodoxy in the Americas. It is the second largest Orthodox Church in North America.

At the enthronement, Metropolitan Joseph talked about his plans to be out among his people in the United States and Canada, with a special emphasis on engaging youth and meeting their needs. “We must listen to our young people and find out how we, the Church, can help them and appeal to them,” Metropolitan Joseph said.

Patriarch John X heads the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch. It is the largest Arab Christian church in the world, with its headquarters in Damascus, Syria, and churches in the Middle East, Europe, North and South America, and Australia.

Patriarch John X came to the United States to enthrone Metropolitan Joseph at a time when his homeland, Syria, is racked with strife. While in the US, he met with the Secretary General of the United Nations and with the White House about the situation of Syrian Christians today.

The Patriarch’s brother, Orthodox Bishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syria, was one of two church hierarchs kidnapped almost two years ago in Syria. Nothing is known of his whereabouts.

“For centuries Arab Christians and Muslims in Syria have lived alongside one another in harmony,” the Patriarch said. “And now we have these foreign elements who have come into our country and disrupt our peace.”

The Church of Antioch can claim to be the world’s oldest Christian Church. The Acts of the Apostles says, “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). It was founded by SS Paul and Barnabas in 42 A.D. and its first bishop was St Peter the Apostle, who later became Bishop of Rome. Patriarch John X is the 167th successor of St Peter for the Antiochian Orthodox Church.

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New Head of Antiochian Orthodox Church in America Enthroned
In so many ways, we are not like the Roman Catholics in the US. Even if they did in the beginning, our people no longer live around their churches. Very few of our parishioners live within walking distance of our churches. The long distances between our parishes make having regional activities among our parishes and priests difficult. Visiting parishioners who may live 20 or 40 or more miles from the church takes our priests much longer than it did years back.

Our bishop has to fly across the country multiple times a year as he attempts to visit all of the parishes. Even then, a year is not enough! A national diocese is unheard of for the Roman Catholics. However, the whole country is our eparchy: from the north to the south, from the east to the west. Welcome to our world!

Researching the early days of our Church in America, Bishop Nicholas confirmed what others had noted: several pioneer Melkite priests, after coming from the Near East, travelled to many different cities in the US, staying in each place for a short time, celebrating Sunday liturgies and feast days, marrying couples, baptizing, chrismating, giving the Eucharist, and burying the dead. Then they would move on. These were the “circuit-riding priests.” In some areas the Melkite people would not see a Melkite priest again for years.

In a local Roman diocese, a priest appointed by the bishop for a certain ministry in addition to his parish work can travel around the parishes in a short time. In our diocese, such a priest would have to rely on mailings, national meetings, social media, or occasional announcements in parish bulletins to get messages out to the people. For example, and more specifically, a local Roman Vocation Director can easily hold several meetings and visit several parishes within a short time. We are not able to do that.

Several years ago, out of concern for us, a Roman Catholic priest at one of our conventions alerted us to the fact that our statistics and demographics needed immediate improvement.

Bishop Nicholas has accepted the need for us to adopt some of the methods of Roman Catholic vocation directors and approved a Vocation Tour of our parishes. Originally we planned to visit a couple of parishes in one of our five pastoral Regions on successive Sundays, with the hope that the rest of the communities in that Region would opt for a mid-week visit.

At the Clergy Conference held in New Orleans in September, we soon learned that the majority of the pastors interested in a Vocation Visit wanted it on a Sunday. Bishop Nicholas, the Eparchial CFO, Deacon Bob Shalhoub, and I agreed to extend the Tour into a three-year plan, hoping to make it to all parishes that welcome the visit.

This Vocation Tour, along with our Bishop’ pastoral visits, may revive and continue the old reality of “the circuit-riding priest,” enabling people to attach a face and a voice to the media messages, to ask questions, and to have conversations.

The topic of the first set of visits in the Tour is “Have You Heard A Call?” Two tri-panel display boards have been prepared. Literature on vocations is ready for distribution. The communities visited advertise the visits in advance.

Recently, with the hospitable welcome of Archimandrite Fouda Sayegh at St Anne parish in North Hollywood, CA, I gave talks to the youth (SAMYA) and to the young adults (SAYA), followed by a discussion with the Religious Education Coordinator. I then drove to Annunciation Mission, Covina, CA, where Archpriest George Bisharat gave me an equally warm welcome and I celebrated liturgy and gave the homily.

