

41 Propositions of Mideast Synod

Addresses Identity of Christians, Migration, Dialogue

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 24, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is the unofficial Vatican translation of the 41 propositions of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops on the theme "The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness."

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INTRODUCTION

Propositio 1

Documentation Presented to the Supreme Pontiff

The synod fathers present to the Supreme Pontiff for his consideration the documentation resulting from the Special Assembly concerning «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)». This documentation includes: the "Lineamenta", the "Instrumentum laboris", the "ante" and "post disceptationem" presentations, the texts of the interventions, both those presented in the synod hall and those "in scriptis", and especially some specific recommendations to which the synod fathers have given a certain importance.

The synod fathers humbly ask the Holy Father to consider the possibility of issuing a document on the Communion and Witness of the Church in Middle East.

Propositio 2

The Word of God

The Word of God is the soul and foundation of the Christian life and of all pastoral work; we hope that every family would own a Bible.

The synod fathers encourage daily reading of and meditation on the Word of God, especially "lectio divina", and the creation of a website about the Bible, including Catholic explanations and commentaries which are easily understood by the faithful. We would also like to see the preparation of an introductory booklet to the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, which could offer a simple way to help people read the Bible.

They also encourage eparchies / dioceses (throughout the document, the word "diocese" also applies to an "eparchy", the equivalent term in Eastern terminology) and parishes to introduce and promote Bible studies in which the Word of God is meditated upon and explained in such a way as to answer the questions the people have, and help them to become more familiar with the Scriptures, deepening their spirituality and apostolic and missionary commitment.

Propositio 3

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A Biblical Pastoral Programme

The synod fathers urgently recommend that work be undertaken to place the two Testaments of Holy Scripture at the centre of our Christian life by encouraging the faithful to proclaim them, read them, meditate on them, interpret them in the light of Christ and celebrate them liturgically, as did the first Christian communities.

We propose that a Year of the Bible be proclaimed after due preparation and that it be followed by an annual Week of the Bible.

I. THE CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Propositio 4

Identity of the Eastern Catholic Churches

Amidst a world marked by division and extreme positions, we are called to live communion in the Church staying open to everyone, without succumbing to confessionalism. We will be able to do this if we remain faithful to our rich historical, liturgical, patristic and spiritual heritage as well as the teaching of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and to the norms and structures of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, the Code of Canon Law and the particular laws of the Churches.

Propositio 5

Sharing in the Cross

Whilst denouncing persecution and violence like everyone else, the Christian remembers that being Christian means sharing the cross of Christ. The disciple is not greater than the Master (cf Mt 10:24). He recalls that blessed are those who are persecuted for justice sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven (cf Mt 5:10).

However, persecution must raise the awareness of Christians worldwide of the need for greater solidarity. It must also arouse in us the commitment to support and insist on international law and respect for all people and all peoples.

The attention of the whole world should be focused on the tragic situation of certain Christian communities of the Middle East which suffer all manner of trials sometimes even to the point of martyrdom.

National and international bodies should also be called upon to make a special effort to bring an end to this situation of tension by re-establishing justice and peace.

Propositio 6

The Land

Given that attachment to the land of one's birth is an essential element of the identity both of individuals and of peoples, as well as an environment of freedom, we exhort our faithful and our Church communities not to give in to the temptation to sell off their real estate. In difficult economic circumstances, we propose to help Christians retain possession of their lands or to acquire new ones through the creation of projects responsible for making them prosper, allowing the owners to stay where they are with dignity. This effort must be accompanied by an in-depth examination of the meaning of the Christian presence and vocation in the Middle East.

Propositio 7

Managing Goods

For the sake of transparency, it is necessary to devise an auditing system for the Church's financial affairs, which distinguishes clearly what belongs to the Church and what belongs personally to those in service of the Church. At the same time, it is necessary to maintain the properties and goods of the Church and her institutions.

