June 2023

A Church of the People: Coptic Church Building and Direction in Central New Jersey

Bishoy Garis
University of South Florida

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by

Bishoy Garis

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of History
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Matthew King Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Darcie Fontaine Ph.D.
Brian Connolly Ph.D.
Tara Deubel Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
June 6, 2023

Keywords: migration, transnationalism, intercommunal, religion

Acknowledgments

No individual can write an extensive research paper without the assistance, support, and cooperation of others. I am greatly indebted to many people. The success of this paper is the result of the patience and flexibility that my supervisory committee has shown me over the past two and a half years. Dr. Matthew King has guided me throughout my PhD program from day one and has instilled in me numerous characteristics necessary of a scholar. The endless chats and time I spent with him over the past five years has profoundly influenced who I am as an individual and researcher. Dr. Darcie Fontaine is another individual to whom I owe more than I can offer. Following an unexpected encounter two and a half years ago that forced me to transition from late antiquity to modern Middle Eastern studies, Dr. Fontaine has been at my side. She exerted her efforts in preparing me for this project and extended a hand to me when my future was uncertain. Both these individuals spent countless hours with me discussing various ways to approach this subject, editing drafts, and supporting me when I felt overwhelmed. I thank them both dearly.

This paper would not have been possible without the cooperation and time of the Copts of Middlesex County. Their willingness to share personal narratives with me, even if embarrassing at times, was beyond admirable. I would like to thank Sonia Demetrious, Rafik Wahba, and Louis Shenouda for the countless hours they spent with me and their willingness to tolerate my incessant requests and invasive questions with a kind and loving heart. I would also

like to thank my friends Mark Salem and Essam Iskander for their time and support. Their willingness to read over my chapters and brainstorm with me will never be forgotten.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents for supporting me and guiding me throughout this dissertation. Their ability to sacrifice everything and come to the U.S. for the betterment of our family has been a source of motivation throughout this project. Their transition from immigrants with very little to their names into successful software engineers encapsulates their tenacity and willingness to overcome any challenge they encounter; characteristics I hope to inherit.

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Abstract

Building off Michael Akladios' work on early Coptic migration and the ad hoc institutionalization of the Coptic Orthodox Church in North America, this dissertation proposes that the construction and direction of Coptic churches in Middlesex County, New Jersey was laity driven, ad hoc, reactive, and dependent on local variables. Additionally, it reveals that the creation of St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in East Brunswick, New Jersey spurred migration to the Middlesex County area and transformed their small community into a domestic and international Coptic migration center. Unlike previous scholarship that places greater attention on urban Coptic communities and transnational networks, this dissertation provides a localized perspective that examines the Coptic community within an overall trend of U.S. suburban development and migration. From this vantage point, it examines how Coptic communities influenced suburban development and worked with organizations to shape local diversification efforts. It is the goal of this dissertation to portray the Coptic community and their religion as a facet of the American religious landscape instead of a marginalized and insular group struggling to preserve their religion and culture in American society. Although Copts arrived in the U.S. with a strong ethnoreligious background, the emphasis or omission of their Egyptian heritage was heavily influenced by the public and their perceptions of the Coptic community. The eclecticism of immigration narratives and church building initiatives discussed in this dissertation sheds light on the complexity of consolidating our understanding of the early Coptic community in the diaspora into a single absolute narrative. While common tropes are

decipherable, a clear understanding of diasporic Coptic communities is only possible through discernment and the quantification of developmental difference.

Introduction: Finding a Place for the Copts in Modern Scholarship

"We were pioneers venturing on Noah's Ark to a new land that would expand the Coptic Church and people beyond its borders."[1] These were the words that Rafik Wahba, a Coptic Sunday School teacher from St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church who moved to the U.S. in 1968, told me in an interview in October 2021. Wahba's comment is indicative of early Coptic migrants who started settling in the United States from the 1950s onwards. These individuals were mostly educated and skilled laborers seeking better educational and employment opportunities in the U.S. They formed enclaves throughout U.S. cities, specifically in New Jersey, New York, and California, however, the early community had little communication with each other because there were no Coptic churches or organizations to bring them together. Since these early migrants possessed a strong ethnoreligious identity and connection to the Coptic Church in Egypt, they created organizations in the early 60s to unite the Copts in their regions and throughout the diaspora. In 1970, two churches were owned by Coptic communities in New Jersey and California. The creation of churches was vital to these early immigrants, and by the time the St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in East Brunswick, New Jersey was created in 1980, there were around 16 churches throughout the U.S. As a result, the church became a significant component of their identity in America and provided Copts throughout the U.S. economic, social, and cultural support.

[1] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

Prior to my encounter with Wahba, I wanted to write my dissertation on the Coptic diaspora from the perspective of the Coptic Church in Egypt. I believed a top-down approach would illustrate how Coptic churches were created throughout the U.S. This conversation made me consider, though, the agency of individuals outside the hierarchies of the Coptic Church in Egypt and their roles in shaping immigrant churches in America. It was largely the actions of the laity, not the Coptic hierarchy, that created churches in the diaspora and brought together the dispersed Copts into a community and organization. It is their efforts that this dissertation aims to highlight.

The primary goal of this dissertation is to examine the advent of the Coptic community in Middlesex County, New Jersey, the creation and expansion of their church, how the Copts integrated themselves into the area, the relationships they developed with neighbors and local organizations, and their construction of transnational networks. Building off Michael Akladios' work on early Coptic migration and the ad hoc institutionalization of the Coptic Church in North America, I argue that the construction and direction of the Coptic community in Middlesex County was bottom-up, laity driven, ad hoc, and dependent on local variables. Additionally, this case study will reveal that the creation of St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in East Brunswick, New Jersey by the Copts of Middlesex County proliferated migration to the region and transformed their small community into a domestic and international migration center for Copts. Unlike previous scholarship that places greater attention on urban Coptic communities, activism, and religious identity, I provide a localized perspective that examines the Coptic community within an overall trend of U.S. suburban development and transnational efforts. From this vantage point, it is possible to examine how Coptic communities contributed to suburban development and diversification efforts through their cooperation with local organizations.

Additionally, it provides clarity to how individual churches chose to participate in and create transnational networks. Lastly, it will allow us to step away from absolute claims of a homogenous ethnoreligious community and examine how communal and personal identities were contested and renegotiated according to intracommunal and intercommunal dynamics.

Who are the Copts?

The Coptic people are an ethnoreligious and indigenous group in Egypt. The Coptic language, which has been delimited to a liturgical language in the Coptic Church, is the final form of the ancient Egyptian language and is written in Greek letters with additional characters adopted from the Demotic Egyptian script. The word Coptic is the anglicized form of the Arabic word *Qypt*, which derives from the Greek word *Aigyptos*, which derives from the ancient Egyptian word *Hikuptah*. Ancient Egypt is fundamental to modern Coptic identity and the Copts actively celebrate their ancient Egyptian past. This connection to ancient Egypt was fundamental to Egypt's modernization process and is heightened in the diaspora through the creation of Egyptian festivals. Additionally, Coptic culture and identity is intertwined with anti-Chalcedonian Christian Orthodox theology and Coptic Church traditions.

The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Christian denominations in the world, tracing its roots back to the earliest days of Christianity in Egypt. According to Coptic tradition, St. Mark brought Christianity to Egypt around 61 A.D. and established his See in Alexandria. In the modern era, the Coptic church witnessed a restructuring of their organization that focused on textualizing their faith, educating their clergy, and incorporating the laity into the church's operations. Additionally, the Coptic Church was intertwined with political leaders and formed an entente that saw the church's hegemony expand over the Coptic people. Despite a history of

persecution and congregational decline in the medieval era, the modern Coptic Orthodox Church is growing and continues to play a significant role in the spiritual, social, and cultural life of Egypt and the wider Coptic diaspora.

Historiography: Modern Egypt, Coptic Diaspora, and Religion in the U.S.

Modern Egypt

Scholars of modern Egypt and the Coptic community have made great strides over the past two decades to elucidate Egypt's modernization process and provide agency to the Coptic community in Egypt. Yet, modernization, as Timothy Mitchell argues, is commonly understood as something to have started and finished in Europe, a supposed reality and history to be emulated and mimicked by non-Western nations.[2] As a result, some scholars have argued that Egypt's modernization project was a failure because it culminated with authoritarian rule and religious sectarianism, in contrast to the secular democracies of Europe following World War II.[3] By doing so, they omit a fundamental reality that modernity is a globalized yet localized endeavor and not mere reactions or imitations of Europe's modernization process.

Studies by Ussama Makdisi, Talal Asad, Paul Sedra, Saba Mahmood, and Vivian Ibrahim have taken steps to dismiss this Eurocentric position and demonstrate that the use of religion in Egyptian politics does not mean that Egypt is not modern.[4] Instead, secularism and religion were

[2] Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity," in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell, NED-New, vol. 11 (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1–34.
[3] For instance, see Mariz Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Angie Heo, "The Virgin between Christianity and Islam: Sainthood, Media, and Modernity in Egypt," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 4 (2013): 1117–38.; S.S. Hasan, *Christians Versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Iskander, *Sectarian Conflict in Egypt: Coptic Media, Identity and Representation* (Routledge, 2012).
[4] Ussama Makdisi, "Understanding Sectarianism in the Middle East," *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, July 12, 2017, https://www.thecairoreview.com/tahrir-forum/understanding-sectarianism-in-the-middle-east/.; Talal Asad, "Fear and the Ruptured State: Reflections on Egypt after Mubarak," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2012): 271–98; Paul Sedra, "Class Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: Coptic Christian Communities in

two interconnected facets of modernity used by Egyptian politicians, as well as secular and religious institutions, to define Egyptian modernity. Egypt did not modernize to remove religion, instead, as the Egyptian state and society modernized, so did their religious institutions.[5] However, as Michael Akladios notes, an overemphasis of religion in recent literature "privileges sectarian frameworks in the study of inter-religious communal relations."[6] Although sectarian identities were pervasive throughout Egypt's modernization process, accentuating their dominant role dismisses the reality that these identities were continuously negotiated through Ottoman imperial reforms, colonial encounters, and political debates over the trajectory of Egypt's quest for political independence.[7] Another negative influence of sectarianism in current literature, particularly when focusing on the Copts, is that researchers tend to view the history of the Coptic community as insular, exceptional, and separate from that of Egyptian Muslims.[8] Although these works are invaluable to our understanding of the Coptic community in Egypt, they often adopt a

Modern Egyptian Politics," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10, 2 (July 1999): 219–35; Paul Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers and Education in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (London: I.B. Tauris and Company Limited, 2011); Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton University Press, 2015); Vivian Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity* (IB Tauris, 2010); Vivian Ibrahim, "Beyond the Cross and the Crescent: Plural Identities and the Copts in Contemporary Egypt," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 14 (August 27, 2015): 2584–97.

[5] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*; Paul Sedra, "The Patriarch and His Project: Cultivating a Coptic Community in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," ed. Ramez Boutros, *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies 1*, 2010, 109–20."

[6] Michael Akladios, "Ordinary Copts: Ecumenism, Activism and Belonging in North American Cities, 1954-1992" (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2020), 36.

[7] For more information concerning the imagined and negotiated concepts of sectarianism see Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*; Makdisi, "Understanding Sectarianism in the Middle East"; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 43.

[8] Samuel Tadros, *Motherland Lost: The Egyptian and Coptic Quest for Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013); Anthony Shenoda, "The politics of faith: on faith, skepticism, and miracles among Coptic Christians in Egypt," *Ethnos* 77, no. 4 (2012): 477–95; Hyun Jeong Ha, "Emotions of the Weak: Violence and Ethnic Boundaries among Coptic Christians in Egypt," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 1 (2017): 133–51; Meir Hatina, "In Search of Authenticity: A Coptic Perception," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 1 (January 2006): 49–65; Paul Rowe, "Building Coptic Civil Society: Christian Groups and the State in Mubarak's Egypt," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (January 5, 2009): 111–26; Mariam Ayad, *The Death of Coptic?" Coptic Culture: Past, Present and Future, 11-41*, ed. Mariam Ayad (Shephalbury Manor: The Coptic Orthodox Church Centre, 2012).

persecution narrative that portrays the Copts as victims rather than agents of the Egyptian state and society.[9]

As a result of the persecution narrative, researchers in the past have examined the Copts in modern Egypt through the eyes of Muslims and missionaries.[10] The former tends to focus on the Copts in relation to how Egyptian Islamists attempt to handle Copts within the context of political Islam.[11] This interreligious focus, though, does not give adequate consideration to Coptic intracommunal dynamics and their ability to negotiate their place in Egypt's modern era. Sebastian Elsässer, Mariz Tadros, Nelly van Doorn-Harder and numerous other scholars have exerted their efforts to combat this notion and have instead chosen to examine the Copts as actors rather than victims or bystanders in modern Egypt.[12] Their works explore how Copts contributed

[9] Andrea B. Rugh, *Christians in Egypt: Strategies and Survival* (Springer, 2016); Sebastian Elsässer, *The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Laure Guirguis, *Copts and the Security State: Violence, Coercion, and Sectarianism in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford University Press, 2016); Iskander, *Sectarian Conflict in Egypt: Coptic Media, Identity and Representation*; Nadia Marzouki, "The US Coptic Diaspora and the Limit of Polarization," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 14, no. 3 (2016): 261–76; Samuel Tadros, "In Egypt, Copts Are Being Persecuted Again," *National Review*, 2015, http://www.nationalreview.com/article/416512/egypt-copts-are-being-persecuted-again-samuel-tadros; Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985); Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002). In some cases, they completely omit or briefly mention the Coptic people. See Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: UCP, 1991 edition [1988]); Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers in the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882 - 1954* (American University in Cairo Press, 1998); Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminism, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (American University in Cairo Press, 2011).

[10] J.D. Pennington, "The Copts in Modern Egypt," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18, no. 2 (1982): 158–79.

[11] An archetypal example of this is Rachel Scott's book, *The challenge of Political Islam: Non-Muslims and the Egyptian State*. (Stanford University Press, 2010). While this book is dedicated to non-Muslims and their relationship with the state, Scott spends much of her time discussing Islamic thinkers and how they look to define citizenship to incorporate non-Muslim communities. Her last chapter is dedicated to the Copts, but her focus is on how the Copts responded to Islamic thinkers rather than exploring how Copts wanted to incorporate themselves into the state according to their communal desires.

[12] Elsässer, *The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era*; Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*; Magdi Guirguis and Pieternella Doorn-Harder, *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011); B.L. Carter, *The Copts in Egyptian Politics 1918–1952* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Mariz Tadros, "Christians Coping with Insecurities in the Aftermath of the Arab Revolts: Converging and Diverging Strategies," *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15, no. 1 (March 28, 2017): 21–30; Peter E. Makari, *Conflict & Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007); Philipp Thomas, "Copts and Other Minorities in the Development of the Egyptian Nation-State," in *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic: A Reassessment of Revolution and Change*, ed. Shimon Shamir (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Nelly van Doorn-Harder, eds., *Copts in Context: Negotiating Identity, Tradition, and Modernity* (University of South Carolina Press, 2017); Ibrahim, "Beyond the Cross and the Crescent; Heather J. Sharkey, *A History of*

to nationalist movements, responded to persecution, and continuously constructed and adapted their identity in modern Egypt. Scholars who discuss Egypt from a missionary perspective are preoccupied with Western imperial expansionism and how missionaries used their influence to protect Eastern Christians while creating their own institutions.[13] This emphasis delimits Copts in Egypt as a "Christian other," which insinuates that Christianity in Egypt was an outcome of Western imperial interests instead of an authentic belief with ancient traditions.[14] Heather Sharkey, Samir Boulos, and Paul Sedra have challenged these perspectives and provided a more thorough understanding of how Copts restructured their institutions to combat missionaries, the cultural exchanges that took place between Copts and Western missionaries, and the appropriation of missionary strategies to extend the Coptic Church's influence on lower-class and middle-class Copts.[15]

Another growing trend in modern Egypt scholarship is the relationship between the Coptic Church and Egyptian state. Scholars discussing this relationship have examined the ways the Coptic Church has reacted to new state developments, its modernization process, which is often linked to Pope Cyril IV (1854-1861), intracommunal dynamics between Coptic patriarchs and the *Majlis al Milli* (lay council), and the church's increased hegemony over the political and social lives of the Coptic community.[16] Researchers have elucidated contested spaces between

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Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Middle East (Cambridge, 2017); Mark Farha and Salma Mousa, "Secular Autocracy vs. Sectarian Democracy? Weighing Reasons for Christian Support for Regime Transition in Syria and Egypt," *Mediterranean Politics* 20, no. 2 (2015): 178–97; Jason Brownlee, "Social Relationships and the Prevention of Anti-Christian Violence in Egypt," *The Middle East Journal* 72, no. 1 (2018): 66–88.

[13] See Eleanor H. Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon, *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion: Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East* (Columbia University Press, 2014).

[14] The notion of a "Christian other" stems from Ghada Barsoum Botros, "Competing for the Future: Adaptation and the Accommodation of Difference in Coptic Immigrant Churches" (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2005).

[15] Heather J. Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Samir Boulos, *European Evangelicals in Egypt (1900-1956): Cultural Entanglements and Missionary Spaces* (Brill, 2016); Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity*.

[16] Ibrahim. *The Copts of Egypt*; Paul Sedra, "Ecclesiastical Warfare: Patriarch, Presbyterian, and Peasant in Nineteenth-Century Asyut," ed. Abbas Amanat and Magnus T. Bernhardsson, vol. V, YCIAS Working Paper Series (Connecticut: New Haven, 2002); Rowe, "Building Coptic Civil Society."

the Church and laity, which provides a more thorough understanding of Coptic intracommunal dynamics in modern Egypt. Additionally, through examinations of the Sunday School Movement, political ententes between the Church and state, and Pope Shenouda III's (1971-2012) efforts to champion the voice of middle-class Copts, our understanding of increased religiosity and confessionalism among Copts in the 20th century can now be juxtaposed with the Islamization of Egypt and modern Egyptian sectarianism.[17]

These new trends, as Paul Sedra notes, has also forced scholars to shift away from an exclusive upper-class perspective in favor of subaltern perspectives.[18] With an increased availability of subaltern sources, modern Egypt scholarship has furthered our understanding of intracommunal relations, namely the way lower-class and middle-class Copts responded to political and social marginalization manifested by the self-interest of upper-class Egyptian Copts and politicians. The adoption of subaltern perspectives has also encouraged scholars to address women in Egypt and the Coptic community. Research on gender within Egypt and the Coptic community discusses themes such as resistance against clerical and state concepts of gender, the duality of Coptic women identity as a long-suffering wife and mother, the use of female virgin saints to imprint concepts of purity and spirituality among Coptic women, women in the Coptic Church, and women agency.[19] The abundance of scholarship concerning Egypt's modernization

[17] For examples of this see Mariz Tadros, "Vicissitudes in the Entente between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the State in Egypt (1952–2007)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 2 (2009): 269–87; Paul Sedra, "Copts and the Millet Partnership: The Intra-Communal Dynamics behind Egyptian Sectarianism," *Journal of Law and Religion* 29, 3 (2014): 491–509; Bishop Suriel, *Habib Girgis: Coptic Orthodox Educator and a Light in the Darkness* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017).

[18] Paul Sedra, "Writing the History of the Modern Copts: From Victims and Symbols to Actors," *History Compass* 7, 3 (2009), 1056 and 1058.

[19] See Berit Thorbjornsrud, "Born in the Wrong Age; Coptic Women in a Changing Society"," in *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 168–89; Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images of Gender in Modern Coptic Society," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38 (2002): 110–30; Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, *Contemporary Coptic Nuns* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (Yale University Press, 1994); Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (University of California Press, 2005).

process and the various ways religious institutions, lower-class and middle-class Egyptians, and women have contributed to this process has made modern Egypt a vibrant field with much to offer.

When examining Egypt's modernization process in this dissertation, I draw on Göran Therborn's concept of entangled modernities, which defines modernity as a culture or social sphere having a particular time orientation in which there are different periods of modernity followed by de-modernization or re-traditionalization.[20] Modernity is not limited to one realm, instead there are multiple facets of modernity such as thought, practice, technology, behavior, and sex that take place within a modernizing context. These modernities are also entangled, not only suggesting that various groups and individuals internalize and form coexisting concepts of modernity, but that there is a degree of interdependence and exchange between the various modernities.

Although Middle Eastern modernities are mechanically intertwined with global modernizing efforts, I view Egypt's modernization process from a position of contested hegemony, whereby individuals, organizations, and institutions continuously battle to shape the various facets of modernity according to their standards. By doing so, modern Egypt is not seen as a failure but rather a battlefield by which various groups and institutions compete for the power to inculcate lower-class and middle-class Egyptians with their own concepts of modernity. This perspective is vital to this dissertation because it was the inability of these competing groups to provide agency to lower-class and middle-class Copts in Egypt's modernization process that encouraged Coptic migration to the U.S. from the 1950s onward. It was this perspective of modern Egypt, the growing influence of the Coptic Church, increased

[20] Göran Therborn, "Entangled Modernities," *European Journal of Social Theory* 6, no. 3 (August 1, 2003), 294.

sectarianism, and a distinct ethnoreligious identity that Coptic immigrants brought with them to the U.S. These perspectives shaped how Coptic immigrants defined themselves to the public, organized their churches, and contributed to transnational organizations.

Coptic Diaspora

Coptic diaspora studies is a popular intersectional subfield of modern Egyptian history that examines the social lives of Coptic communities in the diaspora and the development of transnational political and social organizations. A significant number of scholars have addressed identity dynamics within the Coptic diaspora, particularly congregational divisions over the direction of the community and church.[21] These tensions stem from cultural differences between first and second generation immigrants. First generation Coptic immigrants view their religious institutions as a "home away from home" that provides the community comfort and reproduces ethnicity.[22] Second generation Coptic immigrants work to "de-ethnicize" their religious institutions as they continue to identify more widely with their country of birth than the land of their parents.[23] Studies on Coptic identity in the diaspora argue that the process of maintaining

[21] See Ghada Botros, "Religious identity as an historical narrative: Coptic Orthodox immigrant churches and the representation of history," *Journal of Historical Sociology19*, no. 2 (2006): 174–201; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts"; Donald Westbrook and Saad A. Saad, "Religious Identity and Borderless Territoriality in the Coptic E-Diaspora," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 18, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 341–51; Christine Chaillot, "The Life and Situation of the Coptic Orthodox Church Today," *Studies in World Christianity* 15, no. 3 (2009): 199–216; Joanne van Dijk and Ghada Botros, "The Importance of Ethnicity and Religion in the Life Cycle of Immigrant Churches: A Comparison of Coptic and Calvinist Churches," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 41, no. 1–2 (June 22, 2009): 191–214; Rachel Loewen, "The Coptic Orthodox Church in the Greater Toronto Area: The Second Generation, Converts and Gender" (Masters, McMaster University, 2008); Roberta Capozucca. "The construction of diasporic identities. A case study: the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox community, London" (PhD Dissertation, University College London, 2012).

[22] Botros, "Competing for the Future," 13.

[23] Botros, "Competing for the Future," 31; Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, "Diaspora Philanthropy," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 6, no. December 1, 2014: 969–92; Jennifer Brinkerhoff and Liesl Riddle, *General Findings: Coptic Diaspora Survey* (George Washington University, 2015): 1-18; Mark E. Mullins, "The Life-Cycle of Ethnic Churches in Sociological Perspective," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14, no. 4 (November 1, 1987): 321–34.

the diaspora's religious identity supersedes the preservation of their ethnic identity. Jennifer Brinkerhoff, Joanne van Dijk, and Ghada Botros have shown that the Coptic diaspora is highly religious and that Coptic communities are experiencing selective acculturation whereby they "selectively retain cultural practices from their heritage" as they assimilate into their country of origin.[24]

Rachel Loewen, in her study of the Coptic community in the Greater Toronto area, argues that this community adopted three strategies that are centered on separating their religious identity from their Egyptian ethnic identity, establishing an apostolic Christian identity, and creating a new Coptic Church "that recognizes and assumes that its survival depends on the inclusion of non-Egyptians."[25] The idea that Coptic communities continue to disassociate themselves from their ethnic roots and place value on their religious identity is true in certain areas, however, the Coptic Church plays a fundamental role in preventing this disconnect and keeping second and third generation Copts connected to Egypt.[26] Scholarship on Coptic identity and socialization in the diaspora continues to be dissected by scholars, especially by Copts from the diaspora, however, as Akladios notes, this new field of scholarship is often constructed within a "dichotomous framing" of 'good' and 'bad' Copts.[27] As a result of this perspective, diasporic Copts are often understood through their spirituality and relationship with the church,

[24] Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, "Assimilation and Heritage Identity: Lessons from the Coptic Diaspora," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 17, no. 2 (May 1, 2016): 467–85; Dijk and Botros, "The Importance of Ethnicity and Religion."

[25] Loewen, "The Coptic Orthodox Church in the Greater Toronto Area."

[26] Ghada Botros notes in her article "Religious identity as an historical narrative," how Coptic communities in the diaspora are "heritage hungry." Through Sunday School curriculums and other church organizations and institutions, the Coptic hierarchy disseminates a selective religious history that emphasizes the Egyptian nature of their religious identity. Also see Brinkerhoff, "Assimilation and Heritage Identity"; Doorn-Harder, *Copts in Context*.

[27] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 1. This is most evident in Yvonne Haddad and Joshua Donovan, "Good Copt, Bad Copt: Competing Narratives on Coptic Identity in Egypt and the United States," *Studies in World Christianity* 19, no. 3 (2013): 208–32.

rather than their economic, social, and political intentions – most of which were the reasons why they migrated outside of Egypt in the first place.[28]

Another theme in Coptic diaspora literature is the role of the Coptic Church in the diaspora. Akladios' dissertation on ordinary Copts highlights the ad hoc institutionalization of the Coptic Church in North America, the cooperation between early Coptic immigrants and Bishop Samuel to bring priests to America, and the intracommunal politics between clergymen and the laity.[29] Ghada Botros' dissertation on the Coptic community in the diaspora reveals that Coptic churches adopted three non-liturgical roles - comforter, helper, and competitor- in response to the social and economic needs of first-generation and second-generation Copts who continuously seek to define themselves within their country of residence. Competition over the youth is a popular trend within Coptic diaspora research because the youth often influence the direction of diaspora churches.[30] Within a North American context, Coptic communities adopt English and English-speaking priests, while contextualizing religious histories and Sunday School in relation to their new environment. These initiatives are taken with the hope of preserving the youth's religiosity and keeping them connected to the church. The role of the Coptic Church in the diaspora continues to grow, however, the transnational nature of Coptic churches and communities remains center to Coptic diaspora literature.

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[28] For more information on Coptic migration, their intentions, and how they defined themselves in relation to why they left Egypt, see Akladios, "Ordinary Copts"; Botros, "Competing for the Future"; Richard R. Jones, "Egyptian Copts in Detroit: Ethnic Community and Long-Distance Nationalism," in *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream*, ed. Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock, 2000; Eliot Dickinson, *Copts in Michigan* (MSU Press, 2008); Sami Boulos, *The History of the Early Coptic Community in the U.S.A (1955-1970)* (Self-Published, 2006); Ezmat Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A: From the Land of the Pharaohs to the United States of America* (Christian Faith Publishing Inc, 2020).

[29] Akladios' extensive research does not go into too much detail concerning the creation and social role of individual churches.

[30] Nora Stene, "Becoming a Copt: The Integration of Coptic Children into the Church Community," in *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 191–212. In this article, Stene examines the role of children in the Coptic community and the need to incorporate them within church operations.

When Coptic communities in the diaspora began constructing communities and churches in the second half of the twentieth century, they brought with them their prejudices and perceptions of Egyptian state and society as well as their connections and networks with friends, families, and organizations in Egypt. As a result, the Copts in the diaspora maintained a strong connection to Egypt and have created numerous social and political organizations that influenced the social, economic, and political lives of Copts in Egypt. Coptic diaspora participation with Egypt was largely done through philanthropic and social organization. In a 2015 survey of the Coptic diaspora by Jennifer Brinkerhoff and Liesl Riddle, the researchers note that diasporic Copts engage with Egypt through "church or church-related charities more than any other type of diaspora organization."[31] Most Copts contribute to philanthropic and charity endeavors through their local church. The local Coptic church is the lifeline between Copts in the diaspora and those in Egypt, particularly since it provides avenues for Copts to participate in social, religious, and political affairs in Egypt. Yet, diaspora Copts also create charities and social organizations, like Coptic Orphans, that start as small local organizations and expand into transnational organizations with branches in the diaspora and Egypt.[32]

Coptic political involvement and activism in the diaspora, has become a focal point of diaspora scholarship over the past twenty years.[33] Scholars tend to focus on three aspects of

[31] Brinkerhoff and Riddle, "Coptic Survey," 18.
[32] See Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, *Institutional Reform and Diaspora Entrepreneurs: The Inbetween Advantage* (Oxford University Press, 2016). Chapter four of this book is dedicated to the creation, direction, and expansion of Coptic Orphans. Also see Chaillot, "The life and situation of the Coptic Orthodox church today," 215-216; Botros, "Competing for the Future," 182-184.
[33] See Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads*, 163-165; Candace Lukasik, "Conquest of Paradise: Secular binds and Coptic political mobilization," *Middle East Critique* 25, no. 2 (2016): 107–25; Candace Lukasik, "Economy of Blood: The Persecuted Church and the Racialization of American Copts," *American Anthropologist* 123, no. 3 (September 1, 2021): 565–77; Haddad and Donovan, "Good Copt, Bad Copt"; Marzouki, "The US Coptic Diaspora and the Limit of Polarization"; Bosmat Yefet, "Defending the Egyptian Nation: National Unity and Muslim Attitudes toward the Coptic Minority," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 4 (2019): 638–54; Michael Wahid Hanna, "With Friends like These: Coptic Activism in the Diaspora," *Middle East Report* 267 (2013): 28–31; Karim Malak, "False Ideas About 'Activism' in Egypt and the Case of Egypt's Copts: Outside the State and Within the Economy of Power," *Postcolonialist* 2, no. 1 (2014): 46–63; Salma Mousa, "To Protest or Not to Protest? The Christian

Coptic activism and protests in the diaspora. The first examines the impact diaspora activism has on the relationship between the Coptic Church and Egyptian state as well as the lives of Copts in Egypt, which is often cast in a negative light.[34] To these scholars, the rise of Coptic activists is an unwelcoming paradigm that erodes "the credibility and position of Copts in Egypt," encourages unwanted foreign intervention, incites Islamists, and goes against the national unity agenda fostered by the Egyptian state and Coptic patriarch.[35]

The second theme examines the binary relationship between U.S. organizations, typically Christian evangelical organizations, and diasporic Copts as they work together to fight for Coptic human rights in Egypt.[36] Scholars who focus on this perspective examine how American organizations exploit the Copts in Egypt to propagate an imagined concept of the "Persecuted Church."[37] This concept is founded on the idea that Christians around the world are in a constant state of persecution. Using Coptic martyrdoms, these organizations create an "economy of blood," as Candace Lukasik frames it, that "performs the double movement of glory and racialization."[38] Additionally, scholars argue that Copts engage with these organizations in the hopes of promoting change in Egypt, however, they often adopt Islamophobic tendencies from these organizations.[39]

Predicament in the Syrian and Egyptian Uprisings," *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2013); Samer Soliman, "The Radical Turn of Coptic Activism," *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 29, no. 23 (2009): 135–55.

[34] Rowe, "Paul "Four Guys and a Fax Machine? Diasporas, New Information Technologies, and the Internationalization of Religion in Egypt," *Journal of Church and State* 43, no. 1 (2001); Haddad and Donovan, "Good Copt, Bad Copt"; Marzouki, "The US Coptic Diaspora and the Limit of Polarization"; Hanna, "With Friends like These"; Soliman, "The Radical Turn of Coptic Activism"; Malak, "False Ideas About 'Activism."

[35] Hanna, "With Friends Like These," 29, 31; Malak, "False Ideas about Activism," 46.

[36] Lukasik, "Economy of Blood"; Haddad and Donovan, "Good Copt, Bad Copt"; Marzouki "The U.S. Coptic Diaspora."

[37] Lukasik, "Economy of Blood," 1.

[38] Ibid., 1.

[39] Samuel Tadros is an archetypal example of this. See Samuel Tadros, "The Future of Egypt's Copts" (Washington DC: Hudson Institute, 2014), http://www.hudson.org/research/10106-the-future-of-egypt-s-copts.

The last theme, although severely understudied, is the role of the local church in diaspora activism. Oftentimes, scholars attempt to disassociate diasporic political organizations from local churches.[40] This perspective, though, ignores the significant role churches serve as a space for Copts to mobilize, discuss actions, and debate the degree of their participation. While certainly there were clergy and laity that admonished the more militant style of activism that individuals like Shawky Karas and Rudolph Yanney proclaimed in the pews of churches in Jersey City, New Jersey, Coptic churches were directly involved in early diasporic activism.[41] By ignoring this phenomenon, scholars dismiss the intracommunal politics that took place within these communities and the avenues made possible by their local churches, which serve as a safe space to discuss Coptic issues, whether local or transnational.

