

**SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM**

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**SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST**

**The Catholic Church in the Middle East:  
Communion and Witness.  
“Now the company of those who believed  
were of one heart and soul” (*Acts 4: 32*)**

**THE REPORT OF  
THE GENERAL SECRETARY**

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Holy Father,  
Your Eminences and Excellencies,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

*“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing”* (Gen 12:1, 2). Abram, born in Ur of the Chaldeans, heard these words addressed to him by God in Haran. He passed through the region and dwelt near the Oak of Moreh (cf. Gen 12:6). He then set up camp in Negeb (cf. Gen 12:9), went down into Egypt (cf. Gen 12:10-20), returned to Negeb, went to Bethel (cf. Gen 13:1, 2) and then to the land of Canaan (cf. Gen 12:12), where he came and dwelt at the Oaks of Mamre, in Hebron (cf. Gen 13:18). God made a covenant with his servant Abram, who became Abraham, because he was given a special mission: *“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations”* (Gen 17: 4, 5). Knowing the faith and justice of Abram (cf. Gen 15:6), God made him a threefold promise: a son, a people beyond counting and a land. The oath of the God of Israel will never fail, as St. Paul attests (cf. Rm 9:1-11:36).

*“I am who am!”* (Ex 3:14), are the holy words of the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who appeared on Mount Horeb in the burning bush which burnt but was not consumed. They were addressed to Moses to reveal his holy name and entrust Moses with the mission of freeing his people from slavery in Egypt: *“I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings [...]. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt”* (Ex 3:7-10). Strengthened by the grace of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses surmounted numerous difficulties and guided the Hebrew people through the Red Sea and the desert to the Promised Land, which he could only view from *“Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho”* (Dt 32:49), where he died and was buried *“opposite Beth-pe'or”* (Dt 34:6). God established, through his friend Moses (cf. Ex 33:11), a covenant with the Chosen People on Mount Sinai. If the people will hear the voice of Yahweh and observe his law, they will be for him *“a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”* (Ex 19:6). God entrusted the Chosen People with

“Ten Words”, the Ten Commandments, which were the terms and basis for the covenant (cf. *Ex* 20-24).

“*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am*” (*Jn* 8:58). In his discussion with the Jews in the temple of Jerusalem, Jesus alluded to the divine name revealed to Moses (cf. *Ex* 33:14), implicitly declaring himself to be God, born in Bethlehem to save humanity (cf. *Lk* 1:4-14). “*Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad*” (*Jn* 8:56). Jesus Christ, “*Son of David, Son of Abraham*” (*Mt* 1:1), also applies to himself the expression “Day of the Lord”, which was reserved in the Old Testament for God alone, thereby designating himself as the true object of the promise made to Abraham and the joy he experiences in the birth of his son, Isaac (cf. *Gen* 12:1-3).

After 30 years of his hidden life in Nazareth, Jesus, as he preached throughout Galilea (cf. *Mt* 4:23) and travelled “*all the cities and villages*” (*Mt* 9:35), had also to indicate his relation to the great prophet, Moses. At the beginning of his public life, as he walked along the lake of Tiberias, he called disciples who were convinced that they found “*him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*” (*Jn* 1:45). Their conviction was confirmed on Mount Tabor, when “*two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem*” (*Lk* 9:30,31). In his discussion with his fellow-Jews in the Temple of Jerusalem, Jesus again refers to the testimony of Moses: “*If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me*” (*Jn* 5:46). John the Evangelist summarises in the following words the contribution of both in salvation history: “*For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*” (*Jn* 1:17).

These brief citations from the Old and New Testaments show the importance of the geographic area of the Middle East for all Christians, especially those who actually live in the Holy Land, the land which Jesus sanctified with his birth in Bethlehem, his flight into Egypt, his hidden life in Nazareth and his preaching in Galilee, Samaria and Judea, which was accompanied by signs and wonders, primarily his passion, death and resurrection in the holy city of Jerusalem. The events from salvation history, which took place in the Middle East, continue to be vividly remembered in the hearts of the inhabitants of the region, particularly Christians. In them, Bible peoples can be said to continue today. As a result, the events that took place centuries ago remain alive not only through the power of the Word of God, which is always alive and effective (cf. *Heb* 4:12), but also through these peoples’ vital link to this land, which was sanctified by the special presence of

God, who revealed himself in the fullness of time (cf. *Heb 9:26*) in his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. If these “peoples of the Bible” exist today, so too “bishops of the Bible”, i.e., in reference to the places where they exercise their pastoral activity. There are many such Pastors in this synodal assembly which gathers all the ordinaries of the 101 ecclesiastical jurisdictions of the Middle East, whom I greet in a special way. We add to these Pastors the 23 ordinaries from the Diaspora, who through their pastoral care nurture the faith of those who have emigrated from the Middle East to various parts of the world.

