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THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH THE DIOCESE OF SOUTH CALIFORNIA,
& ALASKA IN LOS ANGELES MAIN OFFICE

For Immediate Release
November 10, 2020

The Repose of His Eminence, Archbishop Abune Melketsedek
“A precious thing in the Lord’s sight is the death of his faithful servants.” Psalm 116:15

His Eminence Archbishop Abune Melketsedek, the Most Reverend visionary, erudite, and thoughtful father, whose name is at the forefront in the context of modern Ethiopian Orthodox Church history, has run the great race, finished the course, and fallen asleep in the Lord.

Archbishop Melketsedek served the church tirelessly from a very young age, bearing the monastic burden as Deacon, Priest, Bishop, and Archbishop; published books and established educational institutions; mobilized the construction of many churches; served his country during the reign of emperor Haile Selassie as part of His Imperial Majesty’s cabinet. Moreover, he worked tirelessly in his exiled years for the continued honor, unity, and elevation of his country.

The ever-resourceful, diligent, and eloquent scholar, our father Archbishop Abune Melketsedek, whom his country owes a great debt to, entered into his rest at the age of 97 on November 6, 2020 in Oakland, CA, the seat of his archdioceses, where he served for 27 years.

A committee has been organized under the leadership of His Eminence Abune Elias to plan the memorial service for His Eminence. A prayer service for the departed Abune Melketsedek will take place at the seat of his archdiocese, Mekane Selam Medhanealem Cathedral in Oakland, CA on Saturday, November 21, 2020. An extensive service is being planned so his children in God may express their love and reverence for His Eminence, but due to the continued constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, the services will be live streamed on various social media platforms. Pertinent information in regard to the services will be published on the Mekane Selam Medhanealem Facebook page: EOTC Medhanealem Oakland and the Archbishop Melketsedek Workneh Foundation website: AMW-foundation.org as it is received.

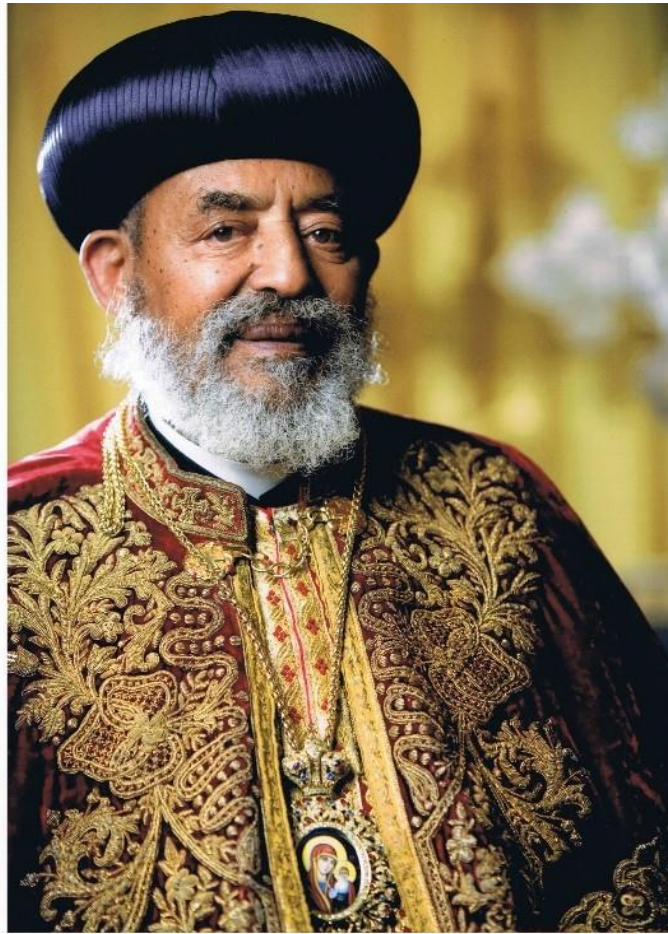
May His Eminence’s blessings remain with us.

