

Light of the East

Society of St. John Chrysostom – Youngstown/Warren Chapter

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Next Meeting TBA

The Executive Board will meet after Holy Pascha to plan upcoming meetings and programming.

Featured Article

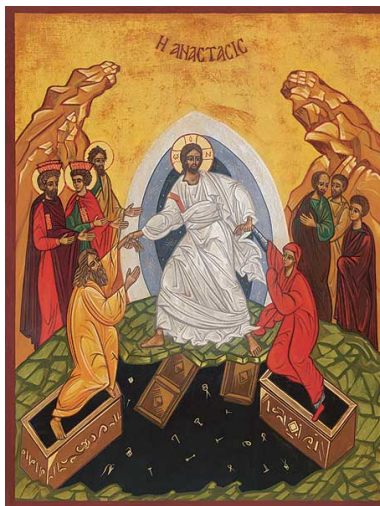
Why do Catholics and Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter on different days?

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CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!

By Chris Berardi



Once again, we commemorate as a Church the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the definitive conquest of sin and death. No longer are we consigned to slavery as our lot – we now have a choice to follow Jesus in freedom and to have eternal life bestowed upon us.

However, it is not an easy choice. Jesus' path to his Resurrection led straight to Golgotha, and he promises us that if we follow him, we too shall have to suffer our own Way of the Cross. He tells us that just as the world hated him, it shall hate us. In this newsletter, there are several news stories that confirm that even in our own day the followers of Christ are persecuted with a virulent hatred.

In addition to our struggle without, we are also faced with an even greater struggle within. Jesus tells us that we who want to come after him must give up everything and follow him. It is easy to think of this everything as physical possessions, and yes, we must use the good gifts of creation with temperance. But, even more so this everything includes the craft in our hearts. We must let go of our prejudices and attachments that are intangible but hold us back from our discipleship of Christ just as much as anything else.

We who desire to see unity in the Church must take this command of Christ and look within and make sure that we do not hold on to any preconceived notions about the other. Let us look upon our brothers and sisters in Christ with new eyes, the new eyes that allowed the disciples to see Jesus at Emmaus on Easter. Let us recognize that, fundamentally, we are all children of God who have the same heavenly Father. And may we fulfill Jesus' prayer that we all be one.

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Current dues are \$20 for an individual or \$30 for a family membership. For membership inquiries, contact Rich Mattiussi at (330) 573-8653 or via email at mattiussi52001@yahoo.com.

Treasurer's Report

Balance as of April 10, 2017
\$1,966.72

Newsletter Committee

Editor	Rich Mattiussi
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Who are we?

The Society of St. John Chrysostom aims to make known the history, worship, discipline, and theology of Eastern Christendom. The Society also works and prays that all Christians, particularly the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, will attain the fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires and encourages support for the Eastern Christian Churches:

- Byzantine and Oriental Catholic Churches
- Orthodox Church
- Oriental Orthodox Church
- Church of the East

The Society was founded in the United Kingdom and Europe in 1926. In 1998, the Society was also founded in the United States. Following some exploratory and preparatory meetings in 1998 and early 1999, the local Youngstown/Warren Chapter was founded and the first meeting took place on May 4, 1999.

Who was Saint John Chrysostom?

Saint John Chrysostom was born in Antioch around the year 349, and after an extensive education embraced a life of asceticism. He was the Archbishop of Constantinople from approximately 397 to 407, during a period of great reform and renewal among the clergy and faithful of the Byzantine Roman Empire. Twice he was forced into exile by enemies and the imperial court, and died at Comana in Pontus, Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).

Who are the Eastern Churches?

Jesus Christ commanded his apostles to preach the "good news" to the whole world. St. Peter traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch and then to Rome. St. Andrew founded the Church in Byzantium which later became Constantinople. St. James went to Egypt and St. Thomas to India. Of the five initial Patriarchates, known as the Pentarchy, the four in the Eastern half of the Roman Empire are the origins of what are today called the Eastern Churches.

For more information

Youngstown/Warren Chapter Website
<http://www.byzcath.org/stjohnchrysostom/>

National Society Website
<http://www.ssjc.org>

Why do Catholics and Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter on different days?

By Kathleen Manning

Since the early Middle Ages, all Christians have used the same method for determining the date of Easter, though they arrive at a different result. Described authoritatively in *The Reckoning of Time* by eighth-century English scholar Bede, “The Sunday following the full moon which falls on or after the



equinox will give the lawful Easter.” The equinox is observed on March 21. This straightforward method based upon an easily observable natural phenomenon survived the Schism of 1054, when the Catholic and Orthodox Churches split from each other. Still, if you have Orthodox Christian friends or visit a predominantly Orthodox country, such as Russia or Greece, in the late spring you may find yourself celebrating a second Easter.

You can thank Gregory XIII for the extra helping of Easter eggs. In 1582, the pope instituted a new calendar for all Catholic countries, and it would eventually be adopted as the civil calendar by countries throughout the world. The old Julian calendar year, created during the reign of Julius Caesar, was 11 minutes too long. That may not seem like much, but compounded over centuries, it was causing calendar days to shift in relation to natural phenomena like the change in seasons. Consequently, by the time of Gregory’s papacy, the spring equinox could no longer be observed on March 21. The new Gregorian calendar brought March 21 back into alignment with the equinox by axing 13 days from the calendar for one year. To keep things in alignment going forward, the Gregorian calendar allows a centurial year, like 1900 or 2000, to be a leap year only if it is divisible by 400.

The Orthodox churches continued to use the Julian calendar. Thanks to the 13-day difference between the two, the all-important date of March 21 on the Julian calendar corresponds to April 3 on the Gregorian calendar.

For the remainder of the 21st century, Easter will fall between April 4 and May 8 for Orthodox Christians, and March 22 and April 25 for Catholics. Still, Jesus only died and rose from the dead once, not twice within two separate five-week windows. In the interest of Christian unity, some religious reformers have pushed for creating a single Easter that all churches can observe. In 1997, the World Council of Churches proposed that Easter Sunday should be determined by when the astronomical equinox is observed in Jerusalem. This solution would sidestep the issue of any church having to abandon their calendar. However, Orthodox Christians would be more dramatically affected by this change than Catholics, since the astronomical equinox is much closer to March 21 on the Gregorian calendar than it is to March 21 on the Julian calendar.

Since the last call for reform at a 2009 meeting in Ukraine, attempts to standardize the date of Easter have stalled. In the meantime, Catholics and Orthodox Christians can look forward to April 16, 2017, when their divergent calendars and calculations will lead them to celebrate Easter on the same Sunday.

This article appeared in the April 2015 issue of U.S. Catholic (Vol. 80, No. 4, page 46).