I am blessed to have a generous bi-ritual priest in Atlanta, the Rev Dr Tom Flynn, who covers for me when I need to be away. Although called upon by many of the local Roman parishes, his love for our St John Chrysostom parish and the Byzantine Church moves him to say that his first obligation is to us! Hence, I need to plan ahead and get on his schedule as quickly as possible!

We cannot waste any more time, miss any opportunity, or neglect any participation to make known our great need for priests in our Church here. We all must welcome every chance to encourage our young men to give the seminary a try. We all must cooperate with the Holy Spirit to create a real and holy atmosphere of openness to vocations in our families and parishes. We all must support each other in this endeavor.

With the present crisis in the Near East, we may eventually witness a migration here. We would rather see a cessation of the horrors taking place there. However, we cannot place our hopes for filling our pastoral needs on those who may be approved to come here to serve. We need our own native sons to hear and accept the call to serve.

Continued on page 33
WHAT'S YOUR MELKITE IQ? 
A Self-Assessment for Your Fun and Enlightenment 
By Abouna Dimitry

See how much you and yours know about your faith and traditions by completing this self-quiz. You can find the correct answers on page 32. Do some research to learn more about the topics that especially interest you.

1. Who was the person that was swallowed by the big fish after God sent him to Nineveh?
   A. Job
   B. Jonah
   C. Isaiah
   D. Daniel

2. Which prophet had the vision of the Lord on His throne surrounded by angels singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy"?
   A. Isaiah
   B. Jacob
   C. Elisha
   D. Elijah

3. The first five books of the Bible are called
   A. Patriarch
   B. Pentateuch
   C. Numbers
   D. Lamentations

4. Which book of the Bible tells of the way in which David became King of Israel?
   A. Genesis
   B. Exodus
   C. Numbers
   D. I Kings

5. Who can interpret the Bible without mistakes in interpretation?
   A. The Church
   B. The bishop
   C. The priest
   D. No one

6. Which book of the Bible records the vision of John the Apostle concerning the coming of God's kingdom?
   A. First Epistle of St. John
   B. Acts of the Apostles
   C. Revelation or Apocalypse
   D. Gospel of St. Luke

7. The word Apostle in Greek means
   A. Teacher
   B. Learner
   C. One who is sent
   D. Prophet

8. How many days after his birth was the infant Jesus brought to the Temple to be presented to God?
   A. Eight
   B. Ten
   C. Forty
   D. Fifty
9. Which saint was the sister of Saint Basil the Great?
A. Saint Macrina
B. Saint Melania
C. Saint Monica
D. Saint Nina

10. The Patriarch of which of the following cities is the Ecumenical Patriarch?
A. Jerusalem
B. Alexandria
C. Constantinople
D. Moscow

11. On the Feast of the Encounter of the Lord in the Temple, who met Christ with his parents?
A. Samuel and Rebecca
B. Simeon and Anna
C. Elizabeth and Zechariah
D. Joachim and Anna

12. Which of these feast days are preceded by a fasting period?
A. The Nativity of the Lord
B. The Resurrection of the Lord (Pascha/Easter)
C. Theophany (Epiphany) of the Lord
D. All of the above

13. On which feast day do we say, “Christ is baptized in the Jordan,” and reply, “Glorify Him”?
A. Theophany
B. Nativity of Christ
C. Circumcision of Christ
D. None of the above

14. Salvation for humankind was brought by whom?
A. Moses
B. The Mother of God
C. John the Baptist
D. Jesus Christ

15. Which of the following is an accurate description of Jesus?
A. Perfect Man and Perfect God
B. Reconciler of humankind with God
C. Destroyer of Death
D. All of the above

16. The Church is called “apostolic” because
A. The apostles founded the Church
B. The apostles were the first Christians
C. The teaching of the apostles was passed unchanged and without break to the Church
D. All of the above

17. The parts of the church building are
A. Holy Place, nave, narthex
B. Altar, nave, entrance
C. Front, middle, back
D. Iconostasis, narthex, altar

18. The Gospel Book on the altar contains
A. The New Testament
B. The New and Old Testaments
C. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