In a certain way, all bishops are “bishops of the Bible”. In addition to the bishops from the geographic locations mentioned in the Bible, there are also “bishops of biblical communion”. The presence of representatives from all 5 continents clearly shows the interest of the entire Christian world in the Catholic Church on pilgrimage in the Middle East. We further add to this group 19 bishops from neighbouring countries or those particularly involved in the spiritual and material assistance of their brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

The total number of synod fathers at this Special Assembly for the Middle East is 185, of which 159 participate *ex officio* and 17 by papal appointment. The synod fathers include 9 patriarchs, 19 cardinals, 65 archbishops, 10 titular archbishops, 53 bishops, 15 auxiliary bishops, 87 religious of which 4 are elected by the Union of Superiors General. As for the offices they hold, 9 are heads of synods of bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, 5 presidents of international meetings of episcopal conferences, 6 presidents of episcopal conferences, 14 heads of dicasteries of the Roman Curia, 1 coadjutor archbishop, 4 emeriti of which 2 are cardinals, 1 is the Latin patriarch emeritus of Jerusalem and 1 is its Patriarchal Vicar.

The Holy Land is dear to all Christians. I have the honour of extending special greeting to the fraternal delegates from 13 Churches and ecclesial communities.

The Middle East is also home to our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters, because these two monotheistic religions were born there. Therefore, I am happy to announce that in the course of the synod we will have the joy of listening to presentations by a Rabbi and two eminent Sunnite and Shiite representatives of Islam.

I extend greetings as well to 36 experts and 34 auditors, who have graciously accepted the invitation to come to the synod and enrich our discussion with their witness and rich pastoral experiences, principally from the Middle East. Included in this group are representatives of organizations which provide concrete assistance to Churches in the region.

I am indeed grateful to the assistants, translators and technicians, not to mention the staff members of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, for their valuable assistance, fully aware that without their skill and generous efforts this synodal gathering would not be possible.

This report is divided into five sections:

- I) Cyprus: An Ideal Opening for the Special Assembly;
- II) Middle Eastern Statistics;
- III) The Convocation of the Special Assembly for the Middle East;
- IV) Preparations for the Special Assembly for the Middle East; and
- V) Observations on Synodal Procedure.

Conclusion

## ***D) Cyprus: An Ideal Opening to the Special Assembly***

Most Holy Father,

In the name of the synod fathers and the entire group of participants at this synodal gathering and in anticipation of the remarks to be given by His Eminence, the President-Delegate, Cardinal Leonardo SANDRI, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, I have the honour of again offering a heartfelt greeting and thanks for having convoked this synodal assembly and for having provided its ideal opening at Nicosia, Cyprus, during your Apostolic Visit, from 4 to 7 June 2010.

The preparation-time for the Special Assembly for the Middle East was not long. Holy Father, you immediately welcomed the proposal of various bishops from the Middle East to call them to Rome to listen to their joys and sorrows and their hopes and concerns for Christians and all peoples of good will in the Middle East, a region of particular importance for the Church and the whole world. Your Holiness, this is the 4<sup>th</sup> synodal assembly being held in these 5 years of your pontificate. On one occasion, the Venerable, Servant of God, Pope John Paul II said that, considering the number of synods over which he presided, he would be remembered as the Pope of the Synod, the “synodal pope”.<sup>1</sup> Your Holiness, it seems that you might also be embarking on a similar path in your concern as Bishop of Rome, in communion with your brother-bishops in the episcopate and in service to the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care.

During your pontificate, Your Holiness has already visited the Middle East three times. The First Apostolic Visit (28 November - 1 December 2006) was to Turkey. We still have vivid memories of your pilgrimage to Jordan, Israel and Palestine (8 - 15 May 2009). Your latest visit was to Cyprus, when you consigned the *Instrumentum laboris* to the Catholic episcopate of the Middle East, represented by 7 patriarchs and the President of the Episcopal Conference of Iran. Sadly, His Excellency, Most Rev. Luigi Padovese, O.F.M.Cap., Apostolic Vicar of Anatolia and President of the Episcopal Conference of Turkey was absent due to his brutal death the day before the papal visit. During the consignment of the *Instrumentum laboris*, Your Holiness had affectionate words for him, expressing your gratitude for his

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Members of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences - FABC* (15 January 1995), *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 24 January 1995, p. 6.

significant contribution to the preparatory documents, namely the *Lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum laboris*. We prayerfully call upon the Lord to receive his faithful servant into his kingdom of life, happiness and peace, so that from heaven he might intercede for the success of this synodal assembly. May his sacrifice open new paths of mutual understanding and collaboration in respect for religious freedom in all countries of the Middle East and the world. At the same time, we pray that those who were involved in his tragic death will have a change of heart.