Imagining Unity with the Churches of the East

By Ben Martin

Before we discuss the restoration of communion among the churches, we should discuss the terminology with which we speak of churches. I have often heard Eastern Catholics present themselves as belonging to one of the twenty-four churches of the broader Catholic Church, or of the Catholic Communion. I take issue with this way of speaking for two reasons. First, it does not strike me as very informative. I don't mean to reduce the discussion to matters so secular as population statistics and power structures, but I find it difficult to group together churches like the Maronite Catholic Church and the Chaldean Catholic Church with the Albanian Catholic Church and the Belarusian Catholic Church in a satisfying way. The former are large patriarchates; the latter lack even metropolitanate status.

Certainly, we may choose to call them all churches, and back it up theologically, but this strikes me as more of a legal designation than an identification of visible unity or structure. For example, the Italo-Albanian Catholic Church operates as three separate jurisdictions – two eparchies in Sicily and a territorial abbey in Italy; they do not even employ an identical liturgy – the eparchies have the Arberesh Use, while the abbey has the Italo-Byzantine Use. Aside from their shared history, it appears that these separate jurisdictions are called one church because it is convenient for the Vatican to do so. A similar situation obtains with the regard to the Ruthenian Catholic Church.

This manner of identifying churches – and this is my second point – is hardly promising for the Orthodox who might worry about Rome's attitude toward other, independent churches. Therefore, to take a small step toward remedying this situation, I propose that we adopt a change for which Eastern Catholics themselves have called – that we accept the Orthodox classification of churches as autocephalous, autonomous, and semi-autonomous. With these terms, we can speak of the



Adoration of the Magi, c.1670

Catholic Communion as eleven autocephalous churches (Rome, Alexandria, Melkites, Syrians, Maronites, Babylon, Armenia, Kiev, Malabarese, Malankarese, Romania), five autonomous churches (Ruthenians, Hungary, Slovakia, Ethiopia, Eritrea), and eight semi-autonomous churches.

Once we've adopted these concepts, it's easier to speak of how the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church might look after the healing of the schisms with the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Assyrians. Limiting myself to autocephalous churches and anticipating my treatment of canonical territory below, I can imagine the future Orthodox Catholic Communion as the following autocephalous churches:

- **Rome** – Should the Pope restore the title of UnPatriarch of the West? Should the Holy See be a patriarchate? What is its canonical territory? Western Europe; the Americas?

Australia? China, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, the Philippines, the Pacific?

- **Constantinople** – What happens to the Armenian titular patriarch there?
- **Alexandria** – I assume the Oriental, Eastern, and Catholic synods will merge to form one Patriarchate of Alexandria; will it retain some role for the Byzantine liturgy? How will it deal with the parallel Latin jurisdictions throughout much of the continent? Will it surrender some canonical territory to Rome or permit the continued existence of parallel Latin jurisdictions within its territory?
- **Antioch** – Would the five synods want to merge to form one united Church of Antioch? Will this become a tri-ritual church? The Latin Church includes many rites, but would the churches of Antioch find this acceptable? Might it become a bi-ritual church, should the de-Latinization of the Maronite Rite bring it sufficiently close to its Syrian sister-rite? What role will the Byzantine Rite have? If they preferred, might the Maronites end up with their own patriarchate of Lebanon?
- **Jerusalem** – Might this also become a tri-ritual church? Would each rite take turns as patriarch of Jerusalem? Or would the Byzantine synod retain governance and permit the continued existence of either or both Latin and Armenian titular patriarchs within its territory?
- **Babylon** – There are three synods to merge. How far does its canonical territory extend? Iraq, Iran; around the Persian Gulf? into Afghanistan and Pakistan? into the northern 'Stans? Who gets China?
- **Etchmiadzin** – There are three synods to merge.
- **Moscow** – Will Moscow keep all of its current territories? Presumably it will absorb both the Russian Catholic Church and the Belarusian Catholic Church. Kiev should receive autocephaly. Moscow might also consider allowing for both Nikonian and pre-Nikonian Uses as the tiny Russian Catholic Church already does and thereby begin to heal some of its own internal schisms.
- **Serbia** – Two synods will merge. How much of Yugoslavia should it retain? Maybe the Catholic and Orthodox Macedonians will receive autocephaly, as well as the Montenegrins. This is the first patriarchate named for its country rather than its principle city.
- **Romania** – Two synods will merge.
- **Bulgaria** – The Bulgarian Catholic Church will be absorbed.
- **Georgia** – How important is it to sort out Georgia's canonical rank?
- **Ethiopia** – The Ethiopian Catholic Church will be absorbed.
- **Eritrea** – The Eritrean Catholic Church will be absorbed.
- **India** – If we want to recover a new respect for canonical territory, I think it is worth considering the possibility of inviting the Latins, Malabarese, and Malankarese of India to form their own patriarchate together, maybe as a tri-ritual church if it's possible. Other arrangements are possible if all parties are content with overlapping jurisdictions. I have also heard that there is resistance to the full de-Latinization of the Malabarese Rite – a united patriarchate of India might consider retaining the partially Latinized Malabarese Rite while restoring its ancient liturgy in a manner acceptable to all of the Indian rites, so that this fourth liturgy

might have precedence in the patriarchate. Such an arrangement might also help restore unity with the smaller churches that have retained connections with the Assyrian Church of the East. India could retain its titular patriarchal authority over the East Indies.

- **Ukraine** – or the Church of Kiev; many synods may merge.
- **Cyprus** – the first autocephalous metropolitanate
- **Greece** – The Greek Catholic Church will be absorbed.
- **Poland** – How Rome might best respect the territorial rights of the Orthodox Church of Poland is not clear. It is probably easiest for the Orthodox Church of Poland to grant Rome permission to continue to support its parallel jurisdictions. The massive difference in populations is awkward. Would Latin and Byzantine Poles prefer an autocephalous bi-ritual church, a patriarchate of Poland?
- **Albania** – As in India, Rome might consider inviting the Latin Catholics of Albania to form a bi-ritual church with the Catholic and Orthodox Albanians who follow the Byzantine Rite. Alternatively, Rome might seek permission to continue to support its parallel jurisdictions in Albania.
- **Czechia** – I'm anticipating with regard to its name; will the Slovakian Church receive autocephaly?
- **Slovakia** – The Slovakian Catholic Church will be absorbed.
- **Finland** – Will it receive autocephaly?
- **Montenegro** – Will it receive autocephaly?
- **Macedonia** – Will it receive autocephaly?

- **Moldova** – Will it receive autocephaly?
- **Estonia** – Will it receive autocephaly?
- **Latvia** – Will it receive autocephaly?

Obviously, this is a rough sketch of how a reunited church might look – there are dozens of questions raised by this sketch, and it is up to the churches themselves to discern the best ways forward. There are also many barriers to shared communion that I will not attempt to address, but a central question is the authority of the Roman Pope. Equipped with the foregoing account, I think it is possible, for those like me who are less educated on these matters, to reconsider papal authority as it relates to canonical territory.