19. The name Emmanuel is used for Jesus in the Gospel of St. Luke. Emmanuel means ________?
A. God almighty
B. God the savior
C. Holy God
D. God is with us

20. The name Satan means
A. Adversary
B. Deceiver
C. Liar
D. Tempter
YOUR MELKITE IQ IS FINE

Some of the Answers Were Wrong

By Fr. James K. Graham

Everyone knows that the basic rule for editors is “Check Everything.” And then check it again.
But sometimes editors become complacent, thinking that, for instance, surely Abouna Dmitry, the author of our What’s Your Melkite IQ? quiz, knows the right answers to his questions.
And that led to trouble.
The first hint that something was not right with the quiz in our Fall issue came in the following letter from Jim Butler, parishioner and choir director at St Joseph parish in Lansing, Michigan, for more than 30 years:

Dear Fr. James,

It’s distressing to find that my Melkite IQ is lower than I had previously thought.
I had been blithely going through life thinking that we were supposed to be praying continually. After all, this concept has scriptural support from 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Nevertheless, I was aghast to find that I should be restricting my prayer to times of trouble.
It was similarly unsettling to find that when singing about the “Sun of Righteousness,” we are referring not to Jesus Christ but rather to St. John Chrysostom.
There was another item or two during the examination that perplexed me as well, but one can endure only so much at one sitting. I’ll forego further elaboration.
Well, as the teacher of the local flock, you have your work cut out for you. I’m afraid we have been wandering in the darkness while under the impression we were in the light!
There is yet so much to learn!
Jim

Obviously, this was a letter to take seriously. I took the quiz and found that I also disagreed with the answers to questions 8 through 11. I checked with Archimandrite James Babcock, the Editor in Chief, and with Abouna Dmitry. Unanimously, we concluded that the answer key was wrong.

Here are the questions and the correct answers:

8. Which of the following statements best describes how often Eastern Christians should pray?
   a. We should pray before Liturgy on Sunday
   b. We should pray each morning, at meals, and each night
   c. We should pray when we are in trouble
   d. We should pray without ceasing

   The correct answer is D, pray without ceasing, but the answer key gave C.

9. The Elevation of the Holy Cross is celebrated
   a. On the first Sunday after Pascha/Easter
   b. On the first Sunday after Pentecost
   c. On September 14
   d. On the first Sunday of the Great Fast/Lent

   The correct answer is C, September 14, but the answer key gave A.

10. The troparia for many feasts refer to a specific person as the “Sun of Righteousness.” Who is that person?
    a. Jesus Christ
    b. John Chrysostom
    c. John the Baptist
    d. None of the above

    The correct answer is A, Jesus Christ, but the answer key gave B.

11. The blessing of flowers takes place on what major feast day?
    a. Transfiguration
    b. Dormition of the Theotokos
    c. Nativity of the Theotokos
    d. Palm Sunday

    The correct answer is B, the Dormition of the Theotokos, but the answer key gave D.

Many thanks to Jim Butler of Lansing for alerting us to the errors.
It's not clear how this happened, but we will be more careful in the future.
Editor’s note: Check everything. And then check it again. 

Father James K. Graham is pastor of St Joseph parish in Lansing, MI, and Copy Editor of SOPHIA.
The Catholic Church of Jerusalem has recently announced the forthcoming canonization of two Melkite-born nuns, Blessed Mariam Bawardi and Blessed Sultanah (Alfonsina) Ghattas.

Mariam Bawardi was born in the village of Ibillin in Galilee. She founded the Carmelite Monastery of Bethlehem, where it is still possible to visit her cell. In her life she received the gift of the stigmata. A mystic, she also had a special relationship with the Lord through numerous beatific dreams. In one of these dreams, she had the revelation of the alleged site of Emmaus, near the town of Latrun.

On the occasion of her beatification in 1983, Pope John Paul II summarized her merits and her life: “The nun Mariam reflects the various aspects of the One Catholic Church, the Greek-Melkite Church, in which she was baptized and educated, and the Latin Church where she began the Carmelite life.

“Outside her country, she is present in the Christian communities of Lebanon, Egypt, France, and India. There are few saints who received many graces to such a high and rich degree: stigmata, ecstasy and discernment of hearts, prophecies, angelic visions, and indeed, a singular gift for an uneducated [person], the skill of poetry.”

