

# Holy Wisdom

*Peace: Showing that Others Matter!*

VOLUME

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Publication of the Syrian Orthodox Church in America on United Nations Affairs. This publication is disseminated to the entire membership of the Church throughout the world on a quarterly basis. Please bring this information to the attention of your parishioners and all those under your care. The Earth is holy and a manifestation of God. Pray for peace and the UN.

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: It is necessary through the collaboration of NGOs to raise awareness among communities as we promote peace. If you will, the need for community consciousness is a way we can connect parties and others. It is important at this time that all parties begin to realize that they are a part of a larger picture, that they are in it together and they have common concerns. If there is a conflict all parties have contributed to the conflict and they have the power to come together to develop a non-violent intervention to result into a resolution. It is time for us as people to acknowledge that there is something more that exceed our own individual positions and needs. The United Nations, religious institutions and NGO can be an avenue to promote community consciousness to encourage global consciousness, clear and realistic decisions as they promote non-violent solutions to conflicts!*

**Rabbis, Jerusalem aides denounce Christian clergy's harassment**

Jerusalem (ENI) A group of rabbis in Jerusalem has condemned as a “desecration of God’s name” and a “dangerous provocation”, the harassment of Christian clergy by some members of a Jewish group that is said to have involved spitting at priests and nuns. The statement made public on 5 January followed a meeting with Jerusalem city officials on 30 December.

**India's minority watchdog needs teeth, says politician**

Bangalore, India (ENI). A commission aimed at safeguarding the rights of religious minorities in India cannot be effective unless it is given judicial powers, says the politician who is helping to lead the watchdog body. Hmar Tiomte Sangliana, a Christian who took over on 15 December as vice-chairperson of India's autonomous National Commission for Minorities, said that “atrocities on minorities” – particularly Christians – are on the rise. “But the NCM has been able to do hardly anything worthwhile except visiting troubled spots and making statement,” Sangliana told Ecumenical News International. “Only when the commission has adequate powers can we take the officials to task for their failure to perform their duty, and take remedial action.”

**Changing US demographics could make Latinos ‘hosts of table’**

New York (ENI). Roman Catholics in the United States are asking a question that touches on demographics and culture: what will the church look like in the coming years when at least 40 percent, and perhaps even a majority, of U.S. Catholics are Latino? At the very least, “they will not only have a place at the table, they will be the hosts of the table,” said Peter Steinfels, a New York Times religion columnist and the co-director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, at a recent forum that examined the impact of Latin Americans on the church and the U.S. religious landscape.

**Tributes to religion journalist who could ‘shoot from the hip’**

Geneva (ENI). Frances S. Smith, a former editor of the Ecumenical Press Service – the predecessor of Ecumenical News International – has died at her home in Claremont, California, aged 87. “Frances was one of the most respected of church journalists for her accuracy and her objectivity,” said journalist Betty Thompson in a tribute quoted by the United Methodist News Service, where Smith held her final post before retirement in 1988.

**Jerusalem bishop denounces killing of Coptic Christians in Egypt**

Geneva (ENI). Jerusalem Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan has denounced the killing of six Coptic Christians in Egypt and he offered support to the Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. “The attack is horrifying and puts fear in the hearts of Christians in Egypt,” Younan said in an 11 January statement to Ecumenical News International from Beirut, where he was attending the general assembly of the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches. The six Coptic Christians and a Muslim security officer were killed at a church in Nag Hamadi on 6 January, the eve of their Christmas celebration.

**Malaysia Christians flock to worship amid attacks on churches**

Singapore (ENI). Churches in Malaysia were full of worshipers despite attacks against

Christian places of worship in recent days in a dispute about the use of the word “Allah” by non-Muslim minorities. “People’s faith is greater than what’s happening around them so they continue to go to church and pray for themselves as well as for the nation,” said the Rev. Hermen Shastri, the general secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia, on 10 January, the agence France-Presse news agency reported. Shastri said heightened security measures had been taken following the attacks, which came after a court decision that opened the way for non-Muslim minorities to use the word “Allah” in their religious books and publications.

### **Church must bring hope to world’s divisions, says new WCC leader**

Geneva (ENI). The global ecumenical movement must bring the hope of peace and justice to a suffering and divided world, says the new general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit. “As we enter into the second decade of the 21st century, the world continues to face many crises... financial crisis, climate crisis, a food crisis, a new wave of terrorism and violence, new burdens of injustice and violations of human rights,” said Tveit, preaching on 11 January at WCC headquarters in Geneva. “Let us celebrate and remind one another how much we are given in the name of Jesus, as we enter into the many fights against evil, against injustice, against our own shortcomings and sins, said the 49-year-old Tveit.

### **Christianity grows in former Hindu kingdom’s prisons**

Kathmandu (ENI). In 1986, the Rev. Anthony Sharma was arrested for conducting an Easter service in Nepal, then the only Hindu kingdom in the world, and one where converts were punished. Today, the south Asian state is secular and Christianity is growing, especially in prisons, where some inmates say they are comforted by the message of forgiveness and love brought by Christian ministers. “Things have changed,” says Sharma, who was appointed Nepal’s first Roman Catholic bishop by the Vatican in 2007, a year after the fall of the military-backed government of King Gyanendra. This led to the abolition of the monarchy and the end of Hinduism as the state religion.