Scholars of the Coptic diaspora have increased our knowledge of the various Coptic communities in the diaspora extensively over the last two decades, however, there are serious issues that need to be confronted. First, scholars tend to portray homogeneity within the Coptic community in the diaspora, particularly with their faith.[42] While religious identity is fundamental to diasporic Copts, it is not the only way they defined themselves. Local contexts, ambitions, job titles, and individual perspectives towards the Coptic Church, Egypt, and their place of residence are all necessary variables that should be taken into consideration when examining identity in the diaspora. Second, diaspora literature is predominately occupied with urban Coptic communities

[40] Marzouki, "The U.S. Coptic Diaspora"; Haddad and Donovan, "Good Copt, Bad Copt"; Rowe, "Four Guys and a Fax Machine."
[41] See Akladios, "Ordinary Copts." Chapter seven provides substantial information concerning the role of the church in Coptic activism.
[42] For examples that portray Coptic homogeneity in their writing see Saad M. Saad, "The Contemporary Life of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United States," *Studies in World Christianity* 16, no. 3 (November 23, 2010): 207–25; Chaillot, "The life and situation of the Coptic Orthodox church today"; Haddad and Donovan, "Good Copt, Bad Copt."

and have generally ignored suburban Coptic communities.[43] Scholars who focus solely on urban Coptic communities are often examining the Coptic experience in a highly diversified and cosmopolitan arena, an environment that early Coptic migrants were accustomed to in Egypt. By shifting to suburban communities, researchers can move away from how the Copts integrated and defined themselves in these diverse regions and instead look at how the Copts contributed to the diversification of predominately white neighborhoods. From this perspective, we can better understand how the Copts defined themselves and their communities in relation to how they were perceived by white residents. There is also a severe lack of literature concerning the creation and expansion of Coptic churches and their impact on neighborhoods and Coptic migration patterns. Lastly, there have been few attempts to examine the bottom-up and localized construction and direction of individual Coptic communities and churches in the diaspora.[44] As a result, we lack a thorough understanding of how local variables influence the expansion of Coptic churches, how Coptic communities negotiate their presence in a new environment, and how they collaborate with organizations to integrate themselves into their local context. This dissertation looks to address these issues by examining one particular Coptic community in Central New Jersey and placing it in the relevant local, national, and international contexts in which its members operated. To do so, I take an intersectional approach that explores the transnational nature of the Coptic diaspora while placing the Coptic community within the broader field of religion and ethnic religion in the U.S.

[43] An exception to this is Dickinson, *Copts in Michigan*. However, his work does not go into great detail concerning the diversification of Troy, Michigan, the role the Copts played in that diversification process, integration, or migration.

[44] Exceptions are Akladios, "Ordinary Copts"; Loewen, "The Coptic Orthodox Church in the Greater Toronto Area"; Capozucca, "The Construction of Diasporic Identities"; Dickinson, *Copts in Michigan*.

Religion and Suburban Churches in the U.S.

The religious landscape of pre-twentieth century America consisted of parish style churches, often located within walking distance of their congregation.[45] It was common for members in the community to hear church bells and calls to prayer that "regulated daily life, seasons, and community events."[46] These neighborhood churches were immensely integrated into local affairs and served as a major source of social, economic, and spiritual assistance for members and displaced individuals.[47] With the rise of the automobile, highways, and migration into the suburbs by white Protestants, Jews, Catholics, and other ethno-religious communities throughout the twentieth century, spatial proximity to a place of worship no longer served as a prerequisite of congregational membership.[48] Subsequently, two trends can be identified throughout the twentieth century: the rise of ethno-religious places of worship and a philosophical shift concerning suburban religious centers.

Migration, as well as the religious beliefs and practices accompanying these migrants, remains an inseparable facet of American life and philosophy.[49] As Charles Hirschman notes in

[45] Jill Witmer Sinha et al., "Proximity Matters: Exploring Relationships Among Neighborhoods, Congregations, and the Residential Patterns of Members," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 245–60.
[46] Sinha et al, "Proximity Matters," 246; E.B. Holifield, "Toward a History of American Congregations," in *American Congregations Volume Two: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, ed. J.P. Wind and J.W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 23–53.
[47] Charles Hirschman, "The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States," *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (September 1, 2004), 1207.
[48] Sinha et al, "Proximity Matters," 246-247.
[49] Researchers have noted that immigrant communities bring with them traditional religious practices and symbols, however they are also likely to amend and create traditions in response to what they encounter in their new context. The preservation of traditions, particularly popular traditions, create translocal networks that tie certain congregants to a particular region in their country of origin. These networks were bidirectional, resulting in the importation of practices from a specific region and remittance sent back to that specific area. Immigrant communities also enact certain practices to establish a sense of belonging in new social landscapes. For more information on these themes see Peggy Levitt and Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky, "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (July 18, 2007): 129–56; Peggy Levitt, "'You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant': Religion and Transnational Migration," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (September 1, 2003): 847–73; Peggy Levitt, "Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life," in *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 65,1, 2004, 1-18; Richard W. McCallum, "Micro Public Spheres and the Sociology of Religion: An Evangelical Illustration," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 26, no. 2 (May 11, 2011): 173–87; Helen R. Ebaugh and Janet Salzman Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants:*

his study of immigrant churches, the creation of immigrant churches and temples, as well as their presence in established American churches, drastically changed America's religious landscape.[50] Stephen Warner discusses in his study of religion and migration how immigrants do not often join preexisting churches, rather they utilize models offered by established American religious institutions and incorporate social, economic, and spiritual practices.[51] As he states, "American religion is immigrant religion."[52] Places of worship are fundamental to ethnic communities, namely their ability to become a focal point in settlement patterns and communal identity.[53] Warner argues that religious and ethnic communities serve as safe havens, a "home away from home," providing physical, spiritual, economic, and emotional support to congregants.[54] These institutions function as guides to a new society that provide housing, social, and economic opportunities while facilitating their assimilation and integration process.[55] However, religious institutions are malleable entities that constantly adapt and respond to new migrant groups and the socio-cultural dynamics manifested from their arrival.[56]

Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations (New York: Altamira Press, 2000); Hirschman, "The Role of Religion," 1212-1213.

[50] Hirschman, "The Role of Religion," 1212-1213.

[51] Stephen R. Warner, "Religion and Migration in the United States," *Social Compass* 45, no. 1 (March 1, 1998), 126, 127.

[52] Ibid., 126-127.

[53] John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 28.

[54] Stephen R. Warner, *A Church of Our Own: Disestablishment and Diversity in American Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 88. For more information concerning the role religious institutions have on the immigrant experience see Martha Frederiks, "Religion, Migration, and Identity: A Conceptual and Theoretical Exploration," in *Religion, Migration and Identity: Methodological and Theological Explorations*, ed. Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy. (Brill, 2016): 9–29; Marie Friedmann Marquardt, "Structural and Cultural Hybrids: Religious Congregational Life and Public Participation of Mexicans in the New South," in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America and Religion* (Altamira, 2005): 189-219; Elina Hankela, *Ubuntu, Migration and Ministry: Being Human in a Johannesburg Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[55] Ebaugh and Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants*, 53; Hirschman, "The Role of Religion," 1211; J. Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985); Alex Stepick, "God Is Apparently Not Dead: The Obvious, the Emergent, and the Still Unknown in Immigration and Religion," in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America and Religion* (Altamira, 2005): 11-39; Peter L. Berger and Gordon Redding, *The Hidden Form of Capital: Spiritual Influences in Societal Progress* (Anthem Press, 2011).

[56] Botros, "Competing for the Future," 90; David E. Kresta, "Can Churches Change a Neighborhood? A Census Tract, Multilevel Analysis of Churches and Neighborhood" (PhD dissertation, Portland State University, 2019), 16.

In her book *God Needs No Passport*, Peggy Levitt demonstrates that religion is not bound to certain geographical proximities but can traverse imagined boundaries through transnational networks.[57] These networks, often constructed by migrants and places of worship, connect immigrants with their country of origin through philanthropic, political, and cultural endeavors. Scholars have also demonstrated the significant role ethnic and racial places of worship have on political mobilization and participation. From a transnational perspective, immigrant communities utilize their religious institutions to develop international political networks with their country of origin and influence foreign policy.[58] Places of worship also provide a physical space for ethnic and racial groups to participate in local politics and define their political identity.[59] In both cases, the place of worship provides the community a familiar and comfortable space to mobilize and discuss imperative political issues. In other words, immigrant communities placed "enormous financial, social, and cultural weight on their churches and temples as conductors" of local and transnational affairs.[60]

Scholars have also demonstrated that the construction of religious centers in the suburbs, particularly by immigrant groups, profoundly impacted suburban neighborhoods and the relationship between various established and new religious communities.[61] David Kresta

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[57] Frederiks, "Religion, Migration and Identity," 15; Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Gertrud Hüwelmeier and Kristine Krause, *Traveling Spirits: Migrants, Markets and Mobilities* (Routledge, 2009).

[58] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts"; Lukasik, "Economy of Blood"; Levitt, *God Needs No Passport.*; Hüwelmeier and Krause, *Traveling Spirits*; Shirley Lung, "Geopolitics and Identity-Making in US Diasporic Chinese Churches," *Religions* 10, no. 1 (December 24, 2018): 9.

[59] Allison Calhoun-Brown, "African American Churches and Political Mobilization: The Psychological Impact of Organizational Resources," *The Journal of Politics* 58, no. 4 (1996): 935–53; Lewis Baldwin, Corwin Smidt, and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America*, vol. 1 (Duke University Press, 2003); Maria Sobolewska et al., "Understanding the Effects of Religious Attendance on Political Participation among Ethnic Minorities of Different Religions," *European Journal of Political Research* 54, no. 2 (2015): 271–87.

[60] McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 13.

[61] For more information see Frederiks, "Religion, Migration and Identity," 9; Prema Kurien, "Immigration, Community Formation, Political Incorporation, and Why Religion Matters: Migration and Settlement Patterns of the

demonstrates in his study of gentrification and church building how churches are "local economic actors, as landowners, landlords, and even developers."[62] The numerous properties purchased by a place of worship to create schools, recreation centers, houses of worship, senior centers, refugee centers and other social services, allocated places of worship in certain regions with immense economic and social influence.[63] In some cases, the very presence and construction of a church or religious school building encouraged parishioners to purchase a home near the parish and increased the neighborhood's value respectively.[64] In other cases, the appearance of a place of worship decreased the neighborhood's value. The cultural impact – language, food, race, et cetera – that immigrant churches provide a community is also a recognizable component that scholars have discussed.[65]

As immigrants began to develop parish and niche model religious centers throughout the suburbs and cities, their presence affected "non-migrant" communities and generated debates about the role of religion in public and private life – a phenomenon that the Copts of St. Mary's experienced as well.[66] The close proximity of religious buildings as well as heated debates concerning religious building projects in the media also brought about what Ammerman

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Indian Diaspora," *Sociology of Religion* 75, no. 4 (2014), 526; Reinhard Henkel and Hans Knippenberg, "Secularisation and the Rise of Religious Pluralism: Main Features of the Changing Religious Landscape of Europe," in *The Changing Religious Landscape of Europe*, ed. Hans Knippenberg (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2005): 1–13; Ester Gallo, "Introduction. South-East Asian Migration and Religious Pluralism in Europe," in *Religion and Migration in Europe: Comparative Perspectives on South-East Asian Experiences*, ed. Ester Gallo (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014): 1–24.

[62] Kresta, "Can Churches Change a Neighborhood," 12.

[63] Yvonne Y. Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and John Esposito, "Introduction. Becoming American: Religion, Identity, and Institution Building in the American Mosaic," in *Eds. Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and John Esposito (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003): 1–18.

[64] McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 10.

[65] Mucahit Bilici, "Finding Mecca in America: How Islam Is Becoming an American Religion," 2012, https://chicago.degruyter.com/view/title/558607; Justin A. Nystrom, *Creole Italian: Sicilian Immigrants and the Shaping of New Orleans Food Culture* (University of Georgia Press, 2018); Geir Wæhler Gustavsen et al., "Ethnic Variation in Immigrants' Diets and Food Acculturation – United States 1999–2012," *Agricultural and Resource Economics Review* 50, no. 1. 2021: 43–62; Nancy Foner and Richard D. Alba, "Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?," *International Migration Review* 42, no. 2 (2008): 360–92.

[66] Frederiks, "Religion, Migration and Identity," 22-23.

classified as isomorphism; the manifestation of similar aesthetics and functionality by competing organizations.[67] For example, in her study of suburban modern church architecture, Gretchen Buggeln mentions how church building committees often traveled locally to appraise and scout new architecture, rendering a new local norm that had architects replicate their competitor's work at the request of these committees.[68] Moreover, building committees developed a tendency to purchase large lots and "build in stages," which allowed them to expand at their own volition.[69]

The fluidity of zoning regulations throughout the twentieth century, suburban migration, and the affinity by immigrants to belong to a religious house encouraged ethno-religious and immigrant groups to immediately construct houses of worship.[70] In an in-depth analysis of the various philosophies concerning the functionality, practicality, and symbolism of church architecture in the suburbs, Buggeln notes how church architects throughout the 1950s sought to design buildings that were alive and pragmatic, useful, comfortable, and "inexpensive while not appearing so."[71] The phrase "seven-days-a-week" church, as Buggeln clarifies, "perfectly encapsulates" the spectrum of activities and clubs made available by utile and modular buildings.[72] Researchers have categorized two concepts concerning the characteristics of suburban churches.

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[67] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners*. University of California Press, 2005; Mark Mulder and Amy Jonason, "White Evangelical Congregations in Cities and Suburbs: Social Engagement, Geography, Diffusion, and Disembeddedness," *City and Society*, April 1, 2017: 104-126.
[68] Gretchen Buggeln, *The Suburban Church: Modernism and Community in Postwar America* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 68.
[69] Ibid., 58.
[70] Hirschman, "The Role of Religion," 1208.
[71] Buggeln, *The Suburban Church*, 11-12.
[72] Ibid., xxiii.

Since its creation by Nancy Ammerman in 1997, scholars have begun to observe suburban church development along a spectrum.[73] On one end of the spectrum is the parish church, which is defined by three characteristics: a geographical division of a larger religious body, congregants live within the geographical boundaries of the parish; and corollary of the above two characteristics, a tendency for the congregation to be an actor in local affairs.[74] In contrast, the other end of the continuum is the niche church, which possesses four unique characteristics: members are dispersed throughout a metropolitan area, the congregation maintains a specialized identity to draw members with similar identities, interests, and styles of worship, competition for members from similar congregations is minimal, and membership depends primarily on word of mouth, necessitating participation in strong social networks.[75]

For much of American history, the geographically structured parish model dominated the religious landscape.[76] In the second half of the twentieth century however, a rise in mobile congregations increased affinity towards niche religious centers.[77] This shift towards niche model religious centers, as will be discussed in this dissertation, has become a source of contention between neighbors and houses of worship. When the Copts in Middlesex County attempted to expand their church facilities in 1993, residents challenged their building plans because they believed it went against religious convention which fostered an idea that churches were supposed to adopt the parish model and serve residents in the immediate vicinity. Since St.

[73] Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Arthur Emery Farnsley, *Congregation & Community* (Rutgers University Press, 1997); Nancy T. Ammerman, "Finding Religion in Everyday Life," *Sociology of Religion* 75, no. 2 (June 1, 2014): 189–207.
[74] Helen Rose Ebaugh, John T. O'Brien, and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, "The Social Ecology of Residential Pattern and Memberships In Immigrant Churches," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, no. 1 (March 1, 2000), 108.
[75] Ibid., 108.
[76] William McKinney, "Parish," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*, ed. W.H. Swatos Jr (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1998), 350–52.
[77] Ebaugh et al. "The Social Ecology," 107.

Mary's was a regional church with congregants living throughout the Middlesex County area, the expansion and operation of their church reflects the rise of niche style churches in the second half of the twentieth century.

Scholars of migration and religion have also discussed, and disagree over, the role religion has on migration patterns. Skeptics of the impact religion has on migration believe that secular variables have taken precedence, and as Portes and Rumbaut claim, religion "seldom causes emigration."[78] Recent scholarship has challenged this presumption. Drawing on different religious immigrant groups in India, Prema Kurien illustrates that religion can shape migration patterns, remittance use, and the socio-political location of groups within society.[79] Robert Schreiter also lists numerous ways religion significantly impacts individual migrants: religion can be the reason for migration, religion can be an identity marker in a new area, and religion provides moral support during difficult times.[80] Ebaugh and Hagan have shown in their study of the migratory process of a Maya community that religion assists in the decision to migrate, provides moral support during perilous journeys, and builds transnational community structures.[81] These scholars, and others like them, have demonstrated that religion, is in fact, a significant variable to individual migration, particularly for ethnoreligious groups and conservative religious organizations.[82]

Scholars of religion in the U.S. have covered an array of subfields that have advanced our understanding of religion and religious institutions in the U.S. However, few scholars have

[78] Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Univ of California Press, 2006); Claudia Diehl and Dietrich König, "God Can Wait: New Migrants in Germany Between Early Adaptation and Religious Reorganization," *International Magazine* 51, no. 3 (2013), 9-11.
[79] Kurien, "Immigration, Community Formation, Political Incorporation, and Why Religion Matters," 524, 534.
[80] Robert Schreiter, "Spaces for Religion and Migrants Religious Identity," *Forum Mission* 5 (2009): 155–71.
[81] Jacqueline Hagan and Helen Rose Ebaugh, "Calling upon the Sacred: Migrants' Use of Religion in the Migration Process," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 4 (2003), 1159.
[82] For more information on the impact religious conservatism has on migration and the decision to migrate, see Scott A. Myers, "The Impact of Religious Involvement on Migration," *Social Forces*, December 1, 2000.

explored the Coptic community within the context of American religion.[83] To provide visibility to this field, my dissertation looks to accentuate how the construction of a Coptic church in a white suburban town predominantly composed of Jews, alongside Catholic and Protestant sects, influenced the religious landscape of the township and altered neighborhoods. By approaching the Coptic diaspora through the lens of the American context, scholars of Coptic studies can elucidate the way local variables affect Coptic religious identity, church construction, ecumenical unity, and transnational networks. Additionally, this dissertation examines the impact the construction of St. Mary's had on Coptic domestic and international immigration patterns and St. Mary's transformation from a small church in an isolated corner of East Brunswick into a migrant center. It is the goal of this dissertation to present diasporic Copts as a facet of the American landscape instead of a marginalized and insular group struggling to preserve their religion and culture in American society.

Research Aims, Objectives, and Limitations

This research is largely dependent on four types of primary sources: oral histories, the St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church collection, the Sami Zaki collection, and newspaper articles. My lifelong membership in St. Mary's provided me with invaluable access to individuals who were instrumental in constructing this community. At the same time, though, there were instances throughout my research when I felt as if I was part of the subject material rather than an impartial observer. Yet, oral histories are intrinsically bilateral and collaborative. My questions shaped the organization of interviews and how they proceeded, however, my position as a researcher also

[83] See Candace Lukasik, "Postcolonial Solidarities: Oriental Orthodox Kinship in an Age of Migration," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 55, no. 4 (January 1): 484–517; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts."

influenced how I was being perceived by the interviewee.[84] As Akladios notes in his defense of oral histories, I am an "insider" as well as an "outsider."[85] Those I interviewed were only willing to disclose certain narratives after they have assessed my intentions, knowledge, and whether I would "accurately write" their stories.[86] The relationship that exists between interviewer and interviewee is a fundamental component of oral histories because these histories only exist because of our ability to extract this knowledge through "intervention and active engagement."[87]

For this dissertation I interviewed 24 current and previous members of the St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church. They can be divided into three groups: founding members, servants (volunteers that teach Sunday School or participate in church social services), and ordinary churchgoers. Unfortunately, many of the founding members passed away during the Covid-19 pandemic and I was only able to get in contact with two of them. Louis Shenouda and Dr. Mourad Henein both served on the founding committee that incorporated St. Mary's as a non-profit religious organization in 1976. They both migrated to Jersey City, New Jersey in the late 50s and early 60s and were associated with the first Coptic organization in America. The second group of servants were chosen according to their influence in Sunday School and additional social programs. They can be divided into two groups: servants who moved to the U.S. in the 60s and 70s then settled in the Middlesex County area prior to 1988, and servants who moved from Egypt to Middlesex County in the late 80s and 90s.[88] The distinction between both groups is vital

[84] For more information on this reciprocating process see Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop*, no. 12 (Autumn 1981), 103; Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).
[85] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 100.
[86] Almost every individual I interviewed throughout this dissertation asked me what my intentions were and whether I would accurately write their stories.
[87] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 94.
[88] The reason I chose 1988 as a cutoff date is because many of my interlocutors claimed that starting in 1988, they noticed an increase of lower and middle-class Copts coming to Middlesex County directly from Egypt. This marked a demographic shift in the church and was when the community began adopting new social roles to handle these types of migrants.

because each group had their own perspectives and approach towards the direction and functionality of the church. The first group were relatively Americanized, spoke English well, and fostered a philosophy that sought to anglicize religious services. The second group came to America with limited English, prioritized Arabic, and catered to the Arabic-speaking youth. As will be discussed in chapter three, these two perspectives dominated church discourse as the community struggled to integrate the Arabic-speaking youth into the church and broader community. The last group, ordinary churchgoers, were interviewed to better understand why Copts migrated to the U.S. and the impact the creation of St. Mary's had on their decision to move to Middlesex County.

To corroborate these oral narratives, I relied on two collections and numerous news articles. The first was the church's official collection; however, it was not as useful or profound as I expected. There were no surviving board meeting minutes prior to 2013 or any other documents except for blueprints of the construction and expansion of the church. Yet, there were numerous liturgical audio recordings and two videos depicting the Egyptian Festival in 1984 and the church's first Egypt Trip in 1986. Both videos were invaluable to my research, especially when exploring how the community defined their relationship to Egypt and to residents of Middlesex County. The Sami Zaki collection was much more valuable, especially when looking into the conceptualization of St. Mary's. Sami Zaki was supposedly the first person to move to East Brunswick and spearheaded the creation of St. Mary's. His collection contained documents, three letters to Pope Shenouda III, and two histories of the church and community. Sami Zaki wrote his first history following the consecration of the church by Pope Shenouda III in 1977, while the second one was most likely written sometime after 1996. Additionally, his collection contained three books written by Samir Khalil, who was an early member of the church. Samir

Khalil's books included an autobiography of Dr. Fouad George Zaki, a world-renowned cell biologist and Sami Zaki's brother, as well as two short histories written about St. Mary's in 1989 and 2002.[89] Alongside these two collections were news articles published by the *Home News Tribune*, the *Courier-News*, and *The New York Times*. The first two newspapers are local to Middlesex County and provide insight into how the Coptic community defined themselves to the public and how the community was viewed by the public. Unfortunately, government documents pertaining to the construction of the church (1977-1980) and its expansion (1993-1996) were not archived and are lost. Consequently, my depiction of these events is entirely dependent on journalists and Coptic oral histories.

Although my dissertation will provide researchers with a better understanding of a particular Coptic community in the diaspora, my approach has some limitations. The most visible weakness of my approach is that I rely heavily on my oral sources, which at times makes this analysis narrow and one sided. Additionally, my oral sources are all from a Coptic perspective and I do not use oral perspectives from residents who opposed the creation and expansion of St. Mary's. For their perspective I rely on journalistic interpretations and letters published in newspapers. Nevertheless, I utilize oral narratives from Copts of all classes, but the visible lack of female sources, excluding Father Bishoy's wife Sonia Demetrious, creates a male-dominated narrative. When I did speak with female Copts, it was often with their husbands who tended to speak more, while their wives provided better anecdotes and clarified their husbands' words. Although my interviewees witnessed and contributed to the events I discuss throughout this dissertation, time and contemporary perspectives often influenced their oral narratives and

[89] Samir Khalil, *Consecration of St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church*, 1989; Samir Khalil, *St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church: 25 Year Anniversary*, 2002; Samir Khalil, *In Memory of Dr. Fouad George Zaki*. (Written sometime after the death of Dr. Zaki in 2003).

how they were remembered. On account of this, there were numerous times throughout my interviews where I had to intervene and reference a topic or event that I knew about from another source or my own experiences, yet my interlocutors purposely omitted.[90]

With that being said, oral histories are incredibly valuable, not only to this dissertation, but to our overall understanding of how history is remembered, recorded, and passed down. Although the critique that memory is "mutable, untrustworthy, and subjective" may seem to discourage a reliance on oral histories, it is incorrect to assume the recorded history is objective, infallible, and complete.[91] As Peter Burke notes, historians "realize that their work does not reproduce 'what actually happened,'" but "represent it from a particular point of view."[92] Therefore, oral histories are equally as valuable as recorded histories, especially if contextualized and corroborated with other forms of history when possible.

A second problem with this research is that my arguments are at times centered around the church rather than how the community acted outside the church. I do not go into detail about the daily lives of the Copts in Middlesex County as individuals, but rather how they use the church to integrate and portray the community to residents and local organizations. Although the church is laity driven, an overemphasis on how the community defined themselves within a religious context obscures their individualistic nature at times. Yet, the goal of this dissertation is to examine the community as a whole and therefore it was necessary to examine these individuals as part of a larger community.

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[90] A big issue I noticed was that my interlocutors never told me about intracommunal problems unless I mentioned it to them or provided a specific example. Even when they did, few of them were willing to give me details and preferred that I just ignore these issues since they would only distort all the success the community has accomplished. However, after promising not to use names when discussing these problems, they were more open about pervasive issues in the community.

[91] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 99.

[92] Peter Burke, "History of Events and the Revival of Narrative," in Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Pennsylvania State UP, 1992), 239.

Additionally, I underexplore communal relations between various Coptic communities and how they cooperate and impact each other. Although I explore church competition over congregants, I do not explore in detail how different Coptic communities contribute to each other. My research has shown that the Copts of New Jersey and New York contribute heavily to the construction of other churches, participate with each other in conferences, and develop sporting events between churches. Although I wanted to include these events in this dissertation, they did not fit well into the overall purpose of this paper which is to explore the laity driven, ad hoc, and improvised nature of the community and church in Middlesex County. What happened in Middlesex County might appear to reflect the development of other communities throughout the Coptic diaspora, but each community develops in their own unique way. It is essential to recognize that the development of St. Mary's was unique due to a lack of episcopal oversight, unlike other Coptic communities that worked directly with bishops and under his authority.

This dissertation challenges the supposed homogeneity of the Coptic diaspora and encourages other researchers to examine the Coptic community from a local and bottom-up perspective instead of focusing solely on the community's transnational connections with Egypt. Additionally, my research demonstrates the improvised, opportunistic, and reactive nature of Coptic communities and encourages researchers to examine how Copts define themselves in relation to what they encountered in their new environment. Although Copts arrived in the U.S. with a strong ethnoreligious background, the emphasis or omission of their Egyptian heritage was heavily influenced by local perceptions of the Coptic community. Additionally, this dissertation contributes to scholarship that discusses the impact religion has on migration patterns and places the Coptic community within the broader discipline of religion in the U.S. Lastly, this dissertation is necessary because researchers have understudied one of the largest and

fastest growing Coptic communities in the U.S. The Copts of Middlesex County started off as a small community of 35 families in 1976 and by 2006 they had three churches, one satellite church, two schools, and over 1,200 families. Within the next 17 years they would have 8 churches, over 2,500 families, three schools, a recreation center, a political action committee, and numerous buildings within a thirty minute radius of St. Mary's.

Chapter Outline

To illustrate that the construction, direction, and expansion of the Coptic community in Middlesex County was bottom-up, laity driven, ad hoc, and dependent on local variables, this dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter one provides an examination of Coptic migration from Egypt to the U.S. from the 1950s to 1977 and the creation of Coptic religious organizations in the diaspora. This chapter demonstrates how personal preferences, circumstances, and unfulfilled perceptions of urban life in America encouraged Copts to migrate to the suburbs of Middlesex County. Additionally, it shows that the creation of St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church was laity driven, improvised, and opportunistic. The Coptic ecclesiastical hierarchy were permitters of church building projects rather than orchestrators, therefore their role in the construction of St. Mary's was minimal. Instead, individuals like Sami Zaki and Louis Shenouda responded to the community's concerns in Middlesex County and took advantage of Pope Shenouda's 1977 papal visit to get permission to build a church.

Chapter two examines the physical creation of St. Mary's and the challenges that community members encountered when building their church. This chapter demonstrates that zoning ordinances, residents, public perceptions, and documentaries influenced the creation of St. Mary's. Chapter two also shows that the Coptic community in Middlesex County defined

themselves in relation to how they were perceived by local organizations, neighbors, and the East Brunswick planning board. In this case, the Coptic community in Middlesex County emphasized their Egyptian and professional background in response to the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church and the impact this religious group had on the East Brunswick planning board's decision to stall the construction of St. Mary's.

Chapter three investigates the Coptic community's Americanization process, including the anglicization of religious services and the religious, cultural, and political integration of the community into East Brunswick and Middlesex County. Furthermore, this chapter argues that the creation of St. Mary's proliferated migration to the region, which forced the church to adopt non-liturgical social roles to help settle and integrate new migrants. Lastly, because of migration from Egypt to Middlesex County, servants encountered cultural collisions between English-speaking and Arabic-speaking congregants that manifested numerous problems for the servants.

Chapter four examines how the community encouraged and facilitated the creation of other churches in Central New Jersey and expanded their facilities to respond to overcrowding. This examination reveals that the Copts in Middlesex County had to engage in public discourse over the impact of religion in society and whether their church was an institution that was beneficial to the public. Their encounters with residents and planning board members were part of an overall trend in Middlesex County that saw religious buildings struggling to justify the creation of their religious institutions. Additionally, this examination reveals that it was attrition, not necessarily jurisprudence, that dictated the success of St. Mary's and other religious building projects throughout the 1990s.

When Rafik Wahba said that he was part of a movement of "pioneers venturing on Noah's Ark to a new land that would expand the Coptic Church and people beyond its borders,"

he (perhaps inadvertently) highlighted the importance of non-clerical leadership in the perpetuation of Coptic Christianity outside of Egypt. His words should therefore force scholars to question how we write about Coptic church institutions, clerics, and community members in the diaspora. It was ordinary Copts, as Akladios frames it, that created communities and churches throughout the diaspora and defined themselves to the public. These individuals were innovative as much as they were opportunistic and disorganized. Their anecdotes, struggles, and successes are captivating and demonstrate the tenacious spirit of migrants as they establish themselves and lay the groundwork for future generations. It is this ability to create something out of nothing in a foreign land that makes the early Coptic community in the U.S. enticing to researchers.

Chapter One: Coptic Migration and Church Development: 1950-1977

This chapter will explore Coptic migration patterns and the construction of church organizations in the U.S. to elucidate the improvised, non-linear, and laity driven nature of communal settlement and church development in the Coptic diaspora. I will begin by demonstrating how Coptic migration was opportunistic and spontaneous on account of the socio-political dynamics in Egypt, imagined perceptions of Western society, and personal circumstances. Next, I will examine the role that Bible study groups had in creating Coptic communities and producing non-liturgical roles often found in migrant churches. I will then explore the creation of the Coptic Association of America and St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church to demonstrate how religious organizations were created and the role the Coptic ecclesiastical hierarchy had as permitters of church building projects rather than orchestrators. This analysis will reveal that the opportunistic and improvised nature of church building fomented church competition and intracommunal animosity because of a lack of episcopal oversight.

Contextualizing Coptic Migration

Coptic migration from Egypt to North America started in the 1950s after the Egyptian Revolution in 1952 and Gamal Abdel Nasser's ascension to power; however, this endeavor did not occur in a vacuum and was the result of the Egyptian people's attempt to modernize throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the Coptic community's effort to define itself within the modernizing process. To illustrate Egypt's modernization process and its

culmination into Egyptian military rule, I will concisely examine European influence in Egypt and the response by Muhammad Ali and his successors to control Egypt's modernization process, the Coptic Church's response to modernization, British occupation and liberal nationalist movements, Nasser within a postcolonial world, and the rise of confessionalism under Sadat. This analysis will contextualize what was happening in Egypt and demonstrate how the failure to successfully incorporate the Coptic community into the modern Egyptian state initiated Coptic migration to North America.

Colonialism and Modernizing Egypt prior to British Occupation in 1882

European and missionary colonial ventures in the nineteenth century saw the development of institutional disciplinary stratagems designed to organize the body, mind, space and time of individuals into idealized versions of docile and functional beings.[1] Through his various examinations of social institutions and sexuality, Michel Foucault asserts that the human body had entered a machinery of power that explored it, broke it down, and rearranged it within a 'political anatomy' of enclosures and functionality.[2] Historian Timothy Mitchell also explores the structuring of space in what he called "enframing," a modern European perception of order that recognized the world as an exhibition model in which reality was the organized representation of space that could be carefully constructed and implemented within a colonial context.[3] In the case of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Egypt, these tools of power

[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (Vintage, 1990), 137-138, 143-144; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1979).
[2] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 137-138, 143-144.
[3] Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 50-55.

were constructed to inculcate the Egyptian mind and body with Western principles of discipline, industry and order.[4]

While Mitchell and Foucault examine colonial disciplinary mechanisms from a state perspective, historian Paul Sedra suggests that early nineteenth-century missionaries were the first individuals to apply modern tools of power for colonial purposes through his study of "missionary colonialism" in Egypt.[5] Utilizing Joseph Lancaster's monitorial system, missionaries created institutions to inculcate their subjects with values - discipline, industry, and order - they believed would improve the morality of peasants and establish institutional change within their own communities.[6] This process was reciprocal and forced European institutions to evaluate their subjects' progress and complaints to better structure their pedagogies and incentivize continuity within the institution. As a result, both state and religious institutions in Egypt were required to modernize and adapt these principles within their own contexts to compete with other colonial powers for the minds and bodies of the Egyptian population.