During the consignment of the *Instrumentum laboris*, Your Holiness drew attention to the biblical motto of the synodal assembly: “*Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul*” (Acts 4:32), stressing the timeliness of communion and witness in the Christian life. You then summarised in two points the purpose of our gathering: 1) “to deepen the bonds of communion between the members of your local Churches, as well as the communion of the Churches themselves with each other and with the universal Church”; and 2) “to encourage you in the witness of faith in Christ that you are bearing in the countries where this faith was born and developed”.<sup>2</sup> Beyond these principal goals, the convocation of the Special Assembly for the Middle East represents a propitious occasion, “an opportunity for Christians in the rest of the world to offer spiritual support and solidarity to their brothers and sisters in the Middle East”,<sup>3</sup> above all, to those who are enduring great trials as a result of the present difficulties in the region. Furthermore, the Special Assembly provides the occasion to “bring out the important value of the presence and witness of Christians in the countries of the Bible, not only for the Christian community on a global scale but also for your neighbours and your fellow-citizens.”<sup>4</sup> Christians, who have lived in the Middle East for almost 2000 years, want to live in peace and harmony with their Jewish and Muslim neighbours. Christians deserve to be recognised for their invaluable contributions, which oftentimes include acting “as peacemakers in the difficult

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<sup>2</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Discourse at the Consignment of the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops (6 June 2010), Nicosia, Cyprus; *L’Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 9 June 2010, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

process of reconciliation”.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, their human rights should always be respected, including freedom of worship and freedom of religion.

## ***II) Middle Eastern Statistics***

Together, we thank the Good and Merciful God for the abundant gifts which the Church in the Middle East has received in almost 2,000 years of her existence. The Lord Jesus’ disciples, oftentimes in adverse circumstances and even to shedding their blood, bore witness to a living faith, an ardent hope and a fruitful charity. With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the ongoing presence of Christians in the Holy Land provides a strong basis for hope in their present situation and in the future, in a region of particular importance to them. The Holy Land is where they were born and is their homeland. Willing to collaborate with all peoples of good will, especially with the followers of the Jewish and Muslim faiths, Christians want to make a valuable and unique contribution to building thriving, democratic countries.

In this regard, some statistics on the Middle East might prove helpful. The preparatory documents of the synodal assembly, primarily the *Lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum laboris*, list 16 countries in the Middle East, in addition to Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories: Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

This vast region covers more than 7,180, 912 kilometres. The adjoining *chart* indicates that 356,174,000 people live in the Middle East, including 5, 707,000 Catholics, who represent 1.60% of the population. This information comes from the latest edition (2010) of the *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae - 2008*. Determining the number of Christians in the Middle East is not always an easy task. The approximate number of Christians is 20,000,000, that is, 5.62% of the population. The information, even if approximate, gives some idea of the presence of the Christian minority in a predominantly Muslim region, with the exception of Israel, where the percentage of the population is: Jews, 75.6 %, Muslims, 16.7% Christians, 2.1%, Druse, 1.6% and others, 4%.<sup>6</sup>

The chart divides the Middle East into two groups. The first includes countries having a tradition of a Christian presence, which, unfortunately, are

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Calendario Atlante De Agostini 2010, *Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Pioltello (MI) 2009*, p. 678.

displaying significant changes, even in comparison to the data from 1980, not so much in the number of Catholics as much as in the percentage of Catholics in their respective countries. The number of Catholics has not followed the demographic growth of the rest of the population. The second group represents countries where the Christian presence has increased in the last ten years, due to Catholics, in search of work and better living conditions, who take up residence for a certain period of time. We thank God that, with the increase of Catholics in number and percentage, these countries are experiencing the opposite tendency from those in the first group. With the bishops of the Middle East, the whole Church ought to properly consider this change as one of the signs of the times, rendering thanks to God that salvation history can take place in ways and at times which are totally unexpected.

In his discourse in Nicosia at the consignment of the *Instrumentum laboris*, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the notable contribution of Christians to the integral development of the countries in which they live: “You contribute in countless ways to the common good, for example through education, care of the sick and social assistance and you work to build society.”<sup>7</sup>

The data available clearly confirms what the Bishop of Rome said in the course of his Apostolic Visit to Jordan, 9 May 2009, when he blessed the cornerstone of the University of Madaba, which is supported by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In the Middle East the Catholic Church operates 686 nursery schools with 92,661 children, 869 primary schools with 343,705 pupils and 548 middle schools with 183,995 students. There are also 13 Institutes of Higher Learning, including 4 Universities. As for the number of students, 2,443 frequent the Higher Institutes; 1,654 are ecclesiastical students; and 34,506 study at other Universities.<sup>8</sup> It is useful to remember that the enrollment at these schools is not limited to Catholics and Christians only, but is open to those of other religions, particularly Muslims. Sponsoring educational facilities is a practical and effective way for the Church to contribute to educating the young, the hope of both the Church and society.