Sultanah (Alfonsina) Ghattas was born in the village of Ain Karem. She founded the Community of Nuns of the Rosary, who dedicate themselves to the care of the elderly and the young, to the service of the poor, and to the eradication of all forms of poverty. She believed that everyone, through appropriate education, should be helped to develop his/her own faith and dignity.

At the 2009 ceremony of beatification, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem presented her in these words: “Mother Sultanah was born in a devout and laborious family of Jerusalem, a family that worked and prayed together. In her younger years Sultanah felt the call of the Lord and embraced the religious life and took the name of Alfonsina within the Community of the Nuns of Saint Joseph.

“After her simple vows, her Mother Superior entrusted her with the task of catechesis in the local school of Bethlehem. Sister Alfonsina was an unparalleled catechist, a humble educator, and a tireless apostle . . . She was graced with numerous visions by the Mother of God who asked her to found a congregation for girls.”

He continued, “Sultanah inherited from her Melkite family a deep piety, a great faith in Divine Providence, and a filial confidence towards ‘the all-holy, spotless, most highly blessed and glorious Lady and ever-virgin Mary.’ But above all she distinguished herself for the love of silence and self-surrendering life, and love for the cross and sacrifice for others.”

These two nuns, Mariam and Sultanah, lived in the second half of the nineteenth century. Pope Francis and the Consistory of Cardinals were to meet in December for the definitive approval. Then, in the course of 2015, the Church in the Holy Land will have the joy of entrusting herself to the intercession of these two new saints and imitating their example of faith and love.

Vocation Tour to your parish soon, so that together we can challenge ourselves to hear God’s call as potential priests, as supportive families, and as nurturing parishes.

Lord God, touch the hearts and minds of Your people!

Archimandrite John Azar is pastor of St John Chrysostom parish in Atlanta, GA, and Director of Vocations for the Eparchy of Newton. To inquire about becoming a priest, deacon, or monastic, email him at vocations@melkite.org or telephone 404-373-9522.
EASTERN CATHOLIC
RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS
Meet in Arizona

Late in October 2014, members of ECED (Eastern Catholic Eparchial Directors of Religious Education), the publishing arm of ECA (the Eastern Catholic bishops in the United States), met at the pastoral center of the Holy Protection Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Phoenix.

Before any business began, the directors of religious education departments from across the country attended a Divine Liturgy at St Stephen’s Cathedral, celebrated by His Grace Bishop Gerald (Dino) of the Eparchy of Phoenix. In his homily Bishop Gerald emphasized the importance of the work of the committee and the virtue of perseverance in continuing the mission to provide suitable material for instructing the faithful of every age in search of salvation.

A two-day program followed, with reports, deliberations, presentations, and decisions in a detailed agenda designed to evaluate the status of the inventory of books, maps, pamphlets, DVDs and other catechetical aids produced by God With Us Publications. The committee also explored options for furthering the group’s ever-expanding response to the needs of the digital age. Members also heard suggestions for adding to the books in the inventory of God With Us Publications.

For more than 40 years the Eastern Catholic bishops in the USA have collaborated with one another and relied upon the ECED to provide accurate and attractive books, VHS tapes, CDs and posters for every age and grade level—pre-K through high school, and beyond in adult ongoing education. Check out http://godwithuspublications.com for available products.

ECED was instrumental in the four ENCOUNTER sessions held over the past two years. To function on a broader scope, the group has purchased equipment that can be shared, enabling each eparchy to present live-streamed Internet broadcasts of special events. Part of the meeting was devoted to a “hands on” activity involving the camera and computer system.

All this comes in response to frequent requests from the faithful, asking, “When will our churches have resources for us to learn about Eastern Catholic teachings and traditions?” Educators and pastors must direct people’s attention to the various eparchial newspapers and websites, and to the God With Us Publications site, where the information has been available—but perhaps not accessed by all who might be looking for it. The group envisioned networking of parish-level catechists as a possible solution to the perceived lack of material.

The meeting was adjourned, and attendees went home with a task list—in preparation for the next meeting.

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SS Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary Seeks to Preserve Rare Books

By the Very Rev. Robert M. Pipta

Since its dedication on 17 May 1953, the library at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of SS Cyril and Methodius has been home to an exceptional collection of unique texts which document the history, theology, and liturgy of our Byzantine Catholic Church.