Abuna Barnabas, Archbishop of Southern California & Alaska



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Abba Barnabas
Bishop of Southern California,
& Alaska Diocese Office

Condensed Biography of His Eminence, Archbishop Abune Melketsedek



His Eminence Archbishop Abune Melketsedek, the former Arch-hierarch Aba Habte Mariam, was born in Megenta Kusquam, a locality in the district of Farta, Debre Tabor, within the province of Gondar, Ethiopia, to his father Priest Workneh Teku and his mother Mrs. Anguach Atale on July 24, 1924. His father being a proponent of early childhood education laid the foundation for the young Melketsedek's formative education, teaching him *Fidel*, the Ethiopian alphabet with 231 characters, reading, writing and the reciting of the Psalms of David at a very young age. While still very young, Archbishop Melketsedek studied *Tsewatiwe Zema*, the collection of hymns and songs of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church under the tutelage of master Merigeta Wendem at nearby Dedem Giyorgis Church and later travelled to Azawur Kidanemehret Church to receive further training from the great chartist Merigeta Jember. In 1935, he studied the *Degua* (a composite of

songs/chants of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church) under Merigeta Fekad at the renowned Atkena Gyorgis Church. Having completed his studies in *Degua* and *Tsome Degua* (the antiphonal chant of the Holy Lent season), He pursued the mastery of *Sewasew* (Ge'ez grammar) and *Quine* (poetic melody) by traveling to the prestigious Koma Fasiledes Church and studying with Merigeta Amde Berhan. He then travelled to the district of Amara Saynt (Gert Abune Abib) in Wollo province, northern Ethiopia, and took an extensive lesson on the different types of *Quine* composition from Merigeta Abebe Gerte.

In 1935, Archbishop Melketsedek was ordained to the diaconate at Debre Tabor Medhanealem Church by Bishop Abune Abraham at the tender age of 11 and served as a deacon in all the churches he travelled to for his studies. Four years later, renouncing the world, he committed himself to the services of the Lord and became a monk at the age of 15 at the convent of Kristos Semra near Lake Tana. Archbishop Melketsedek had a strong desire to study biblical hermeneutics (the study of biblical interpretation), so he travelled to Este Mekane Eyesus and received training from the hermeneutics scholar Wolde Michael until the school was dispersed due to a typhoid outbreak. Unrelenting to this predicament, he went back to Gert Abune Abib to receive further training in *Quine* composition, and remained there until it became apparent that Merigeta Abebe was increasingly devoting most of his time to the sustenance of his livelihood in farming, which forced Archbishop Melketsedek to once again embark on finding another school where he could immerse himself in his studies full time. Not long after, while at Gishen Debre Kerbe for prayer, God inspired him through a monk to travel to Geregera Giyorgis and seek teacher Seife Selassie, unmatched in his scholarship of hermeneutics, for his teaching. He did as inspired and traveled to Geregera Giyorgis and became a disciple of Seife Selassie. He quickly gained the favor of his teacher for his studious nature. When Seife Selassie was summoned to the city in 1944, he pleaded with Archbishop Melketsedek to accompany him to Addis Ababa, for which he had no interest but heeded the request of his teacher and accompanied him to the city. Seife Selassie was appointed administrator of Menbere Mengest St. Gabriel Church in Addis Ababa, so it was there Archbishop Melketsedek immersed himself in the study of the interpretation of *Metsafe Hadisat* (books of the New Testament) and the Book of Psalms. However, with his teacher's passing not long after, Archbishop Melketsedek assumed the teaching role and tried to preserve the discipleship of his beloved teacher by imparting what he'd learned of the interpretation of the books of the New Testament. After teaching for a year, he wanted to travel to Jerusalem, but that

was neither in God's will nor the Church's and was further discouraged by the Arab-Israeli war of 1948.