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<sup>7</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Discourse at the Consignment of the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops (6 June 2010), Nicosia, Cyprus; *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 9 June 2010, p. 13

<sup>8</sup> The Statistics are taken from the *Annuarioimn Statisticum Ecclesiae 2008*, Vatican City 2010, pp. 281 and 285-287.

## THE CATHOLIC PRESENCE IN MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES

Source: *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae*

COUNTRIES	SURFACE AREA (sq.2)	1980		1997		2006		2008			
		CATHOLICS		CATHOLICS		CATHOLICS		CATHOLICS			
		POPULATION	%	POPULATION	%	POPULATION	%	POPULATION	%		
<b>Cyprus</b>	9.251	630.000	8.000	17.000	2.21	791.000	17.000	2.15	794.000	25.000	3.15
<b>Egypt</b>	1.001.449	41.990.000	158.000	218.000	0.35	75.510.000	197.000	0.26	79.100.000	196.000	0.25
<b>Iran</b>	1.648.195	37.450.000	19.000	12.000	0.02	60.690.000	17.000	0.02	72.580.000	19.000	0.03
<b>Iraq</b>	488.317	13.080.000	378.000	275.000	1.30	21.180.000	304.000	1.06	32.150.000	301.000	0.94
<b>Israel</b>	20.770	3.870.000	147.000	106.000	1.82	5.830.000	128.000	1.82	7.300.000	133.000	1.82
<b>Jordan</b>	89.324	3.190.000	76.000	71.000	1.23	5.770.000	79.000	1.41	5.850.000	109.000	1.86
<b>Lebanon</b>	10.400	3.160.000	1.215.000	1.967.000	62.64	3.140.000	1.836.000	48.10	3.921.000	2.030.000	51.77
<b>Syria</b>	185.180	8.980.000	227.000	309.000	2.07	14.950.000	401.000	2.13	19.640.000	428.000	2.18
<b>Turkey</b>	774.815	44.920.000	17.000	32.000	0.05	63.750.000	32.000	0.04	74.840.000	37.000	0.05
<b>TOTALE</b>	<b>4.177.701</b>	<b>157.270.000</b>	<b>2.245.000</b>	<b>3.007.000</b>	<b>1,26</b>	<b>238.090.000</b>	<b>3.011.000</b>	<b>1,06</b>	<b>296.175.000</b>	<b>3.278.000</b>	<b>1,11</b>
<b>Bahrain</b>	678	350.000	6.000	30.000	4,84	620.000	41.000	5,42	1.201.000	65.000	5,41
<b>Kuwait</b>	17.818	1.360.000	49.000	156.000	8,62	1.810.000	300.000	11,85	2.682.000	300.000	11,19
<b>Oman</b>	212.457	890.000	4.000	52.000	2,17	2.400.000	72.000	2,79	2.795.000	120.000	4,29
<b>Qatar</b>	11.000	220.000	5.000	60.000	10,53	570.000	64.000	9,43	1.541.000	110.000	7,14
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	2.149.690	8.370.000	135.000	641.000	3,29	19.490.000	900.000	3,80	24.810.000	1.250.000	5,04
<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	83.600	800.000	25.000	155.000	6,01	4.006.000	459.000	11,46	4.770.000	580.000	12,16
<b>Yemen</b>	527.968	7.900.000	2.500	3.000	0,02	16.480.000	6.000	0,03	22.200.000	4.000	0,02
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3.003.211</b>	<b>19.890.000</b>	<b>226.500</b>	<b>1.097.000</b>	<b>2,50</b>	<b>43.950.000</b>	<b>1.842.000</b>	<b>3,26</b>	<b>56.516.000</b>	<b>2.429.000</b>	<b>4,05</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>7.180.912</b>	<b>177.160.000</b>	<b>2.471.500</b>	<b>4.104.000</b>	<b>1,46</b>	<b>282.040.000</b>	<b>4.853.000</b>	<b>1,43</b>	<b>340.534.000</b>	<b>5.707.000</b>	<b>1,60</b>

The Catholic Church also has a significant presence in the apostolate of charity to the sick, elderly, disabled and the poor. In the Middle East, the Church has 544 Catholic healthcare structures: 76 hospitals and nursing homes, 113 healthcare institutions for the elderly, 331 healthcare centres and dispensaries, 24 healthcare facilities for the disabled and rehabilitation centres managed by various institutes of consecrated life. All these institutions are open to other Christians, Muslims and all persons in need.

Many initiatives, including those to help the most needy are operated by *Caritas* organisations in particular regions (the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and Northern Africa).

Valuable assistance is offered to our brothers and sisters in the Middle East by the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem and, primarily, the Congregation for Eastern Churches which coordinates assistance through various organisations, including the Group of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches (R.O.A.C.O.).

