

ISIS razes 1,400-year-old Iraq monastery

Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq — The Obama Administration and the Vatican condemned the Islamic State group Wednesday for razing Iraq's oldest Christian monastery, a 1,400-year-old structure that survived assaults by nature and man for centuries before it was deliberately destroyed by extremists.

At the United Nations, UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova said reducing St. Elijah's monastery in Mosul to a field of rubble was malicious and misguided. The Associated Press confirmed the news with exclusive satellite images published early Wednesday.

"Despite their relentless crimes, extremists will never be able to erase history," said Bokova, who called the demolition a war crime. "It also reminds us how terrified by history the extremists are, because understanding the past undermines the pretexts they use to justify these crimes and exposes them as expressions of pure hatred and ignorance."

St. Elijah's monastery on the outskirts of Mosul was a place of worship recently for U.S. troops, who worked to restore it. In earlier centuries, generations of monks tucked candles in the niches and prayed in the cool chapel. The Greek letters chi and rho, representing the first two letters of Christ's name, were carved near the entrance.

During a press briefing in Washington on Wednesday, State Department spokesman Mark Toner said the Obama Administration condemned the destruction by IS. "They continue to carry out these kinds of depraved acts, and it really symbolizes or exemplifies their bankrupt ideology," he said.

In his office in exile in Irbil, Iraq, the Rev. Paul Thabit Habib, 39, stared quietly at before- and after-images of the monastery that once perched on a hillside above his hometown of Mosul. Shaken, he flipped back to his own photos for comparison.

"I can't describe my sadness," he said in Arabic. "Our Christian history in Mosul is being barbarically leveled. We see it as an attempt to expel us from Iraq, eliminating and finishing our existence in this land."

The Islamic State group,



This combination of two satellite images provided by DigitalGlobe, taken on March 31, 2011, top, and Sept. 28, 2014, shows the site of the 1,400-year-old Christian monastery known as St. Elijah's, or Dair Mar Elia, on the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq.



This photo taken in the 1920s shows a ceremony at the Mar Matai monastery in Mosul, Iraq, where a Christian community thrived for centuries.

which broke from al-Qaida and now controls large parts of Iraq and Syria, has killed thousands of civilians and forced out hundreds of thousands of Christians, threatening a religion that has endured in the region for 2,000 years. Along the way, its fighters have destroyed buildings and ruined historical and culturally significant structures they consider contrary to their interpretation of Islam.

Those who knew the monastery wondered about its fate after the extremists swept through in June 2014 and largely cut communications to the area.

Now, St. Elijah's has joined a growing list of more than 100 demolished religious

and historic sites, including mosques, tombs, shrines and churches in Syria and Iraq.

The extremists have defaced or ruined ancient monuments in Nineveh, Palmyra and Hatra. Museums and libraries have been looted, books burned, artwork crushed — or trafficked.

"A big part of tangible history has been destroyed," said Rev. Manuel Yousef Boji. A Chaldean Catholic pastor in Southfield, Michigan, he remembers attending Mass at St. Elijah's almost 60 years ago while a seminarian in Mosul.

"These persecutions have happened to our church more than once, but we believe in the power of truth, the power of God," said Boji. He is part of the Detroit area's Chaldean community, which became the largest outside Iraq after the sectarian bloodshed that followed the U.S. invasion in 2003. Iraq's Christian population has dropped from 1.3 million then to 300,000 now, church authorities say.

At the Vatican, spokesman Rev. Federico Lombardi noted that since the monastery dates back to the time Christians were united, the place would be a special one for many. He said it was the first news he had had of the destruction.

"Unfortunately, there is this systemic destruction of precious sites, not only cultural, but also religious and spiritual. It's very sad and dramatic," Lombardi said.

The loss of the monastery is a blow for U.S. troops and advisers who served in Iraq and had tried to protect and honor the site, a hopeful endeavor in a violent place and time.

Suzanne Bott, who spent more than two years restoring St. Elijah's Monastery as a U.S. State Department cultural adviser in Iraq, teared

up when the AP showed her the images.

"Oh no way. It's just razed completely," said Bott. "What we lose is a very tangible reminder of the roots of a religion. Now it's gone."

Army reserve Col. Mary Proffit remembered a sunrise service in St. Elijah where, as a Catholic lay minister, she served communion.

"I let that moment sink in, the candlelight, the first rays of sunshine. We were worshipping in a place where people had been worshipping God for 1,400 years," said Proffit, who was deployed there in 2004 and again in 2009.

