



3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008-3610

APOSTOLIC NUNCIATURE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

No. 1002 / 16

October 5, 2016

This No. Should Be Prefixed to the Answer

Personal and Confidential

Rev. Father Kail C. Ellis, O.S.A.
Villanova University
416 St. Augustine Center
800 Lancaster Avenue
Villanova, PA 19085

Dear Father Ellis:

I am in receipt of your kind letter of September 9, 2016 regarding the upcoming conference on Christians in the Middle East. I want to thank you for your invitation to attend this most interesting and timely conference, but I regret that I must decline due to the press of an already substantial schedule in early December.

Nevertheless, I applaud the efforts of Villanova University to explore in some detail, certain aspects of the topic of Christians in the contemporary Middle East. Certainly, strategies and solutions for the continued existence of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East cannot be contemplated without a thoughtful framing of the issues.

With cordial regards and prayerful best wishes for the success of the December conference, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Archbishop Christophe Pierre
Apostolic Nuncio



VILLANOVA
UNIVERSITY

September 9, 2016

KAIL C. ELLIS O.S.A, PHD
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT

His Excellency Archbishop Christophe Pierre
Apostolic Nuncio to the United States

Dear Archbishop Pierre,

Greetings from Villanova University. It is my pleasure to inform you that Villanova University will host the conference, *Christians in the Contemporary Middle East: Besieged Religious Minorities and the Struggle for Secular Nationalism and Citizenship*, on December 5-6, 2016. Villanova is a Catholic university founded by the Augustinian Order in 1842 that is located near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The conference will be cosponsored by the American University of Science and Technology, Beirut, Lebanon and by Bethlehem University, Bethlehem, Palestine.

Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, who serves on the Bethlehem University Board of Regents, has been invited to address the conference. Cardinal Sandri has played a key role in supporting Christians in the Middle East; his presence would familiarize the participants of the Holy See's concern for Middle Eastern Christians.

Father Max Cappabianca, O.P., who represents the Congregation for the Eastern Churches on the Bethlehem Board, advised me to inform the Apostolic Nunciature in Washington of our invitation to Cardinal Sandri. Although that is the reason for this letter, I would like to also invite you to the conference if it would be of interest to you. The conference participants will be international scholars, government officials, NGO representatives, and academics. The topics are: (1) The decline pluralistic spaces the Middle East and its consequences for Christians and other minorities; (2) The historic role of Christian intellectual contributions to Arab politics and religious freedom; (3) Securing the equality of citizens, (4) Combating the persecution of minority communities; and (5) Regional tensions, such as the Shia-Sunni conflict, that have threatened the presence of Christians and other communities in the Middle East. I am attaching a copy of the conference program for your review.

It would be an honor to have you attend the conference as our guest. Your recent role as apostolic nuncio to Mexico gave you first-hand knowledge of the dramatic plight of migrants from Central America and Mexico to the United States and gave voice to Pope Francis' concern for them. As an experienced diplomat who has promoted a church that is close to those who suffer, you would have much to add to our discussions of the plight of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East.

With sincere best wishes,

Kail C. Ellis, O.S.A.

Kail C. Ellis, O.S.A.