Egypt's modernization process began following Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and Muhammad Ali's ascension in 1805.[7] Ali began his reforms by modernizing the Egyptian army according to French standards, centralizing the Egyptian state through bureaucratic reform, promoting industrialization, and creating state-sponsored educational programs that sent state servants to be educated in Europe.[8] Additionally, he implemented policies promoting religious

[4] Ibid., 14.
[5] Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity*. For more information concerning missionary activity in Egypt see Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt*; Tejirian and Simon. *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion*, 188-189; Rugh, *Strategies and Survival*, 47-48.
[6] Paul Sedra, "Exposure to the Eyes of God: Monitorial Schools and Evangelicals in Early Nineteenth-Century England," *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 47, 3 (2011): 263–81; Paul Sedra, "John Lieder and His Mission in Egypt: The Evangelical Ethos at Work Among Nineteenth-Century Copts," *Journal of Religious History* 28, 3 (October 2004): 219–39; Juan Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East.* (St. Martin Press, 2007).
[7] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 45; Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 16-17.
[8] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 45; Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 16-17.

and ethnic tolerance to create an inclusive Egyptian society.[9] As Vivian Ibrahim notes in her study of the modernization process in Egypt, Muhammad Ali's strategy of inclusion did not remove the *al-dhimmi* status of non-Muslims, however, it legitimized himself and family to all the inhabitants of Egypt and integrated non-Muslim groups that were "better trained than the Muslim population in the fields of accountancy and land surveying."[10] An outcome of Muhammad Ali's initiatives, which were carried on by his successors, was the rise of a diverse, well-educated, and Europeanized class of land-owning and urban professional elites.[11]

This new group of elites, particularly the Coptic *effendiyya,* grew ever more influential in the social atmosphere of Egypt and the modernization process of their religious institutions.[12] The modernization of the Egyptian state was not exclusively secular, and religion remained a fundamental component of the process.[13] As Sedra argues, "faith became an idiom through which Egyptian educational reform was justified."[14] Schools in Egypt, whether foreign or state run, included sacred texts to inculcate morality, alongside secular values, into state functionaries and peasants. Additionally, in response to Muhammad Ali's policies and a rise of missionary schools in Egypt, religious institutions began to reform and modernize as well.[15]

In the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries from Europe and North America traveled throughout Africa and Asia in tandem with Western imperialism and were, as Heather Sharkey demonstrates, "intrinsically political."[16] Their conversion strategy did not rely on

[9] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 15.
[10] Ibid., 16.
[11] Sedra, "Class Cleavages," 6-7; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 47.
[12] Effendiyya refers to an educated class in Egypt that adopted Western clothing and habits.
[13] Dietrich Jung, "'Modernization in the Name of God': Christian Missionaries, Global Modernity, and the Formation of Modern Subjectivities in the Middle East," in *Middle East Christianity* (Palgrave Pivot, 2020), 69–90.
[14] Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity*, 175-176.
[15] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 21.
[16] Heather J. Sharkey, ed., *Cultural Conversions: Unexpected Consequences of Christian Missionary Encounters in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 1.

apologetics and open discourse but the creation of schools, hospitals, printing presses, and other social institutions to propagate Christianity.[17] When these missionaries arrived in Egypt and saw the state of the Coptic Church, they asserted that it was a corrupted institution enveloped with superstition and in need of reform. They immediately began creating social institutions designed to uproot the common peasant practically and morally in order to disseminate their own concepts of modernity.[18] The appeal of missionaries was not necessarily their theology, but rather their functionality and influence. Sedra shows in his examination of Demetrius II's (1862-1870) Patriarchal tour of Upper Egypt in 1867, how Coptic peasants opted to align with missionaries and their agents because they were useful as bearers of protection rather than beacons of faith.[19] The Coptic Church's inability to combat missionaries upon their arrival was due to a lack of educated clergymen, as well as their inability to provide social services and protect peasants from forced labor.[20] In response, the Coptic elite, in cooperation with Pope Cyril IV (1854-1861), decided to reform and modernize the church.

To compete with Western missionaries and address the concerns raised by these groups, Cyril IV initiated a series of policies that addressed the revenues and expenditures of church endowments, standardized bookkeeping, and revitalized educational efforts.[21] More importantly, as Paul Sedra outlines, he sought to "textualize" the Coptic faith by removing oral culture as the source of knowledge and authority among peasants.[22] By doing so, Cyril IV contested the

[17] Sharkey, *Cultural Conversions*, 1-2; Tejirian and Simon, *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion*, 189; Jung, "Modernization in the Name of God," 74.
[18] Sharkey, *Cultural Conversions*, 1-2; Tejirian and Simon, *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversions*, 189; Rugh, *Strategies and Survival*, 47-48.
[19] Paul Sedra, "Missionaries, Peasants, and the Protection Problem: Negotiating Coptic Reform in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," ed. Abbas Amanat and Magnus T. Bernhardsson (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2007), 80.
[20] Ibid., 79-81.
[21] Paul Sedra, "Schooling for a Modern Coptic Subjectivity in Nineteenth Century Egypt," in *North African Mosaic: A Cultural Reappraisal of Ethnic and Religious Minorities*, ed. Nabil Boudraa and Joseph Krause (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 203.
[22] Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity*, 159-160.

authority of individuals who maintained influence because of their knowledge of oral history and placed it in textbooks, religious pamphlets, and schools. The objective of this movement was not limited to the textualization of Coptic culture and religion, but part of an overall initiative to build character among Coptic peasants and clergy through the inculcation of discipline, industry, and order.[23]

Egypt's modernization process prior to British occupation in 1882 was a result of colonial influences and institutions, whether state or religious, and the aim by the Egyptian state and native religious institutions to compete with colonial powers over the dissemination of modern concepts to the Egyptian people. The modernization policies of Muhammad Ali and the Coptic Church also demonstrate that religion was a fundamental component of modernity in Egypt. Unlike in the West, where modernization dismissed religion in favor of a secular state, religion in Egypt was fundamental to the modernization process and religious schools were used to implement Western constructs of modernity. As the state modernized, so too did religious institutions. This first stage of Egypt's modernization process was centered on modernizing the Egyptian state and society according to Egyptian interpretations of Western principles; however, with the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the modernization process became identified with Egyptian nationalist movements and a desire for political independence.

Egyptian Nationalism and Combating Colonial Powers in Egypt

As Egypt continued to modernize, Egyptians grew ever more disgruntled with European influence and authority under Ottoman-Egyptian state institutions. Egyptians were denied elite positions in the army and government, which were often held by Turco-Circassian officers.[24]

[23] Ibid., 159-160.
[24] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 17.

Additionally, Khedive Ismail (1863-1879) indebted the country to European banks which led to a financial crisis in the country.[25] By the late 1870s, a nationalist fervor swept through Egypt that culminated with armed rebellions and the destruction of European properties in 1882.[26] In response, the British interfered and occupied Egypt. The British justified their occupation by claiming that the Egyptians were heavily indebted to European banks and were unable to govern themselves.[27] This in turn led to the emergence of nationalist movements throughout Egypt, which sought to define "Egyptianness" and undermine colonial discourse relating to Egyptian political infancy.[28] The rise of Egyptian nationalist movements and their quest to become politically independent of colonial powers from 1888 to 1952 signifies the next stage of Egypt's modernization process.

Nationalism in Egypt was centered on shaping a national identity that incorporated Muslim and Christian Egyptians as distinct but harmonious facets of Egyptian history. As Jacques van der Vliet notes, "Pharaonism became the ideological transition of this common effort towards political independence."[29] Although the intention of nationalists, largely made up of the Egyptian elite, shaped Egyptian identity around antiquity and a unified Egypt, nationalist parties failed to address how Christians fit into this picture. As Akladios argues, "national unity discourse belied an inherent contradiction."[30] To claim that Egypt was a homogeneous nation and unified by two distinct yet separate elements, the Coptic people were seen as a variable

[25]Guirguis and Doorn-Harder, *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy*, 97-99; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 50.
[26] Ibid., 50.
[27] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 40; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 50.
[28] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 51; Juan Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 268-270; Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923* (Univ of California Press, 2005), 98; Jung, "Modernization in the Name of God," 83.
[29] Jacques van der Vliet, "The Copts: 'Modern Sons of the Pharaohs'?," *Church History and Religious Culture* 89, no. 1 (2009), 283; Also see, Donald Malcolm Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from World War I to Nasser*. American University in Cairo Press, 2015.
[30] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 52.

within the religious facet of Egyptian history but marginalized from its national history. As a result, Coptic nationalists appropriated a persecution narrative that claimed the Copts as the true Egyptians to push forth their claim for equality and a larger presence within the Egyptian state.[31] This narrative is best illustrated through the words of the Coptic-owned *al-Watan* newspaper, which claimed in 1911 that "The Copts are the true Egyptians. They are the real masters of the country. All those who have set their foot on Egyptian soil, are nothing but invaders. The originators of this nation are the Copts."[32]

The Copts were not the only group to define Egyptian nationalism through confessional lines; Muslim nationalists also worked to define and unite Egypt within an Islamic context.[33] However, following the 1919 revolution, confessional nationalism swayed in favor of a unified Egyptian nationalism under the direction and leadership of Saad Zaghlul and the Wafd party. By 1922, the British granted Egypt 'conditional independence' and allowed the country to hold an election and create a constitution.[34] The Wafd party was elected, and intense debates took place over the formulation of the constitution in 1923 and the use of minority language within it. After a series of deliberations, the Wafd party successfully killed minority representation in the constitution, however, religion was still incorporated into the constitution and religious difference was imprinted into the language of national sovereignty.[35]

The Wafd party was seen as heroes to the Egyptian people throughout the 1920s, however they overwhelmingly expressed the views and ambitions of the *effendiyya* and urban

[31] Sedra, "Schooling for a Modern Coptic Subjectivity," 205-210; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 53.
[32] Quoted in Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, 71.
[33] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 51.
[34] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 69-72; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 56.
[35] Elizabeth Oram, "Constructing Modern Copts: The Production of Coptic Christian Identity in Contemporary Egypt" (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2004), 16; Sebastian Elsässer, "Muslims and Christians in Egyptian State Formation: A New Beginning in 2011?" *In State Formation and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 141; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 58; Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 69-72.

land-owning elite. Foreigners were given privileges unavailable to many native Egyptians.[36] Middle-class and lower-class Egyptians expected state support, but political parties at the time used their power to bolster their own wealth and influence.[37] Due to this, as James Gelvin demonstrates, they failed to "encompass or even control the totality of the Egyptian public sphere."[38] Frustrated with the parliamentary system that seemed to support a colonial regime and benefit elite nationalists, a new group of radical young nationalists became active and sought to define their anticolonial perspective through confessional lines. On one side was Hassan al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood and Muhammad's Youth that believed Islamic culture was integral to nationalism and combating colonial influence in Egypt.[39] On the other side was the Society of the Coptic Nation, which sought to integrate a Coptic ethno-religious identity into their nationalist and anti-colonial movement.[40] These movements intertwined religion with secular nationalism, which made religion even more discernible in the Egyptian state and society.

As religion became more visibly entwined with nationalist movements throughout the 30s and 40s, attacks against the Coptic community rose and Coptic political representation decreased exponentially. In the last Wafd parliament of 1950, the Copts accounted for only 3 percent of total representatives, which was fewer than half the number of representatives they had in 1930.[41] The Coptic patriarch and Church were unable to combat systemic corruption and marginalization, leading to further divide between the clergy and elite reformers.[42] Middle-class nationalists collaborated with working-class Copts and revitalized benevolent societies to help

[36] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 60.
[37] Sedra, "Schooling for a Modern Coptic Subjectivity," 209-210.
[38] James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2016), 198.
[39] For more information on the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt see Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford University Press, 2014).
[40] Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, 81; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 63.
[41] Pennington, "The Copts in Modern Egypt," 158.
[42] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 65-67.

neglected urban Copts through the construction of churches and charities.[43] By the time of the Free Officers Movement in 1952, the Coptic community was becoming ever more disconnected from the state and could not rely on the Coptic Church or nationalist parties to support them. Consequently, sectarianism became prevalent in social and political life and the Coptic elite were unable to protect the Copts from increased discrimination and acts of violence. These problems worsened under the Free Officers as the new state attempted to define itself within a postcolonial Middle East.

Post-Colonial Middle East and Military Rule in Egypt: Nasser and Sadat

The postcolonial Middle East first took form due to the emergence of the new state of Israel in 1948 and the Arab States' inability to regain the land lost in Palestine. A series of military coups took place in Syria in 1948, Egypt in 1952, and Iraq in 1958, which replaced the parliamentary systems founded by colonial powers with a single-party led military regime.[44] Freed from colonial influence, these new states were top-down and generally weak, while reliance on religious institutions and social networks increased.[45] Post-colonial states were largely the outcome of anti-imperial movements, and military leaders fostered an indigenous political identity that fought for lower-class and middle-class natives while vocally opposing the old imperial orders and those affiliated with them.[46] Although anti-imperialism was fundamental to the rise of military rulers, colonial institutions were not eradicated but taken over by the new government and nationalized. As a result, elite members of these societies and minority groups

[43] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 103-106; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 65-66.
[44] Kenneth Christie and Mohammad Masad, *State Formation and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan US EBooks, 2013), 24; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 68.
[45] Christie and Masad. *State Formation and Identity*, 17, 24.
[46] Ibid., 24.

were targeted by these new states because of their previous affiliation and connection with colonial powers. Additionally, post-colonial states in the Middle East were interconnected yet subject to their own economic, ethnic, and religious variables. Nasser led the direction of the post-colonial Middle East through pan-Arabism, however, following Iraqi independence in 1958, Egypt and Iraq became two polarized regional powers fighting for hegemony over the development of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.[47]

In the case of Egypt, their post-colonial state took form under Nasser when he removed all political parties in 1954 and expelled the British in 1956. Nasser's plan for Egypt was to enact an Egyptianization project known as *tamsir al-iqtisad*. *Tamsir* was an economic policy aimed at nationalizing private and public wealth as well as colonial industries.[48] He targeted domestic elites and foreign capitalists, who acquired their wealth due to their connections with the old monarchy and colonial powers, by confiscating their properties and using the finances generated from these properties to fund economic and social development.[49] Additionally, he created national banks and industries as part of his quasi-socialist initiatives in the 1960s.

Although all upper-class individuals in Egypt suffered under Nasser's economic policies, his pan-Arabism philosophy marginalized Egyptianized foreigners (*mutamassirun*), who were eventually expelled or forced out of Egypt.[50] As a result, cosmopolitanism in Egypt faded and was eventually replaced by a largely Arabized Egyptian population. The Coptic elite also struggled throughout this process as their wealth was targeted and sectarianism in Egyptian

[47] Cyrus Schayegh, "1958 Reconsidered: State Formation and the Cold War in the Early Postcolonial Arab Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (1958), 421.
[48] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 69.
[49] Joel Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 62. To achieve this, he instituted a land reform policy that limited the acreage of land held by any individual to two hundred feddans.
[50] For more detail concerning the forced migration of colonial settlers and Egyptianized ethnic groups, see chapter three in Akladios, "Ordinary Copts."

politics continued. Coptic influence in the Egyptian state was already on the decline prior to Nasser, however, since Nasser's government was composed of military officers, the lack of Copts in the army only served to minimize their representation.[51] Copts who did hold power in the new state, as Akladios notes, were technocrats with no real authority or influence.[52] Concomitantly, as Mariz Tadros shows, Nasser nationalized religion and formed a political entente with Pope Kyrillos VI that gave him social and political power over the Coptic community, which further ostracized the Coptic elite in Egypt.[53]

Despite the decline of the Coptic elite, lower-class and middle-class Copts supported Nasser and maintained a revolutionary fervor.[54] Certain Coptic organizations called on Nasser to eradicate the "traditions which have been established over the last few decades which have resulted in the removal of Copts from specific jobs."[55] They also requested the new government embrace the Copts as an "indivisible" component of Egyptian society.[56] Although support for Nasser was more prevalent in working-class circles, Jack Crabbs demonstrates in his study of Egyptian literature during the Nasser regime that Coptic intellectuals supported the new initiatives by adopting socialist and nationalist themes in their writing.[57]

Nasser's policies were part of his overall goal to dismantle the elite's influence and solidify his authority in Egypt through the propagation of his Arab socialist state. Although upper-class Copts were further marginalized in his new state, Nasser was not motivated by sectarianism and their decline in society was an indirect result of his policies. However, by

[51] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 71.
[52] Ibid., 71.
[53] Tadros, "Vicissitudes in the Entente," 271.
[54] Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 160.
[55] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 162.
[56] Ibid., 160.
[57] Jack Crabbs, "Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser's Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6, no. 4 (1975), 406.

placing authority over the Coptic community with Pope Kyrillos VI, in hope that the patriarch would placate dissent and assure Coptic civil obedience and loyalty to Nasser, the Coptic community's place in Egypt's modernization process remained uncertain as sectarianism in Egypt increased. Yet, it was under President Anwar Sadat that Coptic discrimination in Egyptian society became evident as confessionalism reached its boiling point and religion became a marker of identity.

Nasser's defeat in the Six Day War (1967) severely weakened the Egyptian economy, morale, and influence in the region. It was in this environment that Nasser's vice-president Anwar Sadat rose to power in 1970. To establish his own power and legacy in Egypt, Sadat began reversing the policies set forth by Nasser and took the Egyptian state in a different direction. Vital to his success was the formation of an alliance with Islamists to combat Nasserite loyalists and socialists. The ramifications of this new alliance were significant in civil life, as religious affiliation overtook citizenship as the most important marker of an individual's position in society.[58] Under Sadat, secularism in Egypt was replaced by an increasing emphasis on religion in political and social life.[59]

Concomitantly, Sadat consolidated his power in Egypt following a successful military campaign against Israel in October 1973. In response to his victory, the U.S. temporarily marginalized Egypt, which weakened welfare programs and educational sponsorships. Following this decline in state-sponsored aid for the Egyptian people, Sadat began a policy of "limited economic liberalization" that supported private enterprise and foreign investment.[60]

[58] Tadros, "Vicissitudes in the Entente," 271.
[59] Ibid., 271.
[60] Michael Akladios, "Heteroglossia: Interpretation and the Experiences of Coptic Immigrants from Egypt in North America, 1955–1975," *Histoire Sociale-Social History* 53, no. 106 (2020), 639.

Consequently, this policy only served to increase economic disparities between classes.[61] To combat this growing divide, Sadat introduced the *Infitah* (opening up) in 1973. This economic policy allowed the state to remain strong yet incentivized foreign investment and private enterprises.[62] Yet, this policy weakened the economy and resulted in civil unrest as spending on welfare programs continued to be trimmed.[63] As a result, by the mid-1970s, Islamic movements expanded and confessionalism became increasingly evident in social and political life.[64]

Throughout this process, the Coptic people encountered a rise in discrimination and relied heavily on the Coptic Church and the newly elected pope, Shenouda III, to fight on their behalf.[65] Sadat's affinity towards Islamic principles to legitimize and consolidate his power resulted in the termination of the Church-state entente created under Nasser. Since this relationship placed the Coptic community's representation in the hands of the patriarch, Sadat's removal of this entente ostracized the Copts and diminished their voice.[66] However, Shenouda did not remain silent and through a series of conferences in 1976 and 1977, he publicly opposed Sadat's reliance on confessionalism and demanded that the Copts be defined according to their citizenship rather than religion.[67] This involved government protection of Christians and their property, the freedom of religion, increased representation, and Sadat's abandonment of all initiatives to apply Islamic law to non-Muslims.[68] Although his demands were not met, and Shenouda was eventually imprisoned in 1981 for his defiance, the middle-class rallied behind Shenouda and the Church's hegemony over the Copts political and social lives increased. Sadat's

[61] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 77.
[62] Ibid., 77.
[63] Ibid., 77.
[64] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 78; Sedra, "Class Cleavages," 225-226.
[65] Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*, 131.
[66] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 78; Sedra, "Class Cleavages," 225-226.
[67] Sedra, "Class Cleavages," 226.
[68] Ibid., 226.

decision to sideline the Copts and dismiss them from his vision of a modern Egypt built on Islamic principles aggravated the Copts and eventually rendered an exponential increase of Copts migrating out of Egypt.

The failure to fully integrate the Copts into the modernizing process of Egypt, particularly during the post-colonial eras of Nasser and Sadat, exacerbated sectarianism and compelled Copts to leave Egypt for better opportunities in the West. Starting with Muhammad Ali's modernization project, the Copts had tried to integrate themselves within the process and define themselves as an integral part of Egypt. The inability of the state, as well as Coptic politicians and the Church, to successfully create a state founded on citizenship rather than confessionalism allowed sectarianism to flourish in Egypt, which in turn marginalized the Copts in Egypt's social and political realms. The reason for this was because the modernization process in Egypt did not remove religion from public life but rather continued to redefine it and incorporate it in the state. The duality of Egypt's modern identity as both secular and religious removed the Coptic laity's influence in the state and placed it in the hands of the Church. As a result, the Coptic Church fought for the rights of Copts and was unsuccessful because the relationship between the state and Church was volatile under Nasser and Sadat. It was in this environment that Copts began to migrate to North America.

Coptic Migration: From Cities to Suburbs

Coptic migration did not occur in a vacuum, rather it was an ebb and flow movement spurred on by opportunity, political and social vicissitudes, and personal incentives. Starting in the 1940s, Coptic students sought postgraduate degrees and educational opportunities in the

West that they could not find in Egypt.[69] Many of the individuals who left Egypt to study abroad were students seeking a masters or doctorate degree in chemistry, physics, and other specialized postgraduate fields limited in Egypt.[70] Leaving the country on a scholarship to study abroad in the West was an honorable achievement, however, with economic opportunity and affordable living available in Egypt at the time, few were determined to leave their motherland permanently.[71] Following the inability of Nasser, the Coptic elite, and the Coptic Church to incorporate lower-class and middle-class Copts into the modernization process, permanent migration became more appealing. Those who were most likely to permanently leave Egypt in the 50s and 60s were upper-class Copts targeted by Nasser's policies, students seeking graduate programs unavailable to Christians at the time, and young graduates struggling to find employment in Nasser's Egypt. An examination into why they left and where they settled will demonstrate that Coptic migration and settlement was improvised, reactive, and dependent on local and transnational variables.

The Plight of the Elite

Following Nasser's policies that targeted and demoted the landowning aristocrats in Egypt, upper-class Copts feared for their prosperity. Estates were repossessed by the state and wealthy Egyptians became the enemy of state rhetoric and propaganda.[72] Although many Copts chose to stay in Egypt despite their disenfranchisement from certain aspects of society, others

[69] Boulos, *The History of the Early Coptic Community*, *10*.
[70] Ibid., 11-25.
[71] Boulos, *The History of the Early Coptic Community*, 10; Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A*, 213-216.
[72] Akladios, "Heteroglossia," 640-641. Much of the land taken by the government was not farmable but villas and buildings repurposed by the state. Akladios mentions in his article how a Coptic woman from a prominent family that moved to North America in 1953 witnessed her family's summer villa repurposed into a school for deaf and intellectually disabled children.

chose to sell their land and start anew in North America.[73] Their decision to leave was spontaneous and improvised because the immediate effects of Nasser's policies trumped the trials of migrating to a new land and starting over.[74] However, the number of wealthy Coptic families who left Egypt was miniscule in comparison to the numerous middle-class Copts frustrated with the lack of educational and employment opportunities available in Egypt.

Educational and Employment Deficiency

To the misfortune of the Copts, Nasser's decision to ignore sectarianism and grant the Coptic Church representation over the Coptic community made discrimination even more rampant in social and political life. Coptic students seeking graduate and post-graduate studies were particularly affected by this rise in discrimination as many of them were excluded from post-graduate positions on university campuses, particularly in the field of medicine and engineering.[75] As a result, they looked for educational opportunities in the U.S. and either took advantage of student exchange programs or migrated following the enactment of the Hart-Cellar Act in Egypt in 1968.

Rafik Wahba, a Coptic engineer who worked at a prestigious aircraft company in Egypt and moved to America in 1968, struggled with educational discrimination firsthand. He noted with sorrow how "the last straw for me was when I applied for my master's degree. I was denied and desired to know why. I was told that there was a limited number of Christians that could be accepted into the program and that was why I was rejected. It was after this that I realized this country did not want me."[76] Rafik's experience was not unique, and many ambitious middle-

[73] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (In English and Arabic).
[74] Akladios, "Heteroglossia," 641.
[75] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 118; Boulos, *The History of the Early Coptic Community*, 10.
[76] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

class Copts that migrated out of Egypt felt betrayed by the state and abandoned by the people.[77] Not feeling welcomed by their own countrymen stained their consciousness and provoked many into leaving Egypt. More importantly, it convinced them that they were "being manipulated by Nasser" and that the new regime was unable to dismantle the Muslim-Christian dichotomy permeating Egypt.[78]

Frustration over educational discrimination was not the only reason Copts chose to leave. Nasser guaranteed the Egyptian youth state jobs if they obtained a higher education, which many of the Copts achieved despite acts of discrimination. However, upon the completion of their degrees, Coptic academics and professionals found themselves marginalized from university positions.[79] Moreover, by the 1970s, the number of university graduates exceeded the amount of employees state institutions needed.[80] One of these educated individuals who suffered from a lack of opportunity in Egypt was Dr. Fouad George Zaki.

Dr. Zaki received his PhD in cell biology from Cairo University in 1949, two years prior to the revolution.[81] Like other Egyptians with a doctoral degree, he was required to stay in Egypt for five years after he obtained his degree. Like other Copts, Dr. Zaki struggled to find a postdoctoral position at a prestigious university in Egypt and searched for an opportunity outside of Egypt. He was accepted into a postdoctoral program and studied under Nobel Laureate Adolf Butenandt at the Max-Planck Institute for Virus Research in Tubingen, Germany in 1953.[82] Following the completion of his program in 1957, he returned to Cairo with the hope of finding a

[77] Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24. 2021 (in English and Arabic); Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Also see Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 10-25.
[78] Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[79] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 10; Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A.*, 213-216.
[80] Mériam N. Belli, *An Incurable Past: Nasser's Egypt Then and Now* (University Press of Florida, 2016), 33.
[81] Khalil, *In Memory of Dr. Fouad George Zaki*, 9.
[82] Ibid., 10.

tenured position as a professor. After two years of uncertainty and limited opportunities, he made the decision to take his family and move to Sudan.[83] There he was offered a full-time position at Khartoum University to teach Cell Biology and Histology. After one year, he accepted a position at the University of Minnesota and permanently settled in the U.S.

Dr. Zaki's career and eventual migration outside of Egypt is emblematic of the challenges and obstacles Egyptians with graduate degrees suffered under Nasser and the Free Officers. Although promises were made to assure that educated Egyptians had a role in propelling Egypt into an independent and flourishing state, the reality of the situation was far from what the Free Officers imagined. Intellectuals of all sects found it difficult to secure a job in their desired field, particularly those who did not adhere to the quasi-socialist agenda of state institutions. Coptic intellectuals, like Dr. Zaki, also suffered from discrimination in the workplace. With limited opportunity and prolific discrimination, the ability to bolster one's career in Egypt was an uphill battle for the Copts.[84] Their most viable option was to seek permanent employment and opportunity outside of Egypt. Yet, why did a significant number of Coptic migrants choose to settle in the United States instead of the Gulf States or Europe?

The Land of Milk and Honey

The reason Copts decided to settle in the U.S. was due to personal variables such as Father Makary al-Suriani's vision to send struggling students to study abroad, Coptic perceptions of America, and opportunity made available by the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965. Students and professionals took advantage of propitious situations that allowed them to circumnavigate U.S. immigration policies and restrictions placed on them by the Egyptian state. Moreover, Coptic

[83] Ibid., 10.
[84] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 118; Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 10.

communities and organizations in the U.S. sponsored prospective immigrants. Copts who decided to settle in the U.S. often did so based on individual opportunities and their immigration was improvised. Where the Copts decided to live once in the U.S. was influenced by imagined perceptions these immigrants had while still in Egypt. Additionally, the reality of city life, in comparison to the conjured fantasies Copts had of U.S. cities prior to their departure, initiated domestic migration out of the cities and into the suburbs. This analysis of Coptic migration and settlement in the U.S. will demonstrate that these endeavors were spontaneous, transnational, and dependent on personal circumstances.

Father Makary and Early Coptic Immigrants

Father Makary was an innovative individual who was largely responsible for early Coptic migrants in the diaspora. He was well educated and obtained a master's degree in religious education from Princeton in 1955.[85] Pope Kyrillos VI favored the ambitious monk and elevated Father Makary to the rank of general bishop in 1962. He was called Bishop Samuel and oversaw the Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services within the Coptic Church. As Akladios demonstrates, Bishop Samuel fostered a notion "that economic power through Western education and foreign religious charities was the only way to support the Church and community in Egypt."[86] Drawing on Lisa Mar's analysis of Chinese immigration, Akladios argues that Bishop Samuel was the "central immigrant broker" who served as an intermediary between Egypt and Copts in Canada and the U.S.[87] It was under Bishop Samuel, while he was still a monk, that permanent Coptic migration to North America began.

[85] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 201.
[86] Ibid., 72.
[87] Ibid., 201.

Bishop Samuel believed that to overcome the socioeconomic obstacles in Egypt, Copts should emigrate temporarily to the U.S. with the intent of obtaining new "techniques, technologies, and professional connections" that they could use to negotiate a position in Egypt.[88] Coptic students who were struggling to find a university position flocked to his call and began applying for scholarships through Cold War student exchange programs.[89] Although some students were able to secure a scholarship, many struggled. In response, Bishop Samuel, with the support of Coptic organizations and communities in the diaspora, lobbied transnational charities and utilized his bishopric in Cairo to assist Coptic applicants, translate accreditation papers, and provide letters of reference.[90] His push towards temporary student migration to the U.S. did not go as planned because many of these students decided to stay instead of returning to Egypt.

Before going abroad to study, Egyptian students were required to sign an affidavit stating that they would return to Egypt upon completion of their degree. In some cases, students planned to return home after their studies but spontaneously chose to break their affidavit and materialize their dreams in the U.S. In *The History of the Early Coptic Community in the U.S.A.* by Samir Boulos, the author provides multiple profiles about Copts who came to the U.S. on student visas and decided to stay instead of returning to Egypt.[91] One of these individuals was Dr. Wadie F. Mikhail who was selected by the Egyptian government in 1957 to complete his PhD in statistics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.[92] Like other students funded by the Egyptian government to study abroad, he signed an affidavit stating that he would return to Egypt following the completion of his degree. He was granted funding for four years; however, he

[88] Akladios, "Heteroglossia," 644.
[89] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 119.
[90] Ibid., 173.
[91] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 10-25.
[92] Ibid., 19.

completed his doctorate in three years and decided to spend his last year gaining experience and making money before he returned to Egypt. He found a job at the International Business Machines Company, but after three months he received a call from the Director of Egyptian Missions in Washington D.C threatening him with repercussions because he got a job at an American company instead of returning to Egypt. Fearing the consequences he would face upon his return, he decided to break the affidavit and stayed in America.[93]

Dr. Mikhail's decision to break the affidavit and stay in America was common among Coptic students studying abroad. The Egyptian state had a zero-tolerance policy for individuals that broke the affidavit and took litigious steps to force their return to Egypt. However, Coptic students feared the new Egyptian state and opted to stay in the U.S. and go through the legal process to obtain a H-1 visa.[94] Wadie's decision to stay also demonstrates the spontaneous nature of settlement by Copts in America. Those like Wadie, who initially wanted to return to Egypt, found themselves coerced into making life altering decisions because of developing uncertainties back home and unexpected factors in America.

Bishop Samuel's efforts and vision of the U.S. as an alternative solution to student discrimination in Egypt was a catalytic moment in Coptic migration history. His influence in North America and Egypt convinced many Copts that America was the best avenue to advance their careers. However, he did not take into consideration that Copts would fall in love with American society and that they would spontaneously decide to break their affidavits and settle there. This unexpected occurrence, particularly the innovative ways Coptic migrants left Egypt,

[93] Ibid., 19.
[94] Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic). The H-1 Visa was created under the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 and allowed the admission of skilled workers temporarily in the U.S. Copts who chose to stay in the U.S after they completed their degree utilized this legislation to avoid deportation to Egypt until they were granted a permanent visa.

laid the groundwork for other Copts who wanted to create a better life for themselves outside of Egypt.[95]

A Bittersweet Reality

Whether it was to escape Nasser's policies, a lack of educational opportunity, or religious discrimination in the workforce, many Copts in Egypt left family and friends behind in the pursuit of knowledge and opportunity. Although Bishop Samuel encouraged many students to travel to the U.S. and assisted them in the process, another reason Copts migrated to the U.S. was because of their perceptions of America, which were influenced by American missionaries in Egypt and Hollywood. Although Nasser and radical facets of Egyptian society attempted to boycott American products and culture, components of American society and Western society in general, remained widely available to middle and upper-class Egyptians in schools and the media.[96] As Heather Sharkey demonstrates in her study of American evangelicals in Egypt, American missionaries saw themselves as "ambassadors for the United States and as promoters of American culture."[97] It was predominantly due to these cultural encounters with U.S. missionaries and Hollywood that Copts in Egypt adopted a fantasy of the U.S. and migrated there when the opportunity presented itself.

[95] In Sami Boulos' book, he provides numerous examples of the innovative ways Copts left Egypt. For example, Dr Maher Kamil received his PhD from a university in France in 1953 and a D.SC from Switzerland. In 1958, Maher went to Geneva to participate in a conference and met Dr. Kilpatrick, the head of the School of Education at Columbia University. Dr. Kilpatrick convinced Maher that he should go to America and seek a university position instead of returning to Egypt. He seized the opportunity while being out of Egypt and went directly to America from Geneva where he found a teaching position at the Jersey City State College.
[96] Crabbs, "Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser's Egypt," 395-398.
[97] Sharkey, *American Evangelicals*, 18.