The integrity of canonical territory has been a prominent concern among our Orthodox brothers and sisters – maybe one of the most prominent concerns in their dialogues with Rome. And it is understandable why this is so. At present the Pope has the power to intervene in the affairs of the Eastern Catholic Churches, to reconfigure their canonical territories at will, and to erect parallel Latin jurisdictions within the canonical territories of the Eastern Churches without deference to their territorial rights. Although Eastern Catholics may understand the powers of the Roman Pope differently, this account on the part of Rome does not display the understanding of autocephaly upheld by the Orthodox.

Therefore, I think it is fitting for Rome to consider giving up each of these powers, so that each primate has full authority over the canonical territory of his church. Then it is easier to say what powers should rest with the Roman Pope. These might include, for example, the right to hear and resolve territorial and other disputes among the primates of the autocephalous churches, the right to convoke councils, and the right to raise questions concerning doctrine and discipline for consideration by the primates in order to preserve unity among the churches. These might also include special roles in

recognizing autocephaly and in guiding ecumenical dialogue.

This is simply an outline of how the restoration of communion with our Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Assyrian brothers and sisters might look, but I will note a few more concerns that arise from what has been said so far. First, I have not addressed how these changes might be made – that is a question for theologians and canon lawyers to consider. Second, while this vision contributes to subsidiarity among the canonical churches, it does not address subsidiarity within the Latin Church – that is a conversation that should involve our Protestant brothers and sisters. Third, it is clear that a procedure must be developed for hearing and resolving disputes among the primates when Rome is party to the dispute.

Finally, this sketch calls for bi-ritual churches or even tri- or tetra-ritual churches. The Latin Church includes multiple rites, but several of these have been suppressed in favor of the Roman Rite in the past. Perhaps the Eastern Churches can discover ways of marrying their various liturgical and canonical traditions in a similar and more successful manner, where it makes sense to do so. Whether this involves overlapping jurisdictions or adherence to the rule of ‘one city, one bishop’ falls to each church to decide with respect to its own canonical territory.

Relatedly, there will also be need of a procedure for establishing extra-territorial ordinariates or hierarchies, where these are welcomed by the local primate. Consider, for example, the possibility that a large number of Assyrians migrate to the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Perhaps the Catholicos-Patriarch of Babylon will ask the Coptic Pope to establish an ordinariate for the faithful of the East Syrian Rite or for permission to establish an East Syrian hierarchy within his territory – the two primates can negotiate the details concerning the

appointment of bishops, etc., so that the primary territorial rights of Alexandria are respected. Alternatively, the Coptic Pope may approach the Catholicos-Patriarch and request guidance in setting up an ordinariate for the faithful of the East Syrian Rite or that the Catholicos-Patriarch consider erecting an extra-territorial hierarchy for the same reason – again, the two primates can negotiate the details. I assume that procedures like this exist already, but Rome may have a special role in keeping track of and ensuring clarity in agreements like these.

This last consideration allows me to address three churches I’ve left out of the foregoing. First, if communion among the churches is restored, I assume the Italo-Albanian Catholic Church would merge with the hierarchy of Orthodox bishops in Italy and Sicily – what would result is unclear to me – an autonomous church answering to Constantinople? to Rome? an autocephalous church that lacks primary territorial rights? Second, the same question arises with regard to the Ruthenian Catholic Church and the other Byzantine hierarchies in the United States – what results from merging with the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops? Third, I did not address above the territorial claims of the OCA, because its autocephaly is not universally recognized – otherwise its territorial claims are comparable to those of the Orthodox Church of Poland. Finally, similar questions arise with regard to the seven other regions where the Eastern Orthodox Churches have asked the bishops of overlapping jurisdictions to work out plans for unity among Byzantine Christians, as well as with regard to the ROCOR and the extra-territorial jurisdictions of the Oriental Orthodox and Assyrian Churches.

Ben Martin is a Roman Catholic student pursuing a Ph.D. in the Philosophy department at Loyola University Chicago.



Catholic Television Network of Youngstown

The newly elected officers of the Society of St. John Chrysostom – Youngstown/Warren Chapter will be featured in an upcoming episode of Spotlight, a series produced by the Catholic Television Network of Youngstown and the Ecumenical Television Channel. Check your local listings for date and times.

The Catholic Television Network of Youngstown has won numerous awards, the most recent being a 2017 Telly Award for an episode of Spotlight featuring the Bella Woman's Center. CTNY is currently headed by Fr. James Korda as President, Bob Gavalier as General Manager, and Br. Dominic Calabro as Production Assistant. What follows is an overview of the history and highlights of this local initiative of the New Evangelization.

CTNY Mission Statement

The Catholic Television Network of Youngstown uses the mass media with an ecumenical attitude and an evangelizing concern to proclaim the story of a loving God, revealed in Jesus and living in a believing, celebrating and ministering community.

Through the Ecumenical Television Channel ETC-TV this story is proclaimed throughout the six counties of Northeast Ohio and beyond for the sake of a greater awareness, better understanding, deeper discipleship and sustained support.

Lighting Our Way to God: A Historical Narrative of the Catholic Television Network of Youngstown

During the 1950's and 60's vigorous Catholic radio and television flourished nationally and within the Diocese. In 1954 the Sunday Mass was broadcast on radio with the help of a local AM station. In the early 60's the TV Mass For Shut-Ins was first broadcast and continues today.

In the early 1970's a Diocesan Director of Communications and producer were named,

ETC Cable Systems

Spectrum Cable – Channel 13, Channel 78.31 and Channel 17.54
Serving: Youngstown, Salem, Sebring, Beloit, Smith Township, Knox Township, Goshen Township, Butler Township, Washington Township, Damascus, Warren, and Trumbull County.

Spectrum Cable – Channel 4, Channel 78.31 and Channel 17.54
Serving: Brookfield, Lowellville, Struthers, Poland Township, Hermitage and Sharon, PA, and Shenango Valley.

Spectrum Cable – Channel 14, Channel 78.31 and Channel 17.54
Serving: Windham.

Armstrong Cable – Channel 45
Serving: Austintown, Berlin Center, Boardman, Campbell, Canfield, Coitsville, Girard, Lowellville, Poland, McDonald, Mineral Ridge, New Springfield, North Lima, Ellsworth, Goshen, Green, Milton, Smith, North Jackson, North Benton, Beloit and Warren Township

Spectrum Cable – Conneaut (Check parish bulletin for times and channel)

In Canton – WIVM TV 39 and Spectrum Cable 989

In Massillon/Wooster – Channel 128

In Tuscarawas, Carroll, and Holmes Counties – Spectrum Cable Channel 4

Hospitals and Medical Centers

St. Elizabeth Hospital Medical Center – Channel 4

St. Joseph Medical Center – Channel 14

You can also access the ceremonies from St. Columba Cathedral on the diocesan website, www.doy.org. Go to the "News and Media" bar, then, click on CTNY Gallery.

Programs such as Moving Out, Popcorn Digest and Gallery were produced.

