

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN LAITY

Board of Directors Meeting -- May 5, 1995 -- Long Beach, California

Holy Land Update by Alice and Andrew Kopan

A. PILGRIMAGE

The Pilgrimage to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Holy Land is now history. Considerable visibility was given to it as an OCL function, as witnessed by the coverage given to it (with full page of pictures), in the Greek ethnic press as well as by the extensive coverage provided in our own publication, The FORUM.

Based on feedback received, most of the 34 participants were pleased with the way the pilgrimage was handled and executed. Several, considered it a quality event. As a result, a number of participants have since become members of OCL. The question has been raised whether OCL is going to repeat the pilgrimage in the future. Several inquiries have been received.

A by-product of the pilgrimage is that it provided OCL with another action-oriented event as well as credibility and first-hand evidence on the crisis in the Holy Land. This has made OCL's pronouncements with reference to conditions in the Holy Land more tenable.

B. HOLY LAND RESOLUTION

The Resolution on the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, adopted at the Board of Directors meeting in St. Petersburg, Florida on January 29, 1995, was completed on February 15th and mailed to the President's office for processing. Unfortunately, for some inexplicable reason the Resolution was not distributed to the appropriate parties (patriarchs of Jerusalem, Constantinople, Archbishop Iakovos, Metropolitan Philip, etc), until the first week of April, and then, by the vice-president's office (Matsoukas), with no formal cover letter. It is our considered opinion that this cavalier treatment of the Resolution has seriously undermined its urgency.

The Resolution, itself, along with an accompanied article on conditions in the Holy Land, appeared in The FORUM as well as several Greek ethnic newspapers. Copies were sent with the above.

C. STATUS OF BISHOP NIKIPHOROS

The status of Bishop Nikiphoros (our able guide on the pilgrimage), remains the same. His excommunication by the Patriarch of Jerusalem on October 31, 1994 (shortly after our departure with the pilgrimage), has reduced him to the role of a layperson. To his credit, as a good churchman, the Bishop has been self-deprecating, insisting that emphasis with reference to our protests should be placed placed not on his defrockment but upon the irregularities at the Patriarchate which threaten its very existence, irregularities which he protested and for which he has been removed from the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre.

Currently, Bishop Nikiphoros has sued the Patriarch for slander with reference to remarks made by the Patriarch to the Greek and Cypriot press. The Patriarch denies that he made such remarks (despite evidence to the contrary), and claims that the civil courts of Israel have no jurisdiction in the matter. Yet, contrary to his position, the Patriarch is using the same civil courts to get Nikiphoros evicted from his apartment at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre complex.

His All Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople has cautioned us by letter of the difficulty of intervening in the affairs of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and in defense of Bishop Nikiphoros, but indicated that he would use his good office when he formally visits the Patriarch of Jerusalem in May.

Bishop Nikiphoros had expressed a desire to come to America to speak on the irregularities at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. While on the pilgrimage, several informal meetings were held with him by OCL board members concerning this possibility. What will be OCL's role? To what extent should OCL get involved, considering that he is now excommunicated? Is OCL willing to take a position on this matter?