

Middle East Council of Churches
Ninth General Assembly

"Let us work as Christ's ambassadors as if God is preaching
through us"

Faith and Unity Division
Report for the period 2004-2007

Paphos - 2007

Report of Faith and Unity Division

The ministry of the Middle East Council of Churches/ Faith and Unity Division is based on the development of ecumenical spirit through its various programs and activities in particular, and through the Council's programs and activities in general. The programs and activities of the Division are grouped under four different titles, which are:

1.Meetings of the Division's Committee

The Committee of the Division on Faith and Unity holds a yearly meeting during which it confirms the Division's plan of work and gives the necessary guidance to realize best its mission. It looks after the theological affairs in the Council and the efforts for advancing the theological dialogue among the member Churches.

2.Celebration of the World Week of Prayers for Christians' Unity

The Division usually takes upon itself the translation to Arabic of the international text, proposed by the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Pontifical Council for the Consolidation of Christian unity, in Rome, and preparing it to be suitable to our special conditions in the Middle East. It has become general practice for the Middle East Council of Churches to publish the text of prayers in booklets with posters and cards carrying a prayer for unity, and to distribute them to the Churches and the Church institutions. The Division takes also care, in collaboration with the local Churches, to organize the opening and closure of the Week of Prayers, and to organize conferences or Church musical events in a spiritual atmosphere, in each of the countries in the Middle East.

1. Pastors' ecumenical meeting

The Division on Faith and Unity endeavors to gather pastors from the member Churches and urges them to meet, get acquainted with each other and exchange spiritual and pastoral experiences, which may facilitate their ministry in the field and participate in handling some new pastoral matters of ecumenical aspect. In the past years, this Program had a great impact on many pastors, however the reservations that some Churches had concerning it, for fear of the mixing up and interlocking of matters at the pastoral level, and dealing with it without the necessary theological basis, have led to stop the Program. The Division has revived it since 2004.

2. Publication

The list of responsibilities mandated to the Division includes the requirement to publish books or studies of theological signification for the revival of theological thought in the Churches and the Council's meetings. The Division has published in the past the outcome of some research which was presented at its Committee's meetings, particularly those results that contain common points and obtained

agreement. Those studies were helpful for the realization of some ecumenical advancement. But such a program requires a great deal of preparation and a special budget which the Division did not have during the past years.

3. Consolidation of the ecumenical spirit in the Council's programs and activities, in cooperation with all the divisions and departments.

The Faith and Unity Division extends its help to all the other divisions and programs in the Council, and endeavors to cooperate with them, in spite of its limited possibilities, for the sake of ensuring the spiritual, theological and ecumenical spiritual basis for all the programs and activities undertaken by the Council.

Following, is a review of the most important activities the Faith and Unity Division was able to realize since I was given the responsibility of its management in the Spring of 2004 and until this date. I will indicate, to the best I can, the positive sides as well as the weak points that should be avoided for the good work of this Division considered by all as having a basic role in the life of the Council.

First: Meetings of the Faith and Unity Division's Commission

1- Bekfaya meeting, September 7-9, 2004

The Council's Faith and Unity Division's Commission met in Bekfaya, Lebanon on 7-9 September 2004 and approved a plan of work for the four coming years in accordance with the recommendations of the Eighth General Assembly that insisted on the necessity to support this Division with all means to enable it perform its mission in the best way, based on its members' experience and the guidance of the previous Director, Abati Elias Khalifeh that can be summarized in the following:

The importance of practicing truthful dialogue and benefiting from the previous knowledge and varied old experiences, because dialogue is a very difficult question.

- Members of the Commission are very busy which makes it quite difficult, at times, to organize a meeting for the Commission.
- To start by drawing a line and putting a procedure for the dialogue that requires, in the first place, to get acquainted with each other through the liturgy that is specific to each one of our Churches, seeking help from experts and researchers in this field. It is important to avoid the controversial issues, and to deal first with the matters that bring us together.