The Catholic Telecommunications Network of Youngstown was begun in 1980 by the Diocese in order to expand the production and delivery of its radio and TV programs. The Gabriel Award winning Wineskins radio program had begun production along with TV programs such as Reel to Real, Diocesan Spotlight, Jewish Christian Dialogue, Profiles and Issues and more. St. Columba Cathedral is made television ready to provide live and taped broadcasts of liturgical events.

In the 1990's CTNY continued to expand its programming and receive national recognition for its TV and Radio accomplishments. CTNY also serves

as the production and network facility for the Ecumenical Television Channel.

History of the Ecumenical Television Channel

The Ecumenical Television Channel (ETC-TV), serving Northeastern Ohio and Western Pennsylvania, is a collaboration of Christian denominations and the Jewish Community. The primary purpose is to communicate the word of God who calls, nurtures and unites us. This collaboration shall maintain its ecumenical spirit and purpose, in cooperation with the Catholic Telecommunications Network of the Diocese of Youngstown (CTNY).

ETC initially broadcast for one hour a day in 1983 and in 1986 expanded to 24 hours a day, seven days a week of religious and inspirational programming, thus becoming the first Ecumenical Television Channel in the nation.

ETC's development and broadcasting were conducted through the combined efforts of CTNY and ETC-NEO, the now defunct Ecumenical Telecommunications Coalition of Northeast Ohio.

National programs on ETC are provided by EWTN, Boston Catholic Television, the Jewish Network and others.

Local programming includes, Mass for Shut-Ins, Spotlight, Best of CTNY, Scripture 101, Sacraments 101, Communion of Saints, along with other season productions and reflections, special liturgical events from St. Columba Cathedral and Wineskins, a weekly radio program. Also included are programs sponsored by the Catholic Communications Campaign, the Annual Bishop's Appeal and St. Paul's Catholic Books and Gifts, a division of the Society of St. Paul.

ETC is broadcast on two cable systems and 2 hospitals reaching more than 300,000 viewers daily.

Orthodox Church Series

Fridays

8:00 PM – 9:00 PM

12/09/16	What is Orthodox Christianity and St. George
12/16/16	The Bible in the Orthodox Church/OT and St. Constantine
01/06/17	The Bible in the Orthodox Church/NT and St. Peter
01/13/17	Worship in Life and Tour of Orthodox Church
01/20/17	Orthodox Liturgical Year and St. Haramablos
01/27/17	The House of God – Iconography and St. Paul
02/03/17	The House of God – Architecture, Vestments, etc. and St. Helen
02/10/17	Music in the Orthodox Church and St. John the Baptist
02/17/17	The Early Church and St. Basil
02/24/17	The Modern Church, Growth in USA and St. Anthony
03/03/17	The Ecumenical Patriarch, Past and Present and St. Tikhon
03/10/17	Orthodoxy and Other Faith Traditions and St. Athanasius
03/17/17	Orthodoxy: Faith in Action and St. Dionysius
03/24/17	Orthodox Stance on Moral and Social Issues and St. Nektarios
03/31/17	Saints and Martyrs of the Orthodox Church and St. Demetrious
04/07/17	Changing Orthodox Family and St. John Chrysostom
04/21/17	Orthodoxy and Our Youth and Camp Nazareth
04/28/17	Ministering to Our Elderly and St. Catherine
05/05/17	Orthodoxy in a New Media Age and the Ancient Church
05/12/17	Faith and Pulp Culture and Tour of Orthodox Church
05/19/17	Patristics – Fathers of the Church and St. Michael
05/26/17	The Ethics of the Orthodox Community and Orthodoxy Now
06/02/17	A Bible Study, Psalm 8 and Orthodoxy Now
06/09/17	A Bible Study, Luke 19: 1-10 and Windows to Heaven
06/16/17	A Bible Study, Romans 8: 31-39 and Orthodoxy Now
06/23/17	A Bible Study, Letter of St. John 4: 7-16 and Ancient Church

Kenyan bishop visits Valley church, shares faith, culture, needs

By Bruce Walton

Youngstown, Ohio, March 18, 2017 (Vindicator) – The sharing of cultures and ideas with a bridge of faith is something a man of the cloth can only hope to initiate, and something a local priest can happily experience with an old friend.

Bishop Neofitos Kongai of Nyeri and Mount Kenya in Kenya visited his friend and former classmate, the Rev. Joe DiStefano, on Friday to catch up and to speak to the members of the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church.

“When we cross over and share and experience the faith, then we really see the beauty of both of those that is all over the world,” the bishop said.

After a potluck dinner, they had a service and welcomed Bishop Kongai to their congregation.

Bishop Kongai, the second native-born Kenyan bishop, visited the Mahoning Valley on Friday on Father DiStefano’s invitation for a reunion. The two became friends and classmates attending the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Mass., in 2001.

Father DiStefano said he also partly owes Bishop Kongai for helping to introduce him to his wife, Stephanie.

During their time at the seminary, their lessons consisted of church history, theology, doctrines and pastoral classes.

“He is someone who is extremely humble, but he has a very strong faith,” Father DiStefano said. “I think he’s a holy person, and I think history will bear that out.”

Bishop Kongai was born in 1970 in the village of Kesengei, in the Nandi district of Kenya. After graduating from high school in 1992, he attended two Kenyan institutions and became a practicing

priest in the late 1990s, where he earned the name Neofitos, after a famous Cypriot saint.

After his graduation from the Holy Cross school in 2005, he enrolled in two more institutions before becoming a monk. He eventually became an assistant bishop in 2014 and was unanimously elected as bishop of the newly established Diocese of Nyeri and all of the Mount Kenya region a year later.

Bishop Kongai devotes most of his time to ministering to children and families in need.

He has helped build an Orthodox primary academy (St. Nicholas Academy), a medical clinic (St. Luke) and the Parish Church of St. Anthimos. But he said more work needs to be done.

As a new bishop of a young diocese, Bishop Kongai said they are doing fine, but have many needs, which he wanted to explain while on his visit here in hopes of receiving help, as well as spreading faith.

“We need to put systems in place. We need to build churches. We need to help the poor. We need to educate the needy children who don’t have means of going to school,” he said.

Situation is ‘critical and dangerous’ for Iraqi Christian refugees

By Catholic News Service

March 3, 2017 – Refugees sheltering in Jordan at risk as access to international aid tightens Catholic leaders have expressed concern for tens of thousands of Iraqi Christian refugees sheltering in Jordan as access to international aid tightens with crises deepening in the Middle East and elsewhere.

"The situation of Iraqi Christians refugees is critical and dangerous," Father Khalil Jaar told Catholic News Service on the sidelines of a conference hosted by the Vatican Embassy in Amman and the Catholic charity, Caritas Jordan.

Meeting at Our Lady of Peace Center on the hilly, tree-lined outskirts of the Jordanian capital, the leaders sought better cooperation and were exploring income-generation projects for the refugees badly in need of funds.