"I would imagine that many people are feeling like, 'What were the last 10 years for if these guys can go in and destroy everything?'" said Proffit, a library manager in Glenoma, Washington.

This month, at the request of AP, satellite imagery firm DigitalGlobe pulled a series of images of the same spot from their archive of pictures taken globally every day.

Imagery analyst Stephen Wood, CEO of Allsource Analysis, reviewed the pictures for AP and identified the date of destruction between Aug. 27 and Sept. 28, 2014. Before it was razed, images show a partially restored, 27,000-square-foot religious building. Although the roof was largely missing, it had 26 distinctive rooms including a sanctuary and chapel. One month later, "the stone walls have been literally pulverized," said Wood.

"Bulldozers, heavy equipment, sledgehammers, possibly explosives turned those stone walls into this field of gray-white dust," he said. "There's nothing to rebuild."

BRIEFLY

Nazarene church seeks hunting, fishing photos

HERMISTON — The Hermiston Church of the Nazarene is collecting photos to show during its annual Sportsman's Dinner.

People can drop photos off at the church during the week or email to hermistonnaz@gmail.com. People should provide their name and contact information so the photos can be returned.

The dinner, which is open to all sportsmen and women, is Saturday, March 5 at 6 p.m. at the church, 1520 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston. The evening includes good food, tall tales and an inspirational speaker.

For more information, call 541-567-3677 or visit the church's Facebook page.

Pendleton church shows 'War Room'

PENDLETON — A faith-based drama that explores the power of prayer on marriages, parenting, careers and friendships will be shown at the Pendleton First Church of God.

The doors open for "War Room" Friday at 6 p.m. at the church, located at 712 S.W. 27th St., Pendleton. Everyone is welcome to attend. A nursery will be available for kids 3 and younger.

For more information, call 541-276-1894 or visit the church's Facebook page.



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Entries must be received by Feb. 3rd at Noon.