I have presented in that meeting a working paper entitled: *For a plan of work for the coming four years* in which I talked about the internal work of the Commission which consists of a yearly meeting, in both its administrative and dialogue sides, stressing on the Division's role in developing the theological and ecumenical thought in the Council and in the member Churches, within the possibilities available to them and in the frame of their competence. I have then presented the following ideas for consideration:

- How does the Commission intend to activate the theological dialogue in the Council and among the Churches, and how does it look at its work, and how does it plan for it as to the methodology and the means?
- Does the Commission intend to continue in the theological seminars? How will it do that? What is the list of important subjects it proposes?1 and what is the methodology it chooses for such activity? What is the fate of the previous studies, especially those that are not completed yet? What are the methods it will adopt for the success of these seminars? Will it seek help from experts and professors? Will it take care of publishing these studies? How will it transmit the outcome of its theological efforts to the member Churches? What is the plan of working for the acceptance of the results of this effort in the Church texture and Church life, at the various levels and on various grounds?

The discussion of these ideas led to the following:

- Activating the Division's various activities, especially the Ecumenical Pastors' Meeting Program and reviving the Week of Prayers for Christians' Unity.
- Pursuing the theological discussion among the Commission members. The choice was made of the subject, *The expression of the common faith to face the heretical doctrines* for discussion in the following meeting of the Commission to be held in the Convent of As Saydeh Al Azra' in Tal Wardiyat (al Hasaka, Syria) from 24-29 October, 2005. The Commission took upon itself to deal later with other theological subjects provided that it will discuss in its subsequent meetings the following issues: the concept of salvation and the Church, and the concept of ecumenism.
- Requesting the Director of the Division to work towards establishing local committees for the Division in the various countries, in coordination with the local Churches, for the Division to be able to realize its aims in an effective way and in accordance with the requirements of each country.

Committees were formed in each of Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan, and they all attempted to realize the Division's aims and to execute its programs. However, they were faced by many practical difficulties, in particular the slow pace of the work and the lack of commitment, by some of their members, to their responsibilities in the absence of initiatives from the Division's Director, as I was unable to travel at times and be present in the periodic meetings of these committees and follow up their work from near by.

The Commission was unable to hold its meeting in Al Hasaka, as was the agreement, because of the new political situation in Lebanon, and this meeting was delayed several times. To note the difficulty of coordinating the time and place with the Commission members because of their commitments and heavy load of Church work. At the end, the Commission held a second meeting in Cairo, in autumn of 2006.

2. Cairo meeting, November 2006

The Faith and Unity Division's Commission held a meeting on 9 and 10 November, 2006 in Mar Morcos Center, Nasr City, Cairo. I presented a report covering the Division's work since the last meeting in Bekfaya; the participants discussed it and gave their comments. Afterwards, the Commission members moved to deal with the subject of heretical doctrines. H.E. Anba Bishoy presented a reading of the book "Da Vinci Code" and the refutation of it through studies based on the manuscripts of

the Holy Book. Some questions were raised about the way the Churches have dealt with this phenomenon and the extent of its effect on the young people in the Churches and in all the countries of the region. And after discussions and interventions about this issue, whereby each one expressed its opinion, it was obvious that the Churches' response was the same in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Then H.E. Bishop Boutros Marayati had an intervention asking in it about our understanding of the heretical doctrines and about what heretical doctrines we are talking? Then he talked about the new Churches that he considered more dangerous than the heretical doctrines, because their behavior is not ecumenical but proselytizing, and those groups enjoy civil official recognition. His Eminence regarded these groups as adding a wound in our ecumenical unity.

The participants ended with the following suggestions:

Agreement was reached on the necessity of preparing a *working paper on the question of "heretical doctrines"* in order to define "heretical doctrines" and study the reasons for their spreading, and ways to face up to them through the fortification of our Churches. H.E. Archimandrites Ishaq Barakat was put in charge of preparing this working paper in collaboration with some specialists in the University of Balamand.

Then the participants demanded with insistence to hold two meetings of the Division's Commission, with the participation of all its members, one before the meeting of the Executive Committee in 2007 and another before the upcoming General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches. This request was in order to advance in the discussion of what was agreed upon in the Bekfaya meeting of 2004 concerning the theological subjects put forward for treatment. The participants asked me to be in charge of informing all the members and of agreeing on the dates for the two meetings. Some participants insisted on the necessity to discuss the subject of ecclesiology in the second part of the proposed meeting, provided not much time be allowed for the administrative affairs.