"They have finished their money and they aren't allowed to work. How can they live in human dignity?" asked Father Jaar, who has devoted his ministry to aiding Iraqi and Syrian refugees flooding into Jordan from neighbouring conflicts for more than a decade.

Daniela Cicchella of the Jordanian offices of the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, told the gathering that 700,000 refugees of 42 nationalities are registered with the agency in the country. The Jordanian government says it hosts 1.5 million refugees and its budget, water, electricity and other services are overburdened by the numbers.

"We are doing our best to preserve and protect the dignity of the refugees in Jordan. It's our country where we can feel free to work under the umbrella of our government. I hope we can do something better in the future," said Father Jaar, who grew up as a Palestinian refugee from Bethlehem, West Bank.

But the priest has experienced his own challenges trying to provide 200 Iraqi Christian pupils with an education when they were unable to enroll in Jordanian schools after fleeing the so-called Islamic State invasion of their homeland in August 2014.

"At any month we might have to close the school, because we don't have the money to run it. Everything is gratis for the children: transportation, uniforms, school supplies," he said, explaining that their parents cannot afford such expenses when just feeding the family is a struggle. "I hope our good friends can help."

"This is now the third year of displacement for the Iraqi Christians. It's very tough. Donations are becoming less, while global attention is waning," Ra'ed Bahou, regional director of the Pontifical Mission, told CNS.



Churches in Iraq are being destroyed at an alarming rate.

"That means that more problems will be created for these Iraqis. We are trying our best to help them with health care, education, housing and logistics. But the problem is bigger than us," he warned.

Bahou estimates that about 1,000 Iraqi Christian families who came to Jordan after escaping the horrors of the Islamic State takeover of Mosul and the surrounding villages have now resettled in Australia, Canada and elsewhere.

"But another 1,000 or more have come from Iraq. We are trying to coordinate between different organizations, especially Catholic, to cope with these people and their needs," Bahou said.

Only 61,000 of the 140,000 Iraqis sheltering in Jordan are registered with the U.N. refugee agency, said Caritas Jordan program manager Omar Abawi. "Many of the Iraqi refugees are facing increased vulnerability in their living conditions," he told the gathering.

Abawi mentioned some of the challenges. The majority of the refugees are women and children who experience high cost of living expenses. While Syrian refugees have now been granted the right to work legally in Jordan, Iraqi refugees and those from other countries, such as Yemen, Sudan and Somalia, do not have that right. Most refugee children lose out on at least one year of schooling. Basic health services, once provided to Syrian refugees free of charge or for a nominal fee, were never accessible to Iraqi refugees.

"I am always struck by their desperate words about losing hope and the miserable conditions they live under," said Wael Suleiman, Caritas Jordan general director. They experience "frustration, loneliness, isolation, despair and sadness over their forced exodus from their country, families, history, current situation and future."

"We are here to heal the wounds, lift the morales, help to restore hope, enhance human relationships and reflect the concept of living as one human family," Suleiman said.

"Pope Francis' message for the Easter fast urges us to work and deal with others, as they are grace. Today's call is to open our heart for others, especially strangers," he said.

The Vatican is funding a job-creation program for Iraqi refugees in Jordan. More than a dozen will have full-time work cultivating, producing and selling vegetables and oil, while another 200 Iraqi refugees are expected to receive training in carpentry, agriculture and the food industry. An additional 500 will be given seasonal employment.

UNHCR's Cicchella said a pilot project employing Iraqi engineers and IT specialists outside of Jordan on a short-term basis is being explored, as are educational scholarships.

Many church leaders believe it would take time, iron-clad security guarantees and rebuilt infrastructure before Iraqi Christians would consider returning home, but even then many Iraqi Christians now say they can only see their future in the West.

"We need to be optimistic that they can go back to their villages," Bahou said. "They were there 2,000 years and we need them to be back there."

Egyptian President al Sisi meets the Chaldean and Maronite Patriarchs: let us establish the principle of citizenship in all Arab countries



Cairo, March 3, 2017 (Agenzia Fides) – Religious leaders, in the current historical phase, have a key role in spreading in all Arab countries, the principle of citizenship, and reject false interpretations of Holy Books and religious teachings used by extremist and terrorist organizations as an ideological tool of their power projects. This is how Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi expressed his view on the need to "renew religious discourse" in the Middle East, as an antidote to sectarian conflicts that disrupt large areas of the Middle East. On Thursday, March 2 he held talks with Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Rai, and Chaldean Patriarch, Louis Raphael I Sako, who are in Cairo to attend the Conference on "Freedom, citizenship, diversity and integration" conference organized at the Sunni University of al Azhar in Cairo and the Council of Muslim scholars (based in Abu Dhabi) (see Fides 02/03/2017).

During the talks with the two Eastern Catholic Patriarchs, President al Sisi, referring to the situation in Egypt, said he does not identify Egyptian Muslims and Christians as members of a religious "majority" and "minority", underlining the need for all members of the Egyptian nation to be treated without discrimination, in respect of full equality founded on the principle of citizenship. (GV)

Pope Francis to visit Egypt April 28-29

By Hannah Brockhaus

Vatican City, Mar 18, 2017 / 06:11 am (CNA/EWTN News).- In what will be his first international trip of the year, Pope Francis will be traveling to Cairo, Egypt, April 28-29, showing that interfaith dialogue is a priority.

He will visit the country in response to an invitation from His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and the Grand Imam of the Mosque of al Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed el-Tayyib, as well as Egypt's president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and the bishops of the local Catholic Church, a March 18 Vatican communique announced.

While the full program for the Pope's the trip will be published shortly, he will almost certainly visit Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which has recently partnered with the Vatican to discuss combatting religious justification for violence in a warming of relations between the two.

The Pope's trip will likely focus largely on inter-faith dialogue and Catholic-Muslim relations – especially in combating Christian persecution – continuing dialogue from a seminar Vatican officials attended in February.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, along with the council's secretary and the head of their Office for Islam, traveled to Cairo Feb. 24 to participate in the special seminar at Al-Azhar University.

They discussed the theme “The role of al-Azhar al-Sharif and of the Vatican in countering the phenomena of fanaticism, extremism and violence in the name of religion.”

Persecution of Christians has long been an issue in Egypt, with a recent spike in attacks causing even more reason for alarm.

There have been 40 reported murders of Christians in Egypt in the last three months, His Grace Bishop Angaelos, general bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom, said in a statement Feb 28.

Twenty-nine were killed in a bombing at St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo in December. The Islamic State took credit for the bombing and released a video threatening to target Christian “crusaders” in Egypt.

Since the video's release, more Christians have been killed in Egypt and hundreds have reportedly fled their homes in the Sinai region in the north of the country after several murders there, the group In Defense of Christians said.

Egyptian society was also profoundly shocked by the beheading in Libya of 20 Orthodox Coptic faithful and a companion by Islamic State militants in February 2015.

Pope Francis was invited to visit Egypt by Coptic Catholic bishops during their ad limina visit at the Vatican Feb. 6, during which they also gave a report on the state of the Church in their country.