<p>Peace Lutheran Church 210 NW 9th, Pendleton Join us Sundays 9:30 am Sunday Worship 10:30 am Fellowship 11:00 am Sunday School & Adult Class ~Come and be at Peace~ on 1290 KUMA noon each Sunday</p>	<p>Faith Center Church Worshiping God Loving People 108 S. Main • 276-9569 Sunday Worship 10:30 am Sr. Pastor, Ray O'Grady pendletonfaithcenter.org</p>	<p>NEW HOPE COMMUNITY CHURCH 1350 S. Highway 395, Hermiston Sunday Worship Services English- Pastor Dave Andrus 9:00 & 10:45 am Spanish- Pastor Genaro Loreda 9:00 & 10:15 am Classes for kids during all services For more information call 541-567-8441</p>	<p>Seventh-Day Adventist Church Saturday Services Pendleton 1401 SW Goodwin Place 276-0882 Sabbath School 9:20 am Worship Service 10:45 am</p>
<p>Community Presbyterian Church 14 Martin Drive, Umatilla, OR 922-3250 Worship: 10 AM Sunday School at 11:30</p>	<p>PILOT ROCK BAPTIST CHURCH 585 SW Birch, Pilot Rock, OR 97868 (541) 443-2500 prbconline.blogspot.com Sunday School: 9:30 am Worship Service: 10:45 am Wednesday Services: Kids' Club: 6:00 pm Youth Group: 7:00 pm</p>	<p>GRACE AND MERCY LUTHERAN CHURCH, ELCA OPEN HEARTS - OPEN DOOR www.graceandmercy.lutheran.org Sunday School 10:00 a.m. (Nursery Provided) Fellowship, Refreshments & Sunday School Check Out our Facebook Page or Website for More Information 541-289-4535 Tom Inch, Pastor Grace and Mercy Lutheran Church, ELCA 164 E. Main St. / P.O. Box 1108 Hermiston, Oregon 97838</p>	<p>Grace Baptist Church 555 SW 11th, Hermiston 567-9497 Nursery provided for all services Sunday School - 9:30 AM Worship - 10:45 AM 6:00 pm Wed Prayer & Worship - 7:00 PM "Proclaiming God's word, growing in God's grace"</p>
<p>St. Johns Episcopal Church All People Are Welcome Scripture, Tradition and Reason Family service 9am Sunday Gladys Ave & 7th Hermiston Fr. Dan Lediard, Priest, PH: 567-6672</p>	<p>FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH in Mission for Christ LCMC Bible Study.....9:00 AM Sunday Worship.....10:30 AM Red Lion Hotel (Oregon Trail Room) www.faithpendleton.org</p>	<p>First United Methodist Church 352 SE 2nd Street Pendleton, OR 541-276-2616 Sunday Worship 9am Open Hearts, Open Hands, Open Doors Facebook: www.facebook.com/FUMCPendleton Services are broadcast every Sunday on KUMA: 1290 AM @ 11am Rev. Dr. Jim Pierce, pastor</p>	<p>Come meet Jesus at PENDLETON BAPTIST CHURCH 3202 SW Nye Ave Pendleton, OR 541-276-7590 Sunday Morning Worship 11:00 AM Sunday Bible Classes 9:45 AM Sunday Youth Group 6:00 PM Mon. Community Women's Study 9:30 AM & 6 PM Awana Kids Club (K-6th grade) Wed Men's Study 6 PM MOPS meeting the 1st Thur of the Month 6 PM</p>
<p>FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH -Presbyterian Church (USA)- 201 SW Dorion Ave. Pendleton Service of Worship - 10:00 am Children's Sunday School - 10:20 am Fellowship - 11:00 am www.pendletonpresbyterian.com Open Hearted...Open Minded</p>	<p>PENDLETON FIRST CHURCH OF GOD FIRST SERVICE 8:30 AM SECOND SERVICE 10:30 AM 712 SW 27th ST. 541-276-1894 www.fcogpendleton.com</p>	<p>THE COUNTRY CHURCH Pastor James Becker 32742 Diagonal RD Hermiston OR 97838 Sunday School 10 am Worship 7 am Evening Service 7 pm Bible Study Wednesdays 7 pm Firestarter Youth Ministry (Ages 12-17) Monday @ 6 pm</p>	<p>Living Word Christian Center Sunday Worship 10:00am Wednesday Bible Study 7:00pm Youth Classes - Nursery-6th grade Sun & Wed YOUTH GROUPS: Jr Hi, Wed 7pm Sr Hi, Sun after the service Sharon Miller, Pastor 401 Northgate, Pendleton 541-278-9082 www.livingwordcc.com</p>
<p>The Salvation Army Center for Worship & Service Sunday Worship Service 9:30 - Sunday School 10:30 - Worship Service Wednesday Bible Study 5:30 Family Fellowship Meal 6:00 Bible Study COME AS YOU ARE 150 SE EMIGRANT (541)276-3369</p>	<p>St. Paul Anglican Church, APA Currently Located at 119 SW Guinney Pl., Home Church in Pendleton @ Sunridge Estates 541-303-1261 Holy Communion - 1st & 3rd Sunday Morning Prayer - 2nd, 4th & 5th Sunday All Services - 10:00am Sundays The Rev. Fr. Vincent Varnas facebook.com/stpaulanglicanchurchapa</p>	<p>Redeemer Episcopal Church 241 SE Second St. Pendleton (541)276-3809 www.pendletonepiscopal.org Sunday Morning Worship 9:00 a.m. Wednesday Worship Noon Wednesday Evening Prayer and Pot Luck 6:00 p.m. All Are Welcome</p>	<p>BAHA'I FAITH "The Unity of All Mankind" Pendleton Baha'i Center at 1015 SE Court Place Devotions Sundays @ 11:00am; Everyone invited! (541) 276-9360 visit us at www.pendletonbahais.org</p>
<p>First Christian Church (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) 215 N Main • Pendleton Sunday Worship: 10:40a Bible Class: 9:30a Office 276-5358 M-F 8:30-12:30 www.fccpendleton.org</p>	<p>As a place to belong Pendleton First Church INVITING ENRICHING INVOLVING EMPOWERING SUNDAY SERVICES AM Celebration-10:00am AM Kids Place -10:00am The Connection--6:00pm Groups for all ages: Adults, Children, Youth, & College Thursdays Celebrate Recovery-6:00pm Celebration Place-6:00pm Other Groups Available Weekly For more info visit WWW.PENDLETONFIRST.COM 1911 SE Court Ave 541-276-6417 Assembly of God Church</p>	<p>St. Paul Anglican Church, APA Currently Located at 119 SW Guinney Pl., Home Church in Pendleton @ Sunridge Estates 541-303-1261 Holy Communion - 1st & 3rd Sunday Morning Prayer - 2nd, 4th & 5th Sunday All Services - 10:00am Sundays The Rev. Fr. Vincent Varnas facebook.com/stpaulanglicanchurchapa</p>	<p>Redeemer Episcopal Church 241 SE Second St. Pendleton (541)276-3809 www.pendletonepiscopal.org Sunday Morning Worship 9:00 a.m. Wednesday Worship Noon Wednesday Evening Prayer and Pot Luck 6:00 p.m. All Are Welcome</p>