Missionary Influences

Copts, like other Egyptians, came into contact with American missionaries by attending mission schools as students or teachers and through their participation in American social institutions.[98] These schools and institutions possessed American customs and attitudes, which were indirectly, or in some cases directly, conveyed to Egyptian Christians and Muslims.[99] As Sharkey illustrates, these values included Christian universality, religious liberty that defined belief as an individual's choice, and the incorporation of women in social institutions.[100] Additionally, missionaries bridged the divide between Egypt and America by creating a relationship between the two states that influenced U.S. policy towards Egypt.[101] However, missionary schools also served to ignite nationalists, who associated missionary endeavors with colonial movements in Egypt, and Muslims who resented missionary attempts to convert Muslims to Christianity. It was for these reasons that some missionary educational institutions, particularly the American University of Cairo (AUC), took a more secular and nationalist approach.

The creation of the AUC started with Charles R. Watson and his collaboration with the American Presbyterian mission in Egypt and North America in 1916. Since its conception, the AUC was autonomous from the American Presbyterian mission in policy and oversight.[102] Although it incorporated Christian principles and classes, the university was dominated by an American-style curriculum and school culture that stressed international and inter-religious connections.[103] Coptic participants at the AUC like Amir Boktor, a native Copt from Upper

[98] Ibid., 131.
[99] Ibid., 36.
[100] Ibid., 97.
[101] Ibid., 19.
[102] Ibid., 257-258.
[103] Ibid., 260, 290.

Egypt and graduate of Columbia University, embraced the secular values of the university because of the university's affiliation with modern American educational techniques.[104]

Boktor's affinity towards the Americanized aspects of the university reconfirms the attitude some Copts had towards American culture in Egypt. Coptic fascination with American culture stemmed largely from their participation in these schools as teachers and students.[105] To them, missionary schools provided knowledge and opportunity that surmounted state run Egyptian schools.[106] As a result, they appropriated American clothing and customs, and developed a strong appreciation for American values.[107] However, by the 1920s, missionary schools were not the only purveyors of American culture and customs. The importation of films from Hollywood, as well as consumer commodities like automobiles, strongly embedded Egyptians with additional perspectives of American culture.[108] It was these new elements of American society - images of economic prosperity, cosmopolitan cities, anti-communist rhetoric, and national unity - that captured the attention of some Copts and furthered their desire to migrate to the U.S.

Cinematic Propaganda

Exposure to Western society and culture was not limited to foreign schools but was also found in movies imported to Egypt. American movies were widely available in Egypt and

[104] Ibid., 290.
[105] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[106] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East, Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[107] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Akladios, "Ordinary Copt," 112.
[108] Sharkey, *American Evangelicals*, 284.

coveted by the Egyptian youth.[109] As noted in a *New York Times* article about Charles R. Watson in 1926, "The effects of the Western motion picture in the East were not all beneficial, the speaker declared, but he said it had been a large factor in furthering mutual understanding between East and West."[110] Missionaries found the influence movies, as well as music, had on the Egyptian population as counteractive to their efforts of promoting Christianity and family values because it "planted lustful thoughts in the minds of men and thereby led them astray."[111] Nevertheless, on account of its popularity, Watson began screening films for audiences in Egypt at the AUC and provided social and cultural context for each film.[112] Copts were also fascinated with American films and it was a common practice for Copts to watch the newest American films with their friends.[113] Louis Shenouda, a chemist from Cairo who migrated to America in 1968, noted how he and his friends "watched American movies most of the time" and how it was a "pastime" for them in Egypt.[114]

Access to American movies strongly influenced Louis and his friend's perspectives of American society and portrayed America as a "dreamland" to them.[115] Louis found World War I and II movies to be particularly significant because they portrayed American society as "uniformed" with no civil unrest and political turmoil.[116] Egyptians like Louis, who grew up during the monarchical era and disliked the political upheaval brought about by the 1952

[109] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Ramsis Sedra, interviewed in Miami, Florida, November 17, 2022 (in Arabic).
[110] "Finds Our Ideals Growing in Islam: Dr. Watson Calls Auto and Movie Chiefs Agents in Spreading Knowledge of the West," *New York Times*, November 22, 1926, 26.
[111] Sharkey, *American Evangelicals*, 286.
[112] Sharkey, *American Evangelicals*, 285, 286; Lawrence R. Murphy, *The American University in Cairo: 1919–1987* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1987), 114-115.
[113] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Ramsis Sedra, interviewed in Miami, Florida, November 17, 2022 (in Arabic).
[114] Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.

revolution, desired the return of civil stability in Egypt and were envious of the way movies portrayed civility in American society.[117] Moreover, those who opposed the left-leaning ideologies being deployed in Egypt, as well as the rise of Soviet influence, saw America as an enchanting cosmopolitan center and gleaming hope against communism.[118] Yet, cinema at this time was full of American propaganda that showcased national unity in an effort to promote war efforts during World War II and promulgated capitalism to combat communist influences in America and abroad.[119] Considering these factors, American propaganda in their movies left some Copts with a desire for the supposed luxuries America possessed.

The above analysis demonstrates the ways missionaries and Hollywood captured the attention of early Coptic migrants by portraying American culture and society in a gilded manner void of any details concerning racial and ethnic prejudice, civil unrest, and the decline of cities due to increased suburban migration. Bishop Samuel's influence on student migration to the U.S. also sheds light on the transnational nature of Coptic migration and his ability to use transnational networks to secure scholarships for prospective migrants. Additionally, professional Copts who settled in the U.S. in the mid-50s and early 60s, were able to quickly acquire employment opportunities and relayed this information to friends and family in Egypt.[120] On account of these variables, Coptic migrants gravitated towards major cities throughout the

[117] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[118] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[119] For more information on cinema during World War II see Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry, *We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema during World War II* (University Press of Kentucky, 2006). For more information concerning cinema in the Cold War see Sergei I. Zhuk, "Hollywood's Insidious Charms: The Impact of American Cinema and Television on the Soviet Union during the Cold War," *Cold War History* 14, no. 4 (October 1, 2014): 593–617.
[120] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Gabriel. *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A*, 252-269.

U.S., particularly the New York metropolitan area because it was believed to be an economic hub that produced numerous jobs in their desired industries.[121] Moreover, New York, like Los Angeles, which became another center of Coptic migration, was well known to Egyptians through movies, songs, and industry.[122] Although Coptic immigrants worked in New York, most of them lived in Jersey City because it was financially cheaper and a short ferry or train ride away from their jobs.[123] Due to its proximity to Manhattan, as well as chain migration, Jersey City became an enclave for Coptic migrants and a center for Coptic organizations.

Unexpected Encounters and Hope in the Suburbs

Coptic migrants expected to encounter cultural discrepancies, however, upon their arrival in U.S. cities, they also experienced components of American society incongruent with their original perceptions of America. Many Copts moved to America in the late 60s and early 70s while the country was undergoing social movements in response to the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement. Living in cities like Manhattan, Jersey City, and Newark, they witnessed civil unrest in a land they believed was void of political turmoil. Louis Shenouda experienced this firsthand while he was living in Newark. He noted how he "came at the worst time to the United States... The country was in turmoil, and we can see the contentions of the black society. They were not happy and of course they were living under oppressed rules all the time… It was a mixed feeling for us because we thought America was free of these civil unrests. I was shocked with the civil unrest here and the things going on here.[124] Louis' perception of America as a land

[121] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[122] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[123] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[124] Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

free of political turmoil and civil unrest was the outcome of his time in Egypt fantasizing about American culture. He did not expect to see riots and protests in the streets similar to what he witnessed during the Free Officers Revolution in Egypt. Shielded from true American society on account of Hollywood and American propaganda overseas, many of the early Coptic migrants came to see American cities as unsuitable for long-term settlement.

Beginning in 1969, some Copts in North New Jersey and the New York metropolitan area decided to leave the cities in favor of the suburbs. Those who decided to leave the Coptic enclaves up north were typically middle class and upper-class individuals who were financially established, in contrast to the situation of newer immigrants, who tended to settle in major cities. Moreover, many of them had lived in America for at least five years and had a better understanding of American culture and society. Their destination of choice was the developing towns of Middlesex County in Central New Jersey.[125] Choosing the Middlesex County area instead of the suburbs in North New Jersey was predominately the outcome of three variables. First, commuting to North New Jersey and New York was easy due to the construction of highways and public transportation. Those who moved to Middlesex County kept their old jobs, although many also sought employment in their new area of residence. Second, public high schools in Middlesex County were considered top tier and many of them were National Blue Ribbon School Programs. This was particularly motivating for parents with young children who believed the schools up north were inadequate and exposed their kids to foul language, drugs, and violence.[126] Lastly, due to the educational reputation of Middlesex County and the suburbs, Copts believed that their children would grow up in a healthy environment, removed from the

[125] This included East Brunswick, South Brunswick, North Brunswick, Edison, South River, Sayreville, Monroe, Englishtown, New Brunswick, Old Bridge, and Milltown.
[126] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

negative influences they witnessed in the cities up north. This last variable was imperative to parents like Rafik Wahba who noted that:

> The reason why I left Jersey City was because I had a daughter who was three years old and I noticed that the environment and the quality of the people in the city, and the foul language used in the streets, really made me say to myself this is not the society that I would like to raise my daughter in. This is not why I came to America. So, I decided to move out. Again, my brother, who came here a year before I came, lived in the suburbs. So, he was away from you know, the bad low quality of life. So that was also a reason why I knew where I had to go, which was to the suburbs.[127]

Rafik's decision to leave Jersey City and move to the suburbs was the result of the atmosphere he witnessed in Jersey City and the information he received from his brother about life in the suburbs. The unexpected environment of city life in the U.S. shocked Coptic migrants and their expectations of America. The reality of this situation rendered cities uninhabitable to some Copts, and, as a result, changed the trajectory of Coptic migration over the next several decades.

The above analysis of Coptic migration to America demonstrates the ad hoc, opportunistic, and variegated nature of Coptic settlement in the U.S. Although Nasser's policies and Bishop Samuel's vision initiated Coptic migration, those who decided to leave justified their actions according to personal circumstances. Each individual had their own reasons for migrating and utilized whatever avenue was made available to accomplish it. Where Copts decided to settle was linked to their perceptions of the U.S. while in Egypt, as well as chain migration. However, Coptic migration into Middlesex County was the result of American cities failing to meet the imagined perceptions etched into the minds of Coptic migrants by American propaganda in Egypt.

[127] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

Bible Study and Community Building

Scholars have demonstrated how religion is vital to immigrant groups and that the construction of religious organizations and places of worship are crucial concerns for them.[128] Coptic migrants in Middlesex County shared this belief and upon their settlement in the area they encountered numerous problems attending religious services. Early Coptic immigrants in the U.S. found themselves isolated and unaware of other Copts in the area. There was no network or church organization to bring together the Copts in the diaspora at that time and each family or individual encountered other Copts by chance or through conversations with clergy and family in Egypt.[129] Lacking bishops and priests to provide them with liturgical services, many of the early Coptic settlers in America attended liturgies at Syrian, Armenian, and Greek Orthodox churches.[130] Yet, Coptic immigrants generally craved an atmosphere where they could surround themselves with Coptic culture and people. Moreover, there was a fear among Copts that simply reducing their religious life to the attendance of liturgy at a foreign church once a week would corrupt the community and lead to the dissipation of their culture.[131] Rather than encountering "spiritual demise and the corruption of one's soul" as expected by clergymen in Egypt, the Copts constructed small Bible study groups wherever they settled.[132] This undertaking by individual Coptic migrants set the foundation for Coptic religiosity and church building in America.

The Coptic community's establishment of Bible study groups varied depending on the circumstances of its creation. Coptic Bible studies, prior to the creation of a parish, were a bottom-up development in which individuals took the initiative to contact other Copts, find a

[128] Hirschman, "The Role of Religion," 1208; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 28; Warner, *A Church of Our Own*, 88; Frederiks, "Religion, Migration, and Identity," 15-16.
[129] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 10-25; Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A.*, 548-562.
[130] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 10-20.
[131] Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A.*, 278.
[132] Ibid., 278.

location and priest, and prepare the lessons.[133] In her research on immigrant churches, Ghada Botros theorized that Coptic parishes in North America served three essential non-liturgical roles: competitor, helper, and comforter.[134] My examination of Coptic Bible studies in Middlesex County will demonstrate that these religious gatherings acted as a surrogate for the parish and embodied the non-liturgical roles outlined by Botros on account of the ad hoc and regional nature of religious organization building in the Coptic diaspora. Additionally, it will become evident that the source of Coptic religiosity and organization building in Middlesex County was the Coptic laity, who took on the responsibility to provide their community members a place to congregate and worship rather than the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Like other small Coptic communities in the diaspora with no church building, the Copts in Middlesex County traveled to established Coptic churches to participate in Bible studies. The nearest Coptic church to the community was an hour away in Jersey City and many of them did not have time to travel there each week. On account of this, the Copts in Middlesex County became isolated from religious services and decided to host their own Bible study in 1976. Although the early community in the diaspora held Bible studies without the presence of a priest, particularly in areas where no priests were available, the Copts in Middlesex County believed the presence of a priest was necessary to hold Bible study.[135] Therefore, it was the role of individual members and families to organize Bible studies and find a priest to lead them. In Middlesex County, members asked Father Antonious Younan in Jersey City, Deacon Michael Tobia and Deacon Maher Fahim to come every other Friday for Bible study and additional prayers like the

[133] Khalil. *In Memory of Dr. Fouad George Zaki*, 36.
[134] Botros, "Competing for the Future."
[135] For more information regarding Bible study by other communities see chapter five and six in Akladios, "Ordinary Copts." Also see Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 26, 27.

unction of the sick.[136] Members of the community also took the responsibility and financial burden of driving Father Antonious and the two deacons to and from Jersey City.

Fundamental to Bible study in Middlesex County was the creation of a spiritual atmosphere that bolstered comradery and cultural familiarity among the nascent group of Copts. While the adults discussed Bible verses and cultural incongruencies in America, the youth under the age of thirteen attended Sunday School and learned *alhan* (hymnologies) in the basement with Deacon Michael and Maher Fahim.[137] These religious meetings provided the community with a sense of comfort that enveloped their children in Egyptian culture so they could "stay close and preserve their morals, culture, and ethics" in America.[138] Houses that held these meetings became landmarks of Coptic identity and social services for the Middlesex County Copts. New Copts to the area attended these meetings to introduce themselves to the community, enjoy religious services, and seek help settling in the new area. Bible study meetings also provided the community with a space to discuss their future in the area and the possibility of building a church.

As more meetings took place and migration into Middlesex County increased, the community found it necessary to find a larger building to accommodate their growing numbers. This venture demonstrates another important component of Coptic community building in America, the role local churches played in the construction of Coptic religious services. While searching for a larger space to host their Bible studies, members of the community asked various denominational and nondenominational churches for permission to utilize their buildings. The

[136] Zaki, *History and Story*, 7; Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[137] Zaki, *History and Story*, 7; Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[138] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

priests of these churches typically rejected these requests and often told the Coptic community to seek a church for sale because many congregations were "selling their churches."[139] After numerous rejections, they spotted a Roman Catholic Church in Old Bridge called St. Thomas the Apostle Roman Catholic Church. There they introduced themselves to the head priest of the church, Father Shymanski, and told him about their need for a larger place to host Bible studies. Father Shymanski was exceptionally cooperative with them and agreed to give them three classrooms to use, one for the kids and two rooms with a partition in the middle in case they needed a larger space.[140] Furthermore, he refused to charge them for the classrooms and the use of utilities, excluding a seven-dollar fee to pay the janitor.[141]

This encounter reveals the fundamental role that local religious organizations held in the early Coptic community as land and building providers. In Middlesex County, the Coptic community was unable to build a relationship with Protestant churches and relied on the Catholic Church for their needs. An apostolic relationship may have been the reason the Copts in Middlesex County found the Catholic Church as an ally, but in other areas that was not necessarily the case.[142] For example, the Coptic community in Toronto developed strong relations with the Canadian Council of Churches, which was largely made up of Protestant sects.[143] On account of this relationship, a United Church land developer donated land to them for the construction of a parish in the Coptic style.[144] Local variables, such as parishes and religious organizations, highlight the opportunistic and personalized nature of Coptic community

[139] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[140] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[141] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[142] By apostolic I do not mean that the Catholic Church and Coptic Orthodox Church are ecumenically united, instead I use apostolic to denote their shared traditions, sacraments, and history.
[143] Michael Akladios, "Navigating Sacred Spaces: Coptic Immigrants in 1960s Toronto," *Left History* 2017, 102, 106.
[144] Ibid., 106.

building in North America and how it differs from the institutionalized and systematic creation of houses of worship by other religious organizations.

This examination of Coptic Bible studies in Middlesex County shows that maintaining their religiosity outside of Egypt was vital to Coptic immigrants and why they held Bible study meetings. Lacking any direct institutionalized system in the diaspora, the Copts of Middlesex County were forced to utilize their own resources and local factors to create religious services and provide a cultural space for their community. Concomitantly, they adopted non-liturgical roles as a method of cultural and religious survival, which they later systematized and incorporated into their church organizations. The advent of Bible study in Middlesex County encapsulates Coptic religious development in the area.

Church Organization Building: The Coptic Association of America and St. Mary's

Establishing religious organizations in America was the next step for Coptic communities as they worked to solidify their presence and religiosity in the diaspora. As with their Bible study groups, the creation of religious organizations was ad hoc, laity driven, and developed within a local context. Due to its bottom-up development, the creation of church organizations was often chaotic and manifested intracommunal tensions between diaspora Copts. An examination of the creation and eventual dissolvement of the Coptic Association of America, the first Coptic organization created with the intent to lead the Coptic diaspora and bring a priest to North America, will demonstrate that their failure to successfully unite the various Coptic communities under one organization opened the door for the Copts in Middlesex County to create their own religious organization and church. Additionally, Pope Shenouda's decision to remove Bishop Samuel's oversight of the Coptic diaspora in 1972 inadvertently removed the Coptic Church's

influence in the creation of churches in the diaspora. As a result, the Coptic patriarch became a permitter of Coptic organizations and church buildings in the diaspora rather than chief orchestrator. Any community capable of demonstrating to the patriarch that they needed a church, and could sustain one, were permitted to do so. It was on account of this lack of episcopal oversight, as well as the bottom-up development of Coptic organizations in the diaspora, that the Copts of Middlesex County were able to create their religious organization in 1976.

The Rise and Fall of the CAA

Near the end of 1962, a small group of Copts in the New York metropolitan area were disappointed with the lack of liturgical services available to them in America and wanted to remedy their situation. Although Bible study and religious meetings provided them with some spiritual services, the absence of a Coptic priest frustrated them. The community, largely positioned in Jersey City, agreed that the only way to obtain a priest was to construct a non-profit organization and become a recognizable and official entity in the U.S.[145] Adopting a name that reflected their Coptic heritage and adopted country, they named their organization the Coptic Association of America (CAA).[146] The organization espoused five goals: to promote and maintain religious life among the Copts in the diaspora, to preserve Coptic culture and traditions, to establish social fellowship among the Copts living in the U.S., to extend help and aid to new and established members, and to fulfill the needs of the Coptic Church.[147] It is clear from these

[145] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 29; Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A.*, 655-658.
[146] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 30.
[147] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 30; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 240.

objectives that the organization intended to provide religious, cultural, and social assistance to any Copt in the U.S.

In the beginning, the organization had only fifteen members who were predominantly based in Jersey City and New York. To acquire new members, the organization contacted Coptic acquaintances in other states and encouraged them to recruit others as well.[148] Many Copts joined the organization because of the goals they promoted and the association's attempt to unite them.[149] However, the catalyst in the recruiting process was Bishop Samuel. On his first pastoral tour to North America in 1963, Bishop Samuel held liturgies, baptized children, lectured in churches and universities, and encouraged Copts to join the CAA.[150] Bishop Samuel also went to Canada, where he recruited Copts in Toronto and Montreal into the CAA, which transformed the organization into an international body possessing branches throughout North America. He also sent personal letters to members encouraging them to pledge "at least half their tithes" to the CAA.[151] The utilization of Bishop Samuel to recruit new members and secure finances demonstrates the relationship and support the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Egypt had with the CAA and their leadership in the diaspora. Although the CAA was not recognized as an official entity within the Coptic Church, it served as an ambassador for the patriarchate while maintaining authority over the direction of the community in North America. This dynamic allowed the CAA to spread its ideals of uniformity and fellowship across North America and facilitate the direction of the community as they saw fit.

The CAA's aspirations for a unified association that could guide the Coptic community in North America in a singular manner was an unrealistic endeavor. From the beginning, the

[148] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 30.
[149] Ibid., 42.
[150] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 37; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 241-242.
[151] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 32, 43; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 242.

organization encountered numerous problems on account of immigration laws, finances, power struggles, and intracommunal tensions. Unfortunately, despite Bishop Samuel's constant efforts, the largest problem the CAA faced at the time was securing the pledges and tithes promised to the organization. Board members believed that the presence of a priest in North America would encourage donations and consistent payments, but the exact opposite happened.[152] Members began to recant on their donations and funds plummeted. This situation caused animosity between Father Morcos, the first priest sent to serve the community in North America, and the CAA, since it was the role of the CAA to collect funds and provide the priest's salary.[153]

In the wake of this first conflict between the CAA and Father Morcos, a new church organization, spearheaded by Bishop Samuel, was created to remedy the problem.[154] On his second visit to North America in 1964, Bishop Samuel told board members that he wanted to create a new organization under the authority of the Coptic Church.[155] Recognizing the necessity of such an entity, he stated that the objective of this new organization was to independently handle the Coptic Church's affairs in the diaspora, such as the salaries of priests, their duties and obligations, and the construction of churches.[156] On May 2, 1965, without the presence of Father Morcos and Bishop Samuel, the board agreed to separate the CAA from the Coptic Church's affairs in America and provided the new church council with all the funds raised to support Father Morcos.[157] In 1966 the church officially created their new organization and a new set of

[152] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 50; Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A.*, 685; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 246.
[153] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 50-5. For more information concerning the obstacles the CAA encountered, such as the troubles they encountered when trying to bring a permanent priest to the U.S., animosity between Father Marcos and the CAA, disputes over hierarchical boundaries in the U.S. and divisions between the members, see Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 246-249, 251-254.
[154] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 51; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 255-256.
[155] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 51; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 255-256.
[156] Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 51-52; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 255-256.
[157] Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A.*, 691-698; Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 51-52; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 246-249.

laws were written that aggravated some board members. In particular, the bishop was given unprecedented power to veto any decision made by a church, to appoint priests to a church, and to dismiss any member nominated for a board position that he did not approve.[158] The response to these new laws varied from enthusiasm to harsh criticism. Those who supported the new organization saw it as a necessary step towards the establishment of a parish.[159] To others, the creation of the new organization weakened the CAA and was an overextension of the church's power because it gave the bishop absolute power over the congregation and church finances.[160]

A shift in power divided the diaspora, and by 1970, a small group of Copts in Jersey City decided to register themselves as a non-profit organization with the intent to create a church and appoint a priest.[161] The CAA quickly rebuked this new organization, which was called the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, because they feared its acceptance by the Coptic Church would "encourage others" to do something similar and "register an independent church."[162] After failing to gain support from Bishop Samuel and the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Egypt, the CAA acquiesced and decided to dissolve their organization and unite with the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church to create a new organization called The Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of New York.[163]

The rise and fall of the CAA, as well as Bishop Samuel's attempt to institutionalize the Coptic Church in the diaspora, demonstrates the ad hoc and laity driven direction of Coptic organization and church building in North America. What began as a small group of Copts set on

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158 Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 71; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 246-249.
159 Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 62; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 246-249.
160 Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 62,72; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 246-249.
161 Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 96; Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A.*, 915-920; Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 255.
162 Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 100-101; Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S.A.*, 924-930.
163 Boulos, *History of the Early Coptic Community*, 114.

bringing a priest to their area quickly transformed into an international organization tasked with coordinating the direction of the Coptic community in cooperation with the Coptic Church and Bishop Samuel. Due to its laity driven inception and lack of institutional finances, the organization encountered numerous obstacles that divided its supporters and forced the Church to adopt a larger role. The CAA's failure to control the construction of church organizations made church building in the diaspora a localized endeavor. Despite the institutionalization of the Coptic Church in 1966, the Coptic laity led the direction of religious organization building in North America. This was predominantly due to Pope Shenouda's decision to take charge of church development outside of Egypt from Bishop Samuel in 1972.[164] Unlike Bishop Samuel who was directly involved in the creation of Coptic communities and provided them with priests, Pope Shenouda took a step back from this initiative and placed the creation of churches in the hands of the laity. As a result, the consecration of churches was ad hoc, occasionally lacked direction, and permitted to any community capable of sustaining one. Churches were created according to the intentions and ambitions of individuals and small communities, many times on account of disputes. Due to its seemingly arbitrary execution at times, Coptic churches competed over congregants, while priests occasionally attempted to prevent the construction of a church. This was a pervasive problem in Middlesex County, as will be explored in this chapter and chapter four.

The Creation of St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church

The creation of St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church by the Coptic community in Middlesex County will demonstrate the role clergymen had as permitters of church building

[164] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 76.

projects rather than orchestrators. It will also reveal the role proximity had in the creation of new churches and the necessary steps taken to secure papal support. Since Coptic organizations and church building projects were laity driven, there were numerous tasks the community in Middlesex County had to accomplish before the pope approved the construction of their church. Through an examination of two letters sent to Pope Shenouda by the Copts of Middlesex County, it is clear the community had to demonstrate to the patriarch that the creation of a church was needed, possessed the finances to complete the project, secured a property, and had chosen a priest.[165] Moreover, due to the opportunistic nature of their development, the community in Middlesex County had to complete this project within a restricted timeline.

Creating a Religious Organization

The Coptic community in Middlesex County was relatively small in 1976, though it was composed of wealthier and established Copts who came to the region to escape city life. These families attended one of the two Coptic churches in Jersey City, however, whenever the weather was poor, they participated in liturgical services held at the Greek Orthodox Church on River Road in Piscataway.[166] To many of them, the commute to Jersey City was unbearable, particularly during the holidays when liturgies finished around one in the morning.[167] Frustrated with the amount of travel needed to attend a Coptic liturgy and the lack of religious services available to his children, Sami Zaki, who moved to East Brunswick with his brother Dr. Fouad George Zaki in 1969, contemplated the possibility of constructing a church in the Middlesex County area. Following a Bible study meeting between the Copts of Middlesex County, Sami

[165] See Appendix A for Papal letter 1 and Appendix C for Papal letter 2.
[166] Zaki, *History and Story*, 6.
[167] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 22, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

asked the group if they wanted to fund their own church in the area. Enthusiastic about the initiative, the small group agreed and decided that they should try and locate other Copts in the area. Following an extensive search, they found thirty-five families located in the area and interested in the proposed project.[168]

With the core of the community established, they discussed the process of creating a church organization. In early September 1976, a rumor spread across the diaspora that Pope Shenouda III was planning a papal trip throughout North America in April 1977.[169] The uncanny timing of the news galvanized the community and convinced them to take advantage of the visit by having the pope lay the foundation stone and ordain them a priest while in New Jersey.[170] To do so, the community had to expedite the process and demonstrate to the pope that their community had the funds and vision to build and sustain a church.

In their first letter to Pope Shenouda on December 8, 1976, the community justified the necessity of a church in Middlesex County in four ways: distance, communal growth, lack of spiritual services, and the rearing of the youth. Their main argument was that the community had to travel around 50 miles to the nearest church and suffered spiritually because of it.[171] The Coptic community believed that the church served a dominant role in their secular and spiritual lives, specifically the priest who oversaw the needs of families and supervised the rearing of children.[172] Stripping the Coptic people of these essential elements was akin to losing their identity. Furthermore, community members claimed that there was an exponential increase of

[168] Zaki, *History and Story*, 7. Nadia Shenouda, being the most affable of the group, was tasked with locating other Copts in the Middlesex County area and creating the census. To complete the assignment, she asked priests and other families in Jersey City if they knew Copts living in Middlesex County. She was also fortunate enough to encounter recognizable faces at her local supermarket and asked them to put her in contact with any other Copt they knew living close by. Additionally, she searched the phone directory for other Copts.
[169] Zaki, *History and Story*, 9.
[170] Zaki, *History and Story*, 9.
[171] Papal Letter 1.
[172] Ibid.

families because Copts had "begun to purchase houses" in the area.[173] Drawing on proximity, spiritual deficiency and communal growth, the community petitioned the support of the patriarch and his "approval" to build their church.[174]

Spearheading the creation of their non-profit organization was Sami Zaki who personally chose the board of directors and oversaw the construction of the bylaws.[175] Strikingly, the bylaws created by the organization differed drastically from those of the CAA. While the CAA emphasized the cultural and social aspects of their organization, the organization in Middlesex County was religious in nature and "formed for the purpose of administering and managing the affairs, property and temporalities of the said Church."[176] Additionally, the Copts in Middlesex County submitted to the authority of the patriarch and considered themselves "integral with and inseparable from" the Coptic Church in Egypt.[177] Accentuating the patriarch and Coptic Church in Egypt as inextricable components of their organization highlights the strong relationship the community in Middlesex County had with the Coptic Church in Egypt. Unlike the CAA which was in cooperation with the Coptic Church rather than beneath its authority, the Copts of Middlesex County saw themselves and their religious organization as an extension of the Church in Egypt. This attachment to Egypt and the Coptic Church reflects the community's ethno-religious identity and their desire to remain associated with Egypt, a theme that will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter two and three. Nevertheless, the community's first task was completed and on January 5, 1977, the St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church was officially incorporated as a non-profit organization in the state of New Jersey.[178]

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[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Zaki, *History and Story*, 10-11.
[176] See Appendix I for St. Mary's Bylaws.
[177] St. Mary's Bylaws.
[178] The decision to name the church and organization after St. Mary was Pearl Zaki's idea, Sami Zaki's sister-in-law. Pearl Zaki was an American born Catholic who married the renowned scientist and researcher Dr. Fouad George

Securing Finances and Land

To secure papal approval of their church building project, the community had to prove they had the funds to guarantee the longevity of a church and priest. As mentioned above, the CAA encountered onerous challenges and essentially collapsed as an organization because of its inability to secure pledges and maintain a constant flow of donations. Although finances were difficult for the CAA, that was not the case for the Copts of Middlesex County. One reason they did not struggle like the early community was because all members were relatively wealthy in comparison to those in Jersey City. Monthly pledges were always fulfilled, and few people ever recanted their payments. Moreover, in times when larger funds were needed, families generously offered to contribute whatever amount was required. Another reason why finances never troubled the community was because they received support from other Coptic communities in New Jersey and New York through fundraisers and private donations, including one fundraiser in January 1977 that raised $12,000 in cash and pledges.[179]

The collection of donations and pledges by St. Mary's reveals how distinct the execution of church projects was. Since there was no large church organization for money to be drawn from, each community had to acquire wealth on an individual basis. Granted that their own wealth made the project a reality, the community also relied on the assistance of clergymen to

Zaki. Her fascination and love for St. Mary occurred in 1968, following the apparition of St. Mary at the church in Zeitun. When she heard about the apparition, Pearl and her son travelled to Egypt to witness the miracle, however when they got to the church in Zeitun the apparition was no longer visible. Devastated, Pearl and her son went to see Pope Kyrillos VI to get his blessings while they were in Cairo. It was during this meeting that Pearl lamented about the missed opportunity to the revered patriarch. Sympathizing with her, Pope Kyrillos told Pearl to return to the church in Zeitun because St. Mary would appear again. Enthusiastic about this revelation, Pearl and her son visited the church once again and bore witness to the apparition. Upon her return to the U.S., she published two books on what she saw and gave countless presentations on the apparition to Copts and media outlets in Central Jersey. When she heard from Sami Zaki that they were building a church in East Brunswick, she asked him to name it after St. Mary.

[179] Zaki, *History and Story*, 11-12.

collect donations from other Coptic communities. The financial assistance offered by Copts to support a parish other than their own was emblematic of Coptic charity and collectivity. Despite the regional character of church building, Coptic communities in the diaspora relied on other churches to support them when needed. Moreover, Copts believed that assisting another church was a blessing and provided donations for spiritual reasons. With their finances in order, the community continued the process by purchasing land to build their church on.

Typical of a founding group, an agreement over the size of the lot led to arguments and disagreements on account of personalities and finances. Some of the members suggested that the organization should purchase a large parcel of ten to twelve acres to prepare for anticipated congregational and edificial growth.[180] Other members, concerned about the current limited financial situation they were in, believed that one or two acres was enough.[181] After some debate, a consensus was reached to seek a property of three to four acres in East Brunswick because of its geographical centrality and proximity to highways. The land they decided to purchase was an apple orchard of three and one third acres with a small house on it, located at 433 Riva Avenue in a sparsely populated area of East Brunswick and minutes away from multiple highways.