Propositio 8

Encouragement to Make Pilgrimages

The East is the land of biblical Revelation. Very early on, the region became a place of pilgrimage in the footsteps of Abraham in Iraq, of Moses in Egypt and in Sinai, of Jesus in the Holy Land (Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon) and of St. Paul and the Churches mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles and the book of Revelation (Syria, Cyprus, and Turkey).

Pilgrimage to the Holy Places has been encouraged by the Supreme Pontiffs. Going back to the place of origins is an opportunity for a profound catechesis, enabling the pilgrim to discover the riches of the Eastern Churches and to meet and encourage the local Christian communities, the living stones of the Church.

Propositio 9

Peace

Our Churches commit themselves to pray and to work for justice and peace in the Middle East and call for a "purification of memory", choosing the language of peace and hope and avoiding that of fear and violence. They call upon the civil authorities to implement the resolutions of the United Nations concerning the region, particularly the return of refugees and the status of Jerusalem and the Holy Places.

Propositio 10

Consolidating the presence of Christians

Our Churches must create an office or a commission entrusted with the study of the phenomenon of migration and of the factors behind it so as to find ways of stopping it. They are to do all that is possible to boost the presence of Christians in their countries, and to do this especially through development projects to limit the phenomenon of migration.

Propositio 11

Pastoral practice for emigration

The presence of numerous Eastern Christians in all the continents challenges the Church to devise an appropriate pastoral programme in light of emigration:

1. the Eastern bishops are to visit the seminaries of the Middle East to present the situation and the needs of their eparchies;
2. the formation of seminarians with a missionary spirit, open to different cultures;
3. the preparation and accompaniment of priests missioned outside the patriarchal territory;
4. the promotion of vocations work in the communities outside of the patriarchal territory; and
5. the sending of priests and the establishment of their own eparchies wherever the pastoral needs require them according to the canonical norms.

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Propositio 12 Emigration and Solidarity

1. To awaken and reinforce a sense of solidarity and of sharing with the country of origin, by contributing to pastoral projects and in cultural, educational, economic and social development;
2. to educate Christians who have emigrated to remain faithful to the tradition of their origins;
3. to strengthen bonds of communion between emigrants and the Churches in their native countries.

Propositio 13 Emigration - Formation

We urge Churches in the countries which receive immigrants to be familiar with and to respect Eastern theology, traditions and patrimonies, and that this be reflected in their norms, and sacramental and administrative practices. This will help collaboration with Eastern Churches present in those countries, and in the formation and pastoral care of their faithful.

Propositio 14 Immigration

We are seriously concerned about the condition of immigrant workers in the Middle East, both Christians and non-Christians, especially women. Many of them find themselves in situations that are difficult or that even undermine their dignity.

We call on patriarchal synods and episcopal conferences, Catholic charitable institutions, especially Caritas, political leaders, and all people of good will, to do everything in their power to ensure the respect of immigrants' fundamental rights as recognised by international law, regardless of the nationality or religion of the immigrants in question, and to offer them legal and human assistance. Our Churches should seek to provide the spiritual help they need as a sign of Christian hospitality and of ecclesial communion.

Propositio 15 Welcoming Churches

To better welcome and guide immigrants to the Middle East, the Churches from which they come are asked to maintain regular contact with the Churches which welcome them by assisting them to set up the structures they need, i.e. parishes, schools, meeting places, etc.

II. ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

A. Communion Within the Church (ad intra)

Propositio 16 Communion within the Catholic Church

"The Holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government and who, combining together into various groups which are held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or Rites. Between these there exists an admirable bond of union, such that the variety within the Church in no way harms its unity; rather it manifests it" ((*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 2). To strengthen this communion, we

recommend:

1. the creation of a commission of cooperation between the Catholic hierarchs of the Middle East, which will be responsible for the promotion of a common pastoral strategy, better understanding of one another's traditions, inter-ritual institutions and joint charitable organizations;
2. the organisation of regular meetings between Catholic hierarchies of the Middle East;
3. the sharing of material resources between rich and poor dioceses;
4. the foundation of a priestly association, Fidei Donum, for the mutual assistance of eparchies and Churches.