The Pope had also received an invitation to visit Egypt from the country's president and from the Grand Imam of al Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayyeb, who occupies a prestigious place in the Sunni Muslim world.

Al Tayyeb paid a visit to the Vatican May 23, 2016 for a meeting with Pope Francis, which marked a major step in thawing relations between the al-Azhar institution and the Holy See, which were strained in 2011 with claims that Pope Benedict XVI had “interfered” in Egypt's internal affairs by condemning a bomb attack on a church in Alexandria during the time of Coptic Christmas.

Since then relations have continued to move forward at a surprisingly fast pace, leading to the Oct. 21 announcement from the Vatican that sometime this spring the Holy See and the Al-Azhar

Mosque and adjunct University will officially resume dialogue.

Francis' visit to Cairo and to the University in April will likely mark the official resumption of this dialogue.

Patriarch Bartholomew meets with a CCEE delegation led by Cardinal Bagnasco



Istanbul, Turkey, March 5, 2017 – On Sunday 5 March in Istanbul, the ancient Christian city of Constantinople-Byzantium, Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of CCEE (Council of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe) met His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Patriarchal See of Phanar. The meeting took place after the Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral of Saint George at the Phanar, presided over by the Patriarch himself to mark the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the First Sunday of Lent when the Orthodox Church recalls the restoration of the sacred icons in the Basilica of Sancta Sophia in 843 after the end of the iconoclast crisis.

Also present at the Phanar, as members of the CCEE delegation, were Cardinal Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, former President of CCEE (2006-2016), and Mgr Duarte da Cunha, CCEE General Secretary.

After the Divine Liturgy, the Patriarch received the two Cardinals, testifying to the great desire to work together with the new CCEE president and recalling the good outcome of the collaboration undertaken so far with CCEE, especially through the realisation

of the European Catholic-Orthodox Forum. “We gain great courage and inspiration from this collaboration”, the Patriarch said. “Today more than ever, our Churches are called to defend Christian principles and stand together in the face of the unprecedented challenges and threats against Christianity”. According to Patriarch Bartholomew, it is necessary to promote an ethos, build bridges and discover new forms of evangelisation in the European arena.

For his part, Cardinal Bagnasco thanked the Ecumenical Patriarch for his invitation and also echoed the strong conviction about the need to pursue industrious and fruitful collaboration through the European Catholic-Orthodox Forum.

The common harmony about the urgent need to pursue reflection and joint commitment was then given concrete expression by the joint decision to hold a sixth European Catholic-Orthodox Forum in the course of 2018.

In the evening, the delegation met the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Turkey, His Grace Mgr Lévon Zékiyan, Archbishop of the Armenian Archeparchy of Istanbul.

On the morning of Monday 6 March, after the celebration of Mass in Istanbul's Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, the delegation met the Latin Apostolic Vicar, His Grace Mgr Ruben Tierrablanca Gonzales, and the Apostolic Vicar of Anatolia, His Lordship Mgr Paolo Bizzeti SJ.

Pope prays for peace with leader of Assyrian Church of the East

Rome, Italy, November 17, 2016, (Vatican Radio) – Pope Francis spoke on Thursday of the suffering of innocent victims caught up in the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts, saying that nothing can justify such terrible violence. His words came as he met with the head of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Gewargis III, who was making his first visit to the Vatican since

being elected as Catholicos-Patriarch in September last year.

In his words to the new leader of this Church, which traces its roots back to the apostles Thomas and Bartholomew, the Pope appealed for an end to the conflicts in the Middle East which cause such great suffering to Christians and members of other religious or ethnic minorities.

Every day, the Pope said, Christians in these places "walk the way of the Cross". They remind us that Jesus is always at the heart of our faith, even in our adversity, calling us to live out his message of love, reconciliation and forgiveness.

Blood of martyrs is seed of unity

Just as the blood of Christ, shed out of love, brought reconciliation and unity, the Pope said, so the blood of the martyrs is the seed of unity for all Christians.

Theological dialogue and practical partnerships

Pope Francis also spoke of the important progress in relations between Catholics and the Assyrian Church of the East, recalling especially the Common Christological Declaration signed by Pope John Paul II and by the previous Catholicos Mar Dinkha IV. He encouraged the work of the joint commission for theological dialogue between the two Churches, saying that partnering together through works of charity can also help to heal the wounds of the past.

Shared Christian witness

Unlike most other Churches that trace their origins to the first centuries of Christianity, the Assyrian Church of the East is not in communion with any other Christians of either the Eastern or Western traditions. Pope Francis concluded his remarks saying that the great evangelizers, saints and martyrs throughout history accompany us and urge us to open up new paths of communion and shared witness to the world.

The Pope and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch met a year ago. Here's what's next.

By Andrea Gagliarducci

Rome, Italy, Feb 12, 2017 (CNA/EWTN News) – One year ago marked a historic first meeting between a Pope and a Russian Orthodox Patriarch.

Now, the Vatican and the Moscow Patriarchate will celebrate the meeting's anniversary with a conference at Switzerland's Freiburg University.

The conference will take place Feb. 12, exactly one year after the meeting between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill at the St. Marti airport at the Havana.

Christian brotherhood and unity were the focus of the 2016 meeting.

"We spoke as brothers," Pope Francis said of the meeting last year. "We have the same baptism. We are bishops. We spoke of our Churches."

Patriarch Kirill said their private discussion was conducted "with full awareness of the responsibility of our Churches, for the future of Christianity, and for the future of human civilization" and provided a chance to understand each other. He said the two Churches will work against war.

Now, one year later, Catholic and Russian Orthodox leaders will gather in Switzerland for a conference. The event is held by Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, and Metropolitan Hilarion, president of the department of the external ecclesiastical relations of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate.

Cardinal Koch and Metropolitan Hilarion both led the negotiations that led to Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill's joint statement in Havana. At the Switzerland conference they will talk about progress and rapprochement between the two Churches.



Pope Francis meets with Patriarch Kirill in Havana, Cuba on Feb. 12, 2016. Credit: L'Osservatore Romano

It is probable that Cardinal Koch's lecture will follow the approach of Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle, who is in charge of the Eastern relations desk at the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the Christian Unity.

In Jan. 19 essay for *L'Osservatore Romano*, Fr. Destivelle emphasized the advances in the dialogue between the Holy See and the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate.

The 2016 meeting was not framed by theological dialogue, which is instead the competence of the International Roman Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue. Rather, it was framed instead "by the dialogue of charity, and more precisely by pastoral ecumenism."

The priest reiterated that the joint declaration between the Pope and the Patriarch was "a pastoral one." He rejected interpreting their declaration through "geopolitical lenses" and said it would be incorrect to see in them an excessive theological impact.

The declaration focused at length on anti-Christian persecution, especially in in the Middle East and North Africa. It lamented the hostilities in Ukraine. The declaration also voiced concern about the threat of secularism to religious freedom and the Christian roots of Europe.