### **Malaysia: more churches and temples attacked in ‘Allah’ dispute**

Singapore (ENI). More places of worship belonging to religious minorities in Malaysia have been targeted in a continuing dispute about the use of “Allah” by non-Islamic faiths, and the World Council of Churches has expressed “deep concern” about the situation in the Muslim-majority country. The attacks against Christian churches followed a court decision that outraged Muslim hardliners, as it opened the way for Christians and other non-Muslims to use the word “Allah” in their religious publications and prayers.

### **Pope wants Turkey to strengthen status of Catholic Church**

Rome (ENI). Pope Benedict XVI has called for the Roman Catholic Church to be given legal recognition in Muslim-majority but politically secular Turkey, which has faced criticism of its treatment of religious minorities as it seeks to become a member of the European Union. A November 2009 “progress report” by the European Commission on Turkey’s possible membership of the European Union said that in the country, “Non-Muslim communities – as organized structures of religious groups – still face problems due to lack of legal personality.”

### **Australian bishop scolds ‘scruffy’ clergy**

Melbourne (ENI). An Anglican bishop in Australia’s largest city of Sydney has dressed down his own clergy over their lack of sartorial style, and suggested they usually “dress worse than the lay people” in their congregations. “Why are our clergy the worst dressed people in church?” wrote Bishop Robert Forsyth of South Sydney on the Sydney Anglicans Web site ([www.sydneyanglicans.net](http://www.sydneyanglicans.net)) as he reported the question of a friend. In the column, he wrote, “There is a way of dressing casual that looks really good...and there is a way that looks positively daggy (slovenly) and scruffy.”

### FROM EGYPT:

“And they cried with a loud voice, saying,

“How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Rev. 6:10

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Rev. 7-17

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ: I greet you all with best wishes for a blessed new year. As many of you are aware, last week the Coptic Orthodox Christians of Egypt faced another brutal attack and witnessed the murders of six young men as they left their church in Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt on Christmas eve following the Divine Liturgy of the Feast of the Nativity.

These young men – Pola, Abanoub, Zakaria, Ayman, Mina and Bishoy died simply for being Christians. A Muslim police officer was also killed in the attack. My home parish, St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Cleveland, will designate Sunday, February 14, 2010 as a Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the Coptic Martyrs of Nag Hammadi. I would humbly ask you and your churches to join us in this day with your prayers for the Christians of Egypt as a sign of solidarity and support. This day is the closest Sunday to the traditional 40-day memorial following their tragic murders.

Addressing his flock at his weekly meeting at the Grand Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo this week, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark told the people of Nag Hammadi and the world that the news of these shootings made him feel as if each bullet was shooting him, that the pain and mourning of the families was his pain and mourning. His Holiness described the young victims as true martyrs who having participated in the Holy Eucharist were killed for no other reason than being Christians. He said their blood sanctified the ground they fell to, and that Nag Hammadi has entered history as a city of martyrdom. He called the freedoms of life and worship basic and fundamental human rights. His Holiness emotionally referred to the killing of the righteous Abel and quoted Genesis 4:10: “And He said, “What have you done? The Voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.”

As you know, the Copts are the Christians of Egypt, the descendants of the Ancient Egyptians and the sons of the Pharaohs. Egypt was Coptic long before the Arab Conquest and the Copts of Egypt are the indigenous inhabitants of the land. My church, the Coptic

Orthodox Church, is the largest and oldest in Egypt; however, we are joined in our struggles by our sisters and brothers of various churches in Egypt, all who face the same difficulties and tribulations.

The freedoms of religion and worship are fundamental human rights that must be protected. Religious tolerance in our troubled times must be promoted and defended by all. The Copts are citizens of Egypt, tax-paying, loyal and patriotic citizens who must be afforded the complete and fully protected rights of their Muslim neighbors. Decades of pleasantries and ignorance of growing hate have led to the current catastrophes that are not isolated and are repeated year after year. Anti-Christian attacks have been on the rise since the early – 1970s and have escalated. When we remember the new martyrs of Nag Hammadi, we also remember those who were killed before them and never received justice. We recall the events of El Khanka, El Zawya el Hamra, Assiut, Abu Qurqas, El Kosheh, Dayrut, Alexandria, El Odayisat and the dozens of other attacks and all those who have died simply for being Christians.

My personal request is that you spread the word and consider forwarding this email to your friends and other churches to join us in prayer on Sunday, February 14, 2010 as a Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the Coptic Martyrs of Nag Hammadi.

I wish to thank all those churches and religious and civic leaders, including H.H. Pope Benedict XVI, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. who have expressed their support and prayers for the situation in Egypt. We ask you to join us in a prayer for peace in Egypt and the whole world. We pray for the rights of all Egypt's citizens to be equal and protected.

“Blessed be Egypt My people,” Isaiah 19:25

With prayerful best wishes and thanks for your fraternal support and love,

Bishoy

Bishoy M. Mikhail  
Ecumenical Officer

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria  
Archdiocese of North America  
Office of Ecumenical Affairs

### **WCC head to tell Davos meeting, Haiti debt should be cancelled**

Geneva (ENI). The head of the world's largest grouping of churches, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, is to tell the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos that Haiti's foreign debt must be immediately and unconditionally cancelled. Tveit, a Norwegian Lutheran, who took over as general secretary of the World Council of Churches on 1 January, is due to attend the Davos summit later this week. In a statement made available to Ecumenical News International on 25 January, Tveit said, “The time has come for the international community – politicians, business and civil society organizations – to focus on how Haiti

can become sustainable”.