Propositio 17

New Ecclesial Movements

A number of the synod fathers recognize that the new ecclesial movements of the Western tradition, increasingly present in the Churches of the Middle East, are a gift of the Spirit to the whole Church. To help the charism of these movements to build up the Church, it behoves their members to live out their own charism taking into full account the culture, history, liturgy, and spirituality of the local Church. To make this happen, these movements are asked without delay to start working in union with the bishop of the place and to follow his pastoral instructions. It would be desirable for the Catholic hierarchy of each country of the Middle East to work out a common pastoral position on the movements in question, their integration and pastoral activity.

Propositio 18

The Jurisdiction of Patriarchs

Outside of the patriarchal territory, in order to maintain the communion of the Eastern faithful with their patriarchal Churches and to provide them with appropriate pastoral service, it is desirable to study the question of extending the jurisdiction of the Eastern Patriarchs to cover members of their Churches wherever they live throughout the world, with a view to taking appropriate measures.

Propositio 19

The Situation of the Catholic Faithful in the Gulf Countries

In a spirit of communion and for the good of the faithful, it would be desirable to form a commission bringing together the representatives of the relevant dicasteries, the apostolic vicars of the region and the representatives of the sui iuris Churches concerned. This commission would be responsible for studying the situation of the Catholic faithful in the countries of the Gulf, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and suggest solutions to the Holy See which it deems helpful for the promotion of pastoral action.

Propositio 20

Vocations

Vocations work supposes:

- prayers for vocations in the family, in the parish, etc.;
- promoting the Christian life in families so as to make possible the blossoming of vocations;
- the creation of vocations committees in each diocese involving priests, consecrated men and women and lay

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people to organize meetings for young people so as to present to them the various vocations in the Church and clarify their discernments;

- devise a plan of spiritual formation for young people involved in the ecclesial movements;
- making parishes and schools more aware of the different kinds of vocations, priestly, consecrated and lay;
- maintaining or setting up minor seminaries where feasible;
- calling on priests and consecrated men and women to witness by the coherence of what they say and do in their lives;
- to intensify an ecclesial communion between priests, which requires an openness to the different pastoral needs of dioceses. This can help remedy the low number of priests in some dioceses; and
- to attract young people to consecrated life by the example of a deep, radiant, happy spiritual life.

Propositio 21

The Arabic Language

The experience of the synod for the Middle East has highlighted the importance of the Arabic language, above all that it has contributed to the development of the theological and spiritual thought of the universal Church, and more precisely the patrimony of Arabic Christian literature.

The proposal was made to make greater use of the Arabic language in the major institutions of the Holy See and their official meetings, so that Christians of Arab culture have access to information from the Holy See in their mother tongue.

B. Communion Among the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful

Propositio 22

The Clergy

To make sure the clergy have a reasonable and dignified standard of living, especially when they are advanced in years and not in active service, it is necessary:

1. to put in place a system of solidarity that ensures an equal salary for all priests who are active or inactive, as set out in the canonical norms;
2. to institute a system of social protection according to the conditions of each country that should be extended to men and women religious, as well as to the wives of married priests and to their children who are minors.

Propositio 23

Married Priests

Clerical celibacy has always and everywhere been respected and valued in the Catholic Churches, in the East as in the West. Nonetheless, with a view to the pastoral service of our faithful, wherever they are to be found, and to respect the traditions of the Eastern Churches, it would be desirable to study the possibility of having married priests outside the patriarchal territory.

Proposito 24

The Laity

By Baptism, lay people participate in the triple function of Christ's priesthood, becoming prophets, kings and priests. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council recognized the role and mission of the laity in its decree on the lay apostolate (*Apostolicam actuositatem*). Pope John Paul II convoked a synod on the laity and published the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* in which he expressed esteem for "the very important apostolic collaboration which the lay faithful, men and women, bring to the life of the Church through their charisms and all their activity in the cause of evangelization, the sanctification and the Christian animation of the temporal realm" (no. 23).