The community's decision to purchase the lot in East Brunswick was done for three reasons. First, the lot was large enough to allow for expansion in the future. Due to the constant stream of Coptic migration into Middlesex County, board members foresaw the necessity of future building projects on their lot and took it into consideration. Furthermore, by acquiring a lot rather than an old church for sale, the community was able to build their church in the Coptic style. Second, purchasing a lot near two major highways demonstrates a common theme of

[180] Zaki, *History and Story*, 11-12; Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[181] Zaki, *History and Story*, 11-12.

suburban churches, which is that most people do not live within walking distance of the church.[182] Members of St. Mary's were dispersed throughout Middlesex County and many of the congregants lived fifteen to forty-five minutes away from East Brunswick. Placing the church near the highways made the commute easier for members and encouraged attendance. Lastly, the community believed that building a church in a secluded part of town allowed them a degree of privacy to conduct their services without disturbing others, however this was not the case as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Selecting a Priest and Church Competition

The final step the committee needed to complete before the papal visit was the selection of a priest to shepherd their community. According to the *Deskolia* (book of apostles' teaching), the priest was supposed to "be chosen and ordained among his people."[183] Sami understood the affinity the committee had towards Deacon Hana Demetrious, who served at the St. George and St. Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Church in Jersey City and recommended him as well as two other names for the organization to choose from. Unanimously, all members agreed to nominate Deacon Hana for the priesthood.[184] Following the selection of Deacon Hana, Sami alerted Pope Shenouda of their nomination through a second letter and phone call.[185] Pope Shenouda

[182] Sinha et al., "Proximity Matters," 246-247.
[183] Zaki, *History and Story*, 15.
[184] Deacon Hana graduated from the Theological Institute of Alexandria at the top of his class in 1972. In 1974 he was given a position at the Theological Institute as a teacher and taught theology. It was during his tenure at the Theological Institute that he developed close relations with Pope Shenouda III. Recognizing his theological aptitude, Shenouda sent the ordained Deacon to serve at the St. George and St. Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Church in Jersey City on November 24th, 1974. While in Jersey City he became incredibly popular among the congregants for his charisma, proficiency in religious studies, and close relationship with the pope.
[185] Zaki, *History and Story*, 15; Papal letter Two.

approved the community's decision and anointed Deacon Hana as their priest on May 22, 1977, and named him Father Bishoy.[186]

The anointment of Deacon Hana differed slightly from the anointment of Father Morcos under the CAA. When the CAA recommended a priest for the diaspora, the board made a list of qualifications and then placed responsibility on the church in Egypt to find a candidate that suited their requirements. For St. Mary's, they personally selected an individual with whom they had already established intimate relations with and then sought the approval of their recommendation from the pope. The selection of Deacon Hana demonstrates the customized nature of St. Mary's and the community's ability to organize their church according to their preferences. However, their decision to take Deacon Hana away from Jersey City, as well as the improvised nature of church building in the diaspora, created a problem with the head priest of St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church, who I will refer to as Father A.[187]

Figure 1: Ordination of Father Bishoy by Pope Shenouda III at St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church in Jersey City, New Jersey. St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection.

[186] The Coptic community in Middlesex County were largely responsible for the finances and wellbeing of Father Bishoy. See Papal Letter Two for more information concerning the promises the community made to Pope Shenouda about Father Bishoy's wellbeing.

[187] I gave this priest a pseudonym because my interlocutors requested that I do not state his name.

Since the creation of St. Mary's was opportunistic and time restricted, board members abruptly approached Father A to request Deacon Hana as the priest for their new church. The priest was disappointed with the precipitous nature of this request and the fact that they sought to take away his most affable deacon.[188] Moreover, he felt betrayed that some of his more prominent congregants were building a church that would serve as a competitor to his church in Jersey City.[189] Following the incorporation of St. Mary's, migration into East Brunswick increased exponentially and what started out as a few families had become sixty in a matter of one year. Father A's concern that a new church in East Brunswick would render an exodus from Jersey City to Middlesex County was becoming a reality. According to Louis Shenouda, who served on the board at the time, Father A contacted Pope Shenouda and told him that there were only a few families in Middlesex County and that he could "count them on one hand."[190] Furthermore, he asserted that the new congregation could not support a church or priest and that they would "start something" they would "probably not be able to finish."[191] Father A was not successful and acquiesced after Pope Shenouda consecrated the land on Riva Avenue in 1977.[192] He did not hold a grudge either, and Louis Shenouda told me that he supported the community "whenever they needed help."[193]

The anecdote above illustrates how the Coptic Church's decision to approve as many parishes as possible without setting standardized requirements incited intracommunal tensions and competition. The prospect of losing congregants, as well as their social influence and wealth, pressured Coptic churches to compete over congregants. Additionally, the improvised nature of

[188] Zaki, *History and Story*, 15.
[189] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Dr. Mourad and Aida Henein, interviewed via phone call, June 1, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[190] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[191] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[192] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[193] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).

St. Mary's development came as a surprise to Father A who saw the creation of their organization as a direct threat to his church. Although animosity between Father A and St. Mary's board members was temporary, it places into question what entities the biggest threat to congregational longevity and attendance are. Botros discussed in her work how churches competed for the youth's time and attendance, hoping to keep them in the church and prevent them from joining another denomination.[194] While Botros is certainly correct in her analysis, based on this anecdote, it is plausible that the impromptu nature of church development in the diaspora transformed Coptic churches into competitors, even if short-lived.

The advent of the community in Middlesex County and the creation of their religious organization highlights the ad hoc, laity driven, and opportunistic essence of church building for the early community in the U.S. Although the community worked with clergymen in the U.S. and the patriarch in Egypt, the role of the ecclesiastical hierarchy was limited to assisting the community when needed and approving their choices. It remained the role of the community to conceptualize and materialize their intent while updating the patriarch about their progress. Moreover, the creation of St. Mary's demonstrates the uniqueness of organization building and the important role communal resources had on their goals. However, since the creation of St. Mary's was bottom-up and spontaneous, the organization stirred resentment from their former priest in Jersey City who saw the creation of St. Mary's as a rival to his church. Overall, this analysis demonstrates that due to a lack of episcopal guidance and institutional support, as well as the laity driven nature of church building in the diaspora, the success of St. Mary's development was dependent on their ability to utilize their resources to navigate through local variables and obstacles.

[194] Botros, "Competing for the Future," 125.

Conclusion

This chapter unraveled the laity driven and sporadic way Coptic migration and church development unfolded in the diaspora. A Muslim-Christian dichotomy, civil unrest, employment shortages and educational discrimination all served as common themes in Coptic migration narratives.[195] The way Copts internalized the norms and ideologies of Egyptian society and compared it to Western society also influenced where they decided to immigrate. Imagined concepts of American society permeated the minds of Copts while in Egypt and guided them as they ventured to the U.S. The revelation of city life and how it contradicted their conjured perceptions of America flustered Coptic migrants and set into motion suburban migration and the creation of new communities away from major migration centers like Jersey City.

Additionally, my examination of church and organization building in this chapter revealed that social atmospheres, communal wealth, non-Coptic churches, and personalities all contributed to the creation and destruction of religious organizations. Pragmatism and individual preferences steered the direction of religious organizations and their response to social and religious exigencies. The decision for the CAA to separate itself from the Coptic Church while St. Mary's decision to affiliate themselves directly with the patriarch demonstrates the individuality of religious organizations and provides insight into the complex structure of power between the diaspora and Egypt. The eclecticism of immigration narratives and church building initiatives discussed throughout this chapter sheds light on the complexity of consolidating our understanding of the early Coptic community in Middlesex County into a single absolute narrative. While common tropes are decipherable, a clear understanding of diasporic Coptic

[195] Akladios notes in his article on Coptic immigration narratives that the testimonies of Egyptian immigrants to North America "illustrate that socialization in Egypt prior to emigration was central to how immigrants remembered and ordered their narratives." Akladios, "Heteroglossia," 649.

communities is only possible through discernment and the quantification of developmental differences.

Chapter Two: Constructing a Church and Public Presence: 1977-1980

Coptic building projects in the diaspora have received very little attention from scholars, however, an examination of the St. Mary's building project from 1978-1980 will demonstrate the regionalized nature of these endeavors and how they were influenced by communal intentions and external factors. This chapter will begin with an analysis of how St. Mary's used local festivals and a network of Copts to obtain additional finances for their project. It will also demonstrate how finances and communal vision shaped building designs, functionally and aesthetically. Next, I will discuss how residents, zoning laws, environmental ordinances, and documentaries affected the community's project. The last section will explore how residential resistance forced the community at St. Mary's to take a more public and vocal role in the region. This entailed the utilization of media outlets and festivals to combat opposition and define themselves as a skilled and productive ethno-religious group from Egypt. The problems and solutions the community experienced when building their church demonstrates that church building projects in the Coptic diaspora were improvised and contingent on communal resources and local variables.

Designing an Optimal Coptic Suburban Church

A common trend of the early Coptic community in North America was the procurement of church buildings being sold by Protestant and Catholic congregants. All Coptic places of worship in North America prior to 1982, excluding the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Toronto and St. Mary's, were previously churches of other denominations that Coptic

communities purchased and renovated.[1] Consequently, many of them were void of architectural nuances - three altars, domes, and ciboriums - that differentiate a Coptic church from those of other denominations. Additionally, prior to the establishment of permanent diaspora bishops in 1995, Coptic communities in America did not have access to institutional funds from the Coptic Church. In its place, Coptic communities wanting to build a church relied on their own wealth and resources to complete their project. However, as was the case with St. Mary's, established Coptic parishes and congregants provided financial aid to developing communities. This paradigm was a natural response to the lack of institutional support Coptic communities in the diaspora had. Although some priests and church leaders protested or remained indifferent to the creation of a Coptic church near their own parish, they almost always supported the creation of another church once it had been approved by the pope.

An examination of St. Mary's building design will illustrate how Coptic communities in the diaspora funded their projects and how communal resources and preferences shaped the design and functionality of their church. Moreover, this analysis will show how building a Coptic church from scratch allowed the Coptic community in Middlesex County to construct their building according to their financial means and vision of an authentically designed Coptic edifice to be occupied seven days a week. The community's vision to create a church that provided cultural comfort and functionality was not unique to suburban church buildings in the second half of the twentieth century. In her book on suburban churches, Gretchen Buggeln outlines how modern suburban churches built in the second half of the twentieth century possessed two common themes: practicality and immersion.[2] Suburban churches were designed to be functional "seven-days-a-week" churches and provide congregants a space for liturgies, Sunday

[1] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 260-263.
[2] Buggeln, *Suburban Churches*, 11.

Schools, and other daily activities.[3] As Buggeln claims, the design of a church has "lasting ramifications" on the quality of religious programming, activities, and church attendance.[4] These churches were also designed to be comforting and provide the congregants a place to integrate contemporary culture with religious experiences.[5] Functionality and comfort were two concepts that strongly shaped the design of St. Mary's.

Fundraising

The building committee tasked to design and construct the church began its project with fundraising. To acquire the capital to build their church the committee adopted three strategies: utilizing communal resources from other Coptic communities in the diaspora, attending local festivals, and requesting large donations from the congregants of St. Mary's. The first approach relied on Coptic crowdfunding, whereby Father Bishoy and additional board members traveled throughout the tristate area petitioning Copts to donate to the construction of their church.[6] The Copts of Jersey City were particularly charitable because they personally knew and adored Father Bishoy and the board members.[7] Moreover, all the men who went on these charity campaigns were once active members of the Jersey City churches and the Coptic Association of America.[8] On account of this, they possessed a network of Copts to target and exploit for funds. Alongside this initiative, the community sold copper plates etched with a rendering of the church's façade to Copts all over the U.S.[9] Diasporic contributions had provided St. Mary's with

[3] Ibid., xxiii.
[4] Ibid., 83.
[5] Ibid., xxv.
[6] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[7] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[8] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[9] Sandra Lanman, "Soon-to-Be-Completed Church Centerpiece of Egyptian Festival," *Home News Tribune*, September 9, 1982, 9.

funds in the past and it remained a useful avenue of obtaining finances in the future, however, these funds were limited at the time because many communities were renovating and purchasing their own churches.[10]

Another way committee members fundraised was through their participation in local festivals and fairs. Many ethno-religious groups throughout Central New Jersey hosted and participated in festivals to celebrate their culture, raise funds, and introduce themselves to society. These festivals were integrated into the fabric of the region and served as mechanisms to facilitate the assimilation of communities while accentuating their individuality. The first festival the Copts of St. Mary's participated in was the International Folk Festival held at Middlesex County College (MCC) on June 11, 1978. Earlier that year, Sami Zaki received an invitation in the mail requesting the attendance of the Coptic community in Central New Jersey to sell "food, clothes and folklore items" at the festival.[11] Additionally, the festival committee requested the Coptic community and its leaders participate in the "Nations Parade" and wear their "national dresses."[12] According to a *Home News Tribune* article covering this event, the festival attracted "representatives from more than 20 nationalities," turning MCC's Performing Arts Center into "an exotic bazaar, offering eats and entertainment, exhibits and tours."[13] Strikingly, it was the first time the Copts of St. Mary's met community leaders from "other nations" and, according to St. Mary's board members Sami Zaki and Louis Shenouda, it imprinted on them the importance

[10] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic). It is important to note that while church competition was evident in the early community, as discussed in the previous chapter, Coptic individuals throughout the diaspora contributed to the construction of other churches whenever possible because it was seen as a blessing. Competition did not dissuade charity, which is a fundamental value of Coptic Christianity.
[11] Zaki, *History and Story*, 15. According to Sami, the college found out about the church and got the community's information from the State.
[12] Zaki, *History and Story*, 15.
[13] Laura Sanders, "20 cultures show their stuff in exotic international bazaar," *Home News Tribune*, June 12, 1978, 19.

of familiarizing themselves with local cultures and communities.[14] Although community members were uncertain about what they should offer at the fair, the committee formed to handle this event prepared Egyptian food and sought to share their pharaonic heritage and Christian culture with the broader community. The fair was a success and the community raised $950 from food alone.[15] Furthermore, their attendance and popularity at the MCC folk festival placed them in contact with festival planners and they were invited to additional festivals and fairs throughout Middlesex County.

A few months later the community was invited to participate in a local Oktoberfest event in New Brunswick.[16] Like the Folk Festival at MCC, various ethnic groups were invited to Oktoberfest to sell their food and display their cultures as a form of fundraising and to spread awareness about their community.[17] Each group set up a booth on the street and dressed in traditional clothing; for the Copts, this included caftans embroidered with pharaonic designs.[18] The community quickly realized that their food was the highlight of any festival and were amazed that people were "crazy about" their food.[19] They raised nearly $2,000 in one day by "standing in front of a table on the street."[20] Fascinated by how easily they could obtain money and network through these fairs, the Copts of St. Mary's eventually created their own festival.

The community's participation in these festivals sheds light on the way the Copts defined themselves to the public. The strong correlation between ancient Egypt and Coptic identity was the outcome of the Coptic people's struggle to "locate their community within the public sphere

[14] Zaki, *History and Story*, 15; Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[15] Zaki, *History and Story*, 15.
[16] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[17] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[18] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[19] Zaki, *History and Story*, 16.
[20] Zaki, *History and Story*, 16.

of Egyptian life."[21] As Egypt began to define itself as a nation, Coptic scholars and aristocrats emphasized their pharaonic heritage and shared it with their Muslim counterparts. This union incorporated ancient Egyptian culture into the nation's identity with the hope that the Copts would also be recognized as an integral part of that nation.[22] Moreover, Copts reconstructed their secular and religious identity to incorporate their pharaonic past. As a result, modern Coptic identity took an ethnoreligious shape centered on regaining their ancient pharaonic past.[23]

When the Copts of St. Mary's settled in the U.S. they brought with them this well-defined ethnoreligious identity, however, events in Middlesex County influenced how the community portrayed themselves to the public. For example, when the Copts participated in their first festival at Middlesex County, public and media outlets were fixated on their ancient Egyptian culture and modern cuisine. In a *Home News Tribune* article about the MCC folk festival, the author made two references to the Coptic people. The first one mentioned the Egyptian food being served at the event, while the second noted how "members of the East Brunswick Coptic Orthodox Church were explaining the origin of two 5,000-year-old scarabs, religious symbols of resurrection."[24] The author's decision to omit any information about the Coptic community's religious background and instead place all emphasis on their pharaonic culture suggests that the enticing attributes of the Coptic community were the facets which appeared exotic to Western minds and their imagined perceptions of Egypt, a notion the community grasped and implemented when they created their own Egyptian Festival.

Although donations from other Coptic communities and wealth obtained from festivals contributed to St. Mary's building project funds, most of the capital needed to buy land and

[21] Armanios, "Virtuous Women," 112.
[22] Ibid., 13.
[23] Ibid., 13.
[24] Sanders, "20 cultures show their stuff in exotic international bazaar," 19.

construct the building was acquired from the congregants of St. Mary's. The community's wealth depended on the financial generosity of some 150 families and significantly shaped the direction and design of the parish. Of the 1.5 million dollars secured for the building project, 1.15 million of it was donated by the parishioners of Middlesex County.[25] Since each building project in the Coptic diaspora was executed according to communal vision and finances, the financial resources available to the congregants of St. Mary's allowed them a certain degree of freedom to construct the church any way they liked. Furthermore, intracommunal charity and the community's attendance at intercommunal festivals reaffirms that Coptic church building projects were influenced by local factors. $350,000 was raised by festivals and other Coptic communities to support the construction of the church and although this may seem miniscule in comparison to the community's own wealth, those sources played a large role in future fundraising projects.[26]

A Church Designed for Functionality and Collective Participation

Part of Father Bishoy's vision for the church was to utilize the input of community members and apply their talents towards the successful operation of the church.[27] His philosophy sought to avoid micromanagement and granted responsibility to any trustworthy individual capable of completing the task.[28] By doing so "he tapped into the church's resources" and encouraged congregational participation, rendering an understanding among the community that

[25] Lanman, "Soon-to-be-completed church centerpiece of Egyptian Festival," 9; Valerie Hendy, "Coptic church marks opening on Saturday," *Home News Tribune*, November 18, 1982, 24. These donations did not come all at once, but in stages and when needed.
[26] Lanman, "Soon-to-be-completed church centerpiece of Egyptian Festival," 9; Hendy, "Coptic church marks opening on Saturday," 24.
[27] Sonia Demetrious, "Eulogy," St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection, 2009.
[28] Sonia Demetrious, "Eulogy," St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection, 2009; Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, November 11, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, October 24, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

it was the congregants that made up the church and not the ecclesiastical hierarchy.[29] Fundamental to this vision was the creation of an environment that provided a place for the youth, that integrated women, and provided daily religious and liturgical services.

In 1977, Father Bishoy visited the St. Vladimir Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York to seek guidance in the creation of a Sunday School program tailored to the cultural and religious discrepancies found in American society.[30] St Vlad's was one of the few, if not only, orthodox seminaries in the tristate area at the time and was a valuable resource to the Copts because they had spent years discussing how to retain orthodox beliefs in a predominantly Protestant and secular land. It was during this trip that Father Bishoy realized the key to attracting and maintaining the attention of the youth was finding ways to keep them active in the church.[31] Immediately he began holding Sunday School meetings on Saturday evenings. In doing so, Father Bishoy ensured that the spiritual guidance of the youth was not rushed or limited to once a week.[32] He also created a community for the youth to spend time with on weekend evenings and establish lifelong friendships through the "word of God."[33] The adoption of "Saturday School" classes was innovative in New Jersey and was quickly implemented by many Coptic churches in the area.[34] Additionally, Sunday and Saturday School were reorganized to transcend spiritual services and provide a space for the youth to engage in recreational activities. For example, sports became an essential part of spiritual services. Early Sunday School directors, like Rafik Wahba, claimed that attendance increased after he allowed the youth to play soccer on

[29] Sonia Demetrious, "Eulogy," St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection, 2009.
[30] Sonia Demetrious, "Eulogy," St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection, 2009; Khalil, *St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church*, 75.
[31] Khalil, *St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church*, 76.
[32] Sonia Demetrious, "Eulogy," St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection, 2009.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Sonia Demetrious, "Eulogy," St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection, 2009; Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, November 11, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

the church's property after Sunday School.[35] Combining sports with spiritual services made the prospect of going to church more appealing to the Coptic youth and the community in Middlesex County implemented this strategy throughout the week.

Women in the Church

The integration of lay women into the church was part of the Coptic Church's modernization efforts in the 19th and 20th centuries. The transformation of the Coptic Church into an "all-embracing institution" tasked with the spiritual and temporal welfare of the community provided women "numerous service opportunities" in the modern Coptic Church.[36] As Febe Armanios points out in her article on gender dynamics in the Coptic Church in Egypt, although women took more visible roles in the Coptic church, their value was determined by how virtuous they were.[37] Hagiographies about female saints emphasized purity and religiosity, transmitting to young Coptic women that "a nice Coptic girl" is one who "spends most of her free time in church, attending the liturgy, Bible studies, social gatherings, and charitable activities."[38] In response to this push for a more active role in the Church, Coptic women took advantage of available positions such as Sunday School teachers, camp counselors, kitchen volunteers, and, in rare cases, board members.[39] When Coptic migrants settled in the U.S. they brought with them these defined gender roles and implemented them at St. Mary's. However, the

[35] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, November 11, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[36] Alissa Joy Walter, "A Minority within a Minority: A History of Women in the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox and Evangelical Churches (1854-Present" (Master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2011), 80. For more information see Hasan, *Christians Versus Muslims in Modern Egypt*, 3; Doorn-Harder, "Discovering New Roles: Coptic Women and Church Revival, " *In Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 83; Dina El-Khawaga, "The Laity at the Heart of the Coptic Clerical Reform, " *In Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 158, 160.
[37] Armanios, "Virtuous Women," 110.
[38] Armanios, "Virtuous Women," 120; Doorn-Harder, "Contemporary Coptic Nuns," 82-83.
[39] Walter, "A Minority within a Minority," 84-85.

degree to which they were enforced and contested in Middlesex County was dependent on the community and Father Bishoy's vision.

At St. Mary's, women were integral to the church and given ample opportunities to fulfill their supposed role as virtuous and spiritually active congregants. Although no woman was selected to serve on the church board until 2022, which consequently made them invisible in the decision-making processes, they were given prominent roles in the church. For example, when Father Bishoy and the board decided that the community should hold summer camp to provide the youth activities when they were out of school, Father Bishoy gave responsibility of organizing summer camp to Venice Shenouda.[40] Shenouda was given the authority to organize activities, religious services, field trips, food schedules, and oversee church volunteers.[41] She was essentially given absolute freedom to construct summer camp according to her own vision and volition. The only thing Father Bishoy mandated was that the youth participate in liturgy each day.[42] Like Venice Shenouda, women at St. Mary's were given additional supervising roles such as hosting their own religious meetings and bible studies, giving lectures, and organizing the food at festivals.[43]

Another woman that was fundamental to the operations of the church was Father Bishoy's wife Sonia. The role of the wives of priests is briefly covered by scholars, however Dina El-Khawaga notes that these women "have the impression of belonging to the institution more than other laypeople."[44] Additionally, the wives of priests tend to serve in smaller roles by

[40] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[41] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[42] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[43] Khalil, *St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church*, 75; Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[44] El-Khawaga, "The Laity at the Heart," 150.

helping and listening to the problems women in the church have.[45] If indeed the wives of priests were given such minimal tasks, then Sonia was an anomaly because she was instrumental at St. Mary's. According to Sonia, when Father Bishoy was ordained a priest and assigned to St. Mary's, he told her that she was going to serve with him and be at his side.[46] From that very moment Sonia became Father Bishoy's "secretary" and organized his appointments, visits, confessions, and every facet of his daily life.[47] She joined him in everything except for church board meetings, which he did not share with her.[48] Sonia was also given responsibility over numerous tasks such as securing books and religious icons for the library, speaking with women, maintaining relics, and preparing icons for liturgies.[49] However, despite the agency she possessed in the church, it is important to note that Sonia remains obstinate in her claim that she "never influenced any of Father Bishoy's decisions."[50]

Although Sonia argues that she never interfered in Father Bishoy's decisions, she also told me that numerous congregants believed she had the power to do so.[51] Congregants constantly approached her hoping that she could change Father Bishoy's mind when he made a decision or delayed a visit to one of the congregant's house because he was busy.[52] This assumption had its negative effects as well because Sonia was accused by certain congregants of being too involved in the church.[53] Throughout my discussions with Sonia, I was very curious to

[45] Anitra Bingham-Kolenkow, "The Copts in the United States of America," in *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 269.
[46] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, April 23, 2023 (in English).
[47] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, April 23, 2023 (in English).
[48] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, April 23, 2023 (in English).
[49] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, April 23, 2023 (in English).
[50] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, April 23, 2023 (in English). There is one decision that she did influence however, which was the procurement of a Saint Philopateer icon and its placement in front of the church altar. St. Philopateer was one of her patron saints and the only request she made was to honor her patron saint by placing his icon in the front of the church.
[51] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, April 23, 2023 (in English).
[52] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, April 23, 2023 (in English).
[53] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, April 23, 2023 (in English).

why this accusation happened and what it reveals about gender roles in the church. If the role of a good Coptic woman was to be virtuous and participate in the church, then at what point is church participation seen as superfluous and bad? Additionally, was Sonia challenged because she was seen as being too political and involved, or was it the fact that she was a female with agency in the church that frustrated certain congregants? Sonia refused to answer these questions and told me to "remove those dangerous thoughts" from my mind.[54] Nevertheless, the notion that these questions were too "dangerous" suggests that there were clear gender anxieties about how much involvement a woman should have in the Coptic Church. Additionally, it confirms that women were active at St. Mary's and that their participation, at times, challenged constructed gender roles.

This analysis of the role of women at St. Mary's demonstrates that the community and Father Bishoy wanted to integrate women into church services and provided them supervisory roles when possible. Although women were never given the agency to dictate the direction of the church, it does not mean that traditional gender roles were viewed negatively by Coptic women. As Karolina Jeppson notes in her study of women in the Coptic Church, "women are socialized into gender patterns, therefore many women seem to consider gender division as natural."[55] Simply being able to participate in religious services was fulfilling to some women, although to what degree women disapproved of these gender roles is unknown to me since all the women I interviewed throughout this dissertation either claimed they were happy with church operations or refused to comment on it like Sonia. Nevertheless, providing activities for women in the

[54] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, April 23, 2023 (in English).
[55] Karolina Jeppson, "Gender, Religion, and Society: A Study of Women and Convent Life in Coptic Orthodox Egypt" (MA thesis, Uppsala University, 2003), 51.

community influenced the design of St. Mary's and the community's effort to create a seven-days-a-week church run by the community themselves.

A Functional Yet Comforting Church

Father Bishoy did not believe that the church should limit liturgical services to Sunday only. His philosophy rested on "worship, instruction, and fellowship," none of which could be accomplished with a service held only once a week.[56] To enact his vision, Father Bishoy and community members often enlisted the aid of visiting priests to hold liturgies multiple times a week. Although the community utilized a Roman Catholic Church and the old house on the church's property to host liturgies until St. Mary's was built, the community was fixated on designing their church to incorporate liturgies multiple times every day. With constant migration into the area by Copts, the community believed that a large church and Sunday School building were necessary to support congregational growth and provide the community a place to congregate and attend additional religious services throughout the week.

The decision to build their church from scratch allowed board members and Father Bishoy a degree of freedom to design their church according to their vision and perception of congregational growth. Therefore, St. Mary's was designed to be occupied every day and catered to the youth. Unlike other Coptic churches in America at the time, the church was designed in a traditional manner with three altars.[57] According to Coptic tradition, an altar can only be used for liturgy once every nine hours, therefore the adoption of three altars allowed the community to hold consecutive liturgies a day. Attached to the nave of the church was a Sunday School

[56] Ibid., 51.
[57] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).

building consisting of three rooms for religious meetings. These rooms were also used for summer camp, social meetings, and additional social services. Incorporating a large parking lot was also essential to the church design because it took into consideration communal growth and served as a neutral meeting place for non-religious youth activities. Moreover, a large grass field was left open so the youth could play soccer and participate in other recreational activities. The large, spacious, and utilitarian design of the church encapsulates the vision of the community to provide congregants with a daily space for religious and social services while arranging for anticipated congregational growth. Alongside utility, aesthetics and communal wealth profoundly influenced the design of St. Mary's.

Aesthetics played a fundamental role to the Copts of St. Mary's because of their ethnoreligious roots and the ancient traditions stemming from Egypt they wished to retain. Board members requested the assistance of Fikri Saleh, a trained architect and student of Coptic architecture who lived in North Carolina, to build their church in a traditional yet modern style.[58] The congregants chose to do this because they wanted to provide the community a sense of comfort and maintain their connection to Coptic culture. Although Coptic architecture has changed over the centuries according to influence, patronage, and socio-political dynamics, the exterior of modern Coptic parishes is often constructed in the shape of a ship, circle, or cross. For St. Mary's, the church was designed in the shape of a ship with a 37-foot high stucco ceiling and three domes or cupolas surmounting three sanctuaries.[59] There were additional Coptic touches incorporated into the design plan like a *lakem*, a basin filled with water on Covenant Thursday and used by the priest to wash the feet of parishioners.[60] Rare old wood found in Egypt was used

[58] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[59] Lanman, "Soon-to-be-completed church centerpiece of Egyptian Festival," 9.
[60] Ibid., 9.

to build a traditional iconostasis and adorned with numerous icons.[61] The community's attempt to build a traditional church possessing Coptic niches while maintaining a modern essence through its functionality demonstrates their commitment to their vision of a seven-day church inundated with Coptic traditions and a connection to the mother church in Egypt.

Although preference, functionality, and comfort played dominant roles in the design of the church, communal wealth allowed for the materialization of their design. To maintain a traditional church, many of the interior facets were imported and rather costly. Numerous pieces required craftsmanship by Egyptian carpenters and materials that could not be found in the U.S. For example, the construction of the iconostasis, ciborium, and tribune took place in Egypt and were later imported after completion.[62] To paint the iconostasis, as well as other icons, the community hired the renowned Egyptian iconographer Dr. Isaac Fanous. Hiring Fanous was a significant expenditure because the community had to pay for his flights, housing for several months, and the cost of his services.[63] Later icons were purchased from Egypt, particularly the convent of St. Demiana in the town of Bilqas.[64] These icons were drawn in the Coptic style, void of foreign influences, and imported upon their completion.

The numerous, and perhaps ostentatious, Coptic features incorporated into the design of the church encapsulate the uniqueness of Coptic church building projects in North America. Due to limited financial resources, few communities at the time had the initial wealth to construct and design a brand new church.[65] In most cases, Coptic communities renovated churches and adopted

[61] Ibid., 9.
[62] Ibid., 9.
[63] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[64] Dr. Mourad and Aida Henein, interviewed via phone call, June 1, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[65] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).

Coptic features as finances and congregants grew.[66] Several early Coptic churches possessed Protestant features, particularly from the exterior, that would make them indistinguishable from other American churches. However, the community in Middlesex County was building their church from scratch, which allowed them the freedom to design their edifice according to their vision of a seven-days-a-week church that provided a space for the community to congregate religiously and socially. The community's ability to capitalize on local festivals and fairs to generate wealth, as well as their own resources, provides another example of how local variables influenced the construction of St. Mary's.

External Variables and a Public Response

With a steady stream of funds and a committed disposition, a building committee under the leadership of Ibrahim Habib was created to undertake the church project.[67] In 1978, the committee submitted its building design to the township. However, they found themselves in a difficult position because there were no other Coptic churches "built from scratch in the area" for them to learn from.[68] Excluding St. Mark's in Toronto, which the community in Central Jersey had no communication with, no other Coptic church in North America was built in the Coptic style and the building committee found themselves alone on this endeavor.[69] Moreover, the Copts of St. Mary's encountered profound challenges manifested by a national trend of suburban migration, industrial development, the creation of zoning ordinances, and a prolific 'Not in My Backyard Syndrome' that placed all they worked for at risk. An examination of these tribulations

[66] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[67] Ibrahim Habib immigrated to Jersey City in 1968 and then to East Brunswick in the mid-70s. Like other Coptic migrants, Habib was an engineer and came to America to find economic opportunities he could not find in Egypt.
[68] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[69] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).

will demonstrate how East Brunswick residents influenced the construction of the community's church and how the turbulence they encountered forced the building committee to utilize media outlets and public events to define themselves to locals.

Following the Second World War, suburban migration, development, and industrialization in New Jersey accelerated on account of increased mobility, a growing middle class, state-sponsored housing programs, and substantial housing shortages in many cities.[70] With the creation of the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike in the 1950s, the topographic and economic layout of the state was transformed.[71] For example, between 1950 and 1980 more than half of all farmland in New Jersey was converted into residential and commercial buildings. Moreover, the six largest cities in the state (Jersey City, Newark, Camden, Elizabeth, Paterson, and Trenton) lost about 13% of their population and one-quarter of their jobs.[72] In 1975, state officials revised New Jersey's Planning and Zoning Statutes and created the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) to regulate migration and development.[73]

The MLUL was created to grant municipalities the power to regulate land on behalf of the state through six major components:

1) a comprehensive master plan;

2) a capital improvement program;

3) an official map;

4) subdivision and site plan ordinances;

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[70] Buggeln, *Suburban Churches*, xxi.
[71] Alan A. Altshuler and David E. Luberoff, "Mega-Projects: The Changing Politics of Urban Public Investment," *Rowman & Littlefield*, 2004, 5; Don Tapping and Tom Shuker. *Value Stream Management for the Lean Office: Eight Steps to Planning, Mapping, & Sustaining Lean Improvements in Administrative Areas*. CRC Press, 2018.
[72] Altshuler and Luberoff, "Mega-Projects," 2. As individuals began to migrate out of the cities and into the suburbs, industries followed suit. This phenomenon initiated the industrialization of farmland and suburbs throughout New Jersey.
[73] Ibid., 2.

5) zoning ordinances; and

6) development application submission and review procedures.[74]

The master plan is a development proposal that allows municipalities to guide the use of land in a manner that "protects public health and safety and promotes general welfare."[75] It is generally composed of land use and development plans, maps, diagrams and nine further elements.[76] Alongside the master plan, the MLUL outlined the power conferred upon the Board of Adjustments and the procedures that should be taken to create zoning ordinances, variances, and conditional usage.

Zoning ordinances were designed to limit, restrict, and regulate buildings and structures, as well as the use of land "for trade, industry, residence, open space, or other purposes."[77] These laws were created to guide industrial and residential development in environmentally sensitive areas, historical districts, and densely populated districts.[78] The issuance of variance was granted to sites to "relieve difficulties or hardships" brought about by certain zoning regulations as long as it did not allow "a structure or use in a district restricted against such a structure or use; and provided further that the proposed development does not require approval by the planning board of a subdivision, site plan, or conditional use."[79] Lastly, no variance or other relief could be approved unless it could be "granted without substantial detriment to the public good and will not substantially impair the intent and purpose of the zone plan and zoning ordinance."[80] This provision pertaining to the "substantial detriment" of an edifice or use has been an ongoing

[74] "Municipal Land Use Law," N.J.S.A. 40:55D § 16a (1975).
[75] Ibid., § 19a.
[76] Ibid., § 19b.
[77] Ibid., § 52a.
[78] Ibid., § 52a-f.
[79] Ibid., § 57c.
[80] Ibid., § 57d.

source of dispute between planning boards and building projects, especially for the congregants of St. Mary's.