### **French court rules Orthodox cathedral in Nice belongs to Russia**

Moscow (ENI). A French court has ruled that the St. Nicholas Cathedral in Nice, built with funding from the Russian Tsar Nicholas II and completed in 1912, just prior to the country's revolution, belongs to Russia and must be handed over. The victory is Russia's latest in a series of battles for church property around the world, which represent attempts by the Russian government and Russian Orthodox Church to reassert control over a widespread diaspora. A Russian group has run St. Nicholas Cathedral under the jurisdiction of the Istanbul-based Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople since the 1920s.

### **Christians, Muslims blame each other as Nigeria relaxes curfew**

Lagos, Nigeria (ENI). A curfew in Jos, a city in the central part of Nigeria, has been relaxed a week after interreligious violence erupted and left about 500 people dead. Fighting first broke out on 17 January, when, according to some reports, Christian youths were protesting at the building of a mosque in the Christian-majority area of Jos, the capital of Nigeria's Plateau State. The violence later spread to nearby towns and villages. Followers of both Christianity and Islam in Jos, which has a population of about half a million people, each blamed gangs from the other's community for sparking the violence.

### **Swiss and S. Africa Muslim scholars no longer banned from US.**

Washington, DC (ENI/RNS). The U.S. State Department has announced that two prominent Muslim intellectuals will no longer be barred from traveling to the United States based on past accusations that they had supported terrorism. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signed orders allowing Tariq Ramadan and Adam Habib to re-apply for U.S. visas, said State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley on 20 January, Religion News Service reports. Ramadan, a Swiss citizen who teaches at England's Oxford University, had been barred from entering the United States since 2004 for allegedly endorsing terrorism. Habib is a scholar and senior administrator at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa and had been critical of the actions of the United States in the Iraq war.

### **S. African Methodists feud over Zimbabwe-refugee-aiding bishop**

Johannesburg (ENI). Members of the Methodist Church in South Africa are at loggerheads over the suspension of Bishop Paul Verryn, whose former congregation in central Johannesburg has provided a home in its church for a continuous stream of Zimbabwean refugees. A group of 150 supporters and friends of Verryn have launched a campaign using the social networking Web site Facebook. Many of the 3 comments on the site come from disgruntled Methodist members and ministers. "There is a real hunger in the Methodist Church to express concern," said organizer Wendy Landau. "It is a fight for the soul of the church. It is about what Paul can and cannot do."

### **Faiths join in mourning atheist Indian Communist leader**

Bangalore, India (ENI). Indian faith leaders and the Roman Catholic Church in the city of Kolkata (formerly, Calcutta) have praised the life of Marxist leader Jyoti Basu, an atheist who fought for the poor, and who has died aged 95. Basu died on 17 January, and about

5000 people later attended an interfaith service for him at the Jesuit St. Xavier's College and School in Kolkata. Representatives from Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism took part in the service, and paid tribute to the late communist leader.

### **Online archive opens the Reformers' works at US seminary**

Grand Rapids, Michigan (ENI/RNS). Some surprises started unfolding when a team of Calvin Theological Seminary professors and graduate students recently launched the Post-Reformation Digital Library. Chief eye-openers included successfully tracking down rare Reformed theologians' manuscripts once thought lost. Religion News Service reports. Another revelation: 16th – 18th century theologians and philosophers were brutally honest about their doctrinal positions and emotions, including the well-known Reformer John Calvin, who pushed the boundaries of good taste in a sermon about rowdy adolescents.

### **European Court reprimands Romania over Catholic minority**

Warsaw (ENI). In a ruling that could affect similar disputes, a European court has ordered the government of Romania to compensate a Greek Catholic parish for failing to return to the parish properties seized from it under communist rule. "Legislative shortcomings have helped create a drawn-out preliminary procedure capable of hindering the applicant parish's access to a court," the European Court of Human Rights said in a 15 January judgment. The court said the Romanian government had violated articles of the 1950 European convention on human rights. It ordered Romania to pay 23,000 euros to the Greek Catholic parish to cover damages and expenses.

### **Kyoto traditional fan meets Japanese biblical imagery**

Tokyo (ENI). An original Sensu, or traditional Japanese folding fan, with two biblical prints on it from the renowned late Japanese artist Sadao Watanabe, has been produced in Japan for domestic and international sale. The prints include one that shows two of the magi, the wise men who the Bible says visited the baby Jesus. They come from the collection of Watanabe, who lived from 1913 to 1996. Although the fan can only be put to practical use in warmer weather, its makers say it looks beautiful when put on display. Watanabe was a Japanese artist known for his special way of printing images from biblical stories; he employed a technique taken from Japanese textile dye art. Watanabe converted to Christianity at the age of 17.

### **Lithuania steps into European crucifix debate.**

Vilnius (ENI). Lithuania has come out in support of Italy in its efforts to revise a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights that obliges State schools throughout Italy to remove crucifixes from classrooms. The online news daily [www.delfi.it](http://www.delfi.it), on 13 January reported that the Committee for Foreign Relations of the Lithuanian Parliament had decided to join the dispute with the European court, and to defend the right of believers to the public display of religious symbols. "The public use of crucifixes reflects the Christian tradition of Europe, and should not be considered a restriction of religious freedom, said Lithuanian foreign minister, Vygaudas Usackas.