Regretfully, I did not succeed in organizing any of the two meetings for financial reasons, in the first place, and for other reasons related to the political situation in the region. In fact, an administrative instruction was issued by the General Secretariat in April 2007 requiring MECC directors not to have meetings of their divisions' commissions if short of funds to cover the related expenses, and to use instead the email for the exchange of ideas. Upon approval of the Chairman of the Commission, H.E. Anba Bishoy on this matter, I stopped the efforts to organize the Commission's meeting.

Second: Celebration of the World Week of Prayers for Christians' Unity

Since my taking over the directorship of this Division, I was preparing every year the celebration of the Week of Prayers with the local committees in the various countries; I attended to the printing of the necessary publications in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, that is the booklets, posters, cards, etc. and watched over their distribution to all the Churches and the efficient Church agencies. The Division succeeded in the realization of great advancement in this connection. For more details concerning these activities, see the appropriate issues of Al Muntada magazine.

Celebration of the Week of Prayers for Christians' Unity in 2005
"Jesus is the only foundation of the Church" (1Chor 3, 1-23)

In Lebanon

The Week of Prayers was inaugurated at Saint George Cathedral for the Greek Orthodox, on 15/1/2005 and closed with a Church music event that was organized in coordination with the Association of Theological Institutes in the Middle East, at the Maronite Saint George Cathedral in Beirut, on 23/1/2005. And during the week I gave many lectures at educational institutions and for Catholic congregations. I have also participated in a special round table on the Week and the celebration of it, that was televised by Tele Lumiere – Nour Sat.

In Egypt

The celebrations continued throughout the week and included the various Churches. H.H. Pope Shenouda III participated through its weekly public session in the celebration of this week, and H.E. Anba Bishoy oversaw the organization of this week and participated in prayers in the churches of the four families of Churches in order to encourage the believers and pastors to attend. The Local Committee in Egypt took care of organizing the Week of Prayers and of printing and publishing its program to allow the largest number of believers to participate in the prayers.

In Syria

The celebration with the Ecumenical Prayer took place in the city of Aleppo, on 24/1/2005, in the presence of the Heads of Churches or their representatives, at Saint Ephram Church for the Syrian Orthodox. Also, there was celebration of the week in the city of Homs, with participation of the Heads of Churches and believers in the ecumenical prayers and in the meetings throughout the week from 17-23/1/2005.

On every occasion and in every meeting that took place I reminded the local committees, Churches and believers of the necessity to extend the prayers, celebrations and special activities particular to the Unity throughout the year, and in the various regions within each country, so that they do not remain limited to few days and to the capital and big cities.

Celebration of the Week of Prayers for Christians' Unity in 2006. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18, 20)

The Faith and Unity Division organized, in cooperation with the local Heads of Churches in each one of the countries in the region, the celebration of the Week of Prayers for Christians' Unity. The activities were as follows:

Lebanon

In cooperation with the Association of Theological Institutes in the Middle East, the Division organized an evening of the yearly spiritual hymns at the Maronite Saint George Cathedral in Beirut, on Sunday 15/1/2006. The bishops of the Capital, some pastors, priests and a crowd of believers from the various Churches participated in this evening. For the closing of the week, the church of the Evangelical Synod was chosen. The celebration with ecumenical prayers was on Saturday 21/1/2006. A group of bishops, pastors and believers participated in these prayers, and Pastor Joseph Kassab gave the sermon. It was all televised on Tele Lumiere and Nour Sat.