With the creation of the MLUL, development was localized and subject to the preferences of planning boards and municipalities. East Brunswick officials found it essential to control development in their historical districts and environmentally sensitive areas.[81] From 1960 to 1970, East Brunswick witnessed population, infrastructural, and economic growth at twice the rate of other townships in the region.[82] In 1975, their first master plan was created and contained a series of goals and objectives, maps, demographic and population statistics, zoning ordinances, and twenty-seven conditions to regulate and facilitate development according to their ideal vision.[83] The township's vision was to allow for development without creating an "adverse effect" on sensitive and populated areas.[84] Their master plan was constructed to hinder the encroachment of industrialization and residential development on existing neighborhoods, farmland, historical landmarks, and environmentally sensitive areas, much of which existed on or near Riva Avenue.

The land the Coptic community bought on Riva Avenue was zoned a single-family rural preservation lot in 1978, and the East Brunswick township categorized the region as low-density development on account of environmentally sensitive features.[85] The area possessed a small septic system, and the township did not plan on creating a sewer system because of the soil

[81] John J. Lynch, "Master Plan: Township of East Brunswick Middlesex County, New Jersey," April 4, 1990. The original Master Plan in East Brunswick was composed in 1975, then briefly amended in 1980, 1988, 1990, 1995, 1999, 2005, 2011, and 2015. The master plan of 1990 outlines the original 1975 plan and what changed up until 1990. For access to the master plans from 1990 to the present see "Master Plan & Re-Examinations: East Brunswick, NJ." https://www.eastbrunswick.org/229/Master-Plan-Re-Examinations.
[82] Lynch, "Master Plan," 11.
[83] Ibid., 38-40.
[84] Ibid., 38-40.
[85] Ibid., 40-41.

condition in the area.[86] This also meant that all septic systems were severely limited and regulated to prevent development in the region.[87] Moreover, Riva Avenue contained an aquifer that served as the town's source of fresh water, making expanded development a danger to the township's drinking water. The environmental considerations and low-density zoning ordinance attributed to Riva Avenue placed the congregants of St. Mary's in a contentious position, however, the community also faced significant resistance from the residents of East Brunswick.

Starting in the mid-1970s, building projects throughout the U.S. encountered what was theorized by journalists and scholars as 'Not in My Backyard' (NIMBY) syndrome.[88] NIMBY syndrome refers to the strongly negative reaction that residents have toward new developments in their neighborhoods; frequently these residents recognize the necessity for a facility but oppose its implementation in their specific neighborhoods.[89] This phenomenon is not exclusive to larger environmentally damaging projects like mining and energy plants, but affects any institution or community pursuing a project that is seen as an inconvenience to local residents.[90] Disgruntled residents could be motivated by a variety of factors, including "founded or unfounded fears" about public safety and the value of their homes, or bargaining strategies to receive some form of compensation.[91] The congregants of St. Mary's soon realized that despite living in a country with constitutional protections to religious freedom, their new neighbors on Riva Avenue did not welcome their church project.

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[86] Ibid., 41.
[87] Ibid., 41.
[88] Joseph G. Werner, "NIMBY: Is There Room in Paradise for Public Housing?," *The Urban Lawyer* 30, no. 2 (1998): 477–90; Robert Wilton, "Colouring Special Needs: Locating Whiteness in NIMBY Conflicts," *Social & Cultural Geography* 3, no. 3 (January 1, 2002): 303–21.
[89] Jaume Armengou and Domenec Mele, "Moral Legitimacy in Controversial Projects and its Relationship with Social License to Operate: A Case Study," *Journal of Business Ethics* 136, no. 4 (July 1, 2016), 733.
[90] Armengou and Mele, "Moral Legitimacy in Controversial Projects," 733; T. Pelekasi, Maria Menegaki, and Dimitris Damigos, "Externalities, NIMBY Syndrome and Marble Quarrying Activity," *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 55, no. 9 (2012): 1192–1205. Desmond Connor, "Breaking through the 'NIMBY' Syndrome," *Civil Engineering* 58, no. 12 (1988): 69–71.
[91] Armengou and Mele, "Moral Legitimacy in Controversial Projects," 733.

Residential Resistance: Who Wants a Church Near Their Home Anymore?

The first challenge the building committee encountered was from George Krauszer, an affluent Riva Avenue resident and co-founder of the popular New Jersey convenience store franchise Krauszer's Food Store.[92] Congregants defined Krauszer as an incredibly wealthy, older, and politically connected white male with "an intense gaze to fire his disapproval" at the congregant's project.[93] Krauszer, as well as one other resident, lived in the adjoining lots and petitioned the East Brunswick planning board and mayor to prevent the construction of the church on Riva Avenue. Their grievances were founded on three concerns. The first was the increase in noise and traffic the new church would create.[94] They also questioned why the church was proposing such a large building when their community was rather small.[95] Lastly, they challenged the congregation's desire to build a large church in a residential area rather than an industrial area or "somewhere away from all the residents."[96] Consequently, the claims made by these residents convinced the East Brunswick planning board to reevaluate the blueprint submitted by the Coptic community. Following this reexamination, planning board members became skeptical of the proposed size of the project. They believed it would have a "negative effect" on the recently created zoning ordinances for Riva Avenue, which were designed to limit the expansion of septic systems and protect the Farrington Sands Aquifer.[97] Additionally, while the construction of a religious building was allowed on the lot, the scale of the project required

[92] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English); Dr. Mourad and Aida Henein, interviewed via phone call, June 1, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic). He was known to the Coptic congregants as the "Krauszer's Guy."
[93] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English); Dr. Mourad and Aida Henein, interviewed via phone call, June 1, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[94] Sandra Lanman, "Coptic Festival: 2-day testament to ancient culture," *Home News Tribune*, October 9, 1980, 35.
[95] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[96] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[97] Lanman, "Coptic Festival: 2-day testament to ancient culture," 35.

variance to accommodate three 40-foot domes, a building feature emblematic of Coptic architecture.

Throughout 1978, Building Committee leader Ibrahim Habib and other committee members spoke to residents and planning board members about their proposed project in an attempt to appease them. After a series of unsuccessful meetings, Habib and the mayor agreed that the community should speak with the neighbors one by one to resolve the issue and come to an agreement.[98] Many of the neighbors were willing to compromise with the Coptic community, making simple requests that would "protect" themselves from the noise and traffic they feared.[99] When Habib and a few other committee members approached George Krauszer's house, they were invited inside for a brief minute. The dissatisfied neighbor did not wish to speak with them or compromise, he simply told them, "On my dead body this church will never be built."[100] They were swiftly escorted out of the house and decided to continue justifying their building design to the planning board.

The complaints that emerged in response to the Coptic community's building project reveal how opponents of building projects in the late 70s and early 80s utilized environmental and zoning ordinances to regulate suburban growth. The initial tribulations the Coptic community encountered were not unique, but part of a growing trend of NIMBY syndrome in New Jersey. For example, from 1977 to 1981 there were six building projects in Central New Jersey being contested by neighbors because of the noise and environmental effects they would

[98] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[99] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English). The main two requests were that the community should build a fence around their property and avoid parking on the streets.
[100] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English); Dr. Mourad and Aida Henein, interviewed via phone call, June 1, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic). Ibrahim, Louis and Mourad claim that the Krauzers guy said, "this church," while Aida claims that he said, "this building."

have on their neighborhoods.[101] Whether it was for commercial, residential, or recreational purposes, residents believed the creation or expansion of facilities was necessary but challenged the location of these facilities near their properties. To combat these projects, residents utilized media outlets to gain public support, and in some cases, took legal action.[102] However, the obstruction of a project did not always gain public support, and on some occasions, it was only a vocal minority that challenged the construction of a project. For instance, in 1980, South Brunswick township denied the construction of a movie theater near a residential area. Most townspeople wanted the movie theater, but they remained silent and allowed a "well-organized minority to impose its will."[103] The Copts of St. Mary's found themselves in a similar position, but unlike the rest of these projects, the community in East Brunswick was the only group looking to build a church in a residential area. Although it was easy for Habib and the building committee to claim discrimination as the reason why their project was being contested, they did not believe the church or congregants were unwelcome in East Brunswick but that simply "no one wanted a church next to their home."[104] Nevertheless, while discourse throughout 1978 focused on the scale of the church, as well as environmental and zoning ordinances, an untimely televised documentary changed the trajectory of discussions.

[101]Jeff Leebaw, "Adams School playground site irks Passaic Place residents," *Home News Tribune*, April 13, 1977, 18; Ross Becker, "League's lots becomes "battle-fields" four months a year," *Home News Tribune*, April 29, 1977, 4; Home News Trenton Bureau, "N.J. supports new nukes – but just barely, Eagleton Poll finds," *Home News Tribune*, November 27, 1979, 8; Liz Voisin, "EPA official blames public for chemical dumping mess," *Home News Tribune*, March 28, 1980, 26; Pat Garrison Quinn "Manolis Development veto stirs debate over influence," *Home News Tribune*, May 1, 1980, 31; "Court battle of GAF noise continues," *Home News Tribune*, March 28,1981, 19.
[102] "Court Battle of GAF noise continues," 19.
[103] Quinn, "Manolis Development veto stirs debate over influence," 31.
[104] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English); Dr. Mourad and Aida Henein, interviewed via phone call, June 1, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Lanman, "Coptic Festival: 2-day testament to ancient culture," 35.

Drug Dealers or Avid Churchgoers: Who are the Coptic People?

On October 28, 1979, the televised CBS program "60 Minutes" spent ten minutes discussing an infamous religious branch in Miami known as the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church.[105] The segment by Dan Rather was titled "Holy Smoke," and broadcasted the religious philosophy and practices of the group at their religious complex on Star Island. Although the branch in America consisted of white Americans, the religion was founded in Jamaica under the supposition that "black Africans were the original Jews of the Bible, and that the slaves of the New World were their direct descendants."[106] Controversially, they also believed that marijuana was a "holy herb" that should be smoked by all members of the church, children included.[107] The ten-minute segment contained footage of children smoking weed, white parishioners dancing and chanting in a trance, and utilized the word Coptic thirty-nine times. Dan Rather also compared the group to Jim Jones and theorized that this new religious compound could eventually lead to another Jonestown catastrophe.[108]

Although the intention of CBS was to bring awareness of this group to the country, the Copts in North America were "stunned" by these developments.[109] As discussed earlier, the building committee was engaged in heated discussions about the creation of their church and the impact it would have on newly constructed zoning laws. Following multiple meetings with board members and influential residents, they had finally started to gain some leeway. The broadcast of this documentary could not have come at a worse time. A few days after the episode was aired, Ibrahim Habib, unaware of CBS' recent story, went into town hall to continue discussing the

[105] "Holy Smoke," *60 Minutes* (CBS, October 28, 1979).
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Pearl Zaki, "Confusion about name of church," *Home News Tribune*, November 7, 1979, 23.

church's building project. As he entered the building, he found himself surrounded by hard-eyed individuals accusing him of being a part of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church.[110] Habib tried everything possible to convince town hall members that the Coptic Church was an apostolic and orthodox church comparable to the Greek Orthodox Church, yet they remained obstinately suspicious of his intentions.[111]

The appearance of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church drastically altered conversations between planning board members and the Coptic community. Concerns over building dimensions and zoning issues no longer occupied the minds of planning board members and residents. Instead, they were fixated on understanding who the Coptic people were and whether they wanted them in East Brunswick.[112] Ibrahim noted how skeptics of the Coptic community began paying attention to the physical and linguistic characteristics of their community members, particularly their clergy who looked "weird" and "satanic" with their long beards and black robes, their "weird language," and their "rambunctious and unruly" behavior.[113] They also began to question how a small community could afford such a large project, insinuating that the Copts must be "uneducated" marijuana-smoking "drug dealers."[114] Utilizing "polite and subtle questions," as Habib frames it, some opponents of the project questioned whether the Copts would "contaminate this white area" and claimed additional taxes would be needed to "protect themselves" from these "kinds of people."[115] Strikingly, Habib did not find the accusations and subtle acts of intolerance he encountered as signs of discrimination, rather he believed it was the

[110] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[111] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[112] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[113] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[114] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[115] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).

result of ignorance and his community's inability to properly demonstrate who they were and what they believed in.[116]

The ten-minute broadcast about the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church demonstrates how external variables influenced the community's building project in East Brunswick. While the initial reasons for protesting the community's project were linked to the site itself (i.e., noise, traffic, zoning ordinances, and environmental concerns), with the introduction of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church discussions about the community shifted from the building dimensions to the people building it. It transformed the orientation of debate from regulating suburban development to contemplation over whether residents wanted the Coptic people in East Brunswick. Although Habib and other community leaders refused to label what they encountered as an act of discrimination, the shift in attitude towards the Coptic community transformed the building project committee's approach.

When the community first approached residents and planning board members to discuss zoning and environmental issues, their objective was to mitigate the situation in a passive, quiet, and non-confrontational manner. The reason for this approach could be linked to what the congregants were accustomed to in Egypt whenever a community wanted to build or renovate a church. Throughout the twentieth century, the creation or renovation of a church in Egypt was dependent on the relationship between the pope and state or bishop and local governor.[117] Although a quid pro quo existed between the state and church, the state maintained heavy regulations such as granting building modification permits five or ten times in a year.[118] Restrictions on church building activity made the process onerous and, in some cases,

[116] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English); Lanman, "Coptic Festival: 2-day testament to ancient culture," 35.
[117] Rowe, *Coptic Church Building*, 331.
[118] Ibid., 338.

impossible.[119] Copts commonly disregarded the legal processes and undertook the construction or renovation of a church in a clandestine manner at night.[120] The decision by Habib and other church leaders to initially approach their situation calmly and avoid litigious steps was most likely a natural response on account of their experiences in Egypt. Following the severe accusations they encountered because of the CBS documentary, they decided to take a more public role and attempted to define themselves as distinctive from the Ethiopian Zion church to the whole East Brunswick community.

In response to the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church segment, multiple Coptic priests, including Father Bishoy, wrote letters to the station protesting the use of the word Coptic and the program's inability to differentiate between this religious group and the ancient church.[121] East Brunswick congregants were particularly aggravated with the episode and asked Pearl Zaki to write an article and publish it in the *Home News Tribune.* The article, which was published on November 7, 1979, began with a critique of Dan Rather's use of the word Coptic and the emotional impact it had on the congregation. She wrote that each time Dan Rather used the word "Coptic," members of the community "lost a little, as if the heart of Jesus was pierced again."[122] Pearl then took a corrective approach, concisely elucidating who the Coptic people were and what they believed. Despite these attempts to remedy this public relations disaster through media

[119] Ibid., 338.
[120] Ibid., 338.
[121] Lanman, "Coptic Festival: 2-day testament to ancient culture," 35. Habib also searched for additional evidence to support his claims but surprisingly, had no luck finding any book or documentary that clarified who the Coptic people were. To his fortune, he eventually found a British documentary about the celebration of Bright Saturday in a Syrian monastery. Although the film was not about the Coptic people, a short segment of it discussed the Copts of Egypt. Habib believed the documentary provided enough evidence to vindicate the community's besmeared name. After purchasing the video, he asked a catholic priest and two rabbis in East Brunswick to aid him in his debate with the planning board. With the hope that their "seminarian expertise" would provide the leverage needed to prove the credence of his claim, Habib showed them the video and had the religious men speak to the planning board on behalf of the Coptic community. While helpful, Habib and the religious men he spoke to believed it was also necessary that the Coptic community better demonstrate who they were to the residents of East Brunswick through public outreach.
[122] Ibid., 23.

awareness, the community believed a local festival was a more effective way to introduce themselves to the area.

The reason Habib and the community chose to host a festival rather than a public panel was on account of the immense success they had at the International Folk Festival the year before.[123] However, unlike the festival at Middlesex County College, which was intended to raise funds for the church and contribute to institutional initiatives, the Egyptian festival was initiated to combat any notion that the Copts were associated with the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church by properly introducing themselves to the local community. Prior to the festival, Habib contacted journalists to advertise the festival and discuss who the Coptic people were. In an article published on November 5 and 6 in the *Home News Tribune*, journalists went into detail about the founding of the Coptic Church by St. Mark, the persecution the community encountered in Egypt, and the central role the local parish played in their daily lives.[124] Habib also clarified to journalists that almost all the men in the community obtained "advanced technical degrees."[125] Habib's objective was to gain the trust of locals by demonstrating that the Copts were a successful immigrant group and not a threat to the area. As Habib told journalists prior to the festival, "We are offering ourselves as we are. Nothing is phony."[126] The Copts took this festival seriously and sent 20,000 brochures to residents throughout Middlesex County.[127]

St. Mary's first Egyptian festival was a two-day event held on November 10 and 11, 1979, at Corpus Christi in South River.[128] A great amount of labor was thrusted onto the Coptic

[123] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[124] G.J Rosen, "Egyptian festival to benefit church fund," *Home News Tribune*, November 5, 1979, 5.
[125] Ibid., 5.
[126] Ibid., 5.
[127] Ibid., 5.
[128] Starting in 1981, the Egyptian Festival was usually held the weekend following the St. Mary Feast on August 22nd. In a video of the 1984 Egyptian Festival, many Copts told the camera that they attended the festival to receive "al barakat al adra" (the blessings of St. Mary), which accentuates the intimate and religious aspect of these

women who spent days preparing and cooking a variety of Egyptian food, pastries, and other delights emblematic of modern Egyptian cuisine.[129] Alongside the food, the community transformed the gym into a bazaar named after the famous Cairene marketplace Khan al Khalili. It was there that customers found caftans embroidered in pharaonic designs, pharaonic style jewelry, paintings done on papyrus, musical instruments, religious icons and jewelry, and various other Egyptian and Coptic commodities imported from Egypt. Scattered throughout the gym were Coptic and Egyptian artifacts and artwork on exhibit, including watercolor and religious paintings by local Coptic artists.[130] On the third floor of the building there were two lectures given multiple times throughout the day (one by Pearl Zaki on the apparition of St. Mary in Zeitun in 1968 and the other a presentation on Egyptian antiquities through photos by her husband Dr. Fouad George Zaki).[131] They also played an English version of the King Tut Movie and a short film about the Coptic Church in Egypt throughout the entire event.[132] The festival was a success, resulting in "shortages of just about everything."[133]

The Coptic community in Middlesex County defined themselves in their first festival as the descendants of the ancient Egyptians, followers of an Egyptian Christian Orthodox faith, and ambassadors of modern Egyptian cuisine. Strikingly, although the purpose of this festival was to denounce any relationship between the Coptic faith and the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, the Coptic community placed a larger emphasis on their pharaonic lineage instead of their Christian heritage. Their decision to accentuate their pharaonic heritage over their Christian beliefs was in

festivals. To many Coptic participants, the money spent was seen as a donation to the church, and to some, a method of honoring St. Mary and requesting her intercession.

[129] Rosen, "Egyptian festival to benefit church fund," 5.

[130] Ibid., 5.

[131] Ibid., 5.

[132] Rosen, "Egyptian festival to benefit church fund," 5; Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).

[133] Lanman, "Coptic Festival: 2-day testament to ancient culture," 35.

response to the public's fascination with pharaonic culture. The media's overemphasis of exotic food and pharaonic trappings at the International Folk Festival highlights the reality that the Coptic people were popular at festivals and fairs because they fit the archetypal exotic culture that fascinated Americans.[134] The community hoped that by capitalizing on American fascination with Egypt they could win over the public and reclaim their appropriated history.[135]

Figure 2: Dr. Ibrahim Habib showing Mayor William Fox a model of the church at the first Egyptian Festival.

Additionally, the community's emphasis on ancient Egypt was due to the relevance and popularity of Egypt during the King Tut American tour from 1976 to 1979. During this period, the treasures of King Tut were brought to six U.S. cities, culminating with an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This tour heavily impacted American fascination with Egypt and

[134] In a video from the 1984 Egyptian festival, one American family noted how they attended the first festival and each one after that because they love Egypt but could never find time to visit. They stated that the Egyptian festival was the next best thing.
[135] Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, November 11, 2021 (in English and Arabic).

contributed to the Egyptian festival's popularity.[136] For example, in an article published in the *Home News Tribune* in 1989, one resident noted how she attended the first Egyptian festival because she visited "the Metropolitan Museum of Art when they had the King Tut exhibition, and I was so impressed then that when I heard this festival was here, I just had to come."[137] Egyptomania entranced the American people and the Coptic community exploited these fantasies in their festival. For example, when advertising their festival in 1979, the Coptic community created a flier with a picture of King Tut and a caption stating that the movie was going to be shown five times a day in English.[138] The only additional information on the flier was the date, time, and location of the festival. Although further advertisements by the media provided a concise history of Coptic Christianity, the community emphasized Egyptian food and ancient Egyptian culture to journalists because they understood that was what Americans wanted.[139] By exploiting imagined perceptions of Egypt – bazaars, caftans with pharaonic imagery, and exotic foods – members of St. Mary's believed they could win over the public and undo the damage caused by the Ethiopian Zion church.

The Egyptian Festival attempted to remove any connection between the Copts and the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, yet it did not resolve the issues surrounding zoning ordinances and their request for variance. In 1980, as planning board meetings began to take place again, opponents of the project hired a lawyer to oppose the church for the possible increase in local traffic and the adverse effect it would have on the environment and recently imposed zoning ordinances.[140] The Copts responded by hiring their own attorney, Terrill M. Brenner, to represent

[136] Hollywood was also fascinated with ancient Egypt and four movies depicting ancient Egyptian culture were produced throughout the 1970s.
[137] Wisam Ali, "Egyptian fest draws 3,000 in S. River," *Home News Tribune*, July 31, 1989, 9.
[138] *Home News Tribune*, November 9, 1979, 3.
[139] Rosen, "Egyptian festival to benefit church fund," 5.
[140] Lanman, "Coptic Festival: 2-day testament to ancient culture," 35.

them. Although there were Coptic lawyers throughout the tristate area, the congregants of St. Mary's wanted a Jewish American lawyer to represent them because many of the residents in East Brunswick were Jewish and therefore, they could fight "fire with fire."[141] The decision to hire Brenner and the challenges the community encountered made it impossible to maintain an insular attitude, and the community began integrating itself into the area by utilizing valuable local resources.[142]

Throughout 1980, four board meetings were held and attended by lawyers from both sides. Brenner worked tirelessly to demonstrate that the plans for the septic system would not have an adverse effect on the environment and sought to defend the character of the community. He illustrated to board members that the Coptic community in East Brunswick was composed of professionals and that on account of their religion and careers they did not have a drug problem.[143] Brenner and Habib also presented a film depicting the Coptic religion and people to better illuminate who they were and how the church would be used.[144] In response, they were accused by the opposing lawyer of "injecting religion into a government proceeding."[145] However, Habib defended their actions by claiming that he had to insert religion into the proceedings because "parishioners perceived a direct attack on them through the opposition."[146]

On July 2, 1980, Brenner and Habib were able to demonstrate to the planning board that their septic sewer plans would not adversely affect the Farrington Sands aquifer and that the

[141] Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic); Dr. Mourad and Aida Henein, interviewed via phone call, June 1, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Ibrahim Habib, interviewed via phone call, June 21, 2022 (in English).
[142] Sami Zaki and Louis Shenouda mention how Brenner refused to charge the church and continued to serve as their lawyer in all future building projects and litigations. This relationship extended to the congregation, and he was hired as an attorney by numerous congregants.
[143] Dr. Mourad and Aida Henein, interviewed via phone call, June 1, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[144] Lanman, "Coptic Festival: 2-day testament to ancient culture," 35.
[145] Ibid., 35.
[146] Ibid., 35.

creation of the church would not adversely affect the low-density zoning ordinance placed in the area.[147] They were given conditional approval to build the church with final plans to be discussed the following month.[148] On August 6th, 1980, after a two year struggle, the Coptic community was granted final approval and variance to build their church.[149]

Conclusion

St. Mary's building project from 1978 to its approval in 1980 shows that this endeavor was shaped according to financial means, communal visions, and external factors. The Coptic community in Middlesex County used their own resources and a Coptic network throughout the tristate area to obtain enough finances to build a church with few monetary limitations and in a traditional style. The execution of the project was centered on the creation of a seven-days-a-week church that integrated members and provided them with an environment for religious and social activities. However, the duration and process of completing their building was contingent on multiple local variables and varied drastically from what other Coptic communities went through to obtain a church.[150] As discussed, environmental and zoning ordinances have been the most efficient fronts to combat building projects. St. Mary's was not unique in this sense because many building projects were contested by residents and planning boards in Central New Jersey. However, unlike residential, commercial, and industrial building projects, the Copts were incorrectly accused of being associated with a cult and were subject to subtle discriminatory

[147] Ibid., 35.
[148] *Home News Tribune*, July 1, 1980, 4.
[149] "Planners approve noise barriers along turnpike," *Home News Tribune*, August 8, 1980, 36.
[150] For example, when the Coptic community in Jersey City procured their church in 1970, they purchased an old Protestant church and had no problem simply taking over the existing edifice. The community in Toronto provides a better scenario because like the Middlesex County Copts, the Copts in Toronto built their church from the ground up. The community in Toronto had their land donated to them by a church land developer and therefore did not encounter any zoning issues. Moreover, while St. Mary's had to respond to dissatisfied residents and subtle acts of discrimination, the community in Toronto did not experience any form of local resistance.

comments throughout planning board meetings. To remedy their problems, the Copts capitalized on the public's fascination with their culture and used media outlets and the Egyptian festival to define themselves in relation to what people expected from them. They slightly augmented their identity and centered it on ancient Egypt and modern Egyptian cuisine. As a result, the success of St. Mary's building project was determined by the community's ability to utilize local resources to combat unexpected factors.

Chapter Three: Assimilation and Migration

Scholars of transnationalism and immigrant religion have discussed the intricate process by which immigrant religious groups create religious institutions and integrate themselves into their new country of residence.[1] Religious institutions play a fundamental role in the assimilation and integration process of immigrants, however, many ethnoreligious places of worship encounter congregational divisions over the direction of this process.[2] In the case of St. Mary's, the community underwent an Americanization process that entailed the anglicization of religious services and priests, as well as further integration into the Middlesex County area through their participation in local events and politics. Yet, the church's Americanization process did not neglect the community's ethnoreligious roots and connection to Egypt. On the contrary, as the community began anglicizing religious services and integrating into local society, they maintained their ethnoreligious background and defined themselves as an American yet Egyptian church to the public. Simultaneously, the church experienced constant migration into the area from Copts in Egypt, which modified their Americanization process and created cultural divisions within the church.

Anglicizing religious services is a common trend of immigrant churches, as outlined by Mark Mullins in his research on ethnic churches.[3] This process includes the abandonment of an

[1] Mullins, "The Life-Cycle of Ethnic Churches," 14; Botros, "Competing for the Future," 31-32; Frederiks, "Religion, Migration, and Identity," 189; Ebaugh and Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants*, 20; Levitt, "You Know Abraham," 851; Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 590; Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," *American Historical Review* 83 (1978), 1168–74.
[2] Ebaugh and Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants*, 20; Botros, "Competing for the Future," 34.
[3] Mullins, "The Life-Cycle of Ethnic Churches," 14.

ethnic community's native language in favor of the local language to appease the youth and further assimilate the ethnic community into their country of residence. However, as was the case for St. Mary's, this endeavor was reactionary and continuously restructured due to new waves of migrants from Egypt. The adoption of English into St. Mary's religious services likewise spurred tensions between first- and second-generation immigrants, as well as the different waves of migrants. Concomitantly, these problems generated socio-cultural dynamics within the church and forced the community to perpetually react to new migrants and the perspectives they brought with them.

From an integration standpoint, church volunteers and Father Bishoy were largely responsible for integrating the community into East Brunswick and Middlesex County in general. Working with local and national organizations, they integrated the community religiously, culturally, and politically into the area. Through their participation in local events, festivals, and politics, the church became a geographical marker of Coptic identity to the public. However, St. Mary's integration process was twofold. Although their initial approach focused on making the community a visible facet of East Brunswick and Middlesex County, increased migration from Egypt into the area forced the community to adopt new roles centered on integrating new migrants into the area. As was discussed in chapter two, the first group of migrants into the Middlesex County area were mostly established, educated, and relatively anglicized Egyptians who had been living in the U.S. for at least five years. Their priorities were centered on creating a church and integrating the community into the area. Starting in the late 1980s, Egyptian immigrants of all classes settled directly in the Middlesex County area and the church responded by creating committees and services to facilitate their assimilation into American society and take advantage of state programs.

This chapter will examine the church's Americanization process and how it was continuously reformed to handle migrants coming directly from Egypt to Middlesex County and the sociocultural dynamics taking place within the church following their arrival. It will begin by exploring migrants who domestically migrated to Middlesex County and the Americanization process they initiated. Following this analysis, I will examine the new group of migrants coming from Egypt to Middlesex County and the impact the church had on Coptic international migration patterns. Lastly, this chapter will examine how the church adopted new roles to respond to these new migrants and integrate them into society, the impact they had on the church's anglicization process, and the cultural collisions that took place between the English-speaking and Arabic-speaking congregants. Although the intent of this chapter is to examine St. Mary's Americanization process and response to new migrants, it will also shed light on additional themes such as the role of non-Coptic organizations in the church's Americanization process, translocalism and traditions, Coptic identity, and the impact religion has on migration patterns.

An American Yet Egyptian Church

English-Speaking Migrants

As discussed in chapter two, early Coptic immigrants formed enclaves in major cities like Jersey City and Los Angeles. Starting in 1976, families from Jersey City and the surrounding area began migrating into the Middlesex County area because of the incongruence of city life and poor schools. When rumors began to spread that a church was going to be built in East Brunswick, the number of families in Middlesex County increased from thirty to one hundred in four years. To them, the presence of a Coptic church was necessary and the deciding factor in

their migration. Coptic immigrants wanting to abandon urban life flocked to East Brunswick because they wanted their kids to grow up in an atmosphere that they believed was beneficial to their kids and within the vicinity of the church. The church provided the youth with extracurricular activities, spiritual growth, and a positive environment to develop friendships. It is for these reasons that numerous Coptic families settled in East Brunswick and within the vicinity of the church.

The majority of Copts that moved into Middlesex County throughout the 1980s were wealthy individuals and families from Jersey City. Church officials claim that up until 1988, only five percent of the four hundred and fifty families came to the area directly from Egypt.[4] Many of these migrants knew very little about the Blue Ribbon schools and overall crime rate of East Brunswick until they heard about the church and began researching the area themselves.[5] Additionally, realtors began targeting Coptic migrants and highlighted the church's proximity in their listings.[6] For this first group of Coptic migrants, St. Mary's served as a geographical marker that accelerated migration into East Brunswick and the Middlesex County area.

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[4] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic). There are no surviving documents from the church listing the number of families attending the church in 1988, my decision to pick the number four hundred and fifty stems from a *Home News Tribune* article written about the Egyptian Festival in 1989. However, another *Home News Tribune* article written in the same year and about the same event claims there were four hundred families attending the church. "Egyptian culture in S. River," *Home News Tribune*, July 28, 1989, 54; Ali, "Egyptian fest draws 3,000 in S. River," 9. Additionally, one of my interlocutors claimed that by 1988 there were 435 families in East Brunswick; this number is based off his wedding invitation list in 1988. He claims that he invited every family at St. Mary's to attend his wedding, however this is based on his memory and the wedding list no longer exists.

[5] Here is another example of how the creation of St. Mary's made Copts in the tristate area cognizant of East Brunswick Township and encouraged further research into the area. Magdy and Mary Yousseff migrated out of Egypt in 1990 and settled in Queens, New York because they had family members living there. While in Queens, they heard about Father Bishoy and a "big church" in East Brunswick. Curious about why this church was so popular, they decided to attend liturgy at St. Mary's and speak with Father Bishoy. Following their discussion with Father Bishoy, they sought more information about the area and began speaking to congregants about life in East Brunswick. During these conversations the family became aware of the Blue Ribbon schools, lack of crime, and housing market. After numerous conversations with the congregants of St. Mary's, they made the decision to move to East Brunswick in 1998; Andrew, Magdy, and Mona Yousseff, interviewed via phone call, January 13, 2023 (in English).

[6] *Home News Tribune*, January 9, 1988, 26.

This desire to live near the church highlights the important role religion had on Coptic migration patterns within the U.S. Moreover, it supports the argument that the church serves as a geographical marker that encourages migration into an area. However, another common theme of these domestic migrants is that they believed the church should undergo an Americanization process that promoted the anglicization of religious services and further integration into local affairs, while maintaining the community's ethnoreligious identity and connection to Egypt. The church's Americanization process was multifaceted and can be divided into three dimensions. The first part focused on maintaining the youth, which necessitated the anglicization of Sunday School, liturgies, and priests. Their second initiative was a reactionary response to the problems the community encountered when building the church. This entailed church volunteers and representatives participating in local events and politics which integrated the community religiously, culturally, and politically into Middlesex County and made the Coptic community a visible component of East Brunswick. The final part of their Americanization process was to keep the congregants connected to Egypt through "Egypt trips" and philanthropy while becoming a source of ethnic and cultural reproduction in East Brunswick through the immortalization of Coptic traditions.