### ***III) Convocation of the Special Assembly for the Middle East***

On 19 September 2009, during his meeting with the patriarchs and major archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI announced his decision to convoke the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops.

The idea of convoking this synodal assembly arose from two pastoral concerns. Firstly, various bishops, primarily from the more troubled regions in the Middle East, for example, Iraq, asked the Holy Father to gather the bishops of the region to listen personally to what they had to say about the oftentimes dramatic situation of the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care, and, with the grace of the Holy Spirit and in episcopal communion, seek possible ways to better the situation, beginning with the communion internal to the Churches and these Churches among themselves. Consultation in the matter came also from cardinals and prelates of the Roman Curia, who have frequent contacts with the Pastors and Christians of the Holy Land, either institutionally or in person.

Secondly, during his Apostolic Pilgrimage to Turkey and later to Jordan, Israel and Palestine, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI personally experienced the joys and sorrows of the various local Churches. As a result, he readily accepted the bishops wish to go beyond their feelings of isolation and strengthen the bonds of communion with the universal Church through the Bishop of Rome, who presides over the Church in charity. The announcement

of the convocation of the synodal assembly was done in an atmosphere of profound communion with the Pope and the heads of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, who were received in audience at Castel Gandolfo. This important gesture, a fraternal, love-filled encounter, was also sought by Your Holiness “to listen to the voice of the Church which you serve with admirable self-sacrifice and of strengthening the bonds of communion which bind them to the Apostolic See.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Holy Father, you expressed your wish to “foster that synodality so dear to Eastern ecclesiology and greatly appreciated by the Second Vatican Council.”<sup>10</sup> Recalling at that time the appeal for peace made by the patriarchs during the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, you turned your thoughts primarily to the suffering regions of the Middle East. In this context, you made the announcement of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, entrusting the results to the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is greatly honoured in the venerated tradition of the Eastern Catholic Churches, as also among our brothers and sisters in other Christian Churches.

#### ***IV) Preparations for the Special Assembly for the Middle East***

In the audience granted to me on 13 June 2009, the Holy Father spoke about the convocation of a Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops. In this regard, he was prepared to schedule a meeting in the General Secretariat for 8 July 2009 to discuss the matter-at-hand. The participants at this meeting were the heads of the 4 dicasteries of the Roman Curia having frequent contacts with the Eastern Churches, namely, the Prefects of the Congregation for Eastern Churches and the Evangelization of Peoples as well as the Presidents of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Representatives from the Secretariat of State, from the Section for Relations with States, were also present. After an initial exchange of information on the situation of the Church and society in the region, various proposals were made concerning the convocation of the Special Assembly for the Middle East, possible topics to be treated, the number of participants and the actual dates for the special assembly.

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<sup>9</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Ad Patriarchas et Archiepiscopos Maiores Orientales: AAS* 101 (2009) 858.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

At the same time, all agreed that a Pre-Synodal Council for the Middle East needed to be formed to prepare the necessary documentation.

In the subsequent papal audience granted to me on 7 September, I presented to the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI the results of the meeting of the study group. After further reflection, His Holiness made his decision to convoke the Special Assembly for the Middle East to take place from 10 to 24 October 2010 to treat the topic: *The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness*. “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4: 32). As previously mentioned, the announcement of this very important event was made personally by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, on 19 September 2009. At the same time, His Holiness also established the Pre-Synodal Council for the Middle East, whose members included all 7 patriarchs, namely, 6 of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the two presidents of the episcopal conferences of Turkey and Iran.

Considering the relatively limited time for the preparation of this synodal gathering, the General Secretariat organised the first meeting of the Pre-Synodal Council for the Middle East for 21 to 22 September 2009, immediately following the Holy Father’s meeting with the patriarchs and major archbishops.

The purpose of this meeting was to prepare the *Lineamenta*, the document presenting the topic of the synodal assembly. After an ample exchange of opinions on the complex situation in the Middle East, the Council members agreed on an outline for the *Lineamenta* and made specific suggestions on its contents.

In a subsequent meeting from 24 to 25 November 2009, the members of the Pre-Synodal Council examined a draft of the *Lineamenta*. Well aware of the pastoral situation in each country of the Middle East, they made various observations which were later inserted in the text. The document was then sent by electronic mail to the Council members for their final approval, with the request to submit any further suggestions before the end of November. After examining their comments, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops finalized the document, which was later translated into 4 languages: Arabic, English, French and Italian.

On 19 January 2010, in the Holy See Press Office, His Excellency, Most Rev. Nikola Eterović, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops and the Under-Secretary, Rev. Msgr. Fortunato Frezza presented the *Lineamenta*, which carried the date, 8 December 2009. The document was widely distributed in the region and was also available on the internet, at the Vatican

website, on the pages dedicated to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

The Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, the episcopal conferences, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the Union of Superiors General and all interested parties had until Easter, 2010 – which providentially was observed by all Christians of every tradition on 4 April – to submit to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops their response to the *Questions* in the *Lineamenta*. The responses were to serve in drafting the *Instrumentum laboris*, the “document for work” setting the agenda for the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops.