I celebrated with an ecumenical prayer at the Northern town of Zghorta, and at the Lady of Salvation's congregation in Ein Ar Rumanneh, Beirut. I was also interviewed on television, Tele Lumiere and Nour Sat, for an hour during which I explained the meaning of prayers for unity and informed the viewers about the importance of ecumenical work and about the necessity of dialogue among our Churches, in its

theological, pastoral and life dimensions. I have then announced the program for the celebrations specific to this Week. I had also a televised program with Father Hanna Dagher about the ecumenical work and ecumenical witness that lasted for more than three hours on Tele Lumiere and Nour Sat. Many persons, from the various Churches, who are committed to ecumenical work, participated in this program. The participants presented their valuable ecumenical witness and experiences that clearly showed the variety of the ministries in the Churches and the richness of the spirit's gifts, and clarified the efforts that are being deployed, at the various levels, for recuperation of the communion among the Churches in the region to be a sign for the unity of the Church in the world. Following is a list of the participants in this program:

- Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, Pastor for the National Evangelical Church in Beirut; Member of the Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches, and Professor of Ecumenical Theology at the Near East School of Theology.
- Father Fadel Sidarous, Regional President for the Jesuit Monastic Order in the Orient, and Professor of Doctrinal Theology.
- Father Boulos Rouhana, Dean of the Pontifical Theological Faculty at the Holy Spirit University, Kaslik; Member of the World Theological Committee in Rome; Member of the World Dialogue Committee between the Catholic Church and the Old Oriental Churches, and Secretary of the Episcopal Committee for the Ecumenical Relations at the Council of the Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon.
- Mr. Michel Nseir, Director of the World Council of Churches' Office for the Middle East, and the former Executive General Secretary for the Association of the Theological Institutes and Colleges in the Middle East.
- Father George Massouh, Director of the division on Muslim Christian Studies at the Balamand University, and Pastor for the Orthodox Congregation in Aley.
- Father Boulos Wehbe, Director of the Students' Affairs Office at Sayedet Louzeh University, Pastor for the Saint Michel Orthodox Congregation in Beirut, and Member of the Joint Committee for the Ecumenical Christian Education.
- Mrs. Aline Papazian, Director of the Ecumenical Relations Office at the Middle East Council of Churches, and Former Director for the Life and Service Division.
- Father Najji Edelbi, Professor of Patristic Sciences at the Holy Spirit University, Kaslik; Member of the Episcopal Committee for Ecumenical Relations at the Council of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon, and coordinator for the Ecumenical Affaires at the Greek Catholic Bishopric in Beirut. He is also a person with great experience in the pastoral ecumenical work.
- Father Tanios Khalil, Teacher of the subject of Ecumenism at the Sagesse University, and Member of the Episcopal Committee for the Ecumenical Relations at the Council of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon.

Syria

I met with the Churches' delegates, in coordination with the Associate General Secretary at the Middle East Council of Churches, Mr. Samer Lahham, and took care of preparing for the celebration with the Ecumenical Prayer that took place at the Orthodox Cathedral known as Al Mariamyah, on Saturday 21/1/2006. Heads of Churches and believers from the various Churches participated in the prayers, and H.B. Patriarch Ignatios IV Hazim, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, delivered the sermon. And as usual, the celebrations took place also in Aleppo and Homs and other regions.

Egypt

At the beginning of February and throughout a whole week, the celebration of the Week of Prayers for unity took place in the various Churches in the presence of a crowd of Heads of Churches and believers. H.H. Pope Shenouda III devoted Wednesday of this week for a prayer with the Heads of Churches and the crowd of believers gathered at the Saint Mark Cathedral, and he delivered a sermon on the subject of the yearly prayer.

Celebration of the Week of Prayers for Christians' Unity in 2007 "he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak" (St. Mark 7, 37)

The organization of the Week of Prayers this year was as follows:

Lebanon

Mar Yacoub Cathedral, for the Syrian Orthodox in Beirut, was chosen for the celebration with the ecumenical prayer, on Thursday 18/1/2007. The organization of this event was done in agreement with H.E. Bishop George Saliba who chose for us a bouquet of patristic texts from the Syrian Antiochian heritage, and delivered a sermon emphasizing the necessity of activating the ecumenical work, spreading the ecumenical spirit, and working for the unification of the feast of Easter. The Tele Lumiere and Nour Sat television station televised this event. Excellent echo was heard about this prayer that was noted for its pious character and the spiritual and brotherly atmosphere. There was also a good echo about the reception given, after the prayer, by His Eminence in the church salon where the believers and pastors met and talked about ecumenical matters.

