

Fr Mina Nematalla to Come back to Archangel Michael Church!

Church News

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Approval has been granted for the burial of Fr Mina Nematalla's remains on site in an historic crypt and monument to the founders of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Australia.



On Sunday 12th October 2008 HG Bishop Daniel announced the joyous news to the congregation in St St Mary and St Stephen's English Chapel that HH Pope Shenouda III had formally approved the plan to bury the remains of the late Fr Mina Nematalla in a specially designed crypt to be constructed on site at Archangel Michael and St Bishoy Church in Mt Druitt.

Fr Mina was the first Coptic priest to come to Australia, charged with establishing the Coptic Orthodox Church on this continent. This responsibility was given to him by Pope Kyrillos VI of blessed memory, who also happens to be his maternal uncle. After a four month voyage by ship, Fr Mina and his family arrived in Sydney on 26th January 1969. He was greeted by dozens of excited immigrant Copts and was taken immediately to a hired Salvation Army Hall in Redfern where he proceeded to perform his very first official duty in Australia - conducting the Divine Liturgy and administering Holy Communion to the spiritually hungry Copts of Sydney who had hitherto had survive without a Church.

Over the next 31 years Fr Mina shepherded the growing Coptic community and oversaw the establishment of so many of the foundational institutions and practices that we all take for granted today. These included Sunday School, Youth Groups, Deaconship, support for new migrants, social activities - in fact too many to name in this short article. He was involved in the establishment of a number of Sydney's oldest parishes, including the somewhat brave step (at the time) of establishing a parish way out in Mt Druitt which was virtually still a rural suburb back in 1980. He also travelled to other cities all over Australia to nurture the small Coptic communities there until they were able to receive their own permanent priest.

Fr Mina's service was recognised in many ways in the latter part of his life, including his appointment as the spokesman for HH Pope Shenouda III and his being awarded the prestigious Order of Australia Medal by the Howard government.

His last decade was dogged by ill health as kidney failure led to his eventual kidney transplant, followed by a mountain of complications. Throughout all his suffering, he never missed a liturgy if he could stand on his feet, and even came when he couldn't. He reposed in the Lord on July 1st, 2001.

The crypt is proposed to be a single room annexed to the eastern wall of the main Church. The remains of Fr Mina will be entombed in a series of sealed cases according to health department regulations, which will then be sealed inside a granite sarcophagus. The crypt is planned to incorporate not only the details of Fr Mina's colourful life, but also historical data and images from the early days of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Australia. Some years ago, the Church began collecting historical material for the Archives, and this will provide a rich mine of interesting subject matter for display. This monument is bound to play an important part in passing on our history and heritage to future generations of Copts, as well as presenting that heritage to non-Coptic visitors.

If you have any photos, recording or documents that relate to the early history of the Coptic Church in Australia, or to the early years of the parish, we would like to hear from you and get a copy. Please contact our Archivist, Dr Emad Rezk at [var id='emadrezk17';var host1='hotmail.com';var host2='';document.write\(''+id+'@'+host1+'.'+host2+''\);](mailto:emadrezk17@hotmail.com)The crypt project is estimated to cost about \$50,000 in total. Already, a number of individuals have pledged donations to make it happen. If you feel you would like to support this project to preserve our history for future generations, you are welcome to contribute your donation, however large or small. Please contact Mr Adil Henen, the Church Treasurer or Dr Emad Rezk the Church Secretary at [var id='emadrezk17';var host1='hotmail.com';var host2='';document.write\(''+id+'@'+host1+'.'+host2+''\);](mailto:emadrezk17@hotmail.com)It is hoped that the crypt will be completed in time for the 40th Anniversary Celebrations of the Coptic Church in Australia on January 26th 2008. Please pray for this important project.