### *Instrumentum laboris*

Despite the limited time to study and reflect upon the *Lineamenta*, the percentage of responses was very satisfactory. These responses were categorically divided according to the various institutions with which the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops has official contact.

Institutions	Number	Responses
Eastern Catholic Churches <i>sui iuris</i>	6	6 (100%)
Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem	1	1 (100%)
Episcopal Conferences	3	3 (100%)
Dicasteries of the Roman Curia	26 <sup>11</sup>	14 (56%)
Union of Superiors General	1	1 (100%)

The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops also received observations from various institutes of higher study, universities, religious communities and lay groups, not to mention individual lay persons, all of whom have a deep concern for the present and future of the Catholic Church in the Middle East.

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<sup>11</sup> Even though the *Lineamenta* was sent to all 26 dicasteries, responses came from those with major interest in the ecclesial situation in the Middle East and whose heads normally take part in synodal assemblies.

The Pre-Synodal Council for the Middle East met on 23 and 24 April 2010 to examine the responses which arrived at the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. At this time, with the assistance of experts, they drafted the *Instrumentum laboris*, which essentially maintained the structure of the *Lineamenta*, thereby facilitating the Council's work in examining the document. Taking into consideration the submissions by the previously mentioned episcopal bodies in each country, the Pre-Synodal Council members enriched the draft with the bishops' fruitful pastoral experiences and valid observations. The General Secretariat then undertook the work of finalising the text. Subsequently, the document was sent by electronic mail to the Pre-Synodal Council members with the request to submit any further observations by 15 May 2010. These recommendations were then incorporated in the text and the final document was translated into 4 languages: Arabic, English, French and Italian. On 7 June 2010, in Nicosia, Cyprus, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI graciously consigned the document to the members of the Pre-Synodal Council, who represented the entire episcopate of the Middle East.

After the consignment of the *Instrumentum laboris* by the Holy Father, who again expressed his deep gratitude to the Council members for their tireless work, the document was widely distributed by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, employing, among other means, its webpage on the Vatican website.

#### *The Appointment of Members with Special Roles at the Synod*

On 24 April 2010, the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI appointed those who were to exercise special roles at the Special Assembly for the Middle East:

Two Presidents-Delegate *ad honorem*: His Beatitude, Cardinal Nasrallah Pierre SFEIR, Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites, Lebanon; and His Beatitude, Cardinal Emmanuel II DELLY, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, Iraq.

Two Presidents-Delegate: His Eminence, Cardinal Leonardo SANDRI, Prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches; and His Beatitude, Ignace Youssif II YOUNAN, Patriarch of Antioch of the Syrians, Lebanon.

General Rapporteur: His Beatitude, Antonios NAGUIB, Patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts, Egypt.

Special Secretary: His Excellency, Most Rev. Joseph SOUEIF, Archbishop of Cyprus of the Maronites, Cyprus.<sup>12</sup>

### ***V) Observations on Methodology***

At a Synod of Bishops, the privileged place of episcopal communion, bishops strengthen the bonds of effective and affective communion among themselves and, together, with the Roman Pontiff. This communion is not based on feelings alone, however noble, but is, instead, an ecclesial reality which requires an arduous presence, a patient listening, a great openness, an attention to one's neighbour, consideration for the needs of others, collaboration with one another and sacrifice for the good of all. I am sure that with such a spirit of ecclesial service, each synod father will be ready to accept and fulfill the task which will be entrusted to him, through election, appointment or designation, each making his proper contribution to the outcome of the synodal assembly. Oftentimes, this service is hidden but nonetheless important for the outcome of the synodal assembly. To maximize the number of synod fathers taking an active role in the assembly, each synod father is asked to undertake one task only.

In the audience granted to me on 26 March 2010, the Holy Father, Benedict XVI approved the criteria for participation at this synod assembly which was agreed upon by the Pre-Synodal Council for the Middle East of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops at its meeting on 24 and 25 November 2009. After the Supreme Pontiff's approval, this criteria was communicated to the patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* and the presidents of the episcopal conference of the region.

According to the decision of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, the *ex officio* members of the synod are all active bishops in the Middle East, Ordinaries and Auxiliaries, and those exercising a corresponding responsibility. This group includes cardinals regardless of age and heads of the major Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*. Moreover, the bishops of the Diaspora from their respective Eastern Catholic Churches are also entitled to participate at the synodal assembly.