The synod fathers commit themselves in the same way, especially since lay people in the East have always played a role in the life of the Church. The fathers want lay people to share in a greater degree of responsibility in the Church, encouraging them to be apostles in their workplace and to witness to Christ in the world in which they live.

Propositio 25

Formation of seminarians

As a way of developing our unity in diversity, seminarians are to be formed in the seminaries of their respective Churches as well as to receive their theological formation in a joint Catholic faculty. In certain places and for pastoral and administrative reasons, however, it may be helpful to have a single seminary for different Churches.

Propositio 26

The Consecrated Life

At the heart of the Church is consecrated, apostolic, monastic and contemplative life. The synod fathers show deep gratitude to consecrated men and women for their evangelical witness. They remember especially the martyrs of yesteryear and the present day. They ask that the consecrated life, adequately renewed, be welcomed, encouraged, and integrated ever more closely into the life and mission of the Church in the Middle East.

Our Churches recognize the importance of the place of consecrated women and women religious in society, by virtue of their witness of faith, their disinterested service and their precious contribution to "the dialogue of life".

Propositio 27

Women and Children

Our Churches are to take the appropriate means to foster and reinforce the respect, dignity, role and rights of women. The competent and generous devotion of women at the service of life, the family, education and healthcare need to be highly appreciated. Our Churches are to ensure that they are integrated and take a full part in pastoral activities by listening carefully to them. Children are the crown of marriage and a special gift for the world, the Catholic Church and Catholic parents have always shown a special interest for the health and education of all their children. Every effort must be made to safeguard and promote the respect of their natural human rights from the moment of conception, and to provide them with healthcare and Christian education.

C. Communion With the Churches and Ecclesial Communities: Ecumenism (ad extra)

Propositio 28

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Ecumenism

Unity between the disciples of Christ in the Middle East is above all the work of the Spirit. It is to be sought through a conversion of the heart, in a spirit of prayer, respect, perseverance and love, far removed from any trace of the mistrust, fear and prejudice which constitute such obstacles to unity.

We wish to see our Churches renew their ecumenical commitment through practical initiatives:

- by supporting the Council of the Churches of the Middle East;
- by providing our parishes, schools and seminaries with formation in an ecumenical spirit, underlining the achievements of the ecumenical movement;
- by implementing any pastoral agreements which may have been made;
- by organising meetings of the faithful and pastors for prayer, meditation on the Word of God and collaboration in all areas;
- by adopting a standard Arabic translation of the Our Father and the Nicene Creed; and
- by working for a common date for the celebrations of Christmas and Easter.

The Eastern Catholic Churches, living in communion with the Church of Rome and in fidelity to their Eastern traditions, have a vital ecumenical role to play.

The synod fathers urge these Churches to inaugurate an ecumenical dialogue at the local level. They recommend also that the Eastern Catholic Churches take part as much as possible in international commissions for dialogue.

Propositio 29

Feast of Martyrs

To inaugurate an annual feast in common for all the martyrs of the Churches of the Middle East and to request each Eastern Church to draw up a list of its own martyrs, witnesses of the faith.

III. CHRISTIAN WITNESS

WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION AND LOVE

A. Christian Formation

Propositio 30

Formation

To help adults to grow in a living faith, our Churches of the Middle East propose the creation of catechetical centres where they are lacking. On-going formation and collaboration between the different Churches at the level of the laity, seminaries and universities are indispensable. All these centres should be open to all the Churches. Catechists in particular must be properly prepared through a suitable formation which takes into account current problems and challenges.

All the baptised are to be ready to give an account of their faith in Jesus Christ and are to be concerned about putting forward the Gospel without timidity but also without giving offence. Formation is to address the celebration of the mysteries, knowing, living and acting. Homilies are to be well prepared, based on the Word

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of God and linked to real life. It is important that formation includes learning about modern technology and communication science. Lay people are to witness firmly to Christ in society. The foundations which will enable them to become such witnesses are in Catholic schools which have always been recognised as the most important means of religious education for Catholics and for a social formation which leads to mutual understanding of all members of society.