This collection includes more than 22,000 volumes, 30 percent of which we believe are to be found nowhere else in North America. The library’s rare book room houses 7,000 of these valuable, non-circulating documents. We also have personal history donations, manuscripts, music, and various other artifacts that proudly reflect the intellectual and spiritual heritage of our faith.

These historically significant volumes are both fragile and vulnerable. Unfortunately, the library is currently not equipped to protect these items properly, and very few preservation practices are in effect. The Seminary and its Board of Directors have recognized that the library is in very real danger of losing irreplaceable historical texts if action is not taken quickly.

The Seminary’s Board of Directors also have identified a goal of making the library’s material more accessible to a wider audience as part of the Seminary’s increasing focus on distance courses and online learning. In addition to the associated technologies necessary, the ultimate goal is to preserve the library’s rare materials in a stable, digital format, thereby rendering them accessible to scholars from around the world.

The Seminary has begun an appeal to enable us to purchase and install badly-needed equipment in the Seminary’s library in order to preserve our collection. Once this is done, we plan to acquire the associated technologies to provide library friends around the world with access to this collection.

It is our desire for the library, and for our students—current and future, near and far—to be filled with the knowledge and truth of our faith and with the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord and Savior.

If you have questions about the library appeal or the work of the Seminary, please phone 412-321-8383 or write to The Byzantine Catholic Seminary of SS Cyril and Methodius, 3605 Perrysville Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15214. You may also make a donation on-line at www.bcs.edu.

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The Very Rev. Robert M. Pipta is Rector of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of SS Cyril and Methodius in Pittsburgh, PA. The Melkite Eparchy of Newton sends its prospective priests to the Byzantine Catholic Seminary for their theological education.
SAINT JUDE
MIAMI, FL
By Helene Hart

Hundreds of local residents, parishioners, and other devout people came to celebrate the patronal feast of St Jude Church in Miami, FL. The Festival of St Jude took place from October 25 until October 28, the saint’s feast day according to the Latin calendar. (On the Byzantine calendar the date is June 19.)

According to tradition, St Jude was one of the original Apostles, a relative of Jesus, and with Him from the beginning and throughout His ministry. After the Ascension, Jude traveled and preached the Gospel in Judea and Samaria and also went to the lands of Arabia, Syria, and Mesopotamia before dying a martyr around 80 AD. Pilgrims came to his grave to pray and many of them experienced the results of his powerful intercessions. Hence, he came to be known as “The Saint for the Hopeless and the Desperate.” Tradition says that St Bridget of Sweden and St Bernard received visions from God asking them to accept St Jude as “Patron Saint of the Impossible.”

Religious leaders, community dignitaries, and people devoted to the saint from different backgrounds and origins streamed into St Jude Church on its October feast day, one of the largest feast days in the community. Several thousand people came to bring flowers, light candles, and receive blessings in this shrine church. For months, groups and organizations in the parish were making arrangements to prepare beautiful flower displays, plants, traditional food, music, and a Merchant Bazaar for the festival, an institution since the parish was established in the Brickell neighborhood of Miami.

After the last Divine Liturgy of the day, mariachi musicians marched into the church hall to perform. The hall also featured a heritage corner filled with interesting information about the culture and history of the Melkites and received blessings in this shrine church. For months, groups and organizations in the parish were making arrangements to prepare beautiful flower displays, plants, traditional food, music, and a Merchant Bazaar for the festival, an institution since the parish was established in the Brickell neighborhood of Miami.

After the last Divine Liturgy of the day, mariachi musicians marched into the church hall to perform. The hall also featured a heritage corner filled with interesting information about the culture and history of the Melkites going back to the first Christian community.

The hard work of faithful parishioners, their time, talent, and treasures, and all who participated made this three-day celebration very successful.

By midnight, the church filled with flowers and candles glowed under the crescent moon, sending a powerful message echoing on the steel and glass facades of the surrounding skyscrapers. This celebration of St Jude’s feast revealed the beauty, faith, and compassionate commitment of thousands in the community.

Helene Hart is a parishioner of St Jude Melkite Greek Catholic Church, Miami, FL.