I met with a group of university students in the Kesrouan region and talked to them about the ecumenical affairs and problems, and explained the subject of the prayer for this year. I did the same in As Saydeh Institute at Al Jamhour, Beirut which is one of the most important of the Old Secondary Institutes that belong to the Jesuits monastic order. I also had two interviews at Tele Lumiere and Nour Sat television through which I explained, for two hours, the meaning of the prayer for unity and its importance for the life and witness of our Churches.

I shared with Tele Lumiere the preparation for a televised discussion group about the ecumenical work and ecumenical witness; it lasted for more than three hours during which both Bishops Boulos Matar and George Saliba, and Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, from the Evangelical Church, talked about the subject. Also, in cooperation with the Association of the Theological Institutes in the Middle East, the Division organized the yearly evening of spiritual hymns at the Holy Spirit church, in Kaslik, on Sunday 21/1/2007. The participants in this evening included some bishops, pastors, fathers and a crowd of students of theology and believers from the various Churches.

Syria

Preparations were made for the celebration with ecumenical prayer in collaboration with the two colleagues, Messrs. Samer Lahham and Razik Syriani. Prayers, seminars and meetings with young people were held in each of Aleppo, Homs, Latakiah, Hassakeh and most cities. The colleague Razik took care of ensuring the printing of publications and of distributing them to all the Syrian regions.

In Aleppo the first prayer was held on 22 January and grouped, in addition to a crowd of believers, the clergy in Aleppo in the Church of the Cross for the Armenian Catholics. H.E. Bishop Boutros Marayati delivered the sermon in which he talked about three points: the theological dialogues and common statements and the way

they are received and represented in our Churches; and the common projects that consolidate the spirit of unity and common work; and the spiritual dialogue which is the heart of the ecumenical work. And on 26 January, the public prayer was held, with the participation of the young people, at the Nabi Elias Cathedral for the Greek Orthodox and was marked by the presence of a great number of deaf and dumb persons and of those with special needs. Paragraphs of the prayers were presented in the signs' system specific to them.

In Al Hassakeh, prayers were held throughout a whole week and were closed on the 22 January at the Syrian Mar Ephram Cathedral, and H.E. Bishop Athtassios Matta Roham delivered the spiritual sermon clarifying the meanings of unity and the basis on which it is built.

In Homs the ecumenical prayer was held on 29 January at the Saydet es Salam Cathedral for the Greek Catholic, and Bishop Ezidor Battikha delivered the sermon in which he mentioned, in addition to the meanings of the unity, the role of the Churches in caring for the handicapped, wounded and heart broken people.

Egypt

The Week of Prayers started in Egypt on Monday 22 January, 2007. The inauguration was at the Virgin Mary's Church for the Greek Orthodox, Salah Ed Deen Square, Misr Al Gadida.

The participants included: Rev. Dr. Safwat El Bayadi, H.E. Bishop Yuhanna Kolta, H.E. Anba Bishoy, H.E. Bishop Nicolas Antonio and members from the Local Committee of the Division. A number of beautiful Byzantine tunes, presented during the celebration, produced a memorable effect among the people present. In the following days, prayers were held in the various churches, and the closing prayer was held in Saint Therese Church for the Armenian Catholics in Misr Al Gadida. All people present exchanged the kiss of peace and then H.E. Cardinal Estephanos II talked about love.

Jordan

Thanks to the great efforts that were deployed with the Local Committee in Jordan, an ecumenical prayer was held for the first time since many years. This prayer gathered the Churches in Amman on Tuesday 23 January. Rev. Dr. Nuhad Tohme, the Associate General Secretary, delivered the speech of the General Secretary and Father Ghaleb Badr read my speech, as I was unable to attend because of the security situation in Lebanon. The sermon was delivered by H.E. Bishop Salim Sayegh. This prayer was noted for the spirit of humility and the varied hymns. The MECC Office in Amman looked after the printing of the necessary publications to spread the ecumenical spirit among the believers, the Churches and the different groups.