The Holy Father then gave his approval for bishops to represent the countries of Northeastern Africa. In addition, His Holiness agreed to have the presidents of the episcopal conferences of the five continents take part. Their presence is a sign of the close bonds between the world episcopate and that of

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 5 May 2010, p. 4.

the Middle East. To this group were added bishops representing countries which welcome the faithful from the Middle East and offer notable assistance to the Catholic Church in the region through the work of women and men missionaries and financial resources. In conformity with the norms of the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum*, the Holy Father completed the number of synod fathers with appointments of his own.

His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI willingly accepted the proposal of the Pre-Synodal Council to invite a significant number of women and men auditors, who are involved in evangelisation and human promotion in the Middle East. Their presence and comments will allow us to have a vision of life in the Church and society in the region as seen by the laity. A significant number of experts are also present to offer assistance to the Special Secretary and General Rapporteur through their studies and experiences.

Synod methodology has not undergone great changes in relation to that already seen in recent synods at which the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI has presided. Nevertheless, we should indicate some important points:

1) Each synod father is strongly asked to read attentively the *Vademecum* which he has received. Following the norms of the Apostolic Letter *Apostolica sollicitudo* and the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum*, not to mention synod practice over the years, this document describes synodal procedure in detail;

2) The *Vademecum* is printed in 4 languages: Arabic, English, French, and Italian and for convenience the *Kalendarium*, i.e., work schedule, is in Latin, the official language of the Synod of Bishops. As noted, there are 14 general congregations and 6 small-group meetings;

3) To maximise participation during this Assembly, each synod father will be able to make a *5-minute presentation* in the synod hall. We hope that as many synod fathers as possible will be able to speak. If a synod father is unable to speak, he can, if he wishes, submit to the General Secretariat his written presentation, which will be duly examined and considered in drafting the proposals and in other documentation;

4) To promote a thorough examination of the topics on the agenda, the final hour, 6:00 - 7:00 P.M., of the afternoon session of the General Congregations will be devoted to an open discussion. The synod fathers will have the opportunity to speak for no more than 3 minutes;

In this regard, please permit me make two observations. During the open discussion, it is important to focus on the topic of the synod: “*The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness*”, a very significant and particularly rich subject which requires thorough examination from various perspectives in the Church and translation into pastoral initiatives. The

presidents-delegate are therefore asked to make sure that the discussion does not wander from the established topic. It is also helpful that during our open discussions each synod father speak freely and not from a written text, as in the case of his official presentation during the general congregations. They can possibly have notes, but should speak freely, including asking questions and making spontaneous observations, even if their formulation is less than perfect;

5) To avoid any unnecessary repetition of subjects, I ask the patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches to agree upon the subjects of the presentations of each member in such a way that the position of the respective synods of bishops of each Church *sui iuris* can be faithfully presented, in its entirety and rich variety. The General Secretariat will ensure that the voice of every Eastern Catholic Church is heard, even those who have few bishops. To give some order to the presentations, the synod fathers ought to submit a request to speak as soon as possible. Because the synodal assembly is to last for the brief period of two weeks, only the first week will be dedicated to the presentations of the synod fathers in the synod hall.

6) The synod fathers are cordially asked to make a summary of their presentation, which is customarily published. If, for some reason, someone does not wish his summary to be published, he is asked to notify the General Secretariat. This is also the case for texts *in scriptis*, which can always be submitted to the General Secretariat.

7) The General Secretariat has arranged for simultaneous translations in the 4 official languages of the synodal assembly: Arabic, English, French and Italian. Presentations can be made in these languages in the course of the synod's work.

8) The *Propositiones* can also be drafted in these 4 languages. It is strongly recommended that each proposal be concise and treat one subject only. While giving due consideration to the teachings of the Church, which does not need to be repeated in the *Propositiones*, the synod fathers should be intent instead on proposing what might foster ecclesial communion and invigorate Christian witness in the Middle East for the good of the Catholic Church.

9) To promote communion among the members in a significant way, the synod fathers will be divided into three language-groups for discussion: Arabic, English and French. You will shortly receive the list of members for the groups, which are generally formed according to the choices you indicated on the participation forms, submitted to the General Secretariat. Changing groups can only be done for a serious reason and in accord with the General Secretary.

10) Electronic equipment will be employed during this assembly to facilitate the synod's work. The *Vademecum* provides specific directions for its

use. If necessary, the synod fathers should assist each other, particularly in the initial days of work, by showing those around them how to use the equipment. In any case, technicians, present in the synod hall, can be asked for assistance. It is important that each synod father occupy the seat which has been assigned to him according to precedence, since each seat corresponds to a given number in the electronic system for voting. Among other things, this electronic equipment will be used in taking attendance each day. During various elections and at the time of voting, each synod father will receive a small electronic device.

11) The participation of fraternal delegates, representing other Churches and ecclesial communities and now customary synodal practice, is particularly significant in this synodal assembly, considering their presence in the Holy Land and the Middle East. They will be able to address the assembly and participate in the small discussion groups. Christians everywhere, but particularly in the Land of Jesus, are called to proceed on the path which will lead to the unity of all those who believe in the Lord Jesus and who have received the Holy Spirit, so they can glorify Our Father, who is in heaven, in word and, above all, in deed.