### **Church of England loses \$78 million in New York real estate deal**

Washington DC (ENI/RNS). The Church of England stands to lose about US \$78 million

in a New York real estate investment gone sour, according to Episcopal News Service. The Anglican church's investment was part of a record-setting \$5.4 billion deal put together in 2006 by two New York based firms to buy two massive apartment complexes in Manhattan, Religion News Service reports. After defaulting on loan payments, the firms will cede the downtown properties – Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village – to its lenders.

## UNITED NATIONS

UN Chief launches campaign in Africa to eradicate male violence against women  
New York, January 30, 2010

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on the support of African leaders to give new impetus to his campaign to end the violence suffered by women on the continent, which he called the “unsung heroines” of development in the region.

“We know African women are often a linchpin keeping families, communities, and nations together,” Mr. Ban said at the African launch of his “<http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/>” UNiTE to End Violence against Women” campaign in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

African women are the “driving force to overcome poverty, reduce hunger, fight illiteracy, heal the sick, prevent the spread of disease and promote stability, he said in a message read on his behalf by Cheick Sidi Diarra, UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

“But far from being empowered, women are all too often subjected to horrific abuse and violence,” stressed Mr. Ban, urging leaders to address the violence through the eradication of discrimination.

The Secretary-General's UNiTE campaign, launched in 2008, calls for all countries to put in place strong laws, action plans, preventive measures, data collection, and systematic efforts to address sexual violence by 2015.

He noted that more than 5 million people have signed the “Say No to Violence Against Women” initiative, which spotlights the physical and sexual abuse experienced by up to 70 per cent of all women from men in their lifetime—the majority from husbands, intimate partners or someone they know.

“They are now looking for answers from us, from you, to uphold their right to live lives free of this threat.” Said Mr. Ban

### **World church leader hails G7 debt relief for Haiti, asks IMF to copy**

Geneva (ENI). The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, has written to the finance ministers of the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations to thank them for pledging to write off Haiti's outstanding debts to



G7 countries. At the same time, Tveit, a Norwegian Lutheran, warned that the approval by the International Monetary Fund of more loans to Haiti after its devastating earthquake on 12 January would cause extra problems for the stricken country. “The decision of the IMF approving more loans to Haiti after the earthquake will only add to Haiti’s burden, nearly doubling the country’s debt to that institution, as there is no clear willingness or definitive moves yet to cancel the country’s current debt,” Tveit wrote. On 22 January, the general secretary of the Geneva-based Lutheran World Federation, the Rev. Ishmael Noko, had said, “I call for an immediate and complete moratorium on Haiti’s debt service obligations and cancellation of the remaining debt.”

### **Indian Christians hope European visit will highlight their plight**

Bangalore, India (ENI). Church officials have expressed hopes that a visit to India by a European Union delegation, which led to protests by some Hindu groups, will draw attention to the plight of harassed Christians in the Kandhamal region of the country’s eastern Orissa state. The 11-member delegation, with serving ambassadors among its members, was led by EU political affairs secretary Christophe Manet. On 3 February, angry protestors, said to be Hindu extremists, greeted the delegation with shouts of “go back”, as it landed at Bhubaneswar airport in the capital of Orissa state. Christians said the Bharatiya Janata Party, which has a reputation for being a Hindu nationalist group, backed the protestors.

### **Australian bishop searches India for priests to work in outback**

Melbourne, Australia (ENI). An Australian bishop has gone to India to find priests to work in an area of Australia that ranges from tropical islands to the wilderness of the Australian outback. Bishop Brian Heenan of the Roman Catholic diocese of Rockhampton in the state of Queensland told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that Indian priests would help overcome an extreme shortage of home-grown clergy. “These priests can come, please God, for maybe two years or three years and then, if all is going well, they will probably go back to India, and others will come and take their place,” Heenan said. The bishop said he would also be happy to hear from priests elsewhere in the world who were interested in working in his diocese.

### **US Baptist leaders urge Obama to help Haiti missionaries**

Washington, DC (ENI/RNS). Southern Baptist leaders have appealed to U.S. President Obama to assist in the release of 10 American missionaries charged with kidnapping children in Haiti. “We do not know all of the facts of this case, but we are concerned that the continued detainment and possible conviction of these Baptist mission volunteers will distract the world’s attention and undermine the relief efforts so desperately needed by the Haitian people,” wrote the leaders in a 5 February letter to Obama. The missionaries, five men and five women, are said to belong to an Idaho-based church. They were arrested in January and charged in February with trying to take 33 children across the border to the Dominican Republic 17 days after the earthquake that killed more than 200,000 people in Haiti.

### **Christian leaders around world distressed at Philippines arrests**

Manila/Geneva (ENI). Christian leaders around the world have condemned the arrest in

the Philippines of a church official and other health workers in the southeast Asian country, and say they are worried about reports of torture being inflicted on those held. The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, joined other church leaders in expressing his concerns in an 11 February letter addressed to Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and members of her cabinet. Tveit called for the immediate release of those detained.