SAINT ANNE
NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CA
By Nina Kasbarian

The festivities for the Golden Jubilee of St Anne’s presence in North Hollywood started at Los Angeles City Hall on 28 October 2014 at the monthly meeting of the city council. With a delegation from the parish present, Councilman Paul Krikorian presented Father Fouad Sayegh, pastor of St Anne Church, with a proclamation from the city and spoke to the council about the history of the parish. Father Fouad thanked the council for the special honor. He provided a little more information about our church and community, invited the council members to visit the church, and welcomed them to use the parish’s newly-remodeled Hall of Friendship and Heritage Room for their offsite meetings. Parishioners in attendance were invited to a private tour of City Hall, which overlooks all of downtown Los Angeles.

The anniversary celebrations continued with Solemn Vespers on Saturday 1 November, which was followed by an International Banquet for more than 250 people. At the banquet Fr Fouad honored some parishioners in recognition of their support, hard work, and devotion during the building of the church 50 years ago.

An Agape Luncheon followed the Divine Liturgy on Sunday 2 November. Many guests attended or sent a delegation. Bishop Nicholas was unable to attend the festivities, having undergone urgent surgery only three days before. He delegated Fr Alexei Smith, Protopresbyter of the Western Region, to represent him and sent an official letter wishing the parish a happy 50th Anniversary and assuring his presence in spirit.

In his letter, Bishop Nicholas announced that he has asked Pope Francis to name St Anne Church in North Hollywood “Co-Cathedral” in the Eparchy of Newton. If his request is approved, the eparchy will have two cathedrals: east and west.

Earlier in the year, more than 10,000 people came from near and far to enjoy a summer weekend of music, food, and fellowship at St. Anne’s annual Festival. A special committee offered a tour of the church, explaining it as a spiritual treasury. The festival featured lots of activities, including games for children, backgammon games, and music from famous singers. Visitors could choose from a variety of booths offering Middle Eastern food, Philly Cheesesteak, the famous Awamat, Filipino food, falafel, shawarma, zatar, BBQ, and much more. Thanks to the Festival Committee and to everyone for their help.

The Melkite Ladies League had a very active summer, including a visit to the Monastery of the Angels in the Hollywood Hills and volunteering at the Los Angeles Food Bank. They held their annual Christmas party on 6 December.

St Anne’s new associate pastor, Fr Musil Shihadeh, arrived from St Michael parish in Hammond, IN, on December 2 and was welcomed into the family at St Anne.

Nina Kasbarian reports on St Anne parish, North Hollywood, CA, for SOPHIA.

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HOLY CROSS
PLACENTIA, CA

By Father François Beyrouti, Pastor

Holy Cross parish in Placentia, CA, had a very busy fall season. The annual Middle Eastern Food Festival on Saturday and Sunday, 13 and 14 September, was a great success. The weekend’s events began on Friday evening with the Divine Liturgy and lighting and blessing of the holy fire. This custom dates back to the fourth century when Saint Helen found the cross of Jesus in Jerusalem.

Parishioners and many visitors enjoyed two wonderful days of live Arabic and English entertainment, a group of salsa dancers, church tours, and of course delicious hand-made Middle Eastern food and desserts. The festival committee, chaired by Moussa Toubbeh and Nathaeer Lutfi, prepared many months for this successful event. The generosity of many donors and the hard work of all the volunteers paid off in the celebratory atmosphere that everyone experienced. The Orange County Register even published two articles about the festival.

On 23 October, after the Divine Liturgy for the feast of Saint James, a feedback and appreciation meeting for the festival volunteers and donors wrapped up the event for the year.

This year, the Eastern Christian Formation/Sunday School program added several activities to reinforce what the children learn. Fr François gave a talk to the children of the church and explained the different parts of the Divine Liturgy. Another time he showed the children the Prosphoria service and how the priest prepares the holy bread and makes the commemorations before the Divine Liturgy.

At a Fun Family Bible day, the children and their parents searched for a list of Scripture verses related to thanksgiving and the family. The children who had already begun memorizing the books of the Bible found this exercise easier.

The children enjoyed a Saint Nicholas Day party on Sunday 7 December. The Sunday School teachers also renewed emphasis on the children’s learning and singing the different parts of the Divine Liturgy.