Shortly thereafter, with the natural inclination to supplement his ecclesiastical education, Archbishop Melkisedek enrolled in Kidist Selassie Theological College. He studied there for four years surpassing his peers with outstanding performance and receiving many accolades. While at Kidist Selassie, he also received extensive lessons from scholar Felatawos on the interpretation of the eight books of the Old Testament (the Octateuch) - which is the Pentateuch (Gen., Ex., Le., Num., Deut.) + Jos., Jdg., Ruth, the four major prophetic books - (Isa., Jer., Ezek., and Dan.), and the 12 minor - Hos., Am. Mic., Joel., Ob., Jon., Nah., Hab., Zeph., Hag., Zech., Mal.). Concurrently, he taught religious studies at Kotebe College once a week while also fulfilling his apostolic duty of visiting with and imparting encouraging words to patients at Dagnawi Menelik Hospital, nurturing children in the word of God, and giving sermons to parishioners at Kidist Selassie Cathedral.

For his noteworthy scholastic achievements, Archbishop Melkisedek received multiple awards from His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I. In addition, he was afforded the opportunity to attend Holy Theological School of Halki, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate's main School of Theology in Turkey, under the auspices of the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate. He returned to his country in 1956 as the first Ethiopian theologian cleric with a university degree. He brought with him new knowledge from his exposure to the outside world, which he made tremendous efforts to adopt in a way that would be beneficial to his country. His progressive ideas were not embraced by the church, which denied him a teaching position. Upon appealing his position to the emperor, along with his peers with whom he studied abroad, Archbishop Melkisedek was appointed Director of Sewasew Berhan St. Paul School of Theology on the Emperor's recommendation and the blessing of His Holiness Abune Baslios in 1957. Serving in the capacity of director and instructor, he revived the school by preparing teaching materials and revising the curriculum.

In 1959, Archbishop Melkisedek was elected to Emperor Haile Selassie's cabinet as Director of Religious Affairs, serving as a conduit for the emperor's orders, exercising episcopal oversight over religious institutes, presenting candidates for bishop and administrator roles and

identifying challenges, along with possible solutions, that face the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. In the same year, he presented qualified candidates to fill administrative roles in a few churches including Menbere Tsebaot Kidist Selassie, to which the emperor deemed His Eminence himself qualified to serve as interim administrator of Menbere Tsebaot Kidist Selassie Cathedral. The emperor then assigned him Interim Administrator of the Cathedral. He was then officially appointed Arch-hierarch a year later. In addition to transforming the church into an exemplar of effective service and administration, Archbishop Melketsedek worked with steadfast devotion to recruit clergy based on the criterion of merit, that helped produce fathers who assumed ranks from bishop to patriarch. He also expanded on the existing building. His Eminence filled both roles, Director of Religious Affairs on the Emperor's Cabinet and Arch-hierarch of Kidist Selassie Cathedral, for fourteen years until 1973. In addition to these responsibilities, Archbishop Melketsedek was always self-motivated in working with global charitable organizations to establish schools in Addis Ababa and rural parts of Ethiopia, publishing many books that are fundamental to the Ethiopian Orthodox faith, expanding evangelization strategies on many communication platforms including Bistrate Wengel radio, and establishing different organizations. For his significant humanitarian, religious and national contributions, Archbishop Melketsedek has received from his country and different foreign countries, a multitude of honorary awards and vestments including,

The Order of the Star of Ethiopia (1st grade/Grand Cross)

The Order of Emperor Menelik II (1st grade/Knight Grand Cross)

The Order of the Holy Trinity (Commander Grade)

Honorary Awards from:

- The Greek government
- Church of Greece
- Church of Alexandria in Greece
- Lazarus Medal from Austria

Vestments including,

- Gold-embroidered black velvet cloak

- Gold-embroidered red velvet cloak and cassock
- Gold blessing cross

In 1973, at the onset of the Derg regime that deposed Emperor Haile Selassie and disbanded his governing councils, Archbishop Melkisedek was unjustly imprisoned for 8 years for no other reason than having worked in close proximity to the emperor. His imprisonment may have separated him from his family and the work he loved, but never discouraged him from the love of Christ, the glory of God, and his apostolic duties. In the time not spent for praying and preaching, he consoled his fellow inmates, authored many of his books, and studied different languages during this time. He recounts his time in prison as “seemingly prison, but God was shielding me.” Fellow inmates, however, remember him as “a gift from God for our source of consolation. He was our father of consolation.” During this harrowing time, when many were giving-in to fear, Archbishop Melkisedek remained firm in preserving his dignity and his monastic position, even refusing to cut his hair, which in Orthodox Monasticism is a sign of the consecration of one’s life to God. When former government officials, members of the imperial household and anyone that worked closely with the emperor, and the emperor himself were massacred in what is recorded in history as Bloody Saturday, Archbishop Melkisedek was spared by the grace of God and released from prison 8 years later on the premise the government mockingly articulated as, “you were suspected a hindrance to the revolution, but are now pardoned.”