### **Uganda's Anglican church wants changes to anti-homosexuality law**

Nairobi (ENI). The Anglican Church of Uganda says it wants to see changes to a proposed law, which would jail homosexuals and even execute them in some cases, which many international church and secular leaders have condemned. Still, the church has said there is still a need for a law that would clearly address gay issues in the east African country, and that Ugandan Anglicans remain strongly opposed to the acceptance and promotion of homosexuality. "The Church of Uganda associates itself with the concerns expressed in the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2009," Archbishop Henry Orombi said in a 9 February statement.

### **Activists hail church decision to sell India mining venture shares**

Bangalore/London (ENI). Indian Christian activists have welcomed a decision by the Anglican Church of England to sell its shares in Vendata Resources, whose planned bauxite mine in north-east India has taken flak from local residents and conservationists. "We are really happy that the Church of England has taken such a bold step," John Dayal, the secretary-general of the All India Christian Council, told Ecumenical News International. "With such an unprecedented act, the Church of England has shown that churches can make an impact on issues of justice."

### **Christian and Muslim leaders join call for Kenya truth head to quit**

Nairobi (ENI). Some Kenyan Christian and Muslim leaders have joined civil society groups in calling for Bethuel Kiplagat, the head of the country's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission to resign. They point to charges that Kiplagat, who is a retired diplomat, has links to past governments that leave him "tainted", and also claim that his appointment was irregular. The critics have noted accusations that Kiplagat and others on the commission are linked to human rights abuses during the period the commission will investigate.

### **Southern African Anglican bishops lambaste gay bashing in Africa**

Cape Town (ENI). The bishops of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa say they are disturbed by the debate among Ugandan lawmakers and clergy of a draft law that seeks to criminalize homosexuality. "It even proposes imposing the death penalty, which we regard as a breach of God's commandment, 'You shall not murder,' given in Exodus 20:13," the bishops, who are meeting near Mbabane in Swaziland, said in a statement made available to Ecumenical News International. The bishops called on all Christians to stand up against the proposed law so that it is not passed in Uganda or anywhere else in the world, and called on Uganda's president and lawmakers "to engage in dialogue with their counterparts on the rights of minorities".

### **Irish bishops castigated before Vatican meeting with Pope**

Dublin (ENI). Twenty-four Irish Roman Catholic Bishops received a tongue-lashing on 15 February from a top Vatican official as they began two days of unprecedented meetings with Pope Benedict XVI and his officials. The bishops are in Rome following the publication, on 26 November, of an Irish government-commissioned report, led by Judge Yvonne Murphy, into how the Roman Catholic Church in Dublin dealt with allegations against priests of sexual abuse. The day began with a Mass for the 24 Irish bishops before their encounter at the Vatican, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican's Secretary of State, a right-hand man of the Pope, described the abuse scandal as "humiliating" and "abominable".

### **Debate on minarets moves from Switzerland to Germany**

Trier, Germany (ENI). Reactions to an attempt by a small Muslim community in a German industrial town to build a minaret on its mosque have triggered a debate that some politicians and religious figures fear is sparking a rise in extremist rhetoric. The debate follows a vote in a November 2009 national referendum in Switzerland not to allow the construction of any more minarets in that country, and also talk to neighboring France of banning the burqa, an all-covering garb that some Muslim women wear. The Muslim community in a southwestern town has applied for permission to build a minarets on top of their mosque on the banks of the Saar River. (Ambassador DeLuca attended meeting of OIC on these issues.)

### **Churches deplore hospital blast in Pakistan, rue security**

Kochi, India (ENI). Church officials in Pakistan have condemned the bombing of a hospital in Karachi earlier in the month that killed 27 people, including five Christians from two families, and left over 100 injured, and have accused the government of being unable to deal with violence in the country. "We condemn this diabolic act. Bomb explosions in a hospital are most shocking," Nuzat William, president of YWCA Pakistan told Ecumenical News International on 11 February from her Karachi office. In a press statement giving details of the Christians killed. Aftab Mughal, director of Minorities Concern of Pakistan, also condemned the 5 February blast that was triggered from a motorbike parked at the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Center Hospital.

### **Orthodox leader 'resists opposition' with call for church unity**

Geneva (ENI). The Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomeos I, a key leader for the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians, has written a Lenten encyclical that stresses the need for greater unity for churches, and counters accusations from some of his bishops that ecumenism is heresy. At the same time, a letter from the head of the U.S. National Council of Churches to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton shows that Bartholomeos also faces pressure in Turkey. His See is in Istanbul, the capital of Turkey, and his official title is "Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch."

### **Japanese pastor dismissed for giving communion to unbaptised**

Tokyo (ENI). Japan's largest Protestant denomination has dismissed one of its pastors for continuing to allow unbaptised people to receive Holy Communion at his local church. The sacked minister, the Rev. Jiro Kitamura of the United Church of Christ in Japan, is

appealing the decision because he says he cannot accept it. The pastor has campaigned for some time to give the Eucharist, another name for Holy Communion, to those who have not been baptized. During Holy Communion services in Protestant churches, people receive bread and wine as symbols of the body and blood of Jesus.

### **European court censures Turkey over religious identification**

Warsaw (ENI). European human rights judges have condemned Turkey for requiring citizens to specify their religious status on its national identity cards. “This is in breach of the state’s duty of neutrality and impartiality, since it leads the State to make an assessment of the applicant’s faith,” the European Court of Human Rights said on 2 February. Sinan Isik, an Ismir-based member of Turkey’s Alevi community, took the case to Strasbourg in 2005 after local courts refused to allow him to remove the “Muslim” tag from his national identity document.