At the university level, we encourage the foundation of an association of institutions of higher education with particular attention to the social doctrine of the Church.

Propositio 31 Pastoral Workers

In order to form leaders and pastoral workers in various areas, we recommend the foundation of inter-ecclesial formation centres in each country which employ the new technology of audiovisual communications.

The resources they produce should be available on-line and on DVD to make them as cheaply and widely available as possible.

Propositio 32 Catholic schools and Educational Institutions

The synod fathers encourage Catholic schools and educational institutions to continue to be faithful to their mission of educating new generations in Christ's spirit, in human and Gospel values, and consolidating a culture of openness, conviviality, care and concern for the poor and for those who suffer from disability. In spite of the difficulties, the fathers invite them to maintain the educational mission of the Church and to further the development of young people who are the future of our societies. Given how important the role of these institutions is for the common good, we remind those in positions of responsibility to offer them their support.

Propositio 33 Media

The synod fathers have noted the pivotal importance of the new means of communication for Christian formation in the Middle East, as well as for the proclamation of the faith. They are communication networks which hold out the promise of special opportunities for the spreading of the Church's teaching.

Concretely, the synod fathers advocate the aid and maintenance of the existing structures in this area, such as "Télé-lumière-Noursat," "la Voix de la Charité" and others, so as to fulfil the objectives for which they have been established in an ecclesial spirit. Some synod fathers have even wanted to support the creation of a media city for Noursat both regionally and internationally.

The synod fathers heartily recommend to those in charge of audiovisual structures in our Churches:

- the creation of a team with technical and theological expertise;
- the establishment of programmes of biblical formation for pastoral purposes; and
- the use of subtitles in Turkish and Farsi for Christians in Turkey and Iran.

Propositio 34 Mission

Heirs of an apostolic spirit which has taken the Good News to distant lands, our Eastern Catholic Churches are asked to renew their missionary spirit in prayer, through formation and through being sent on mission. The urgency of the mission both ad intra and ad extra is an incentive for the Churches.

Propositio 35

The Family

The family, the basic unit of society and the "domestic Church," needs to be accompanied and supported through its problems and difficulties, especially in the urban environment. In order to attain this objective, we need to make better provisions in centres for marriage preparation, counselling and guidance centres, spiritual and human guidance of young families, and their on-going pastoral support, above all those facing difficult situations (emotional difficulties, disability, drugs etc.). Child bearing and the good education of children should be encouraged. The practice of home visiting by pastors should be revived.

Propositio 36

Youth

"Youth are the future of the Church", said Pope John Paul II. His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI continues to encourage youth: "Despite these difficulties, do not let yourselves be discouraged, and do not give up on your dreams! Instead, cultivate all the more your heart's great desire for fellowship, justice and peace. The future is in the hands of those who know how to seek and find sound reasons for life and hope" ("Message for the XXV World Youth Day", 7, 28 March 2010). Moreover, he appeals to them to be missionaries and witnesses in their societies and in their way of life. He calls them to deepen their faith and grow in their knowledge of Jesus Christ, their Ideal and Model, so as to participate with him in the salvation of the world.

The synod fathers commit themselves:

- to listen to them so as to respond to their questioning and their needs;
- to ensure their necessary spiritual and theological formation, suitable to assist them in their work;
- to build with them bridges of dialogue so as to bring down the walls of division and separation in societies; and
- to put to use their creativity and their know-how so they can serve Christ, their peers and the society in which they live.

Propositio 37

A New Evangelisation

Our Churches are called upon to adopt the mentality of a New Evangelisation by taking into consideration the cultural and social context in which people live, work and act today. This demands a profound conversion and renewal in light of the Word of God and the sacraments, especially reconciliation and the Eucharist.

Propositio 38

Social Doctrine

The synod fathers urgently recommend the diffusion of the social doctrine of the Church, which is oftentimes lacking. It is an integral part of faith formation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church are important resources in this area.