By the time of his release, the church was under complete control of the Derg, and the clergy was unwilling to welcome him back and allow him to resume his work. But upon learning the eagerness of the Orthodox church in Austria to receive him, should the Ethiopian Orthodox Church neglect and undermine his knowledge and potential, he was allowed to work at Sewasew Berhan St. Paul School of Theology. But his aversion to the way the school was run led to his transfer to the publishing enterprise of the church, where he translated many books that benefited the generation, and published his own books and authored and printed new books.

Archbishop Melkisedek was recommended for the rank of bishop before his imprisonment, which he declined in favor of traveling to work in different places. But in 1990, at the intercession of 3 Archbishops sent from the Holy Synod to entreat him to join the episcopacy in order to help resolve the schism that was wreaking havoc within the Holy Synod and to improve the operation

from within, Archbishop Melketsedek agreed, and was consecrated bishop as Aba Melketsedek by His Holiness Patriarch Abune Merkoriwos on October 22nd of the same year. Not long after, a coalition of rebel forces toppled the Derg regime and established The Transitional Government of Ethiopia, under which the unfortunate governance of the church fell. Patriarch Abune Merkorios was forced to abdicate and flee abroad while the new government exerted complete authority over the affairs of the Orthodox church to enthrone a new patriarch. The enthronement of a new patriarch while the incumbent patriarch was still alive was an egregious violation of the cardinal tenets of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, but to make matters worse, a top-down replacement of clergy with unqualified persons ensued. Whoever opposed the appointment of the new patriarch and refused to work under the new leadership, from bishops to priests, increasingly received threats. Both the country and the church were under duress. After bearing witness to the destruction of his country, debasement of the Orthodox Church, and the destruction of life and history, Archbishop Melketsedek denounced the government and produced writings of opposition to no avail and was ultimately exiled from his beloved country. Although his departure from his country made him an exile, every ground he treaded was a home, as the psalmist testifies “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof,” making his exile a blessing and affording him the opportunity to travel all over the United States and carry out his apostolic duties of shepherding and teaching Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in the diaspora.

Until the exiled Patriarch arrived in the U.S., Archbishop Melketsedek worked diligently to console the multitude of Ethiopian Christians who had migrated to North America since the 1970s. When the patriarch settled in America and the exiled synod commenced its work, he served as General Secretary of The Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church-In-Exile until the reunification of the two synods and the reinstatement of His Holiness Abune Merkorios to his rightful seat in 2018. Archbishop Melketsedek established the seat of his Archdiocese in Berkeley, CA, and later at Mekane Selam Medhanealem Cathedral in Oakland, CA, but traveled often to support the People of God who make up the Ethiopian Orthodox Church all over the United States, Canada, Australia, the Middle East, Asia, Europe and South Africa in building churches. When asked where he resides, he would say “on the air” as he would be in the West at night and be ready for morning service in the East, with the look on his face never of weariness but enduring diligence.