### **Women in US protest for right to mixed gender prayers**

Washington DC (ENI/RNS). The walls that segregate Muslim men from women inside many American mosques took a long time to go up, and it could be a long time before they come down. On 20 February Fatima Thompson was to find out just how firm those walls are, Religion News Service reports. Thompson, 44, was planning for about 30 like-minded Muslims to help her stage a “stand-in” at the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C., in a bid to persuade mosque leaders to remove a seven foot partition behind which women pray – or at least allow women the option of praying in front of it.

New York -- 24 February Prayer Vigil – Multiple religions expressing solidarity with the Haitian People at Tilman Chapel, Church Center for the U.N.

### **Service Leadership: Haitian Church of God pastoral leadership**

Facilitated by: The New Seminary, The office of the Chaplain of the Church Center for the United Nations, World Council of Churches United Nations Liaison Office.

Prayers from multiple religious traditions for the following: Prayer for all survivors and their families. That they might experience grace and mercy and deep spiritual strength in this time.

That the relief effort be demilitarized on all levels. The presence of guns and tanks do nothing in this situation but intimidate an already horrid situation for the Haitian people. That all relief projects and processes be very aware that the Haitian people are capable, strong, courageous and intelligent. That relief efforts focus on capacity building of Haitians to receive what they need and state that they need. And that despite the inequalities of economic strength that true equal partnerships are built.

That the Haitian government find the wisdom it needs to negotiate all the political and economic complexities and that the growth of Haiti be founded on just development practices, including the eradication of debt from International Financial Institutions and a strong regulation on the influx of business so as to mitigate tendencies towards greed without accountability to the Haitian people.

That the future of the Haitian people finally have the infrastructure it needs for sustainable development with the creation of roads, jobs, stable housing, hospitals and schools.

That Haiti becomes the Haitian beauty it was intended to be.  
May your hearts be with the Haitian people.

Rev. Kathleen Stone  
Chaplain, Church Center for the U.N.

Over 60,000 Haitians vaccinated as part of ongoing UN-backed campaign

#### OUR NGO:

New York, 18 February – Dr. Anthony DeLuca and Dr. Andrea DeLuca attended the following meeting: Security Council meeting on Middle East, Palestinian question; Launch of the Revised Humanitarian Appeal for Haiti Earthquake with Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and President William Clinton, UN Special Envoy for Haiti.

“The global jobs crisis: Assessing the pace and quality of growth” on occasion of World Day of Social Justice 20 February co-organized by Kyrgyzstan and International Labour Organization. (Dr. DeLuca is special advisor to Kyrgyzstan).

Dr. & Mrs. DeLuca also met privately at Episcopal Church Headquarters with Ms. Helene Wangusa, (Uganda), Anglican Representative to the United Nations to discuss both financial and other church matters of our two-churches/organizations the Anglican office has long supported by providing space for our Ignatius University.

Dr. Anne Riccitelli, Representative of the Syrian Orthodox Church in America, attended DPI/NGO “Prevention, Prosecution and Protection: Focus on the trafficking of women and girls.” They attended a luncheon at Cibos with Dr. Antoinette DeLuca who was updated on the work of our NGO.

#### UNITED NATIONS:

New York – 23 February ... More than 60,000 people in earthquake-devastated Haiti have been vaccinated against diphtheria, tetanus and other diseases, but additional teams are urgently needed to wrap up this immunization campaign, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) reported.

Agency spokesperson Paul Garwood said that the campaign that kicked off on 16 February has so far reached some 62,000 people, or 10 per cent of the target population. Local staff trained by the Health Ministry, along with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are also helping to administer the immunizations, he said.

Mr. Garwood also noted that there have been no recorded increases in outbreaks of infectious diseases. Respiratory infections are the main cause of illness, he told reporters in Geneva, followed by trauma, injury, diarrhea and suspected malaria cases.

At the same press conference, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) named sanitation as one of its main priorities for the 1 million people displaced by the 12 January earthquake, which claimed more than 200,000 lives.

According to its spokesperson Marc Vergara, the agency and its partners plan to install

over 10,000 latrines by April and more than 20,000 in the coming six months. Prior to the 7.0-magnitude earthquake, just under 20 per cent of the 9 million strong Haitian population had access to latrines. Mr. Vergara said that UNICEF has also rented 1,000 portable toilets to be accessed by over 110,000 people on top of the 2,600 latrines already in place. Additionally, UNICEF has signed an agreement with a local NGO for 1,200 young people to build 1,000 sanitation blocs comprising latrines, showers and hand washing areas. For its part, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the number of people who had fled the city hardest hit by the earthquake, the capital, Port-au-Prince, has risen to nearly 600,000. An estimated 160,000 people have left the capital for the area near Haiti's border with the Dominican Republic, seeking refuge with already poor host families whose household numbers have swelled from 5 to 10 – 15 people, as a result, OCHA spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs said. On logistics, more than 3,000 people from more than 200 organizations, including UN agencies and media institutions, have used the UN Humanitarian Air Service between the Dominican Republic's capital, Santo Domingo, and Port-au-Prince. The service has also delivered nearly 9,000 metric tons of relief supplies. Ms. Byrs also announced today that the \$1.44 billion revised humanitarian appeal launched last week by the UN and its aid partners – the largest ever in the wake of a natural disaster – is now nearly half funded. At its launch in New York on 18 February, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon paid tribute to the Haitian people's resilience, patience and "solidarity amid almost inconceivable hardship," renewing his vow to help the country recover and rebuild. "Day by day, the humanitarian situation is improving," he said. "Clearly, however, major needs have yet to be met."