Third: The Ecumenical Meeting of Pastors

Amman Meeting in 22-23 November, 2004: For Development of the Ecumenical Spirit

This meeting was held at the national level in Al Feheiss, near Amman, in the Nuns' Convent of the Lady of Rosary. It grouped more than 60 bishops, priests and pastors from the local Churches. After the opening prayer, the MECC General Secretary gave a lecture on "*The Church's pastoral work and the ecumenical spirit*"

in the Holy Book"; followed by a lecture from the Director about "The *pastoral work and the ecumenical spirit*". And several lectures followed on: "*The ecumenical spirit and religious education*", "*The ecumenical spirit and the Church-related schools*" and "*The ecumenical spirit and the work of young people*". During the meeting, work groups were formed that discussed these subjects from their different sides and worked to put a mechanism for the application of the ecumenical principles in the pastoral work.

Cairo Meeting, 1-3 March, 2005: The Impossibility of Distorting the Holy Book

The Division held an ecumenical meeting for cooperation among the Churches in Egypt, at Mar Morcos Center. More than 40 pastors from Cairo and the Lower Egypt attended the meeting, and its subject was "*The impossibility of distorting the Holy Book*". I attended part of the meeting and delivered a speech. The members of the Local Committee commended this meeting and the lectures presented by: H.E. Anba Bishoy, Dr. Atif Mhanna, Father Kamal Faheem and H.E. Bishop Antonio on the texts of the Holy Book, the translations and the matters related to them.

Al Ghardaqa (Egypt) Meeting 4-7 July, 2005: The Impossibility of Distorting the Holy Book

The Faith and Unity Division called for a second meeting of ecumenical cooperation in Al Ghardaqa, after the success of the meeting held in Mar Morcos Center in Nasr City, with the participation of clergy from Cairo and the Lower Egypt. This meeting was for the clergy from Upper Egypt. I came from Lebanon to participate in the meeting with members of the Division's Local Committee in Egypt and more than 65 pastors and priests representing all the Families of Churches.

The first lecture was by H.E. Anba Bishoy, Chairman of the Division, in which he talked about *The problems or doubts that are directed to the Holy Book*, followed with a lecture by Rev. Rifat Fathi Rouman about *The Hebrew and Greek texts of the Holy Book, collection and acknowledgment of legality*, and a lecture by H.E. Archmandrite George Ash Shama' casting a light on the *Translations of the Holy Book* and finally a lecture by Father Boulos Jaras, Dean of the College of Theological and Humanitarian Sciences at Al Ma'adi, about *The concept of revelation in Christianity* in which he talked about "the difference between the revelation and the inspiration, and the concept of the revelation in Christianity". And at the end of the meeting a study group was formed on the ecumenical spirit, with the participation of the R.R.Monsignor Marco Berouji, the Vatican Ambassador and the Apostolic Delegate in Cairo, who delivered the word of the Catholic Family. Then Rev. Emile Zaki talked on behalf of the Evangelical Family, followed with a word by H.E. Anba Bishoy for the Orthodox Family. They all participated in the morning and evening prayers, in the working groups and in composing the final recommendations.

Beirut ecumenical meeting on 14 January, 2006: The challenge of accepting the other as is, in the ecumenical journey

Upon invitation from the Division on Faith and Unity in the Middle East Council of Churches, more than 40 clergymen composed of bishops, priests and pastors from the various Churches, met on 14 January, 2006 at the Maronite Bishopric of Beirut. They prayed together and listened to each other and talked about common pastoral affairs, exchanging worries, hopes and experiences. The participation of the bishops: Boulos Matar, Maronite Archbishop of Beirut; George Khodr, Metropolitan of

Mount Lebanon for the Greek Orthodox; George Saliba, Metropolitane of Mount Lebanon for the Syrian Orthodox; Elie Nassar, Maronite Bishop-Elect for Saidon; and Rev. George Mrad, President of the Evangelical Synod for Syria and Lebanon, had a special impact given the richness of the ecumenical and pastoral experience and for the encouragement of the priests and pastors to participate in such brotherly meetings. Also, the General Secretary for the Middle East Council of Churches, Mr. Guirguis Saleh participated in the meeting. Regretfully, and because of the bad weather conditions, the bishops, pastors and priests coming from the Beqa were unable to arrive to Beirut and participate in this meeting.