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The synod fathers urge the bishops' conference of each country to form an episcopal commission to prepare and propagate the Church's social discourse, taking as its starting point the teaching of the Church, the various positions adopted by the Holy See regarding current affairs and the actual circumstances facing each country.

The synod fathers urgently recommend that the Eastern Churches take care of the elderly, of immigrants and refugees with their many different social needs and most especially of the disabled, setting up whatever structures are needed to meet their needs and facilitating their integration in society.

In fidelity to God the Creator Christians are to have at heart the protection of nature and the environment they call upon government and all men of women of good will to unite their efforts to safeguard creation.

B. The Liturgy

Propositio 39

Liturgy

The biblical and theological wealth of the Eastern liturgies is at the spiritual service of the universal Church. Nonetheless, it would be useful and important to renew the liturgical texts and celebrations, where necessary, so as to answer better the needs and expectations of the faithful. This renewal must be based on an ever deeper knowledge of tradition and be adapted to contemporary language and categories.

C. Interreligious Dialogue

Propositio 40

Interreligious dialogue

Christians in the Middle East are called upon to pursue dialogue with the followers of other religions, bringing hearts and minds closer together. For this to happen, they, along with their partners, are invited to work to fortify interreligious dialogue, to strive for the purification of memory through the forgiveness for the events of the past, and to seek a better future together.

In their daily lives, they are to endeavour to accept one another in spite of their differences, working to build a new society in which fanaticism and extremism have no place.

The synod fathers would like to see drawn up a formation plan which helps people to be more open, for use in teaching establishments as well as in seminaries and novitiates. This will help build a culture of dialogue based on human and religious solidarity.

Propositio 41

Judaism

Judaism has a central place in the Declaration of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Nostra aetate*. Initiatives of dialogue and cooperation with Jews are to be encouraged so as to foster human and religious values, freedom, justice, peace and fraternity. Reading the Old Testament and getting to know Jewish traditions lead to a better understanding of the Jewish religion. We reject anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, while distinguishing between religion and politics.

Propositio 42

Islam

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The Declaration of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Nostra aetate*, alongside the pastoral letters of the Eastern Catholic Patriarchs, serves as the basis for the Catholic Church's relations with Muslims. As Pope Benedict XVI has said: "Interreligious and intercultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is in fact a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends" (Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting with representatives of Muslim Communities", Cologne, 20 August 2005).

In the Middle East, Christians share a common life and a common destiny with Muslims. Together they build up society. It is important to promote the notion of citizenship, the dignity of the human person, equal rights and duties and religious freedom, including both freedom of worship and freedom of conscience.

Christians in the Middle East are called to pursue a fruitful dialogue of life with Muslims. They are to take care to show an attitude of esteem and love, leaving aside every negative prejudice. Together, Christians and Muslims, they are called upon to discover their respective religious values. They are to offer the world an image of a positive encounter and a fruitful collaboration between believers of the two religions, combating together every sort of fundamentalism and violence in the name of religion.

Conclusion

Propositio 43

Follow-up on the Synod

The Churches which have taken part in the Synod are called upon to make sure that it is properly followed up by working together with the Council of the Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East and the official structures of the relevant Churches, with a greater involvement of priests and lay and religious experts.

Propositio 44

The Virgin Mary

Holy Mary, the Virgin of Nazareth, who shows us how to listen to the Word of God, is the Blessed Daughter of our land. From the very beginning of Christian history, it was the theological reflection of our Eastern Churches which led to the decisive and glorious definition of Mary as "Theotokos", Mother of God.

In the liturgies of all our Churches, the Virgin Mary has a place of honour and is the object of the special love of all the People of God.

This Daughter of our land, whom all peoples call blessed, is justifiably invoked as Mother of the Church, especially since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

Aware of the special bonds which, by God's design, unite us to the Mother of Jesus, we propose that our Churches come together and jointly entrust the entire Middle East to the protection of the Virgin Mary.

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