



MEDIA RELEASE

Coptic Pope officially opens Melbourne's Eporo Tower

Beacon of Hope creates new landmark for city skyline

Melbourne, Australia; 11 September 2017 The leader of the Coptic Orthodox Church and one of only two sitting Popes in the world, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, officially opened the landmark Coptic cultural hub Eporo Tower in Melbourne's CBD yesterday.

The Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark is known to his people as the Pope of Hope. His Holiness is currently on a 10 day visit to Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne as part of his first official visit to Australia.

Located at 285 La Trobe Street, Eporo Tower is a 44-storey building with sweeping curves and a shimmering glass façade creating a stunning new landmark for the city skyline.

Translating to 'king' in the Coptic language, the chosen name 'Eporo' is also the first word in an ancient Coptic hymn praising the King of Peace. This hymn is considered one of the first of the Coptic Church dating back to around 370 AD. The Coptic community is committed to building bridges of peace, unity and hope in the world.

Initiated by the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne as a missionary church and a beacon of hope, Eporo will serve the diocese's 20,000-strong Coptic community and will welcome all Australians, and international visitors. The Copts will occupy the lower four and a half floors of the building.

Eporo was borne from the vision of the leader of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions, His Grace Bishop Suriel, who saw the need for Coptic art, culture and mission to be embedded within the fabric of the inner city.

"Our Coptic community has been warmly welcomed by the people of Australia and granted a safe haven to call home," Bishop Suriel said. "For nearly 50 years, Australia has provided a wealth of educational, recreational and career opportunities for so many of us to build a positive, meaningful and enjoyable life.

"Eporo Tower will serve as a beacon of peace and deliver a message of hope through mission, education, art, culture and faith."

The tower will feature St Verena and St Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church seating 350 people, along with Sunday School classrooms, administration offices, a function centre/dining hall, an Orthodox bookstore/cafe and a CBD campus for St Athanasius College (SAC). The college operates under the auspices of the University of Divinity offering specialised Coptic Orthodox theological studies to undergraduate and postgraduate students.



Combining modern facilities with traditional Coptic art, Eporo features walls adorned with Coptic mosaics, icons, woodwork and stained glass windows crafted by world-renowned artists using ancient Egyptian techniques.

The Eporo Mosaic

Commissioned by Bishop Suriel to capture his vision of sharing Coptic heritage through art, the striking Eporo mosaic conveys 2000 years of Coptic history. The story of the 15m x 2.5m mosaic begins at the base with a portrait of the flight to Egypt by the Holy Family. The journey continues as the foyer ascends with powerful imagery of St Mark the Apostle bringing Christianity to Egypt and a litany of Coptic martyrs and monks throughout history. It concludes with a celestial vision of human souls entering heaven.

Principal artist Ashraf Fayek spent two years working with 10 artisans to create the mosaic. It draws upon 210 shades of unique colours and 500,000 pieces of bespoke glass and stone tiles, sourced from Italy, Mexico and China. Within the tower, Ashraf has created 97 icons of Coptic martyrs and saints to provide a visual reminder of the church's history and tradition.

"My art presents a link between heaven and earth by artistically presenting theology and history," explains Ashraf. "The founder of the Coptic Orthodox Church, St Mark, studied iconography through the School of Alexandria using the same techniques as the Pharaohs. He used this specialist knowledge to present the Christian faith and it is a great honour to now bring Coptic art into a new era."

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For media information or to schedule an interview, contact:

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About the Coptic Orthodox Church

Founded by the apostle St Mark in 55AD, Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world. Today, the Coptic Orthodox Church has the largest Christian presence in the Middle East, with about 14 million members in Egypt, representing about 15 per cent of the Egyptian population. Australia is home to the third largest Coptic community outside of Egypt with around 90,000 Australian Copts who contribute positively to the communities in which they live. The past 50 years have seen the Coptic Church thrive in Australia and internationally through its commitment to serving others, promoting spirituality, education, the arts and missionary work.

Eporo Tower Timeline

2012 Purchase of three adjoining properties at 279 to 291 La Trobe Street

17 February 2013 Project officially launched with gala ceremony

9 August 2014 Demolition of the existing buildings

7 September 2014 Blessing of the site by Bishop Suriel and diocesan clergy. A gospel is placed at each corner of the building foundation

21 January 2015 First slab of concrete is poured

10 September 2017 Official opening of Eporo Tower, 285 La Trobe St, by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II