In October Our Lady’s Society elected new officers: Iman Lutfi (President), Theresa Awad (Vice-President), Mary Sweiss (Treasurer), Abla Lutfi (Secretary), and Sultaneh Helo (Public Relations). The women donated ten percent of the proceeds from a very successful salad night on 14 September to purchase new Bibles for church use. They also meet monthly for a spiritual gathering led by Christina Einnabe, and Melinda Guinaldo once again coordinated a Women’s Silent Retreat at the Sacred Heart Retreat House in Alhambra.

The youth and young adults continue to be very active, regularly reading the epistle, helping with the collection, and ushering at Sunday Divine Liturgy. They prepare meals for Isaiah House Catholic Workers’ women’s shelter in Santa Ana on the fifth Sunday of every month. Peter and Christine Gambino help coordinate this project. On 10 October, the youth, young adults, other parishioners, and Fr François participated in an Ecumenical Prayer Vigil for Persecuted Christians at Saint Paul Greek Orthodox Church in Irvine.

Some of the youth have been attending free Dabkeh classes offered by Yola, Summer, and Paula Semaan. On 18 October, the youth and young adults hiked the Portuguese Bend Trail on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, then enjoyed lunch at the home of Karim and Lily Karam. The youth and young adults attended the Winter Jam concert with faith-based and inspirational bands, a spiritually healthier alternative to “normal” popular music. They organized a successful luncheon on Sunday 16 November, and are selling See’s chocolate gift packages to raise money for Bibles and other activities. They have also begun planning for next year’s Vacation Bible Camp for children ages 5-12.

Pocket-size editions of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles will be distributed to each family in the parish for Christmas, thanks to the continuing generosity of the Mieh-Mieh community who donated the full cost. The parish continues to facilitate donations to Saint George Melkite Catholic Church in Zababdeh, Palestine and Saint George Melkite Catholic Church in Mieh-Mieh, Lebanon, not only from Holy Cross but also from other Melkite Churches in the US.

In response to rising electricity costs several families purchased and installed energy efficient light bulbs in parish buildings, while another family donated another air-conditioner unit for the church. Other individuals and families have also spearheaded the upgrading of the hall and pastoral center with the purchase of three large TVs, a sound system, and new chairs.

Father Deacon Elias Kashou began a group to visit and pray with all the sick in the parish. In keeping with the Nativity season, on Saturday 6 December Fr François gave a talk entitled “Preparing for Christmas with the Bible: How the Old Testament Prophecies were fulfilled in the Birth and Life of Jesus Christ.”

Father François Beyrouti is the pastor of Holy Cross Melkite Greek Catholic Church in Placentia, CA.

SAINT ELIAS THE PROPHET
SAN JOSE, CA

By Paula Rafeedie

Ten youth group members from St Elias parish in San Jose, CA, recently travelled to San Francisco to participate in a day-long event called “Feed the Homeless.” They met at the Powell Street BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) station in downtown San Francisco and walked to Domino’s Pizza to pick up 12 pizzas, ten to give to the homeless and two to share among themselves.

On their half-mile walk to Domino’s they saw at least ten needy individuals, so they knew that if they retraced their steps, they would know whom to go back to with their much-needed meal.

Youth group members Eliana, Elias, and Danielle Fars; Lian, Auli, and Noor Bishara; Michael Shahtout; Elias Khamisy; Ashley Kandah; and Simranpreet Singh were accompanied by Farah Khoury and Paula Fareedie, who organized the trip, and volunteers Rola Kandah and Chassan Rafeedie.

One by one, each youth member (with the help of an adult) approached each homeless person, told them their mission, and offered

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them a pizza. In each case, every person accepted the pizza with a heart-warming smile. There was little hesitation to begin enjoying the pizza; as it was obvious they were quite hungry. In many cases they were in a visibly weakened condition. Leaving each person, they said, “God bless you” and continued on their way. Some replied, “God bless you” and thanked them for doing God’s work.

In one case, a gentleman shared his story. He was a college graduate from Ohio, served in the Navy, and without giving details, explained that his life turned in an unexpected direction that has left him homeless in San Francisco. Even given his poor luck, he said that he lives each day thankful for any and all blessings and must continue to be hopeful. His attitude was that if his life could turn so quickly in one direction, it could turn just as quickly in the other.

On a number of occasions, the homeless men shared their food with others. One noticed the group carrying a number of pizzas and asked if he could have one, saying that he would share it with others in his situation (which he did).