Anglicizing Religious Services

A common theme of immigrant religious institutions in the U.S. is the attempt to keep the youth tied to the church by translating religious services into English and ordaining priests who were either raised in immigrant societies or spent some time as an immigrant.[7] Following the construction of their church, St. Mary's quickly adopted an anglicization process tailored to the

[7] Botros, "Competing for the Future," 110.

youth. The first target of this endeavor was Sunday School. Youth Sunday School lessons were conducted in English and the community gave precedence to English-speaking servants. The adoption of English into Sunday School was uncontested, particularly because the majority of kids were either born in the U.S. or came with their parents at a young age. However, the anglicization of Sunday School transcended the adoption of English and focused on teaching the youth Coptic Orthodox principles within an American context. Sunday School curriculums for students in high school incorporated apologetics against protestants, addressed contemporary social practices taking place in schools such as drug use, sex, and proms, and provided valuable information about college and what high school seniors would encounter on college campuses.[8] The anglicization of Sunday School was a smooth process, although the creation of Sunday School curriculums was at times reactive and in response to new social developments and behaviors taking place in American society. Although the community was determined to anglicize all religious services, the adoption of English into liturgical services was a far more difficult task and took over a decade to implement.

One of the reasons the congregants of St. Mary's took longer to adopt English into liturgy was the lack of liturgical books available at the time. The process by which liturgical books in the diaspora were translated and produced varied according to region and church. Individual churches and Coptic communities in the diaspora created publishing houses to produce liturgical textbooks; the main ones throughout the 70s and 80s were in Los Angeles, Chicago, Michigan, and Canada. In the U.S., communities that did not own a publishing house translated and created liturgical books, then sent them to Coptic-owned publishing houses to be published.[9] There was never a universal or institutional attempt to translate liturgies into English and disseminate them

[8] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, March 30, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[9] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, March 30, 2023 (in English and Arabic).

throughout the diaspora, therefore liturgical books in the diaspora slightly differ from one another. Fortunately, since the manufacturing of liturgical textbooks was arbitrary and ad hoc, it is possible to track the implementation of English into liturgies by examining which liturgical books St. Mary's adopted and disposed of throughout the 70s and 80s.

The first book the congregants of St. Mary's used was published in Egypt and described to me as the "black book," which was written in both Arabic and Coptic.[10] This was the standard liturgical book the church adopted from Egypt and utilized until 1989. However, starting in 1982, the church began using an additional book, known as the "brown book," which consisted of Arabic, Arabic transliterated in English characters, and Coptic.[11] The Coptic community in Michigan published the brown book in 1980 and it was often purchased by deacons at St. Mary's who could not read Arabic but wanted to participate in liturgy.[12] Additionally, the community transliterated hymns and other liturgical texts from Arabic to Arabic in English characters.[13]

At this point, the number of Arabic-speaking congregants exceeded the number of English-speaking youth and therefore a full adoption of an English liturgical book was not necessary. However, starting around 1986, the English-speaking youth petitioned Father Bishoy and church leaders to conduct a liturgy in English.[14] In response, Father Bishoy purchased liturgical books in English, Coptic, and Arabic that were produced in California,[15] He then began

[10] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[11] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[12] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[13] For an example of this see Appendix L.
[14] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[15] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).

holding liturgies on the first Saturday of every month for English-speaking congregants.[16] By 1989, the number of English-speaking kids in the church surpassed the Arabic-speaking ones and the church began contemplating whether to host English and Coptic liturgies every Sunday.[17]

The discourse surrounding the adoption of English and Coptic liturgies on Sunday created divisions within the church because Father Bishoy was the only priest and could only perform one liturgy on Sundays. To appease the English-speaking youth, liturgies were held the first Sunday of every month in English and Coptic, while liturgies in Arabic, English, and Coptic were held each Sunday for the rest of the month.[18] Although many congregants believed this was a step in the right direction, the youth were not appeased and made further demands for English liturgies.[19] Church servants and Father Bishoy decided that something needed to be done so that the English-speaking youth could engage in liturgy without upsetting the Arabic-speaking congregants. In response, they asked Pope Shenouda for another priest, preferably one who was fluent in English.[20] They proposed Father Bishoy's disciple and lead deacon Mina Tanious. In 1994, he was ordained Father Antonious Tanious. Liturgy was then held twice on Sundays, the morning liturgy from 6-9 am was conducted in Arabic and Coptic while the second liturgy from 9-12 pm was conducted in English and Coptic.[21]

This debate was a significant moment for the Copts of St. Mary's because it confirmed that the direction of the church was centered on appeasing the youth and exemplified the

[16] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[17] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[18] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[19] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[20] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[21] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).

challenges ethnic communities encounter in a new land. To oppose the adoption of English was to marginalize the English-speaking youth and instill resentment towards liturgical services. One of the early congregants and head of the Sunday School program from 1977 to 1989, Rafik Wahba, noted to me how the English-speaking youth fell asleep in liturgies because they were "bored" and did not understand the service when spoken in Arabic.[22] This made the youth apathetic towards liturgies and in some cases even discouraged them from attending liturgies unless it was done in English.[23] Additionally, parents were distraught that their kids no longer wanted to attend religious services and feared that they would lose their religiosity and adherence to the Coptic faith.[24] Congregants believed that the endorsement of English in religious services was necessary to combat this trend and became an integral part of their Americanization process. Strikingly, the community in East Brunswick never translated any liturgical books and instead relied on other diasporic Coptic communities to do it for them. As Wahba noted to me, "no one cared how it got done, as long as it did."[25] Since they never took the initiative to translate the liturgy, the adoption of English liturgical books was contingent on its production and accessibility, which delayed the church's usage of English in liturgies. Yet, the exclusive use of English in liturgies was not possible, even with the ordination of Father Antonious, because of the large number of Arabic-speaking congregants and constant migration from Egypt in the late 80s and 90s; a pattern that will be discussed throughout this chapter.

[22] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, March 30, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[23] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, March 30, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[24] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, March 30, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[25] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).

Integration Process

St. Mary's implementation of English propelled the community forward as they Americanized the church, however, fundamental to this process was the integration of the community into local affairs and events. The community took this initiative following the challenges they encountered building their church in 1978. Integration, rather than insularity, was the strategy the community adopted to develop cordial relations with neighbors, prevent future confrontations, and make themselves a visible entity in Middlesex County. To facilitate the integration process, congregants and church leaders worked directly with event planners and local organizations. On account of this, the community's integration process was subject to the intent and aim of local organizations and ethnic diversity initiatives. Throughout this process, the church provided a space for congregants to organize and discuss local affairs. This in turn transformed the church into a recognizable landmark in East Brunswick for Coptic congregants and non-Coptic organizations. As will be demonstrated, the community integrated themselves into the area religiously, culturally, and politically by participating in local events, visitation programs, and political movements orchestrated by local and national organizations.

Religious Integration

St. Mary's religious integration into East Brunswick was an organic development that first started when the community sought aid from local churches and religious leaders during the building project from 1976-1982; as discussed in chapter one and two. However, the assistance of churches and religious leaders was not necessarily religious integration, which I define in this case as the community's acceptance and participation in the religious setting of East Brunswick. This form of religious integration was the outcome of two main organizations in East Brunswick:

the East Brunswick Clergy Council (EBCC) and the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ). These organizations created interfaith events that unified and made visible the various religious groups in East Brunswick through informative itineraries, collective participation, and active communication. Through an examination of these two organizations, the events they created, and how they incorporated the congregants of St. Mary's, this section will demonstrate how St. Mary's became a recognizable facet of East Brunswick's religious scene and contributed to larger regional efforts to combat religious prejudice and discrimination.

The East Brunswick Clergy Council was first created in 1963 under a different organization, the Suburban Clergy Council, which consisted of clerical leaders from numerous Christian and Jewish denominations in East Brunswick, Spotswood, Old Bridge, South River, Milltown, and Madison.[26] The organization was initially created to address the ways places of worship could influence juveniles in the community and "deal with the problems of teenage years."[27] By 1972, the Suburban Clergy Council ceased to exist as a unified organization between different townships and the East Brunswick Clergy Council was formed.[28] The EBCC met monthly and sought various ways to serve the East Brunswick community and combat religious discrimination through ecumenical unity.[29] The ecumenical programs they founded included a Thanksgiving service each November, the Peace Sabbath Service in May, and the co-sponsorship of an annual CROP Walk for Hunger.[30] These events were orchestrated to unite the

[26] *Home News Tribune*, June 16, 1963, 1; "Clergy Council hears psychologist," *Home News Tribune*, April 27, 1963, 9.
[27] "Clergy Council hears psychologist," 9; "Schedule 4-Week Workshop to Discuss Youth Problems," *Home News Tribune*, April 15, 1964, 3.
[28] The last time the Suburban Clergy Council was mentioned was in a *Home News Tribune* article on December 19th, 1971. From that point forward the clergy council in East Brunswick was identified as either the clergy council, East Brunswick area Clergy Council, or East Brunswick Clergy Council.
[29] "Schedule 4-Week Workshop to Discuss Youth Problems," 3; Paul R. Mueller, "Aligned against the Klan," *Home News Tribune*, April 29, 1991, 4.
[30] "Schedule 4-Week Workshop to Discuss Youth Problems," 3.

various religious denominations in East Brunswick, shed light on their beliefs, and encourage collective efforts to confront social issues taking place in East Brunswick.

St. Mary's acceptance and participation in the EBCC began in 1985, when the congregation was first invited to the Thanksgiving service at St. Bartholomew's Roman Catholic Church.[31] This ecumenical service, which allowed religious groups throughout East Brunswick to gather and pray together once a year, was sponsored by the EBCC and held at a different place of worship each year.[32] Father Bishoy saw this invitation as a wonderful opportunity to expose Coptic Orthodoxy to the township and further integrate the Coptic congregants into East Brunswick.[33] The service was attended by nine churches and synagogues, along with their choirs and clergy. East Brunswick mayor William Fox was also in attendance and read a Thanksgiving proclamation.[34] The St. Mary's choir participated in a series of collective songs, while Father Bishoy participated in a joint Thanksgiving prayer.[35] The following year on November 26, 1986, St Mary's was selected to host the Thanksgiving Service.[36] Once again, it was sponsored by the East Brunswick Clergy Council, however the Coptic community offered traditional Egyptian cookies and pastries to those participating in the event.[37]

Following their participation in the Thanksgiving Service, St. Mary's became a member of the EBCC and participated in other events and symposiums when possible. For example, in 1991 the Ku Klux Klan was publicly resurrected in Old Bridge, and all the religious institutions

[31] *Home News Tribune*, November 23, 1985, 4. In 1976, East Brunswick clergymen from various religious institutions created the communal Thanksgiving Service for the multiple churches and synagogues in the town. This ecumenical service became an annual tradition that allowed these interdenominational religious groups to gather and pray together once a year. In 1979, the event was institutionalized by the East Brunswick Clergy Council who began sponsoring the service each year at a different church or temple and allocated all generated proceeds to various charity organizations.
[32] "Community Thanksgiving set tonight," *Home News Tribune*, November 21, 1979, 5.
[33] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[34] *Home News Tribune*, November 23, 1985, 4.
[35] Ibid., 4.
[36] *Home News Tribune*, November 22, 1986, 6.
[37] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).

in East Brunswick requested that the EBCC president write a formal statement denouncing the Klan's open display of discrimination and "seek the forgiveness of those they sought to terrorize."[38] By joining the EBCC, St. Mary's became an active agent in the organization's fight against religious discrimination. They imprinted themselves into the religious fabric of East Brunswick, which in turn broadened their network with other religious organizations in the area.

One of these additional organizations that St. Mary's associated themselves with was the National Conference of Christians and Jews. However, like the EBCC, the NCCJ made the initial approach and invited St. Mary's to participate in their initiatives. The NCCJ chapter in East Brunswick was created in 1980 and in response to a controversy over the winter holidays celebration sponsored by the township.[39] Christian residents were "irate" over the ostensibly superfluous display of Jewish symbols in the celebration which they believed made the event unbalanced and emphasized Judaism over Christianity.[40] Resulting from these problems was a series of anti-Semitic acts against the Jewish community in the area.[41] Additionally, Hindu representatives from the Indian Association of East Brunswick were disturbed by the townships' failure to incorporate the Indian community in the observance.[42] As a result, the NCCJ chapter in East Brunswick was created to "foster brotherhood and good relations between divergent groups" as well as combat the "lack of understanding among various religious groups" in East Brunswick.[43] To put their mission into practice, the chapter worked directly with schools to teach kids the values of religious and ethnic diversity, and created interfaith visitation programs.[44]

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[38] Mueller, "Aligned against the Klan," 4.
[39] Todd Bates, "Conference of Christians and Jews seeks to expand," *Home News Tribune*, August 30, 1981, 42.
[40] Ibid., 42.
[41] Ibid., 42.
[42] Ibid., 42.
[43] Bates, "Conference of Christians and Jews seeks to expand," 42; "Brotherhood Theme for essays, posters," *Home News Tribune*, February 1, 1982, 26.
[44] Bates, "Conference of Christians and Jews seeks to expand," 42; "Brotherhood Theme for essays, posters," 26.

St. Mary's involvement in the NCCJ was passive in comparison to their collaboration with the EBCC. Father Bishoy and the congregants were not members of the East Brunswick or Central New Jersey chapters of the NCCJ, but they willingly cooperated with their initiatives and participated in visitation programs designed to eradicate prejudicial tendencies between different faiths. For example, on January 2, 1988, a church and synagogue "visitation program" was hosted and sponsored by the Central New Jersey and East Brunswick chapters of the NCCJ.[45] Multiple religious groups partook in a daylong event that consisted of Jews and Christians visiting various synagogues and churches to learn about the culture, theology, and religious customs of the different religious sects in East Brunswick.[46] Congregants of St. Mary's found the event to be a "lovely atmosphere" devoid of politics while producing fruitful discussions about the importance of religion in child rearing and community service.[47] More importantly, it served to destigmatize Jewish and Egyptian relations while manifesting "a great relationship with the Jews" among the Coptic community in East Brunswick.[48] On account of its success, the Coptic community continues to participate in visitation programs to this day.[49]

The analysis of St. Mary's integration into the religious realm of East Brunswick confirms that the Coptic community was part of an overall localized attempt by religious organizations to bolster ecumenical unity and combat acts of religious prejudice taking place in East Brunswick. St. Mary's arrival on the religious scene in 1982, as well as the acts of discrimination they encountered as described in chapter two, made them a perfect candidate for these local organizations. Since the community received an unwelcoming response by locals

[45] *Home News Tribune*, January 2, 1988, 4.
[46] *Home News Tribune*, 4; Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).
[47] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[48] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[49] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).

when they sought to create their church, the goal to fight discrimination by the EBCC and NCCJ fit in with the church's attempt to integrate and define themselves to the public as an ethnoreligious group. By working together with these organizations, the congregants of St. Mary's utilized these platforms to spread awareness and further integrate themselves religiously in the township.

Cultural integration

Culturally integrating the Coptic community into East Brunswick was a similar process to their religious integration efforts. The community took advantage of platforms offered by local organizations that wanted to broadcast the township's cultural diversity and combat discrimination. As discussed in chapter two, the Copts in Middlesex County were already undergoing a cultural awareness project in response to the Ethiopian Zion Church. Additionally, they participated in local festivals and defined their ethnoreligious background to the media. However, these efforts were strictly done to vindicate their besmeared name and fundraise. Following the completion of the church in 1982, the community agreed that larger integration efforts were needed to make the Coptic community a recognizable part of the culturally diverse landscape of East Brunswick.[50] Starting in the 1990s, organizations in East Brunswick began inviting the Coptic community to events designed to publicize the various cultures inhabiting East Brunswick.[51] Additionally, media outlets fostered a narrative that promoted cultural

[50] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Zaki, *History and Story*, 17; Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, December 14, 2021 (in English and Arabic).
[51] Excluding the community's participation in the Middlesex County College festival and Oktoberfest, the Coptic community participated in religious events predominately centered on promoting religious diversity and combating religious discrimination. It was not until the 1990s where the church was once again invited to cultural festivals. The reason for this lacuna is unknown, however it is probable that with the creation of the Egyptian festival, event planners no longer took an interest in the Coptic community or vice versa.

acceptance, especially the consumption of food.[52] The community's intentions to culturally integrate themselves through the use of local organizations and events transformed their 3 acre lot on Riva avenue from an isolated church into an advertised landmark in East Brunswick.

On November 27, 1992, the township hosted the East Brunswick Garden Club's "And Merry are the Times" home flower show and house tour.[53] Intended to expose and educate townspeople about the history of the township and the various cultures embodying it, the tour included the "Americana" home, a classic colonial home, a mill house, a Jewish home, and the St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church.[54] The East Brunswick Garden Club was founded in 1925 and had continuously fought in favor of environmental and historical conservation efforts. Its decision to host this one-time event and incorporate St. Mary's was most likely part of a larger effort initiated the year before by the Human Relations Council in East Brunswick. In 1991, the Human Relations Council was formed to confront the rise of discriminatory acts taking place in the township. Its goal was to address "the causes, impact, and prevention of bias-related incidents" through "conciliation among various groups" and the promotion of cultural

[52] In a *Home News Tribune* article written in 1985 to convince residents to enjoy picnics more often, the author noted how the incorporation of ethnic food enhanced picnics and transitioned it from a monotonous event into one of excitement. He also provided an anecdote about one friend, who after falling in love with an Egyptian woman, decided to visit the Egyptian festival and find out how to make traditional malookiya. The author encouraged residents to diversify their culinary palate since there were Chinese restaurants in "virtually every neighborhood" and "fine Middle Eastern restaurants in New Brunswick." The pursuit of ethnic cuisines and its procurement by various groups highlight the importance of food in deconstructing preconceived notions of what Americans eat. According to one resident, commenting on the increase of ethno-religious groups, "food is another sign of the times." He noted how in the past, "the average American diet was pretty bland. Today you go shopping and the ethnic foods take up a lot of space." The vast selection of ethnic products and food not only left a resonating impact on what food people could eat, but on what being an American consisted of. In the past "you became an American and ate white bread and yellow cheese. Now people don't feel the same need or desire to do that." Immigrant food generated eclecticism rather than acculturation, which allowed immigrant groups like the Copts to integrate into society and become a visible entity in America. For more information see "Dining out in the great outdoors needn't be mundane," *Home News Tribune*, April 20, 1985, 29; Rick Malwitz, "More faiths and more cultures stirred into area's ethnic mix," *Home News Tribune*, February 2, 1997, 1, 2.

[53] *Home News Tribune*, November 27, 1992, 43; For more information on the East Brunswick Garden Club see *The Green Crusade*; *The Garden Club of New Jersey: 1925-1985*; and *The Green Crusade Continues: 1985-2010*.

[54] *Home News Tribune*, November 27, 1992, 43.

collaboration.[55] Although the Human Relations Council served as an advisory board and supported local initiatives taken by organizations like the East Brunswick Garden Club, they never created an event to strengthen cultural unity until 1993.

In that year, a Chinese American family "received an anonymous letter calling for the expulsion of all Chinese from New Jersey" and threatened to violently attack the group.[56] In response, the Human Relations Council created their first annual "Our Community is Fair" festival. The objective of this festival was to bring the township's "diverse community together in the wake of the summer's bias incidents."[57] It is unclear whether the Coptic community was invited to participate in this event, however, they were invited the following year. In the second annual "Our Community is Fair" event, various ethnic communities came together in a daylong activity to "celebrate the cultural diversity of the township through the use of entertainers, ethnic foods, presentations and crafts."[58] The entertainment consisted of "music, Indian folk dances, Middle Eastern dances, Chinese flower drum dancing, Native American storytelling, Puerto Rican guitar and Philippine music."[59] It also contained exhibits about African American history, Lenape Indian history, Judaic culture, Andean antiquities, and a discussion about the Hindu Temple and Coptic Church in East Brunswick.[60]

These events were a conducive platform for diverse communities to discuss bias-related incidents, instigate cooperation between ethnic groups, and highlight cultural peculiarities. The initiative by local organizations like the East Brunswick Garden Club and Human Relations Council to create events for ethnic communities not only assisted in the integration process but

[55] Dionne L. Ford, "Multicultural fete keys on diversity," *Home News Tribune*, October 18, 1993, 1-2.
[56] Ibid., 2.
[57] Ibid., 2.
[58] Michelle DeBlasi, "Become part of the tapestry: E.B fair day," *Home News Tribune*, September 30, 1994, 56.
[59] Ibid., 56.
[60] Ibid., 56.

also redefined what it meant to be American by normalizing diversity. By exposing various ethnic communities to the township and sponsoring collective efforts, these organizations characterized what it meant to be American through acceptance and cultural eclecticism. Although isolated acts of discrimination remained a tenacious issue, these initiatives served to mitigate negative predispositions and sectarian strife.[61] Additionally, St. Mary's participation in these events transformed the community into a visible entity in East Brunswick. This shift from a novice church in an isolated corner of the township into an integrated landmark solidified the community's presence in the area.

Political Integration

Ethnic places of worship significantly influence the way immigrant communities politically mobilize and participate in international and local politics. From a transnational perspective, immigrant communities utilize their religious institutions to develop international political networks with their country of origin and influence foreign policy.[62] Places of worship also provide a physical space for ethnic and racial groups to participate in local politics and define their political identity.[63] In both cases, the place of worship provides the community a familiar and comfortable space to mobilize and discuss imperative political issues. Although numerous Copts from St. Mary's participated in transnational political movements, my objective is to examine how the Coptic community in East Brunswick integrated themselves into their

[61] For example, a few days after 9/11, Father Mikhail Tobia was stopped by an unmarked police car on Riva Avenue and interrogated after he was mistaken by a resident as a terrorist. Additionally, a Coptic congregant was "berated" by a postal courier because he had a sign on his lawn advertising the Egyptian festival. For more information see Jennifer Micale, "Attack Breed woes for Coptics," *Home News Tribune*, November 11, 2001, 11, 13.
[62] For more information on transnational political networks see: Levitt, *God Needs No Passport*; Chapter five in Akladios, "Ordinary Copts,"; Lukasik, "Economy of Blood"; Lung, "Geopolitics and Identity-Making."
[63] For more information on ethnic and racial political identity within a localized context see: Calhoun-Brown, "African American churches and political mobilization"; Sobolewska et al., "Understanding the Effects of Religious Attendance on Political Participation"; Baldwin, Smidt, and Calhoun-Brown, *New Day Begun*.

local political climate and the influence the church had on political mobilization and execution. The Copts of St. Mary's integrated themselves into the local political scene in two ways. The first was an impromptu response to political campaigns taking place in East Brunswick, while the second was an urgent response to a state debate concerning the implementation of sexual education in the classroom. An examination of these responses suggests that the Coptic community's integration into the local political realm was reactive and that the church served as a safe space for congregants to mobilize and discuss their actions.

In 1988, the longtime mayor of East Brunswick, William Fox, decided he would not seek a fourth term.[64] Fox was a Democrat and adored by the townspeople for his role in creating the East Brunswick chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.[65] Members of the East Brunswick GOP found this to be a momentous opportunity for them to regain the mayoral office, which had been in Democrat hands since Jean Walling was elected in 1972 and ended the GOP's long-time tenure of the mayoral position.[66] It was in this political climate that Michael Matta, a prominent member of St. Mary's who lived on Riva Avenue, was approached by Ira Oskowsky and Anthony Riccobone of the East Brunswick Republican party. In this encounter, Matta noted that the pair went around his neighborhood knocking on doors and asking people to donate to the campaign of the GOP-endorsed mayoral candidate Jack Sinagra.[67]

Unsure how to respond to this meeting, Mr. Matta went to the church and spoke to the congregants about whether their community should support Sinagra and contribute to the East Brunswick GOP.[68] This was the first time most church members were confronted by local

[64] "Van Wagner quits E. Bruns. mayoral race," *Home News Tribune*, September 10, 1988, 12.
[65] "Bates, "Conference of Christians and Jews seeks to expand," 42.
[66] "Jean Walling Dead of Cancer; East Brunswick Mayor Was 53," *New York Times*, April 26. 1975, 25.
[67] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).
[68] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).

politicians to contribute to their campaigns, or even encouraged to vote in an election. According to Mr. Matta, "We were still infants… most of us were not even registered to vote."[69] In an effort to further integrate themselves into the township and become active members, the congregants agreed to donate $500 to the East Brunswick GOP.[70] Congregants agreed to support Sinagra and the GOP because of the youth values they promoted and because they were the only candidates to approach the Copts and address them as a political entity.[71] Mr. Matta claimed that the main reason they donated to the local GOP rather than the Democrats was because the former contacted them, "if a local democratic candidate reached out to us, we would have donated to them as well."[72]

The nature of this encounter suggests that the Coptic community's initial decision to politically participate in local elections was the outcome of chance, rather than an urgent need to become political. In this specific case, the Copts of St. Mary's became politically active because it was opportunistic and contributed to their overall efforts of local integration. Their decision to side with the local GOP was due to a successful door to door campaign by the GOP and the religious values the Copts shared with them; albeit those values were not exclusively Republican. The religious values the Coptic community shared with Republicans was due to the latter's emphasis on the importance of religion in the daily lives and rearing of the youth.[73] It was due to these social principles, rather than a shared theological perspective, that the Copts in Middlesex County chose to align themselves with Republicans.

[69] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).
[70] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).
[71] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).
[72] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).
[73] Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).

This encounter also sheds light on the significant influence the church had on Coptic political participation. Matta's decision to discuss whether he should donate to the GOP with his fellow congregants suggests that the church was a space that allowed the community to freely discuss their intentions as a community. It also provided a space for the community to discuss local events, mobilize, and plan a course of action. Although the community's decision to participate in local elections was reactive and opportunistic, their decision to become politically active in 1988 was also due to the New Jersey Senate Education Committee's decision to stall abstinence lessons in the state mandated family-life program.

The creation of the family-life program started in 1979 when the state board of education found out that only "40 percent of the state's districts offered sex education."[74] In response, the board decided that a mandatory sexual education program was needed to combat the alarming increase of teenage pregnancy and venereal disease.[75] In 1980, the state mandated that every school district must adopt a family-life program by September 1981 and implement elementary and secondary programs by September 1983.[76] The curriculum was to be developed locally with the involvement of community members, which allowed parents to review the curriculum and have "their children excused from any portion of the program that conflicts with their moral or religious beliefs."[77] Religious groups and parents throughout New Jersey collaborated to combat this legislation, however the state maintained firm in their decision. It was not until 1988-89 that two state representatives proposed a bill to "codify the moral messages" distressed parents and religious groups have iterated since 1980.[78] The bill, informally known as the stress-abstinence

[74] Susan Walton, "New Jersey Court To Rule on Sex-Education Requirement," *Education Week*, February 24, 1982.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Philip E. Mackay, "The Struggle for Sex Education in New Jersey,1979-2003: Policy, Persistence, and Progress," *Rutgers*, 2004, 1.
[77] Walton, "New Jersey Court"; Mackay, *The Struggle for Sex Education in New Jersey, 1979-2003*, 1.
[78] Mackay, *The Struggle for Sex Education in New Jersey,1979-2003*, 2.

legislation, argued that every program should "stress the moral aspects of abstinence from sexual activity until they're ready as adults to establish in the context of marriage, a mutually faithful monogamous relationship."[79] The bill passed the Assembly "by a wide-margin," but was stalled in the Senate Education Committee until 1992.[80]

Due to the vast amount of coverage pertaining to the stress-abstinence legislation by media outlets and religious organizations, as well as its unexpected halt despite overwhelming support from the State Assembly, the Copts of St. Mary's decided to act. Consternated by this new development in the family-life program, the congregants asked Father Bishoy to invite Coptic intellectuals to St. Mary's to discuss and address these "serious issues."[81] The result of these discussions was the conception of a "Christian-based church curriculum proposal" that replaced sex education programs in public schools.[82] The program was founded on "Christian beliefs and traditional Coptic views of sexuality" that portrayed sexuality as a "sacred marital relationship between a man and woman."[83] The Coptic youth and their parents attended classes for many weeks and upon finishing the course they were granted a certification that exempted them from attending sex education classes at public schools.[84]

It is plausible that inspiration for this decision stems from the actions of the Catholic Diocese of Metuchen in Central New Jersey. Around the same time the Copts of St. Mary's created this curriculum and program, the Catholic Diocese in Metuchen instituted a new family-life program in their parochial schools throughout Central New Jersey.[85] The goal of this program was to teach the youth about family life and values through a Catholic Christian

[79] Mackay, *The Struggle for Sex Education in New Jersey,1979-2003*, 17.
[80] Ibid. 17
[81] Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United States*, Kindle Edition, 2990.
[82] Ibid., 2997.
[83] Ibid., 2990.
[84] Ibid., 2990; Michael and Mona Matta, interviewed via phone call, March 22, 2022 (in English).
[85] Paul Grzella, "Catholic schools to begin new family life program," *Courier-News,* August 27, 1989, A1, A8.

perspective. Additionally, controversial subjects such as human sexuality, AIDs, abortions, homosexuality, and contraceptives were discussed with kids and their parents.[86] Strikingly, the Diocese of Metuchen was the only Catholic Diocese to implement this program nationwide, however, numerous Jewish and Protestant communities in East Brunswick and Central New Jersey created programs as well.[87] Since the Copts of St. Mary's were in constant communication with local religious organizations and places of worship, and since their family-life program took a similar ethos and structure as the one composed by the Catholic Diocese of Metuchen, it is likely that the community got the idea to create their program from these other places of worship.

An analysis of St. Mary's immersion into the political realm demonstrates how the church served as a safe space for Copts to mobilize, discuss problems, and provide solutions. The Coptic community in Middlesex County first engaged in politics through transnational efforts, which were part of an overall Coptic diasporic effort to confront events taking place in Egypt. Yet, their engagement in American politics was opportunistic, reactive, and in response to events taking place in East Brunswick. St. Mary's decision to initially engage in the political realm was due to local political organizations reaching out to them, however, as social exigencies presented themselves, the community took a more organized approach and followed in the footsteps of other religious groups. This endeavor fit into the community's quest to further integrate themselves into the township, and as a result, they were identified as a political entity in East Brunswick.[88]

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[86] Ibid., A1, A8.
[87] Ibid., A1, A8.
[88] Following this period, and until today, governors and mayors visited St. Mary's to gain their support and showcase their resolve towards fighting discrimination. East Brunswick mayor William Fox regularly attended the Egyptian Festival. Governor Christine Todd Whitman attended the Egyptian festival in 1996 to show her support for the Coptic Community and the challenges they encountered when expanding the church. Long-time mayor of East Brunswick, David Stahl, held numerous meetings at the church to talk to the Coptic congregants before elections from 2009 to 2016. When the church purchased Corpus Christi in 2014, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie held a political campaign there in the same year.

Egyptian Roots

As discussed throughout this chapter, the Copts of St. Mary's underwent an Americanization process that required the anglicization of their institution as well as their participation in local events and politics to further integrate themselves into East Brunswick. By doing so, the community became a geographical marker in the region and embarked down a path of assimilation, however, they did not abandon their connection to Egypt. A main reason for this was because St. Mary's served as a conduit between the community in Middlesex County and the Copts of Egypt. They did this by organizing youth trips to Egypt, providing philanthropic services to Egypt, and adopting popular traditions that connected the community to certain regions in Egypt. Additionally, by maintaining a Coptic ethos that placed the adherence of traditions over everything else, the church became a hub of Coptic culture to both Coptic and Protestant Egyptians in the area. This complex and binary relationship gave the Copts of St. Mary's agency to decide how strong of an Egyptian communal identity they wished to import and what they were willing to compromise to assimilate into society.

Egypt Trips

Starting in 1986, Father Bishoy began orchestrating his "legendary Egypt trips" for the adults and youth of his congregation.[89] Alongside their spiritual wellness, Father Bishoy believed it was essential that the youth maintained "strong historical and cultural connections" with their "motherland of Egypt."[90] These trips were conducted in the summer, at the expense of those participating, and were intended to share Coptic traditions, songs, and sites with the youth while

[89] Sonia Demetrious, "Eulogy," St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection.
[90] Sonia Demetrious, "Eulogy," St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection.

strengthening their bonds with each other and those in Egypt.[91] As depicted in a 1986 recording of this trip, the congregants of the youth began their trip by visiting ancient monasteries and churches throughout Cairo and Upper Egypt, which often included tours and lessons in Arabic and English about the history of these edifices and their iconography.[92] They also explored ascetic caves of hermits in Wadi Natrun and partook in monastic prayers with monks and bishops. These trips also included cultural exchanges between the monks and Copts from East Brunswick. For example, the youth choir performed spiritual songs in English and Arabic for the monks, while the monks provided the youth with liturgical vestments and icons to bring back home.

Although a religious education was an essential component of this trip, the itinerary also included many pharaonic sites. Ancient Egyptian history and culture remains a fundamental aspect of the Coptic community's ethnoreligious roots and has been the focal point of how they represented themselves at festivals. Furthermore, the community's emphasis on their pharaonic past was a vital component of how the Copts used history to shape their identity and inculcate the youth with Egyptian patriotism. For example, during their tour, the community stopped at the colossal statues of Amenhotep III and were told by their Coptic guide that "despite the technology we see in different countries, our ancestors were greater than these people today."[93] This nostalgic confirmation of an esteemed past now lost confirms that teaching the youth about their pharaonic past was necessary to the community's identity and played an important role in keeping the community connected to Egypt.

[91] Sonia Demetrious, "Eulogy," St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection.
[92] 1986 Egypt Trip Video, St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection.
[93] 1986 Egypt Trip Video, St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection.

Cultural and historical awareness was not the only objective of these trips; a significant portion of these journeys was dedicated to philanthropy. Philanthropic missions on these trips provided the Copts of St. Mary's the "sustenance of heritage" that their community desired.[94] It gave them a chance to see where their families came from and to better understand the hardships the Copts in Egypt encountered. On these trips, youth members worked on building projects and brought with them clothing and toys to give to impoverished villagers in Upper Egypt.[95] Due to the philanthropic and collective success of this first trip in 1986, the congregants of St. Mary's developed further charity missions to Egypt with the sole intention of providing philanthropic services to impoverished Copts. However, the Copts were not the only recipients of the church's charity.