12) In the course of the synod's work, we await three specially invited guests: *Rabbi David Rosen*, the Director of the Department for Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee and the Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding (Israel); and two Muslim representatives: *Muhammad al-Sammak*, Political Counsellor of the Grand Mufti of Lebanon, a *Sunnite*, and *Ayatollah Seyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Ahmadabadi*, Ph.D., Professor in the Law Department of Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, and Member of the Iranian Academy of Science, a *Shiite*.

We are grateful that these three invited guests accepted the Holy Father's invitation to take part in this synodal assembly, which is seen as a significant gesture of the Catholic Church's determination to continue the dialogue with the Jewish people, with whom we share a major part of the books of the Old Testament. The presence of two well-known Muslims also represents the Church's desire to proceed in the vital dialogue between Christians and the world of Islam for the good of not only the faithful belonging to these respective religions but all inhabitants of the Middle East and the entire world.

### ***Conclusion***

*"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation"* (Mk 16:15). These words were pronounced by the Risen Lord at Jerusalem, before

ascending into heaven and taking his place at the right hand of the Father (cf. *Mk 16:19*). The Master assured his disciples “*and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age*” (*Mt 28:20*). Therefore, the Lord accompanied the propagation of the Gospel, which began in the Holy Land and went out to the entire world: “*And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it*” (*Mk 16:20*). The proclamation of the Good News presupposes two essential aspects: communion and witness, which are connatural to Christianity, from the very beginning. Jesus Christ chose Twelve Apostles (cf. *Mt 10:1-4; Mk 13:13-19; Lk 6:13-16*), forming the nucleus of the Church. Subsequently, Jesus designated another 72 disciples, sending them “*two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come*” (*Lk 10:1*). Included among his disciples, whose number grew steadily, were “*also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities..., who provided for them out of their means*” (*Lk 8:2,3*). In their many vocations and the tasks entrusted to them, all were dedicated to living the ideal of the Christian life: “*Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul*” (*Acts 4:32*). At the same time, the Lord, before ascending into heaven, said to his disciples: “*you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth*” (*Acts 1:8*).

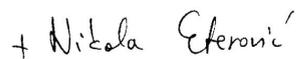
The Lord Jesus’ word was put into practice, as witnessed in the mission of the Apostles in the then-known world. This is seen in the shedding of their blood in martyrdom and in the foundation of the first Christian communities according to the Gospel ideal of “*one heart and soul*” (*Acts 4:32*). In our being in Rome, we are obliged to evoke with gratitude the example of Sts. Peter and Paul, who, leaving their homeland, carried the Gospel to the centre of the Roman Empire and concluded their preaching in martyrdom, the supreme expression of Christian witness. Since their time in Rome, the Christian community has flourished under its head, the Bishop of Rome, who, through God’s Providence, presides over the Church in charity. The 264<sup>th</sup> Successor of St. Peter the Apostle, Pope Benedict XVI, united to the apostolic patrimony which is St. Paul’s, extends a cordial welcome to his brother-bishops who have come from the Holy Land and are gathered for the Special Assembly: to provide him personally with information on the situation of the Catholic Church in the Middle East; to strengthen the bonds of Catholic communion, mindful of its ecumenical aspects; and to inspire Christians in their witness to Christ. Undoubtedly, under the wise guidance of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, these proposals will be realized. At the same time, the synod fathers of

the Middle East are very grateful to the Holy Father for his constant support, which is expressed in this synodal assembly and his untiring efforts in seeking a just and ongoing solution to the serious problems of the region, primarily that justice and peace will prevail. They are also grateful to the Supreme Pontiff for the Petrine charism which will assist them in achieving the purpose of this synodal assembly. Hopefully, after returning to the Middle East at the end of the synod, the Pastors of the Eastern Catholic Churches and all the Churches of the Latin tradition will be able to glorify God for a renewed sense of communion and inspiration in Christian witness in the places where they live and in the relations they have not only with Christians, but also with members of other religious denominations, primarily Jews and Muslims.

To bring this about, we invoke the intercession of all the saints of the region, in particular the numerous martyrs of the Holy Land, and, above all, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church. She will surely watch over the beloved Catholic Church in the land where she lived and cooperated in fulfilling the sublime mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption of humanity as a whole and each person. She tells us: “*Do whatever he tells you*” (Jn 2:5), she encourages us to put our trust, not in human strength and plans but in the promise: “*Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” (Lk 12:32).

Thank you for your patience in listening. May the grace of the Holy Spirit guide us in the work of the synod which lies before us.

Vatican City, 11 October 2010



✠ Nikola ETEROVIĆ  
Titular Archbishop of Cibale  
General Secretary

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