Archbishop Melkisedek worked tirelessly to ensure the continuation and expansion of the Ethiopian Orthodox Holy Synod In-Exile, which produced many member churches that recognized the true legitimacy of the exiled synod. As the number of member churches grew, so did the need for more bishops. He was instrumental in the vetting and consecration of many bishops, resulting in the teaching of the undiluted word of God and the consolation of a multitude of Orthodox Christians. For his exceptional stewardship over his archdioceses in Northern California, the tremendous religious and social strides he made in providing spiritual guidance to faithful Ethiopian immigrants at large and his invaluable services to the church, Archbishop Melkisedek was a recipient of certificates of recognition from United States Congressman Michael M Honda, United States Congresswoman Barbara Lee, 13th congressional district, United States Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, 12th congressional district, Vice President-elect of the United States, Kamala Harris, United States senator from California, Dianne Feinstein, Assemblyman Rob Bonta and The California Legislature Assembly. In addition, Archbishop Melkisedek also received certificates of declaration, proclaiming July 19th, his date of birth, Archbishop Melkisedek Workneh day, from Mayor Edwin Lee for City and County of San Francisco, Mayor Libby Schaaf for the City of Oakland, Sam Liccardo for the City of San Jose, Tom Bates for the City of Berkeley and Lisa M Gillmor for the City of Santa Clara. In addition, although not befitting the contributions he's made over the course of his life, he was memorialized with a library bearing his name based on the decision of Archbishop Melkisedek Workneh Foundation board members and The Oakland Mekane Selam Medhanealem Administration. The library is an embodiment of his life and works, and a vestige for generations to come. It was inaugurated on May 12, 2018 with Archbishop Melkisedek and all primates of the Holy Synod In-exile in attendance.

Although the autocephalous expansion of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the diaspora, which meant the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and the evangelization of many was a great source of joy for His Eminence, the schisms that plagued the church and the exilic status of the Holy Synod weighed heavily on his heart. In contemplating his eagerness to see the unification of the two synods, he wrote, "God willing, he may allow me to see the unity of all the canonical Orthodox churches restored." In pursuing his wish, he served as proxy for the Holy Synod in facilitating reconciliation talks with religious leaders in Ethiopia during his tenure as General Secretary of the Holy Synod. Leading the last and successful peace delegation that took place in Washington DC from July 23rd to 28th, 2018, His Eminence expressed his utmost happiness to an

audience including the Prime Minister of Ethiopia by saying, “the government cruelly deposed us 27 years earlier and now the government is ensuring our honorable return to our country.” Immediately following the reconciliation, the episcopacy travelled to Ethiopia with the Prime Minister, but His Eminence stayed behind due to health issues. In God’s perfect timing, he returned to Ethiopia for the first time in 27 years on December 30th, 2018. While in Ethiopia, he visited with His Holiness Abune Merkorios to express his joy and later sought to visit with His Holiness Abune Mathias, but His Holiness reduced himself to assert, “it is I who should come to you and not you to me” and visited with Archbishop Melketsedek along with a number of Archbishops. Archbishop Melketsedek attended the Council of the Clergy in May 2018 to impart his wisdom and blessing to members of the Holy Synod. Despite the limitations of poor health and receiving serious medical treatment, His Eminence never wavered from faithfully serving the church and shepherding his flock. Although it was increasingly becoming difficult for him to make the parish visits he loved, he managed to travel to Dallas Debre Meheret St. Michael Church and gave his benediction at the inauguration of Saint Yared Pastoral Academy in November 2019, stressing its significant potential to educate generations to come.

His Eminence followed God's path since childhood, and he will be remembered as a gracious and kindhearted leader who was always sustained by his unwavering commitment to Christ in serving his people, the church, and his country with resolve. He was a man of peace and principle who fulfilled his apostolic duty without fear and worked tirelessly to preserve the canonical integrity of the church. Archbishop Melketsedek had a facility for languages. In addition to Amharic and Ge’ez, he spoke English, Greek, Turkish, Arabic, and semi-fluent Tigrigna, which enabled him to represent the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in many instances of global spiritual conferences. He was a prolific writer and scholar who authored 33 and published 22 books. The 11 that remain unpublished for various reasons are in the process of being published and distributed to the public. Many of his books are used as textbook in his beloved Sewasew Berhan St. Paul School of Theology. The ever-memorable Archbishop Melketsedek placed great importance on the value of time from the early days of his ecclesiastic education. He read ferociously, wrote, and fulfilled his apostolic duty with zeal and lived a wholesome life in the spirit, which is and will remain a source of pride for his children in the faith.

May his blessing be upon us.