

The Evangelism Conference 2011 Highlights

By Victor Beshir

Last weekend was a wonderful one for those who attended the Evangelism Conference or watched it live. It was a rich experience that summarized both evangelistic and spiritual experience from Africa, Brazil, Mexico, college campuses from Miami to New Jersey, and the starting of new 125 Orthodox churches by Americans.

The conference began with Fr. Peter Saad, of St. Peter & St. Paul COC, a new priest with a fiery zeal to have a real multicultural church. Although the church has been in her community for only six months, they have reached out in many diverse ways. It sounds like an American church in its serious attempt to embrace the American culture in order to make visitors feel at home without neglecting the handed faith and rich spirituality of the Orthodox Church.

Then came Fr. Peter Gillquist with his talk about "The Great Commission," preceded by his story of joining the Orthodox Church along with 2000 Evangelical Americans in one day. I looked at him and saw age creeping into his face, but the man still speaks with power and his heart still beats with evangelistic passion. He elaborated on many ways to reach out. Then he insisted on presenting Christ to Americans and elaborated on what to say about Christ. Among other things, he insisted on the importance of telling a personal testimony, explaining that this is not a Protestant act but rather a biblical teaching. Then he answered questions for hours. Each answer enclosed with his life-long experience. If time was not limited, we could continue for days with his question/answer sessions because of the stories and the heart-to-heart talks.

H.G. Bishop Youssef came to introduce H.G. Bishop Antonius Markos. He said, in 1999 we had the first conference in which H.G. Bishop Antonius Markos and Fr. Peter were present and this year we have both together again to speak about campus evangelism. This brought to some of the audience beautiful memories of the first spark of evangelism in 1999 conference at time when the Coptic Orthodox Church in North America had any intention to get into evangelism. The conference at that time aimed to raise awareness for evangelism. Thank God, after thirteen years, many Coptic youth are full of love of

evangelism and mission. Many pushed by the love of evangelism went to many countries, while others worked hard in their towns.

H.G. Bishop Antonius then talked about the meaning of witnessing, using the Greek origins of the word, meaning martyrdom, where evangelists are ready to suffer even unto death to spread the gospel. It was a beautiful lecture. I encourage everyone to watch it.

Then a panel discussion on the campus evangelism started. We enjoyed listening to experienced people on this service who offered practical methods for how to start a club in your college, how to arrange for an event, and how to maintain a meeting.

A new vision for campus evangelism came to shed light on what we do now and what we need to do. Currently, we reach out to Copts; we do activities for Copts. Even 90% of our clubs' names start with the word 'Coptic.' When people ask about the meaning of the word 'Coptic,' the answer is "Egyptian," which turn them off. As we do not want to attend a Chinese club meeting, we need to think about our clubs' names. It was strongly recommended to change those names to reflects the need of "Generation 'y.'" "**Reach Out and Help Someone,**" was the name suggested by the conference.

The conclusion of the conference included the need to start immediately working on "My College Mission," directing everyone to the web page of the mission: www.evangelismcopticorthodox.org

The first activity of the mission would be during the colleges' orientation week where we will have "Jesus Awareness Week." The mission will provide the groups with brochures, flyers, materials, and advice.

We also invite you to join "My College Mission."

To participate, please visit the following web page and

fill out the survey:

<http://evangelismcopticorthodox.org/mycollegemission/survey.html>