Australian Anglican group 'first' to sign up to Pope's call

Melbourne, Australia (ENI). A group of "traditional Anglicans" in Australia has voted to accept the recent invitation of Pope Benedict XIV to convert to full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, while retaining their membership of the Anglican Church. Meeting in Melbourne, the Australian branch of Forward in Faith, which comprises many members of the international Anglo-Catholic grouping called the Traditional Anglican Communion, "received with gratitude" the Pope's invitation to join Rome. They decided unanimously to establish a working group to enable the process to move forward.

African churches use mobile phone to ring up growth in members

Nairobi (ENI). A mobile phone suspended on a belt around the waist, or from the neck, is a common sight among members of church congregations in Africa. Now, church leaders are heaping praise on mobile phones, sometimes called cell phones, because they say the instruments help congregations grow. Mobile phone use increased rapidly in Africa about 10 years ago. At that time, however, some Christians on the continent criticized the phones for being "marks of materialism". Now, that has changed "it is as if cell phones have come to revolutionize everything, even Christianity," says Anglican Bishop Charles Gaita of Nyahururu in central Kenya. "They are making things happen quickly." Gaita says mobile phones make it easier and cheaper for the church to spread word about its activities, such as bible studies and meetings.

Hindu leader Ravi Shankar urges Catholic clergy to resist extremism with love.

Vailankanni, India (ENI). Hindu leader Shri Ravi Shanka has told a national meeting of Catholic priests in India that religious extremism “can be fought only through love, genuine spirituality and education”. “The speed of the spread of fundamentalism surprises me but we have to fight it,” Shankar, founder of the Art of Living movement, told the Assembly of Indian Catholic Priests, who were meeting to mark the Year for Priests that Pope Benedict XVI declared in June 2009. More than 800 Catholic priests from across India plus several bishops led by Cardinal Claudio Hummes, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Clergy, were among those present when Shankar addressed the gathering at Vailankanni in Tamil Nadu earlier in February.

World church body anxious about treatment of Egypt’s Christians

Geneva (ENI). Senior officials of the World Council of Churches have warned that Christian Copts in Egypt are being made to feel like “aliens in their own country”. At the same time they have urged churches in the North African country to “continue their involvement in Muslim-Christian dialogue”. In a statement on 26 February the executive committee of the WCC, which represents 560 million Christians worldwide, said, “it is a matter of regret that in Egypt today Christians can easily fall victim to violence and hatred, and that their security is not fully guaranteed. Many Copts, in particular, are made to feel like aliens in their own country.”

Faith-based groups grow as part of New Zealand left politics

Melbourne, Australia (ENI). New Zealand politics has taken on an unexpected religious flavor since the left wing of the political divide adopted faith-based groups into their normally secular structures. While New Zealand has a number of longstanding faith-based political parties, they have been seen as representing the right wing of the political spectrum. The development of affiliated religious subgroups within the Labour Party and the Greens is unprecedented.

Asia’s largest Christian event focuses on green spirituality

Maramon, India (ENI). The annual Maramon convention of the Mar Thoma Church, which lays claim to being Asia’s biggest Christian gathering, has in 2010 focused on caring for the earth, with government officials handing out tens of thousands of saplings for planting. “If we persist with the unscientific exploitation of natural resources and neglect of environmental concerns, there will not be anything left for the future generations in the earth in which we live,” cautioned Metropolitan Joseph Mar Thoma, head of the Mar Thoma Church.

Black churches in US team up to tackle problems facing black men

Washington DC (ENI/RNS). The leaders of three black Methodist denominations are joining together for the first time in 45 years – to address unemployment, crime and other problems that disproportionately affect black men in the United States. “When people talk about us being in an economic downturn, that’s nice talk for the general community, but for the African-American community, we are in a depression,” said Senior Bishop John R. Bryant of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Religion News Service reports. “Our people are hurting.”

### First female German Protestant leader quits after drinking offense

Trier, Germany (ENI). The first woman elected to lead Germany's 24 million Protestants through the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), Bishop Margot Kässmann, has said she is resigning, only days after she was apprehended for a drink-driving offense. She said she will immediately give up her posts as a bishop and as head of the EKD, but will continue as a pastor, Kässmann, a Lutheran and the chairperson of the EKD, the umbrella organization of Germany's Protestants, was caught drink-driving on the evening of 20 February in Hanover. She allegedly jumped a red traffic light and was found three times over the legal limit.

### Protestants, Catholics regret resignation of German bishop

Trier, Germany (ENI). Protestant and Roman Catholic leaders have expressed their regret about the resignation of Bishop Margot Kässmann, the first woman to lead 24 million German Protestants, who belong to the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). At a 24 February press conference in Hanover, where she was resident bishop, Kässmann said she was resigning from her leadership positions, only days after she was stopped for drink-driving offence. When she made her announcement, her four grown-up daughters flanked her. Kässmann said she had given up her posts as a bishop and as head of the EKD but would continue as a pastor.