Other topics of the discussion between the Pope and the Patriarch included poverty, the crisis in the family, abortion and euthanasia. The Pope and the

Patriarch exhorted young Christians to live their faith in the world.

Fr. Destivelle also noted that the declaration drew criticisms from both Orthodox and Catholic sides.

In particular, from Ukraine the Greek Catholic Church expressed "strong reservations" focused on some passages.

The priest said more time is needed for the Havana meeting and the joint declaration to bear fruit.

As for the upcoming anniversary, Fr. Destivelle listed a series of concerts, exhibitions and even exchanges of gifts that will show strengthened relations.

He noted that Metropolitan Hilarion visited Rome four times in the last year and met with Pope Francis twice, on June 15 and Oct. 21. The metropolitan has met with other Vatican leaders. He had a June 26 meeting with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, and several meetings with Cardinal Koch.

Fr. Destivelle wanted to reiterate that the Havana declaration was a "pastoral declaration" that intended to soften the polemics, even the polemics raised after the declaration was issued..

The declaration was at that time considered "Russophile" in some quarters. The Ukrainian religious agency RISU described it as such in its introduction to an interview with Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

Asked about his strong criticism of the declaration, Major Archbishop Shevchuk said that "some considered my words to be too harsh," but he then noted that the Pope himself "affirmed that that the declaration's text was not infallible, that it is not 'a page of the Gospel'."

"It should not be underestimated but it should also not be exaggerated," the archbishop said.

For Major Archbishop Shevchuk, an important result of the Havana meeting was that the Ukrainian Church began a conversation with the Holy See on these points.

“Certainly, even before this event, we always strove to inform the Vatican regarding the truth concerning the war in Ukraine,” the archbishop said. “Nevertheless, after Havana, the global community was able to perceive our distress once again, by being reminded of the ‘forgotten war’ in Ukraine. Our pleas also resounded anew in the Vatican.”

Archbishop Shevchuk also voiced appreciation for the progress of the Holy See, and recalled Cardinal Pietro Parolin’s trip to Ukraine. On the other hand, he emphasized that Ukraine should invest more in relations with the Holy See.

Russia too is investing much in relations with the Holy See. While in Paris for the European Meeting between Catholic and Orthodox Bishops, Metropolitan Hilarion granted an interview to Italian Bishops Conference’s news agency SIR.

In the interview, he underlined the good relations with the Holy See and in particular with Pope Francis. Though he said that another meeting between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill is “not in the agenda,” he said there are many things both Churches can do together.

“If our Churches speak joining their voices, our message is certainly stronger and of more impact,” Metropolitan Hilarion said.

These are all the issues on the table that will likely be developed in the conference in Freiburg on Sunday. From Cuba to Switzerland, from Havana to the great hall of the university, many things have changed. But what has not changed is the strong desire for dialogue between the Holy See and the Patriarchate of Moscow.

Agency marks 90 years of service to Eastern churches, humanitarian aid

By Beth Griffin

March 14, 2017 – An “invisible” Catholic organization celebrated 90 years of quiet service to the poor in the Middle East, northeast Africa, India and Eastern Europe.

Msgr. John E. Kozar, president of Catholic Near East Welfare Association, said the agency maintains a low profile because it works through and with the local church.

“They know best how to represent the face of Christ. We trust their experience, holiness and knowledge about how to govern and care for their people,” he said in a 28 February interview with Catholic News Service.

The mission of the organization is to serve and accompany Eastern Catholic churches in pastoral and humanitarian activities, generally at the level of the diocese or eparchy, Msgr. Kozar said. A secondary mission is to share the needs of the Eastern churches with people in North America who may be confused about where Eastern churches fit in the larger Catholic picture.

Eastern Catholic churches have their origins in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, India or northeast Africa; have distinctive liturgical and legal systems; and are often identified by the national or ethnic character of their region of origin. Members of the 22 Eastern Catholic churches enjoy the same dignity, rights and obligations as members of the Latin Church.

Msgr. Kozar said people in North America have little exposure to Eastern churches and he takes it in stride when asked if Eastern Catholics are “really Catholic” and if they are under the authority of Pope Francis. “I say, ‘Yes! We are one church with two very enriching traditions, Latin and Eastern.’”

He said Eastern Catholic churches are typically smaller than Latin churches. Many have deep

historic roots and are in areas of suffering and religious persecution.

Catholic Near East Welfare Association was founded in 1926 in response to a request by Pope Pius XI to unite all American Catholic organizations providing aid to Russia and the Near East. Near East is an imprecise geographic term that encompasses southwest Asia and the Arabian Peninsula.

As a papal organization, it has a mandate from the Vatican to support the Eastern Catholic Church. Another mandate of the agency is to work for union among Catholic and non-Catholic Eastern churches, including the Orthodox churches.

In recent years, the association spent approximately \$22 million annually on assistance in 14 countries.

The abiding challenge is with refugees and displaced persons in the Middle East, especially Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, Msgr. Kozar said. Access in Syria has been sharply limited because of the ongoing conflict, but the organization is still helping the local churches provide milk, bedding, diapers and antibiotics to their people.

“There are heroic priests, sisters and bishops who never left. Some Catholics and other Christians have been hunkered down for more than five years,” he said.

Catholic Near East Welfare Association also is active in areas where the church has experienced persecution and retribution, such as Egypt. In one town, the agency funded the repair of a section of a burned-out orphanage so the sisters living there could continue to care for 15 children. The orphanage was one of 55 church properties damaged in anti-Christian violence during 2013.

The agency also supports school feeding programs for children in drought-affected parts of the horn of Africa. It serves some of the 1 million families displaced in Ukraine as a result of fighting along the border with Russia.

In India, the agency supports evangelization in the remote tribal areas in the northern part of the country. “It’s very uplifting how people have a yearning to have a different experience of God or to experience him for the first time,” said Msgr. Kozar, who has visited the area several times.

“It’s the most basic form of evangelization,” he said. “Priests and sisters live in villages with indigenous peoples and share their prayer life in a very basic way.”

The two Eastern Catholic churches in India are the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara, which trace their origins to St. Thomas the Apostle.

Pope Francis is expected to travel to India this year, possibly in November. Msgr. Kozar said the visit will give hope to the people and encourage them to continue their many good works of charity and service. He said Catholics comprise only 1 percent to 1.5 percent of the population. “The Catholic Church contributes tremendously to the education environment, medical care and social services, disproportionate to our numbers,” he said.

Catholic Near East Welfare Association works to empower Eastern Catholic churches through education and formation of religious, clergy and communities, according to Michael J.L. La Civita, the agency’s communications director.

“We’re not teaching them how to be a church. We’re providing resources and sometimes know-how to build more responsive and holy churches,” he told CNS. “They start with a foundation and it has to be sustainable, so we have to be invisible.”

“These are churches rooted in the time of Jesus and the apostles, and filled with men and women doing great things,” he said. Instead of falling into despair because of extraordinary challenges in the current day, “they are motivated by the Gospel to do something to change the situation,” he said.

