

# ST. THOMAS MISSION

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**“If we then consider that the salvific event which took place on the banks of the Dnieper goes back to a time when the Church in the East and the Church in the West were not divided, we understand clearly that the vision of the full communion to be sought is that of unity in legitimate diversity.”**

**Pope St. John Paul II,  
*Ut Unum Sint*, 54.**

## Homecoming to God

*by Anna Cannon*

Last spring, I began reading *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen. A couple pages in, Nouwen writes of homecoming, saying “exhausted from long travels; I wanted to be embraced; I was looking for a home where I could feel safe. [...] For so long I had been going from place to place: confronting, beseeching, admonishing, and consoling. Now I desired to rest safely in a place where [...] I could feel at home” (Nouwen, 5). I paused—why am I reading this as I am preparing to leave my home and travel across the world to Iraq? I considered shelving the book and saving it for when it’d be more relevant. However, something prompted me to keep reading.

As I read, I realized that in this foreign place God was inviting me to find my home in Him—only in Him. Iraq would be my homecoming to God—the “place where I am held safe in the embrace of an all-loving father who calls me by name” (Nouwen, 16). I would “kneel before the Father, put my ear against His chest and listen, without interruption, to the heartbeat of God” (Nouwen, 17).



PHOTO BY EMILE WAAD

## American Students vs. Iraqi Students

by Margaret Wittmann

After teaching in an American public school last year, I entered this academic year with a lot of expectations about the ways my Iraqi students would differ from my American students. I have been continuously surprised by the differences, particularly in the students' appreciation for learning. The students of Mar Qardakh International School walk into my classroom each morning with an eagerness and a joy to learn that manifests in their active participation throughout the day. Every day, my students look forward to even the smallest of activities. I often find myself appreciating their evident awe during learning. This awe comes from things as simple as growing bean sprouts in science or comparing a book we're reading to its film adaptation in English. All in all, discovering the distinctions between Iraqi and American students has revealed a fascinating tapestry of educational and cultural diversity that has been a gift to witness.

## East Meets West

by Alex McKenna

In his encyclical, *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II compares the Eastern and Western churches to the two lungs of the body. Both are required for basic human functions and to lose one would be devastating to the other. Far from being “ethnic churches,” the expression of the East in their liturgies, theological lights, history, and perseverance in the face of adversity invites participants from all walks of life to appreciate the beauty of the universal Church in her many extensions. After over a year of experiencing the Chaldean Mass, I have found its naturally rhythmic intonations—following the agricultural patterns of Northern Iraq—and intense apostolic symbolism lift the eyes to the cross and the soul to God. Through this liturgical beauty rooted in early Church traditions, the universal Church preserves its second lung as a guiding star in the East for those of us in the West.