What they expected to be their last box for a homeless person was given to a man trying to sleep next to the subway station. He was immediately thankful and passed out pizza to a few other hungry and disabled people around him. No questions asked; this hungry man gave freely of what he was just given and could have kept for himself.

Once they had passed out all ten pizzas and had two left for themselves, the group, led by Lian Bishara, struck their adult advisers with awe and pure joy by agreeing that they did not need to eat these last two pizzas, which would be better in the hands of the hungry. In Lian’s words, “We can eat later, but when are they going to eat? We need to give these pizzas away.”

The group ended the afternoon by having a discussion about the lessons learned and the next steps to understanding the problem of homelessness. The discussion was very active and the youth group agreed that the next time they do this they will find out more from the homeless about how they ended up in this situation and what they can do to help solve homelessness.

The kind, heartfelt, and loving deeds of that day served as a reminder of how much even teens are capable of. The group is resolved to continue to work to grow in acts of kindness for the homeless and all needy. As Jesus says in the Gospel of St Matthew, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

Paula Rafeedie is a parishioner of St Elias the Prophet Melkite Greek Catholic Church.

Fr. Abraham Azmy serves at the altar of St Ann Melkite Church.

we agreed to his request.

In September 2014, Fr. Augustinos arrived as the Copts’ permanent pastor. They named their parish for St. Moses the Black of Egypt, a 4th century priest-monk. Fr. Augustinos wanted to use St. Ann church for services, including Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings, Bible study, and other activities. This involved some very tight scheduling.

Finally, the Coptic community is renting the Annunciation chapel attached to St Sophia Greek Orthodox Church in New London, giving them more availability.

Meanwhile, the men are remodeling a building in Waterford to be their new church. St Ann pastor Fr. Edward Kakaty goes there occasionally to offer advice on liturgical decor, since Coptic churches, like Melkite churches, have an iconostasis (photo at right). Fr. Abraham and Fr. Isaac Saliba also still keep tabs on their community in the Waterford area.

After 36 years, St Ann church has had its dome re-gilded. The work was done over the course of five days in October 2014. Fr. Ed hired the Leader Sign Company of Worcester, MA, because he remembered that the owner, Tony Hmura (now 91 years old), gilded the cross on Our Lady of Perpetual Help Chapel at St. Ann’s.

Fr. Abraham Azmy serves at the altar of St Ann Melkite Church.

Bishop Tawadros, who came from Egypt and prayed at St Ann with the Coptic community, was elected Pope of Alexandria.

ST. JOHN OF THE DESERT
PHOENIX, AZ

By Khourieh Simone Boutros

Parishioners of St John of the Desert in Phoenix, AZ, recently had the good fortune to spend a biblical evening with Deacon Sabatino Carnazza, Director of the Office of Educational Services for the Eparchy of Newton.

Father Deacon Sabatino came to Phoenix for a meeting with other Eastern Churches, and despite his busy schedule, used this opportunity to meet, teach, and spend some time with us. His teaching entitled “Called by Christ” was a “Biblical Study of Our Christian Vocation Today.”

It was also broadcast live and the video is now available on www.melkite.org under “Media.”

About thirty parishioners and friends were very happy at the end of the presentation for having made the effort to come on a Tuesday evening, and felt rewarded by the biblical knowledge that Deacon Sabatino offered them. If he comes to your parish, don’t miss his teaching!

Khourieh Simone Boutros, a regular contributor to SOPHIA, is married to Fr. Peter Boutros, pastor of St John of the Desert, Phoenix, AZ.
Since our last report, three parishes held fundraising events to support our seminarians. Many thanks to St Ann, North Hollywood, CA; Our Lady of Redemption, Warren, MI; and Virgin Mary, Brooklyn, NY.

Remember that all local NAMW affiliates and women’s societies should hold one event each year to help our seminarians. Please share pictures of your events for the next issue.

In mid-October, we received this note from our first-year seminarian, Oliver Black from Virginia:

Dear Carol and All of NAMW,

Thank you so much for your generous support. I have been here at the seminary for a little over a month and it has been a wonderful experience so far. Again, thank you so much for your generous support; it makes life here much more comfortable.

Yours in Christ,
Oliver Black
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