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Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue

Antiochian Orthodox Patriarch John X and Pope Leo XIV Discuss Middle East Christians and Orthodox-Catholic Relations

The future of Christian communities in Syria and Lebanon was a central concern during a Vatican meeting between Greek Orthodox Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East and Pope Leo XIV.

The two Church leaders met at the Apostolic Palace on September 14, addressing regional instability, interreligious coexistence, and the longstanding relationship between the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and the Catholic Church.

Patriarch John emphasized that Christians belong fully to Syrian society and should enjoy the same citizenship rights as all other Syrians. Rejecting divisions based on religious majorities and minorities, he advocated cooperation among communities as a foundation for peaceful coexistence and national unity.

Regarding Lebanon, the Patriarch expressed concern over attacks affecting the country's southern regions and their social consequences. He called for an end to the violence and encouraged dialogue and solidarity among Lebanon's religious and social communities.

Another important subject was the unresolved disappearance of Metropolitan Paul Yazigi and Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan Youhanna Ibrahim, who were abducted in Aleppo more than a decade ago. Both leaders acknowledged the continuing need for answers concerning their fate.

Patriarch John also highlighted the Vatican's potential contribution to peace and stability throughout the Middle

East.

Pope Leo reaffirmed the Holy See's commitment to supporting regional stability and recognized the historic significance of the Church of Antioch, particularly its contribution to dialogue between Eastern and Western Christianity and its engagement with Arab and Muslim communities.

The meeting also underscored the importance of continued cooperation between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

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Catholic and Orthodox Theologians Explore Christian Faith in a Multicultural World

Catholic and Orthodox scholars gathered in Thessaloniki, Greece, in September for the 18th Inter-Christian Symposium, continuing a longstanding tradition of theological dialogue between the two Churches.

The conference, jointly organized by the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality at the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome and the Faculty of Theology at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, examined the challenges of expressing and living the Christian faith in increasingly multicultural societies.

Under the theme “Christian Faith in a Multicultural Context, with Reference to the Franciscan Jubilee,” participants considered the rise of violence, religious fundamentalism, and hostility toward Christianity, including in societies historically shaped by Christian traditions. Discussions also addressed the renewed significance of martyrdom and the responsibility of Christian theology to

respond to contemporary social and cultural tensions.

In a message to participants, Pope Leo XIV highlighted the importance of reconsidering how Christians communicate their faith in a changing world. He observed that Christianity no longer serves as the sole cultural reference point in contemporary society, challenging Churches and believers to find meaningful ways of proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel.

Held every two years, alternating between Greece and Italy, the Inter-Christian Symposia represent one of the earlier academic initiatives dedicated to Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. They continue to provide opportunities for theological exchange, mutual understanding, and reflection on challenges shared by both Christian traditions.

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Ecumenism in the Holy Land

Cardinal Woelki Pledges Continued Support for Christians Facing Hardship in the Holy Land

Cardinal Rainer Woelki, Archbishop of Cologne, has reaffirmed the German Church's commitment to supporting Christian communities in the Holy Land following a solidarity visit that highlighted growing insecurity, economic hardship, and concerns about the future of younger generations.

Traveling through Jerusalem and several Palestinian towns and villages, Cardinal Woelki met clergy, families, students, and parish representatives to better understand their circumstances. His visits to schools, churches, youth centers, and charitable institutions highlighted the Latin Patriarchate's efforts to sustain Christian life despite mounting challenges.

In Taybeh, the Cardinal heard accounts of settler violence, damaged property, and families struggling to preserve their livelihoods. Particularly troubling was the testimony of a factory owner whose destroyed equipment reportedly left approximately forty families without their source of income.

Woelki emphasized that Christians must be able to remain in their homeland and build a future there. He rejected violence as a solution and expressed support for a just peace based on two states.

In Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, awarded Woelki and Nadim Aman the Gold Medal of the Holy Cross in recognition of their solidarity and assistance.

The Cardinal also met Anglican Archbishop Hosam Naoum and visited projects operated by the Latin Patriarchate.

Concluding his visit, Woelki pledged continued practical support from Cologne and promised to bring the experiences of local Christians to the attention of German political leaders and the wider public.

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Cardinal Pizzaballa Launches Jerusalem Research Forum to Promote Dialogue and Reconciliation

Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, has launched a new academic initiative aimed at exploring Jerusalem's spiritual significance and its potential to inspire peace, reconciliation, and coexistence.

Established in partnership with the University of Notre Dame's academic center in Jerusalem, Within Your Gates: The Forum for the Universal Vocation of Jerusalem brings together scholars and practitioners from different religious traditions, academic disciplines, and communities.