After the opening prayer, there was a welcome address by H.E Boulos Matar, then a reminder of the experience acquired by the previous Parish Ministers' Meeting in Lebanon, presented by Father Boulos Wehbe, followed by a lecture on the meeting's subject given by Rev. Samer Qandalaft, Pastor of the Evangelical Church in Saidon. After that, was a break and a spontaneous meeting followed by working groups on questions raised by the lecturer. Then there was a review of the results from the working groups and agreement on some recommendations that all participants promised to work for executing them under the supervision of the bishops and the members of the Division's Committee. Following is a summarization of the most important of these recommendations:

- Making an effort to hold similar meetings at the level of provinces, in coordination with the local spiritual leaders, and working to form local committees to follow-up these activities.
- Cooperating with the academic circles in the country to study together the arising pastoral situations of mixed marriages, and looking for ways to solve the hanging problems with a Church and truthful ecumenical spirit.
- Arranging to celebrate the Week of Prayer for Unity in the provinces, and not limiting it to the Capital and to an elite of clergy and experts.

Amman Meeting, 20 June, 2006: Christian education for adults

The Division organized an ecumenical meeting for the pastors in Amman, on 20 June, 2006 at the Greek Catholic Bishopric. Present were Bishops Geaourgios El Mur and Salim Es Sayegh and more than 25 pastors. The main lecture was given by Father Rafic Khoury who came from Jerusalem. He dealt with the problem from an eastern point of view and had some inquiries and questions that were discussed by the participants in special dialogue circles, and they reached some recommendations:

- Organizing lectures and camps special for the young people and the adults, where there will be emphasis on the Christian education.
- Seeking modern technical methods in Christian education.
- Working to establish a unified ecumenical religious education.
- Organizing some training courses to develop the cadre for Christian education.

Regional ecumenical meeting of pastors in Paphos, 23-24 November, 2007: We Christ's ambassadors as if God is preaching through us.

Fifth: Spreading the ecumenical spirit through the Council's programs and activities

Throughout all this period, the Division cooperated with all the divisions and programs in the Council. It endeavored to strengthen the basis of the proper ecumenical work through spreading the ecumenical thought, ensuring the necessary upbringing and receiving Church delegations coming from Europe and the United States of America to visit the region and get acquainted with its conditions and the theological and ecumenical affairs in it. I mention, as example, the visits of both delegations from the World Council of Churches and the Council of Churches in America during the war on Lebanon in Summer 2006, and the participation in presenting the theological ideas and the spiritual basis for the initiative of the Episcopal Davidson Clergy Center in the United States concerning its activity in the Lebanon Care Program entrusted to Mrs. Kati Enji. I also had the opportunity to participate in important theological and Church meetings outside the Council's frames for the consolidation of the ecumenical spirit and the participation in the thinking on the Christian presence in the Middle East and the role played by our Churches and the Council in this connection.

Of the most important action taken by the Division in the domain of cooperation was the joint work with the Division on Education and Renewal, with the Division on Life and Service, and with the two Programs on Human Rights and Human Resources. And, in my capacity as member in the Committee of Christian-Muslim relations in the Council, I participated in the meetings that were held in Cairo with the World Islamic Forum. I leave to these Divisions and Programs to mention the common activities, and will only mention a very important work in which the Division had a notable role, that is the participation in the Arabization and review of Faith and Order Committee's Document in the World Council of Churches, number 198, which carries the title: **Nature and Mission of The Church** And I will also talk about another domain of cooperation with the aforementioned Office of the World Council of Churches in celebrating the World Day of Prayer for Peace, in particular in September 2006 after the Israeli war on Lebanon.

"Faith and Order" Document on Church Nature and Mission: May 2007

With an initiation from the World Council of Churches/Office for the Middle East, in the person of its Director Mr. Michel Nseir and thanks to a scientific effort from Father Mushir Aoun, this document was Arabized and I participated in reviewing it with them and with Dr. George Sabra from the Near East School of Theology. I wrote an introduction, in Arabic, to this Document and explained some intricate concepts and supervised its printing. In May 2007, and because of the security situation in Lebanon and the impossibility of my participation with other theologians in the conference held by the Committee on Faith and Order in Cairo to discuss this Document, I took up the organization of a scientific seminar for the teachers of theology in Lebanon. This seminar was held at the Pontifical College for Theology at the Holy Spirit University in Kaslik with encouragement from the Father Dean Boulos Rouhana and from Mr. Michel Nseir and with the help of Dr. George Sabra and Mr. Nicola Abou Mrad from the Balamand University, and Father Fadi Daou from Saint Joseph University. Participants in this seminar were more than 55 professors from the various Institutes of Theology, in addition to participation of the