Although the organization’s efforts are “for, through and with” the Eastern Catholic churches, La Civita said humanitarian aid is provided to all as a witness

to the Gospel. "This requires us to be in dialogue of other communities of faith," he said.

La Civita said the agency's accompaniment extends to Orthodox and other Christian and non-Christian traditions. It also participates in national and local Catholic dialogues with Muslims, Jews and Orthodox.

As archbishop of New York, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan serves as the agency's chairman.

"In this role I have visited a number of Eastern churches in some very challenging areas of the world," he said in response to a question from CNS.

"This papal agency is focused on, as Pope Francis would say, accompaniment — reaching out in a pastoral way to demonstrate solidarity of the Holy Father and the church universal with these local churches that suffer greatly, and are even persecuted," the cardinal said. "Our message is clear and simple: You are not alone. We are here, and we love you."

Icon of St. Luke the Physician to be sent to International Space Station



Moscow, March 16, 2017 – On March 11 in the Church of St. Romanos the Melodist, in the tomb of the Romanov boyars, the vicar of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and deputy abbot of Moscow's Novospassky Monastery Bishop Sava of Voskresensk blessed an icon of Holy Hierarch and Confessor Luke

(Voyno-Yasenetsky) the Physician of Simferopol which is to be sent to the International Space Station.

The icon has since been sent to the Russian Federal Space Agency by the Institute of Biomedical Problems, and is scheduled to be sent to the space station from April till July 2017, reports the monastery's website.

The painting of the icon was complicated by the fact that for use on the space station, iconographers cannot use artificial colors. Thus the icon is covered only with an oil varnish instead of laquer.

The delivery of the St. Luke icon to the International Space Station is possible thanks to the executive director of manned space programs of the state corporation "RosCosmos" (the Federal Space Agency) astronaut Sergei Konstantinovich Krikalev, who circled the earth more than 1,000 times on board Union TMA-6 in 2005 together with a copy of the miraculous Valaam Icon.

The icon's arrival and stay on the space station is timed to the 140th anniversary of St. Luke's birth on May 9, 2017. St. Luke was a beloved bishop and physician who treated innumerable people, many of whom are still alive today. In 1946 he was awarded a first degree Stalin Prize, but was later subject to repressions, being exiled for eleven years. He was rehabilitated in April 2000, and later that same year was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in the assembly of Russian New Martyrs and Confessors.

Today St. Luke is widely venerated throughout the Orthodox world, including Russia, Ukraine, Greece, and America and beyond.

Do you read the Bible as often as you check your phone? Francis asks

By Hannah Brockhaus

Vatican City, Mar 5, 2017 (CNA/EWTN News) – On the first Sunday of Lent, Pope Francis said if we want to fight against the temptation of sin, we must be familiar with the Word of God – treating the Bible more like how we treat our cellphone.

“During the forty days of Lent, as Christians we are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and address the spiritual battle against evil with the power of the Word of God,” he said March 5. “For this you have to become familiar with the Bible, read it often, meditate on it, assimilate it.”

“Someone said: what would happen if we treated the Bible like we treat our cell phone? If we always carried it with us; or at least the small pocket-sized Gospel, what would happen?”

Pope Francis spoke to pilgrims before leading the Angelus in St. Peter’s Square, drawing a stark comparison between the attention we give our cellphones and the attention we give Scripture, for example, always taking it with us, and going back if we forget it at home.

“You forget you mobile phone – oh! I do not have it, I go back to look for it; if you read the messages of God contained in the Bible as we read the messages of the phone...” he said.

The Pope reflected on the day’s Gospel reading from Matthew, which tells about the temptation of Jesus in the desert by Satan.

The episode comes at a specific point, he said, soon after Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River but before his public prosecution.

“He has just received the solemn investiture: the Spirit of God descended upon Him, the Father from heaven declared him ‘my beloved Son’ (Matt. 3:17). Jesus is now ready to begin his mission,” he said.

But first he must go up against the Enemy, Satan, who presents him with three temptations. “By means of this triple temptation, Satan wants to divert Jesus from the path of obedience and humiliation – because he knows that in this way evil will be defeated,” the Pope said.

But the Word of God is like a shield against the poisonous arrows of the devil, Francis said. Jesus doesn’t use just any words – he uses the words of God, and in this way, the Son, full of the Holy Spirit, emerges victorious from the desert.”

This is what we must do against the temptations of the devil, the Pope said. The comparison between the Bible and our cellphones “is strange, but sobering.”

“In effect, if we had the Word of God always in our heart, no temptation could turn us away from God and no obstacle could deflect us from the path of goodness,” he stressed. We would know how “to win” against the daily temptations within and around us.

“We would be better able to live a resurrected life in the Spirit, accepting and loving our brothers, especially the most vulnerable and needy, and even our enemies.”

Let us ask the Virgin Mary, “the perfect icon of obedience to God and of unconditional trust to his will,” to help us during this Lent to listen to the Word of God in the Bible and “to make a real change of heart,” he concluded.

“And, please, do not forget – do not forget! – What would happen if we treated the Bible like we treat our cellphone. Think about this. The Bible always with us, close to us!”

Patriarch Kirill: chasing ‘likes’ on social media is a disease

March 3, 2017 (Catholic Herald) – Patriarch Kirill of Moscow has dubbed the hunt for the perfect profile picture and the obsession over gaining likes on social media as a “disease of society”.

The primate’s comments come after a rise in the trend of dangerous selfie taking in Russia.

About 100 people died or were seriously injured taking selfies in Russia in 2015, according to Russian police figures.

In February, Russian model Viktoria Odintsova was dangled off the side of a 1,000ft skyscraper in Dubai in order to capture a death-defying photo to impress her three million social media followers.



*Viktoria Odintsova says she regrets the stunt
(Instagram/@viki_odintsova)*

Russian police later warned the model not to repeat the attempt.

Risks like these have not impressed Patriarch Kirill who said young people should not jeopardise their safety for the sake of the perfect snap.

“Today our social nets have a real disease when our young people are ready to do anything, sometimes even [horrific] things, to risk their lives, so that someone says that he likes it,” he said after a liturgy at the Moscow Epiphany Cathedral.

“The English word ‘like’ is used to show such support. Some young people have only one goal, to collect ‘likes’, if there are no ‘likes’ they feel it like a personal tragedy.”

Patriarch Kirill added that selfie culture encouraged sinful thought.

He said: “The whole civilisation is directed to help a person perceive these sinful images. To many people it is important from the point of obtaining money, others pursue more dangerous goals, but it is a fact that there are almost no movies without an image that excite sinful thoughts.”

DISCLAIMER: Please note that in the interest of inquiry and dialogue, our newsletter sometimes presents articles with points of view with which we do not necessarily agree.

If you have ideas or suggestions for upcoming issues of this newsletter, please send the information to the Editor at mattiussi52001@yahoo.com.