The initiative seeks to address the complex realities facing Jerusalem and its residents while developing research that may contribute to broader discussions about conflict, reconciliation, and human dignity.

Its academic program will examine subjects ranging from Jerusalem's theological importance and universal mission to the language of conflict and the possibilities for meaningful action under difficult social and political circumstances.

Cardinal Pizzaballa, who chairs the Forum's Board of

Promoters, has emphasized that Jerusalem's religious and cultural complexity should not prevent it from becoming a source of hope for humanity.

"The mission of earthly Jerusalem is to become the image and mirror of heavenly Jerusalem," he said, describing the city as a sign of the reconciliation and peace intended for the entire human family.

Led by Dr. Daniel Schwake, the Forum builds on more than three years of collaboration with Notre Dame and other academic partners.

Through interdisciplinary research and cooperation across religious and cultural boundaries, the initiative aims to connect Jerusalem's spiritual heritage with practical efforts toward a more peaceful and inclusive future for its inhabitants.

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Eastern Orthodox Churches

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Calls for a Spiritual and Ethical Response to the Environmental Crisis

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has urged Christians and the wider international community to recognize environmental protection as a moral and spiritual responsibility, warning that humanity's prevailing attitudes toward nature threaten the planet's future.

In his message marking the beginning of the Orthodox ecclesiastical year on September 1, which also serves as the Day of Prayer for the Protection of the Natural Environment, the Patriarch emphasized that ecological destruction cannot be addressed through technological or economic measures alone.

He described the environmental crisis as fundamentally connected to humanity's misuse of freedom, distorted values, and estrangement from God. Consumerism, excessive exploitation of natural resources, and the pursuit of unlimited economic growth, he argued, reflect a deeper spiritual disorder.

Patriarch Bartholomew called for a profound reconsideration of how societies understand progress, stressing that governments, religious communities, scientists, educators, and individuals all share responsibility for protecting creation.

Drawing on Orthodox theology, he highlighted the importance of the Church's Eucharistic and ascetic traditions, which encourage gratitude, moderation, and respect for the natural world as God's creation.

He also warned against assuming that the Earth can indefinitely absorb the consequences of human activity or recover automatically from environmental damage.

The Patriarch identified solidarity as an essential principle for addressing the crisis, connecting ecological responsibility with human dignity, dialogue, and cooperation across national and cultural boundaries.

His message reaffirmed the Ecumenical Patriarchate's longstanding commitment to environmental stewardship, presenting care for creation as an inseparable part of Christian faith and a responsibility shared by all humanity.

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Orthodox Church in America Establishes New Headquarters and Metropolitan's Residence in Washington, DC

The Orthodox Church in America (OCA) has purchased a property in Washington, DC, bringing its central administration and the residence of Metropolitan Tikhon into close proximity with Saint Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral, the Church's Primatial Cathedral.

The acquisition completes a relocation process that began with the departure from the former Chancery in Oyster Bay Cove, New York. Since 2022, the Church's administrative offices have operated from temporary premises in Springfield, Virginia.

The new location is expected to strengthen coordination between the Metropolitan's pastoral and liturgical

responsibilities and the work of the Church's central administration. Its position in the nation's capital will also facilitate meetings with visiting clergy, Church representatives, and civic and diplomatic institutions.

The purchase was funded through a substantial donation from the late Joseph and Theresa Domanick, two members of the Orthodox Church in America. Both the Holy Synod of Bishops and the Metropolitan Council unanimously supported the acquisition.

Metropolitan Tikhon expressed gratitude for the couple's generosity and acknowledged the efforts of Church leaders and administrators involved in securing the property.

OCA Chancellor Archpriest Alessandro Margheritino described the move as an important institutional development, bringing the Church's administrative, pastoral, and liturgical activities together in one location.

Preparations are underway to furnish the residence and transfer remaining materials from the previous offices, completing a significant transition in the OCA's administrative life.

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Oriental Orthodox Churches

Oriental Orthodox Churches Appoint New SCOOCh President and Strengthen Inter-Church Cooperation

The Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches (SCOOCh) has welcomed Archbishop Mor Titus Yeldho of the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syriac Orthodox Church as its new president, succeeding Bishop David of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of New York and New England.

The leadership transition took place during a September gathering at St. Mary and Pope St. Kyrillos VI Monastery and the Tivaki Ethouab Retreat Center, hosted by Bishop David.

Representatives of the Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, and Eritrean Orthodox Churches attended, reflecting the Conference's commitment to cooperation among Oriental Orthodox communities in North America.