### Philippine Catholics, officials, debate condoms and AIDS prevention

Manila (ENI). Roman Catholic leaders in the Philippines have lambasted a government campaign that encourages condom use to help prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS, while a health official has blamed the church for thwarting its drive. The Archbishop of Lipa, Ramon Arguelles, on 23 February called for the resignation of the Philippines health department secretary, Esperanza Cabral. Arguelles was quoted on the Catholic Bishops Conference Web site as saying it is "immoral for Cabral to be pushing for the use of condoms, which we all know are not a deterrent to AIDS". Cabral told reporters, however, "We are a secular state where the Church and State are separate."

### Indian women's self-sufficiency promoter wins Niwano Peace Prize

Geneva (ENI). The Niwano Peace Foundation has announced it will award its 2010 peace prize to Ela Ramesh Bhatt, an Indian Hindu who is a follower of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, and who applies them to enable women to become self-sufficient. In a 24 February statement announcing the winner of the Niwano Peace Prize, the foundation said Bhatt is "known as the 'gentle revolutionary'." It added, "She has dedicated her life to improving the lives of India's poorest and most oppressed women workers."

### Protest to go on against Israeli occupation of Christian owned land

Beit Sahour, West Bank (ENI). Palestinian activists say they will continue protests against an apparent re-occupation of an abandoned Israeli army outpost on the outskirts of Beit Sahour near Bethlehem, despite being repelled by the Israel Defense Forces. "We are going to be there next week. We object to the military presence there, and will demonstrate peacefully against that presence there," said Bethlehem University professor Mazin Qumsiyeh, who belongs to the Greek Melkite Church and lives in Beit Sahour. People at the 28 February protest said it turned violent after Israeli border police officials



fired stun grenades, tear gas and rubber bullets at a group of about 75 banner-waving demonstrators. They had marched up to the outpost to protest about the Israeli presence there.

**Jewish groups laud hate-crimes charge in Canadian cross burning**  
 Toronto (ENI). Canadian Jewish groups have been among the first to applaud the laying of hate-crime charges against two men accused of using racial epithets, and burning a cross at the home of an interracial couple in the country's Nova Scotia province. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police announced on 24 February that it had charged two men with public incitement of hatred, mischief and uttering threats. The charges were laid after an incident in the early hours of 21 February, when Shayne Howe, who is black, found a two-metre-high cross burning in front of his home in Poplar Grove, Nova Scotia in eastern Canada. Howe heard a man yell, "die, nigger, die," before he ran off. Howe is black; his wife, Michelle Lyon, is white. She is a distant relative of the two accused men, Nathan Neil Rehberg, aged 20, and his brother Justin Chad Rehberg, who is 19.

**Scottish pensioner, aged 90, leaves fortune to Salvation Army**  
 Edinburgh (ENI). The Salvation Army is renowned for helping people, sometimes when they are in desperate need. But in its own hour of need, a Salvation Army branch in a small Scottish town got a pleasant shock after it received a donation of 850,000 British pounds (US \$1.3 million) from a pensioner who had benefited from the Christian organization's welfare services. When 90-year-old Robert Saddler, a retired Edinburgh architect who lived in Forfar, 120 kilometers (75 miles) northeast of the Scottish capital, died in 2009 he left the Salvation Army a small fortune in his will. Major Jim McCluskey, team leader of the army's Angus county's community service, told Ecumenical News International, "We have been thrown a lifeline with the legacy. It is truly God sent."

**Pope's brother says he is willing to testify about scandal-hit choir he led**  
 Trier/Rome (ENI). The Pope and his brother have been drawn into a controversy surrounding the sexual abuse of members of a boy's choir in Germany. The Vatican says that the brother of Pope Benedict XVI was not involved with the choir at the time the sexual abuse allegedly took place, but a German Catholic lay group has demanded that the pontiff explain what he knew about the situation when he was a bishop in Bavaria. German's Stern magazine in its 8 March edition quoted the Roman Catholic lay reform group We Are Church as saying, "Pope Benedict should explain himself".

**Russian and Polish churches break ice with talks**  
 Warsaw (ENI). Poland's Roman Catholic Church has launched its first dialogue with Russian Orthodox leaders, in a bid to rebuild relations between the two countries. "Although these were introductory talks, key problems of mutual interest were discussed, and it was agreed to start work on a joint document about our churches' contribution to the labor of reconciliation," church representatives said in a joint statement. "Both sides stressed the historic significance of this initiative and the conversations now begun, which are an important first step towards bringing our local churches closer and reconciling our nations."

**Questions arise as 'most godless place' gets first saint**

Melbourne, Australia (ENI). Australia – described in the 19th century by a Scottish church minister as “the most godless place under heaven” – will get its first saint when Pope Benedict XVI canonizes Sister Mary McKillop later in the year. Some Protestant church leaders have, however, raised questions about the need to find “proof of a miracle” in order for her sainthood to be confirmed. Mary McKillop, the daughter of a Roman Catholic, Scottish immigrant, at just 24, established the Order of the Sisters of St. Joseph in South East Australia in the late 1800s.

OUR NGO:

Father DeLuca has been in consultation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference with a view to establishing the Institute for Islamic-Christian Dialogue within Ignatius University.

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