



Aid to the  
Church in Need

ACN AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND

ACN News Release 19.05.2025, by Maria Lozano

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## Meeting with Pope Leo XIV: A new hope for the Eastern Churches

In a historic meeting, Pope Leo XIV received representatives from the Eastern Catholic Churches in an audience, during the pilgrimage of *sui iuris* Churches, as part of the Jubilee of Hope. The Pope made a strong, and [deeply spiritual speech](#) to the gathered Church leaders, which was received as a spark of hope amidst different realities marked by persecution, exile and war.

Many of these communities are supported in their countries of origin and in their respective diasporas by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN). The pontifical foundation spoke to six Eastern rite project partners from different regions, to get their impressions, and they all agree that “the Pope didn’t only address us, he gave us a mission”.

“He made us feel proud,” said Syriac Catholic Archbishop Nathanael Wadih Semaan of Adiabene, northern Iraq, after the meeting. “Sometimes we think that we have nothing to offer, that we are few in numbers, and dwindling, but he reminded us that we have a rich liturgy, and a deep spirituality. He told us we should not only preserve it like a treasure but also share it with the world. That was very moving.”

These words led to a renewed sense of mission in what is often a difficult context. “The Pope ignited a new flame in our hearts. He reminded us that yes, we do have something that we can share with the world, with responsibility and joy,” Archbishop Nizar said.

The Pope insisted that Eastern Christians should not abandon their ancestral lands. “He told us: ‘You are the light of the world’. We know that resurrection, and light, come after suffering. In the Middle East we are experiencing a cross, but it will be followed by light,” the archbishop added. “Wherever we are based – in France, Germany, America or Australia – our communities are a shining light. We are witnesses of Christ in our daily lives. We have to take that light with us,” he stressed.

### Hope and strength to begin again

Bishop Boutros Marayati, the Armenian Catholic prelate of Aleppo, Syria, shared with ACN how the Holy Father’s words led to an inner renewal.

“We left the meeting full of hope and spiritual joy. The Pope is aware of what our Churches in the East are going through. He is close to us. He asks that we pray for him, as he prays for us. In Pope Leo, God gave us a new hope. We walk together firmly, without fear.”

ACN also spoke to the auxiliary bishop of the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate of Alexandria, Anba Hani Nassif Wasef Bakhoum Kiroulos, who said: “This meeting really was a blessing. His Holiness focused on the importance of our heritage and the present situation of the



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eastern Churches, which he described as the Church of Martyrs. He asked the faithful not to abandon their country, and to preserve this heritage.”

“He said that the Church needs the Eastern Churches. It was a deeply historical and spiritual event, which reflects the Pope’s vision of peace and unity, that we should preserve our traditions and pray for a true peace, a peace based on forgiveness and the courage to begin a new chapter.”

### **A voice that sounds in the East and in the West**

The world’s youngest bishop, 42-year-old Jules Boutros of the Syriac Catholic community in Lebanon highlighted the personal tone of the Pope’s message. “It was like listening to a father who is addressing his children in a language they understand: the language of the heart. The most beautiful thing was that he personally promised to follow up on our needs through the Dicastery for Eastern Churches. This is concrete hope, which is a consolation for us.”

One of the moments that most impacted Bishop Jules Boutros was when Leo XIV quoted his predecessor and namesake Leo XIII, saying: “any Latin-Rite missionary, whether a member of the secular or regular clergy, who by advice or support draws any Eastern-Rite Catholic to the Latin Rite” ought to be “dismissed and removed from his office”.

The Lebanese bishop says that this reminder stresses “not only his support for the Eastern Churches to support their identity and traditions, but also his wish that they grow, both in the East and in the West, without being absorbed or dissolved into their surrounding societies”.

Speaking to ACN, Bishop Jules also pointed out the deep appreciation that the Pope expressed for the Eastern Churches and the spiritual and liturgical traditions of the East, by quoting from the works of three Eastern Church fathers, Ephrem the Syrian, Isaac of Nineveh and Symeon the New Theologian. “In doing so, he embraced a wide range of traditions, making everyone feel included,” he explained.

The impact of the Pope’s words was not limited to the faithful of Eastern Churches: “I have friends who are priests in America and in Europe who wrote to me, or came to me after the speech, and said: ‘Did you hear how the Pope spoke to you?’ This touched us. Not only did he fill us with joy, but he also touched the hearts of many in the Latin Church, who rediscovered and gained admiration for our traditions. This is something new, that we had not seen before.”

### **A Pope of peace**



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Also present in Rome was the Greek Catholic Bishop of Odessa, Ukraine, Mychajlo Bubnij, who shared his impressions with ACN, highlighting how the Pope opened his audience using the traditional greeting of the Eastern faithful: “Christ is risen, truly he is risen.”

“The Pope addressed each one of us personally. It was a lovely experience. He listens, he understands, and he wants to build a world of truth and justice,” the bishop stressed. “He made special mention to those who are affected by war, such as in Ukraine and Syria, as well as all those who suffer because of conflicts. Leo XIV is the Pope of peace, his very first words were: ‘The peace of Christ be with you, the peace of the risen Christ.’ We hope that in this new pontificate peace might prevail amidst people, in the world, and between countries. He said that we should we cleanse our words of lies,” Bishop Bubnij recalled, adding: “Leo XIV was invited to visit Ukraine, but now he needs time to begin his service as Pontif, to understand what lies ahead. He accepted the invitation and will do everything possible to make the trip.”

### **Unity in diversity: a gift for the whole Church**

In his speech, Leo XIV also mentioned Tigray, the Ethiopian region which was swept by terrible violence during the devastating war of 2020 to 2022. Tesfaselassie Medhin, the Ethiopian Catholic Bishop of Adigrat, an eparchy which covers Tigray and Afar, said he was grateful that one of Pope Leo’s first speeches was to the Eastern Churches. “The essence of the speech was gratitude; an appreciation of the heritage of the Eastern Churches, their spirituality and liturgy, and keeping alive the diversity and the unity of the Christian Churches. The Holy Father also encouraged the persecuted and suffering Churches and spoke about how they are a source of hope to the rest. When I greeted him, I thanked him for his prayers for Tigray, and I passed on greetings from the faithful of Adigrat, assuring him of our prayers for his ministry. He thanked me for that.”

*In 2024, ACN contributed \$22.1 million in grants to support 565 projects with the Eastern Catholic Churches. In addition to this, ACN also granted \$5.2 million to inter-ritual projects (i.e., projects with either more than one Eastern Catholic Church or projects involving an Eastern Catholic Church and the Latin Church).*

*The Eastern Catholic Churches supported by ACN in 2024 include: The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Maronite Church, the Melkite Catholic Church, the Chaldean Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Ethiopian Catholic Church, the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, the Coptic Catholic Church and several Greek Catholic Churches in Eastern Europe.*