Discussions addressed ongoing theological dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, the work of Orthodox Christian Campus Ministries, and opportunities to expand regional cooperation through shared religious and cultural activities.

The Conference also reviewed preparations for upcoming concelebrated liturgies in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, alongside an annual Pan-Orthodox Christmas concert.

A special gathering will honor Bishop Makarios of the Coptic Orthodox Church for his longstanding service and recent academic and humanitarian recognition. Prayers

for peace and reconciliation within the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church will also form part of the occasion.

Following the meeting, participating hierarchs visited the monastery, joined in evening prayers incorporating chants from several Oriental Orthodox traditions, and met members of the monastic community.

The Conference expressed appreciation for Bishop David's years of leadership while welcoming Archbishop Titus to his new responsibilities, reaffirming its commitment to unity, shared ministry, and closer relations among the Churches.

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Armenian Catholicos Karekin II Meets U.S. Delegation Ahead of Yerevan Prayer Breakfast

Catholicos Karekin II, head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, welcomed a delegation of American public figures to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin on September 29, ahead of the Prayer Breakfast scheduled to take place in Yerevan in early October.

The visitors included former U.S. Congressman Randy Hultgren, Wes Anderson, co-organizer of the U.S. National Prayer Breakfast, and Dan Alexander, CEO of Spryng Energy. They were accompanied by Ashot Tunyan, a benefactor of the Mother See.

During their visit, the American guests learned about the history, spiritual mission, and cultural significance of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Discussions highlighted the Church's longstanding contribution to preserving Armenian national identity,

religious traditions, and spiritual heritage. Participants also reflected on the importance of Christian faith and moral values in shaping both individual lives and society.

Particular attention was given to religious education and the involvement of younger generations in Church life. The participants emphasized that encouraging young people to engage with their Christian heritage can help strengthen the moral foundations of society and contribute to a more peaceful future.

The meeting took place ahead of the Yerevan Prayer Breakfast on October 2–3, which brought the American visitors to Armenia and provided an opportunity for dialogue with the leadership of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

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Eastern Catholic Churches

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Establishes Annual Teenagers' Day to Support Young People

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), has introduced an annual Teenagers' Day, emphasizing the Church's responsibility to support young people in their spiritual and personal development.

The observance will take place each September 17, coinciding with the feast of the Holy Martyr Sophia and her daughters Faith, Hope, and Love.

In the decree establishing the celebration, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav described adolescence as a formative period marked by questions of identity, vocation, faith, and personal responsibility. He stressed that teenagers should be recognized not merely as the Church's future, but as active members of its community today.

The initiative carries particular significance amid the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has exposed many young people to displacement, separation from loved ones, uncertainty, and loss. The Church hopes to provide environments where teenagers can find spiritual guidance, security, friendship, and encouragement.

Parishes, families, clergy, educators, and youth organizations are encouraged to mark the occasion through prayer, catechesis, educational activities, and community gatherings.

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav also urged parents to accompany their children with patience and understanding,

while encouraging teenagers to deepen their relationship with Christ and discover their individual calling.

The UGCC's Patriarchal Commission for Youth Affairs will coordinate preparations with other Church bodies.

The initiative follows a decision of the UGCC Synod of Bishops, which met in Zarvanytsia in July 2026.

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Largest Byzantine Catholic Pilgrimage in the U.S. Draws Thousands to Pennsylvania

Thousands of Byzantine Catholics gathered at Mount St. Macrina in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, over Labor Day weekend for the 92nd annual pilgrimage honoring Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the largest Byzantine Catholic pilgrimage in the United States.

Held annually since 1934, the pilgrimage remains a significant expression of faith and devotion to the Mother of God within the Byzantine Catholic tradition. This year's gathering centered on the theme "Theotokos: Beacon of Hope," inviting participants to reflect on the Virgin Mary as a source of spiritual encouragement.

Bishop Robert Pipta of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Parma joined pilgrims, clergy, and bishops from across the Church for the celebrations.

The pilgrimage began with a solemn procession carrying the Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help to the Shrine Altar. Archbishop William Skurla of Pittsburgh then celebrated the Divine Liturgy, concelebrated by Bishop Artur Bubnevych of Phoenix and Bishop Nil Lushchak, Auxiliary Bishop of Mukachevo.

Following the opening liturgy, Sister Susan Sisko, OSBM, welcomed the assembled faithful.

Throughout the weekend, pilgrims participated in communal prayer, received the sacraments, and shared opportunities for spiritual renewal and fellowship.

Now in its ninth decade, the annual gathering continues to bring Byzantine Catholics together from across the country, preserving a longstanding tradition of Marian devotion, liturgical worship, and community life.

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