world famous Herve Legrand who was a visitor in our university and he presented a valuable lecture on our theological understanding of the local Church. This lecture was very well received and quite commended by the participants who asked to repeat this event in the coming years because such meetings revive the ecumenical spirit and open widely the door for serious theological cooperation.

The World Day of Prayer for Peace: 21 September, 2006

A month following the end of the war on Lebanon, and in the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Peace, and after consultation with the Office of the WCC in Beirut and receiving financial support from the Central Mennonite Committee in the Middle East I addressed a call, in four pages, that was distributed to all the media and to the spiritual and civil leaders in which there is an invitation to work for establishing justice and peace, and to participate in an ecumenical prayer that was prepared by the Division for this objective and which was held in the hospitality of H.E. Bishop Youssef Kallas at Saint John the Golden Mouth Cathedral for the Greek Catholic, in Beirut. The sermon was given by H.E. Bishop Salim Ghazal and the closing was with a word by Dr. Muhammad Es Sammak, member of the National Committee for the Christian-Muslim Dialogue, who represented Dar Al Ifta' (Office of the Mufti) in this prayer. This initiative was largely commended as it aimed to common prayer, revival of the spirit of peace and giving back hope to the Lebanese after a month of war and destruction.

Sixth: Opinions(Views) and recommendations on the role of the Division and its work

The mission of the Faith and Unity Division is not an easy one these days because of several reasons, I mention two of them only: Predomination of the life concerns over our Churches, institutions and believers, and the non-availability of sufficient financial support. As Director of the Division for the last three years, I should admit that I do not control the first reason and I was unable, in spite of the great efforts I have deployed, to convince the Churches or our Partners to give enough support to the activities of this Division, may be because the theological concern is not included in their priority programs and is not in accordance with the conditions required for that. This Division seems to be a heavy financial burden on the Council that carries, in addition to the administrative expenses and salaries, the costs of the activities and programs carried out by the Division on Faith and Unity.

No doubt that the Division is doing its best to improve its performance and watch over the consolidation of the ecumenical spirit and spreading it among the pastors and believers. But it looks that the road is still too long ahead of our Churches before they attain the recuperation of complete communion with each other. And for reaching this objective which is the aim of establishing the Middle East Council of Churches, as they all repeat, it is necessary to incite the member Churches to come to a deep theological dialogue that starts from clear basis, and is based on an agreed upon methodology, and treats equally the common issues and the hanging problems, with the honesty of a serious study that has in view the advancing towards Christ, and the impartiality of looking for the truth, and the danger of submission to the work of the Holy Spirit and its inspirations. This means a clear and practical commitment to be translated to a transformation in the Church, pastoral and brotherly behaviour, and increase in the pure love, and the service for free, and acceptance of the other and getting acquainted deeply with him, and the determination to cooperate with him and walk with him on the road of unity, far from the confessional ambitious desires and private interests. This also requires giving

the theological researches, the oriental spiritual heritage and the issue of publication and clerical upbringing a great interest. This talk does not intend to accuse the member Churches with deficiency, but it incites all to put more efforts and to pray more, perhaps the Almighty God will guide us to complete the communion among our Churches for clarity of our common witness on the land of our precious Orient, and to complete His Holy Will so that the world believes.

Footnote p. 5

. Following is what was mentioned, in this regard, in the report to the Eighth General Assembly, p.5 "It is preferable for the dialogue subjects to be taken from the spiritual heritage carried by our Churches' prayers and liturgies through which the believers express their belief. Thus we can discover the factors of unity in the faith that is lived daily, instead of elaborating in the discussion about the controversial subjects that are being handled by international committees, hence avoiding the duplication of work,. and may be we are able to participate in these international dialogues through the rich spirituality of our heritage" .