While certainly the Copts in Egypt remained the primary target of St. Mary's philanthropic efforts, there were instances when Egyptian Muslims were the recipients as well. For example, in 1992 a massive earthquake "rocked" Cairo, Egypt, killing more than 400 people.[96] The Islamic Center of Central Jersey organized a relief effort, in cooperation with Egypt Air, to send canned goods, medical supplies and clothing to those affected by the earthquake.[97] Speaking to the *Home News Tribune*, Sonia Demetrious noted how the Coptic community also contributed to these efforts and that sending relief to Egypt "was a constant thing" for the Copts of St. Mary's.[98] Although Sonia's words depict a community that placed the Egyptian people over sectarianism, the reality of the situation is that few initiatives were taken

[94] I borrowed this phrase from Jennifer Brinkerhoff's article "Assimilation and Heritage Identity," 468. In this article she used this phrase to claim that the Coptic community in the diaspora craved cultural familiarity and that's why Egypt was imperative to how they defined themselves in the diaspora.
[95] 1986 Egypt Trip Video, St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church Collection.
[96] Wisam Ali, "Islamic Center launches local effort to aid victims of Egypt earthquake," *Home News Tribune*, October 14, 1992, 14.
[97] Ibid., 14.
[98] Ibid., 14.

by St. Mary's to aid non-Coptic Egyptians. Nevertheless, remittance to Egypt remained an indissoluble facet of St. Mary's and reflects the importance of Egypt to the congregants.

The creation of "Egypt Trips" provides insight into the way the congregants and Father Bishoy wished to connect the youth with Egypt. These events were incredibly popular and hosted at least once every other year.[99] A reason these events were well liked by the congregants was because they allowed the youth to witness the history and sites they heard countless stories about in Sunday School and at the Egyptian Festival. Their ability to physically stand in ancient monastic caves and witness the grandeur of ancient Egypt fostered Egyptian pride among the youth and strengthened their relationship with Egypt. Additionally, the ability to work hands-on with impoverished villagers established a sense of comradery and sympathy for the Coptic community in Egypt. However, this relationship with Egypt was expanded on at home through the preservation of popular traditions.

Traditions and Translocalism

Another way the congregants of St. Mary's maintained a connection with Egypt was through the implementation of religious traditions. The community brought with them traditional religious practices and symbols, however they also amended traditions in response to what they encountered in East Brunswick. Like other immigrant communities in America, the Copts also brought with them popular religious practices. The adoption of these informal practices created translocal networks in the church, which are local and transnational networks that tie certain congregants in St. Mary's to a particular region in Egypt. These networks were often bidirectional, resulting in the importation of practices from a specific region in Egypt to St

[99] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English).

Mary's and remittance sent back to that specific area. A study of St. Mary's religious traditions will demonstrate how the community brought with them popular religious practices, created translocal networks, and reinvented traditions to establish a sense of belonging in their new environment. Moreover, it will reveal how an emphasis on Coptic traditions transformed St. Mary's into a cultural hub for all Egyptian Christians in Middlesex County.

From August 7 to August 21 the Coptic Orthodox Church celebrates the St. Mary fast, which culminates with the Assumption of St. Mary's body on August 22. Traditionally in Egypt, Copts hold *nahda* every night, which includes vespers, a sermon, and hymns venerating St. Mary.[100] However, some communities and churches create or omit religious practices when celebrating the feast. For example, Father Bishoy's village in Beni Mazar held a public procession on the eve of the St. Mary feast, while many of the Coptic churches in the U.S. only hosted *nahda* for one week rather than two.[101] Starting in the mid-1980s, after the community paved the church parking lot, Father Bishoy began celebrating the St. Mary's fast in a manner traditional to his village in Egypt.[102] Unlike other Coptic churches in New Jersey and New York, Father Bishoy held *nahda* every day for two weeks and held a procession around the church on the eve of St. Mary's fast. Additionally, Father Bishoy began inviting priests and bishops from Egypt and the diaspora to participate in *nahda* and give sermons.

[100] The word nahda means revival or renaissance, however, in this context, I translate it as a spiritual and educational revival that prepares the congregants for a saint's feast. The week or weeks prior to a feast, if a Coptic community holds nahda it is done to revive their reverence and knowledge about that saint. Nahda is usually held for the St. Mary feast, however, Copts in New Jersey tend to hold nahda prior to the feast of their church's namesake.
[101] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[102] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).

The incorporation of other Coptic religious leaders made *nahda* at St. Mary's a well-attended event by Copts throughout the tristate area.[103] Priests and youth from churches all over the tristate area flocked to St. Mary's during this fast to "take the blessing of St. Mary" and partake in the "tradition."[104] Ebaugh and Chavetz note that immigrant communities enact certain practices to establish a sense of belonging in their new social landscape.[105] According to church congregants, many Copts throughout the tristate area associated the St. Mary Feast with the church in East Brunswick and it became a popular religious practice in the region.[106] It provided them a sense of belonging and camaraderie with other Coptic communities in the area.[107] Additionally, the incorporation of this popular religious practice from Father Bishoy's village in upper Egypt created a network where the church in East Brunswick organized philanthropic missions to that area. For example, Father Bishoy and later priests organized trips to help villages in Upper Egypt, though these trips often culminated with a few days stay in Beni Mazar.[108] This bidirectional network was common but not always the case. In some instances, migrants brought popular religious practices with them but instead of creating individual networks that sent remittance back to their old villages, they contributed to larger transnational organizations and local church initiatives.

In the mid-90s, Sami Younan left Egypt and decided to migrate to the Middlesex County area in New Jersey. Upon his arrival, he became very involved in the church, particularly the

[103] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[104] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[105] Ebaugh and Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants*, 53-54.
[106] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[107] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[108] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).

Sunday School program. Utilizing his influence in Sunday School, Younan implemented a popular practice that his church in Egypt held the Saturday before Palm Sunday.[109] To initiate Holy Week, the community dressed a young boy like Jesus and placed him on a donkey. The boy then rode the donkey on the streets in front of the church while the congregants chanted "Hosanna in the Highest" and threw palm fronds in front of him.[110] The purpose of this practice was to resemble Christ's entrance into Jerusalem and spiritually prepare the congregants for Holy Week. The Copts of St. Mary's gladly adopted this practice, however the priests of the church made sure to differentiate this "cultural" practice from orthodox traditions.[111] In 2000, journalists became aware of this practice and decided to write an article about it to delineate the various ways Christians celebrate Holy Week in the Middlesex County area. In an interview with a journalist from the *Home News Tribune*, Father Tanious emphasized that the adoption of the donkey was a "cultural, not traditional thing" that gave "people a feel for the way things were a millennia ago."[112] Although the community celebrated this popular practice, the church clergy did not want outside viewers to misinterpret the orthodox traditions of the church with cultural practices intended to bolster spirituality and communal relations. However, the adoption of this practice also highlights how communal preferences, and the lack of episcopal oversight, influenced the way St. Mary's adopted popular religious practices.

Strikingly, St. Mary's was the only Coptic church in the tristate area to embrace this practice. The reason for this was most likely due to a lack of space available at these other Coptic churches. Most Coptic churches at this time were built in crowded urban areas and did not have

[109] Amged Salib, interviewed via phone call, November 13, 2022 (in English).
[110] Amged Salib, interviewed via phone call, November 13, 2022 (in English).
[111] Ken Serrano, "Coptic Orthodox parish kicks off Holy Week with vespers service," *Home News Tribune*, April 23, 2000, 19.
[112] Ibid., 19.

the physical space to perform this cultural practice. St. Mary's on the other hand possessed a large parking lot which made this practice feasible. Moreover, since New Jersey lacked episcopal supervision, Coptic communities in the area had the freedom to impose cultural practices without fear of episcopal repercussions. This lack of episcopal oversight, which is a common theme throughout this dissertation, gave the community the freedom to import traditions and cultural practices that may have been frowned upon by diocesan bishops.

A result of the community's adherence to church traditions and Egyptian culture was the reproduction and retention of Coptic culture in Middlesex County. Although the church became a physical embodiment of Coptic culture for the Coptic people, it also served as a hub for Egyptian Protestants to teach their children about Christianity in Egypt and reconnect them with their roots. In her article on Arab Protestant churches in New Jersey, Deanna Womack mentions how Coptic traditions remained important to Egyptian immigrants that attended Arabic-speaking Protestant churches.[113] Two of her interlocutors stated that they occasionally attended St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in East Brunswick because it was important that their children "grow up with a sense of their roots" and retain a connection to "the church's long history and deep tradition."[114] They believed that St. Mary's provided a space for their kids to learn about the ancient hymns and traditions preserved by the Coptic Church.[115] By safeguarding their traditions and Egyptian roots, St. Mary's became a site of cultural continuity, linking the past with the present.

This section demonstrated the various ways the Copts of St. Mary's altered their religious institution and integrated into East Brunswick while maintaining their connection with Egypt. As

[113] Deanna Ferree Womack, "Transnational Christianity and Converging Identities," *Mission Studies* 32, no. 2 (June 3, 2015): 250–70.
[114] Ibid., 263.
[115] Ibid., 263.

discussed, responding to the growth of the English-speaking youth in the church was the main reason they decided to anglicize their church. Additionally, the trials they encountered in the building project necessitated further integration into East Brunswick so that they could better define themselves as a facet of the area and avoid future problems. Moreover, the degree by which St. Mary's decided to stay in contact with Egypt was entirely contingent on the intentions of the congregants and how they operated their church. However, with a new flow of immigrants coming to Middlesex County directly from Egypt in the late 80s, the community was forced to alter their Americanization process and adapt new avenues to integrate and anglicize these new migrants.

International Migration and Amending the Americanization Process

Ethnic religious institutions often function as guides to a new society that provide immigrants housing, social, and economic opportunities while facilitating their assimilation and integration process. However, religious institutions are also malleable entities that constantly adapt and respond to new migrant groups and the sociocultural dynamics manifested from their arrival.[116] As discussed throughout this dissertation, the Copts of St. Mary's were relatively wealthy, had a strong understanding of English and American society, and possessed white collar jobs. The need for migration services was limited since all but five percent of all congregants had lived in America for at least half a decade.[117] On account of this, the direction of the church was centered on anglicizing and integrating the community into East Brunswick and Middlesex County. However, starting in 1988, because of chain migration and the church's reputation in

[116] Botros, "Competing for the Future," 90; Kresta, "Can Churches Change a Neighborhood," 16.
[117] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).

Egypt, St. Mary's witnessed a steady and large increase of immigrants coming directly to Middlesex County from Egypt. By 1988, St. Mary's had around four hundred and fifty families attending the church and by the year 2000 the community had over one thousand families in its congregation.[118] A significant number of these new immigrants were from lower-class families in Egypt, hardly spoke English, did not have a college degree, or possessed one that was not transferable in America, and required assistance from family members and the church.

A result of this new group of migrants was the transformation of the church's functionality and the restructuring of their Americanization process. Rather than focusing on how to integrate the community into Middlesex County, the community created the Anba Abraham committee and relied on the experience of certain congregants to facilitate the settlement and integration of these new immigrants into the area. Additionally, they had to respond to two types of migrants that came from Egypt to America. The first type came to America on a temporary visa and required the church's assistance to obtain asylum and permanent residence in the U.S. The second set of migrants were granted permanent residence in the U.S because of the lottery system created in 1990. This group lacked connections in the area and depended on the church to find them temporary housing. Both groups also relied on the church to find them permanent housing, to take advantage of state and federal programs, and provide financial support when needed. An analysis of this new group of migrants and the impact they had on St. Mary's will demonstrate how the church's Americanization process was pliable and responsive to local variables and unexpected waves of migration.

[118] Ali, "Egyptian fest draws 3,000 in S. River," 9; Khalil, *St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church*, 32. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 5,092 Egyptians living in Middlesex County; 3,996 of them were born in Egypt. "Census 2000, Summary File 3," 2000. https://www.nj.gov/labor/labormarketinformation/assets/PDFs/census/2kcensus/sf3/sf3023.pdf, 712, 714.

First Set of Migrants

As discussed in chapter one, Coptic migration to North America prior to 1968 was largely restricted to cultural and educational purposes. Accordingly, these early migrants to the U.S were affluent and educated members of Egyptian society who were "deemed assimilable" by state officials.[119] Following the creation of the Egyptian Ministry of Immigration in 1968 and the restoration of U.S aid after the 1973 war, Copts began acquiring permanent and temporary visas to the U.S.[120] Moreover, the demographics of applicants shifted from affluent and educated Egyptians to the working-class and unemployed youth.[121] Many of these individuals obtained visas through sponsorship and appeals from churches and immigrant families throughout North America.[122] However, a large number of Copts who came to Middlesex County from the late 80s onward possessed only a temporary visa.[123] In response, many of these immigrants overstayed their visa and resided in the country illegally, an uncomfortable situation that placed the priests and congregants of St. Mary's in an ethical conundrum.[124]

Copts who overstayed their visa were a common problem at St. Mary's because these immigrants often sought the church's assistance in handling the matter, rather than professional help. This often put the priests in a moral dilemma because they felt obliged to help these newcomers, yet they did not want to be accidentally associated with fraud.[125] At St. Mary's, Father Bishoy delegated responsibility of visa-overstayers to church volunteers experienced in

[119] Akladios, "Ordinary Copts," 164.
[120] Ibid., 173-175.
[121] Ibid., 171.
[122] Ibid., 176.
[123] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[124] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[125] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).

these matters.[126] One of these experienced volunteers, and early member of the community, was Didi Moawad. Didi developed a strong relationship with a local immigration lawyer named David, with whom she continuously worked with to secure asylum for Copts residing in the area illegally.[127] She accompanied these immigrants throughout the entire process, often serving as a translator and source of transportation.[128] Due to David's experience working with asylees, as well as his knowledge of the Coptic people, he helped Coptic immigrants construct their narratives to better demonstrate why they needed asylum and the dangers of returning to Egypt.[129] This relationship between Dina and David was robust and a majority of Coptic asylees in Middlesex County utilized this connection to obtain asylum and become permanent residents in the U.S.[130]

This first set of migrants came to Middlesex County on temporary and permanent visas because they knew someone who lived in the area prior to their departure. Those who remained in the area once their visas expired sought support in the church, and although what they were doing was illegal, they saw the church as a safe space to discuss their situation and find solutions. Father Bishoy's decision to delegate this process to Didi, who eventually served on the Anba Abraham committee, demonstrates the laity driven facet of the church and the extensive resources the congregants possessed. Additionally, Didi's ability to establish a strong relationship with David reinforces the notion that the Coptic community in Middlesex County relied on local elements throughout their Americanization process. The unexpected waves of visa

[126] It is unclear whether Father Bishoy learned this tactic from other Coptic churches or religious institutions in the area, however it was an incredibly successful strategy that transferred responsibility over this complicated matter to competent congregants.
[127] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[128] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[129] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[130] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English). In some instances, Father Bishoy reached out to wealthy church members and asked them to sponsor families until they were able to secure the proper paperwork to become permanent residents.

overstayers necessitated an immediate response by the community and a reevaluation of the church's functionality. A similar approach was taken with the second set of immigrants who started coming to the area in the early 90s.

Second Set of Migrants

In 1990, the U.S. passed the Immigration Act of 1990 which established new guidelines to increase migration from underrepresented nations. The act also established the Diversity Visa program, which made 55,000 immigrant visas available through random selection.[131] Although advanced degrees and specialized skills were not a requirement for this program, applicants were required to have a high school diploma, or its equivalent, or two years of qualifying work experience as defined by U.S. law.[132] With the establishment of the lottery system, Coptic applications increased exponentially, particularly from lower income households and inhabitants of Upper Egypt. Some of these applicants had friends who lived in the U.S., although a significant portion of them did not. Their knowledge of St. Mary's was the outcome of the church's trips to Egypt and Father Bishoy's initiative to invite numerous priests and speakers from Egypt to St. Mary's. Father Bishoy continuously invited guest speakers, priests, and bishops from Egypt to participate in holidays and give lectures to the congregants. During these visits, Father Bishoy often took his guests to amusement parks, the houses of wealthy Copts, and other lavish activities not available in Egypt. Consequently, these acts rendered an image among visitors that the Coptic church in East Brunswick was incredibly wealthy; a concept that these visitors brought back with them to Egypt and relayed to their friends and congregations.

[131] "Immigration Act of 1990," Pub. L. No. 101–649, S.358 (1990).
[132] Ibid.

On account of this reputation, Coptic immigrants began migrating directly to East Brunswick with the belief that all their financial problems would be taken care of upon arrival. For example, one Saturday evening as Rafik Wahba waited for the kids to be picked up from Sunday School, a yellow cab showed up on the church's property. Stepping outside the taxi was a family of four carrying with them what seemed to be an excessive amount of luggage.[133] When Wahba confronted the family they told him that they had just arrived at Kennedy International airport and took a cab directly to St. Mary's to speak with Father Bishoy. When Wahba asked why they were looking for Father Bishoy, who was not at church at the time, they told him that their priest in Egypt told them to go to Father Bishoy in East Brunswick because he will "take care of everything" they needed.[134] Wahba then sent the family to a Coptic owned hotel where they stayed until they had a chance to speak to Father Bishoy.

According to Rafik Wahba and Sonia Demetrious, these encounters were common in the 1990s and 2000s.[135] Families flocked to St. Mary's with their luggage and expected to be taken care of financially, spiritually, and socially.[136] These engagements became so frequent that congregants believed the Egyptian state conspired to send Copts from Egypt to East Brunswick.[137] The immediate response to these types of immigrants was temporary housing, which the community was capable of providing. Although Wahba made an impromptu decision in the above case, the community possessed the resources to handle these migrants even if their

[133] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[134] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[135] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English).
[136] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English).
[137] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English).

arrival was unexpected. However, by the mid-1990s, the Anba Abraham committee was solely responsible for dealing with new immigrants and facilitating their integration into the area.

Anba Abraham Committee

The Copts' initial response to these new waves of immigrants was to provide immediate assistance such as obtaining asylum and finding temporary housing. Congregants took on these initial roles, however, once the Anba Abraham committee assumed responsibility over all new immigrants, they provided additional aid and resources. The committee was made up of Coptic volunteers who lived in the U.S. a long time and were familiar with federal and state programs.[138] They helped new immigrants find jobs and cars; however, they were largely responsible for two tasks. The first task was helping new immigrants take advantage of state and federal programs.[139] This included social security and additional welfare programs, however, most of their efforts were focused on helping these immigrants take advantage of low-income and moderate-income housing policies so that they could afford to live in East Brunswick and the surrounding towns. The second task was overseeing the financial necessities of new immigrants and allocating them church funds when needed.[140] As the community in Middlesex County continued to grow and depend on the church more often, the Anba Abraham committee grew as well and became more organized.[141] The creation and expansion of the Anba Abraham committee reveals the impact new waves of immigration had on the direction and operations of

[138] Meshriti Mina, interviewed via phone call, March 24, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[139] Meshriti Mina, interviewed via phone call, March 24, 2023, (in English and Arabic).
[140] Meshriti Mina, interviewed via phone call, March 24, 2023, (in English and Arabic).
[141] By 2009, the committee changed its name to the Aghapy House and was incorporated as a non-profit organization. They were still made up of church congregants from St. Mary's and used church facilities to conduct business.

St. Mary's and the institutionalized response needed to expedite their integration and assimilation.

As mentioned earlier, the only individuals that could afford houses in East Brunswick were wealthy Copts, however, following the Mt. Laurel II doctrine in 1983, developers in East Brunswick began creating low and moderate-income houses and apartments that made migration into East Brunswick by these new migrants possible in the late 80s and 90s.[142] The committee played a vital role in helping Coptic families take advantage of these state and federal housing policies by posting advertisements in church periodicals about new developments that offered low- and moderate-income housing, helped senior citizens find apartments, and appointed volunteers to help Arabic-speaking migrants with necessary paperwork.[143] Although the intent of the committee was to find these immigrants houses and apartments in East Brunswick, many of these new immigrants did not qualify for these programs in East Brunswick. In response, the committee began advertising low- and moderate-income housing in the surrounding towns like Sayreville, Fords, Edison, Old Bridge, South Brunswick, and North Brunswick. A significant number of these individuals settled in Edison and Fords until they were financially capable of purchasing a home in East Brunswick. This area became an enclave for Copts and eventually possessed a church as will be discussed in chapter four.

Providing Coptic immigrants with financial assistance was another important task the congregants of St. Mary's had to prepare for. This was due to the reputation St. Mary's had in Egypt as an incredibly wealthy church capable of supporting the financial needs of any new

[142] For more information about Mt Laurel II see Paula A. Franzese, Art Bernard, and Peter Doren, "Mount Laurel and the Fair Housing Act: Success or Failure? A Presentation by the Affordable Housing Colloquium of the Seton Hall University Center for Social Justice with an Introduction and Commentary by Paula A. Franzese," *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 59.
[143] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Meshriti Mina, interviewed via phone call, March 24, 2023 (in English and Arabic).

immigrant. On account of this, numerous immigrants sought financial assistance upon their arrival. For example, one Coptic widow found herself $30,000 in debt because of legal fees and other payments made to settle in the area.[144] Instead of applying for a loan or reaching out to family members in the area, she approached one of the priests at St. Mary's and asked if they could financially support her. After taking into consideration that she was a widowed mother working a minimum wage job, the priests agreed to write her a check for the needed amount.[145]

The priests of St. Mary's were originally tasked with providing financial aid to needy Copts, however, in response to an overwhelming amount of requests, further assistance was needed.[146] Consequently, Coptic immigrants unwittingly took advantage of the church's generosity.[147] According to congregants, it was common for Coptic immigrants to ask multiple priests at St. Mary's for money.[148] In some cases, one priest would approve the financial assistance and then the individual would ask another priest for the same amount of money and receive it. In response to this, the Anba Abraham committee was tasked with overseeing the financial assistance given to Coptic migrants and examining the veracity of their needs. They established requirements and steps that each congregant seeking financial assistance had to follow before receiving financial support. This process included an interview with the individual seeking money, an investigation into whether they received aid from another church or priest, and a detailed account of those who received money in the past.[149] All of these steps were

[144] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English).
[145] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English).
[146] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Meshriti Mina, interviewed via phone call, March 24, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[147] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, October 5, 2022 (in English); Meshriti Mina, interviewed via phone call, March 24, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[148] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Meshriti Mina, interviewed via phone call, March 24, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[149] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Meshriti Mina, interviewed via phone call, March 24, 2023 (in English and Arabic).

required before any immigrant was given financial aid to better handle these cases and prevent the mismanagement of church funds.

This section examined how migration from Egypt to Middlesex County affected St. Mary's Americanization process and the way the church was pushed to adopt new responsibilities to handle a series of issues they rarely encountered before. From an institutional perspective, the church created the Anba Abraham committee to respond to the demands of new immigrants and their expectations of the church when they left Egypt. This systematic response forced the church to adopt social roles that helped facilitate the settlement of these new migrants and their integration into Middlesex County. The restructuring of the church's Americanization process did not mean that they stopped integrating the community as a whole into East Brunswick, but rather that the focus of the church was to integrate these new immigrants into East Brunswick and the church by providing them the resources they needed to do so. This necessary transformation demonstrates that St. Mary's was constantly reacting to new migrants and altering their operations accordingly. However, as will be discussed in the next section, the integration of these new immigrants manifested numerous problems within the church and East Brunswick as the increase of migrants stirred animosity between English-speaking and Arabic-speaking congregants and reignited tensions between the church and its neighbors.

A Clash of Cultures

The congregants of St. Mary's transformed their institution and adopted new roles in response to an increase of new immigrants from Egypt, however, they also had to respond to the negative outcome of these new immigrants, particularly the cultural dynamics that took place in the church and the impact it had on how the church was viewed by locals. The arrival of new

immigrants directly from Egypt to Middlesex County created a cultural collision between the English and Arabic-speaking youth.[150] Consequently, the church was divided into English-speaking congregants and Arabic-speaking congregants, which plagued Sunday School and frustrated the community's anglicization process. Moreover, the trials of building a future in a foreign land caused an absence of parental supervision over the rearing of the Arabic-speaking youth, which transformed the church into a "daycare center" and created problems with neighbors.[151] These dynamics negatively affected the direction of the church as priests, congregants, and Sunday School servants struggled to find long-term solutions to these changes.

Two Groups, One Church

When discussing the cultural dynamics that took place in St. Mary's in the 90s and 2000s, congregants confided in me that convincing Arabic-speaking teens to adopt English and undergo an assimilation process was a complicated issue that still plagues the church today.[152] When assessing why this was the case, congregants disagreed on the root cause of these problems and how to solve them. One approach, espoused by the earliest congregants who settled in Middlesex County in the late 70s and early 80s, was that the Arabic-speaking youth did not want to speak in English and refused to associate themselves with the English-speaking youth.[153] Moreover, they were "stubborn in keeping their Egyptian identity," which to them was

[150] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[151] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[152] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[153] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).

synonymous with the Arabic language.[154] This resulted in the formation of cliques and hostility within the English-speaking youth groups, who complained to Sunday School teachers about the "invasion of the Egyptians."[155] Additionally, the Arabic-speaking youth loudly expressed their resentment towards servants giving Sunday School lessons in English. This dichotomy occasionally resulted in physical fights between the two youth groups.[156]

The first group of servants tried to find a solution to this problem and suggested creating two separate classes to be taught simultaneously in English and Arabic.[157] This was quickly abandoned because it only exacerbated the divide among the two youth groups. In its place, the first group of church leaders placed their hopes in the public school system, gambling on ESL programs and the high school setting to accelerate socialization.[158] Consequently, the Arabic-speaking youth fell into the "wrong groups" and adopted "bad habits" that trickled down into the church.[159] The type of bad habits and groups the Arabic-speaking youth got involved with was part of an overall drug and gang problem taking place in Middlesex County at the time. In 1990, Middlesex County law enforcement agencies reported that violent crimes increased by nineteen percent, nonviolent crimes increased by ten percent, robbery by twenty four percent, and motor vehicle theft by nineteen percent in comparison to 1989.[160] Additionally, in 2001, the National

[154] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[155] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[156] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[157] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[158] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[159] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English).
[160] State of New Jersey Division of State Police Uniform Crime Reporting Unit, "Uniform Crime Reports State of New Jersey 1990," 1990, https://nj.gov/njsp/info/ucr1990/pdf/1990_uniform_crime_report.pdf, 90.

Drug Intelligence Center published an assessment on the drug threat and rise of gangs in New Jersey. Numerous gangs, including the Latin Kings and Ñetas, distributed cocaine and committed assaults, robberies, and homicides throughout Middlesex County.[161] Additionally, Middlesex County narcotics commanders and officials reported an increase in the availability of marijuana.[162] It was this environment that some of the Arabic-speaking youth found themselves in when they went to high school.

The second school of thought, predominantly espoused by servants who moved from Egypt to Middlesex County in the 90s, was that the Arabic-speaking youth wanted to learn English but were not given the proper resources to do so; therefore, they resisted assimilation and remained obstinate towards the church's Americanization process. Additionally, they noted how many of the Arabic-speaking youth did not live in East Brunswick, but in the neighboring towns. Due to this, those who lived outside of East Brunswick were unable to form the same bonds and friendships that the larger English-speaking youth developed in high school.[163] This pattern resulted in the Arabic-speaking youth's ostracization in the church as well as their adoption of bad habits.[164]

To remedy this problem, this group created a separate service on Sundays to teach the Arabic-speaking youth English hymns and familiarize them with American society.[165] This experiment only lasted one year and ended because the Arabic-speaking youth began skipping

[161] U.S. Department of Justice National Drug Intelligence Center, "New Jersey Drug Threat Assessment," May 2001, https://www.justice.gov/archive/ndic/pubs0/669/669p.pdf, 8.
[162] Ibid., 20.
[163] Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[164] Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[165] Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).

the service and did not want to associate themselves with the larger English-speaking youth.[166] Moreover, whenever an Arabic-speaking teenager tried speaking English in church they were ridiculed and made fun of by the English-speaking youth.[167] In the end, it seems the Arabic-speaking youth simply gave up trying and held on closely to their Egyptian and Arabic-speaking identity.

The cultural collision that took place at St. Mary's between the English-speaking and Arabic-speaking youth troubled congregants and was never truly solved. Although both groups tasked with solving this problem believed the issue stemmed from a lack of harmony between the English- and Arabic-speaking youth, their inability to produce a long-lasting solution only aggravated the divide between them. This linguistic cleavage spread into every facet of the church and the community was separated into English- and Arabic-speaking congregants. Additionally, the procurement of bad habits by the Arabic-speaking youth trickled down into the circles of the English-speaking youth.[168] The failure to facilitate the integration of new immigrants in a manner that the congregants desired produced negative outcomes in the church and fostered resentment by the congregants.

Day Care and Angry Neighbors

Another problem that the servants and congregants encountered was the lack of parental supervision administered to the youth. When immigrants arrived in Middlesex County and witnessed the wealth and success of the established Copts, they were given the "wrong

[166] Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[167] Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[168] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).

impression that they too can easily become wealthy."[169] These migrants started holding "two or three" jobs, which resulted in kids being "ignored at home" and abandoned to the church.[170] According to Sunday School servants, kids were dropped off at church and their parents did not pick them up until late after Sunday School.[171] The church was becoming a daycare center, rather than a spiritual place for the youth to congregate and socialize. This was particularly a problem on Friday nights when the Copts in high school held Bible study. Following Bible study, the high school youth began loitering off the church's property, walking through the neighbors' lawns, causing mischief to the neighbors, and getting in fights.[172] The church was becoming a nuisance to the neighborhood and the hostile relationship between the church and its neighbors was reignited.[173] This renewed animosity would later become a source of contention between the church and neighbors when the church sought to expand its building, a predicament that will be discussed thoroughly in the next chapter.

Sunday School servants were faced with a pervasive problem: what should they do about the youth on Friday nights whose parents could not pick them up from church until 11pm or 12am. If they kicked them off the church's property, the kids wandered the neighborhood and caused problems, however, if they kept the youth on the church's property the kids were loud

[169] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[170] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[171] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[172] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[173] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).

and irritated neighbors called the police on them.[174] A promotion at a local Applebee's provided the answer for them. Starting at 10 pm, Applebee's offered half off on all appetizers. The solution then became obvious to the Sunday School servants. After Friday night Bible studies, they took the youth to Applebee's to eat until their parents finished work and picked them up from there.[175] However, this eventually caused a problem because the church fasts on Friday nights, therefore Sunday School servants did not want to encourage the youth to break their fast. In response to this dilemma, servants no longer accompanied the youth when they went to Applebee's and the only ones capable of going to eat after Friday night Bible study were those who had their driver's license.[176]

The problems Sunday School servants encountered with the youth and the use of Applebee's to solve it, further demonstrates the reactive nature of St. Mary's and the way immigration affects the functionality of the church. However, as the church continued to grow, so were the number of problems they had to resolve. Discord between the English-speaking and Arabic-speaking youth was a problem that the community was not prepared for and could not fix. Consequently, their inability to solve these problems caused many of the Coptic youth to develop negative character traits, only to be worsened due to a lack of parental supervision. This in turn reignited vitriolic attacks against the church and reanimated tensions between the congregants and neighbors. Although the community was not entirely prepared for the sociocultural dynamics generated on account of new waves of immigration, their persistent

[174] Rafik Wahba, interviewed via phone call, September 20, 2022 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Dr. Mourad Takla, interviewed via phone call, February 22, 2023 (in English).
[175] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).
[176] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, February 13, 2023 (in English); Sherif Fawzy, interviewed via phone call, February 24, 2023, (in English).

efforts to resolve these issues demonstrates the flexibility of St. Mary's and the functionality of their services.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how the direction of St. Mary's, their integration into Middlesex County, and their services was reactive, improvised, and dependent on the vision of the congregants and local organizations. Moreover, it reinforced the idea that St. Mary's was a reactionary institution constantly responding to new migrants and sociocultural dynamics. The congregants of St. Mary's initiated an Americanization process that encouraged the anglicization of their religious services and their integration into East Brunswick, which in turn made the community and church inseparable from East Brunswick. This process was continuously restructured following a heavy increase of migrants from Egypt to Middlesex County. As a result, the church became a migration center and adopted new roles to facilitate the settlement and assimilation process of these new migrants. This process was handled efficiently through the creation of the Anba Abraham committee and the experience of congregants. However, the influx of these new migrants also produced cultural clashes and tensions between the English- and Arabic-speaking congregants. These tensions altered church operations, stumped servants, and reignited problems with the church's neighbors. The events and actions discussed throughout this chapter further illustrates the laity driven, malleable, and regionalized nature of St. Mary's as they continued to grow in Middlesex County.

Chapter Four: The Outcome of Success: St. Mary's Expansion and Church Building in the 1990s

As St. Mary's congregation increased, the community found it necessary to expand its church to accommodate the youth and multitude of families. To reduce church congestion, the community adopted two strategies. The first was in response to Coptic enclaves developing in the Edison, Howell, and Holmdel regions of Central New Jersey and their desire to build churches for themselves. Realizing that the creation of small churches in those areas would help reduce overcrowding at St. Mary's, Father Bishoy began encouraging and facilitating their advent. This endeavor was relatively successful, however it manifested intracommunal tensions and hierarchical boundaries were contested. Additionally, since most of these churches were largely influenced by Father Bishoy, St. Mary's solidified its hegemony over Central New Jersey and became a mother church in the region.

The second was the extension of the church's property and facility, which was largely influenced by residents on Riva Avenue and planning board members. As discussed in chapter three, the congregants of St. Mary's proactively engaged in community affairs to better demonstrate their visibility in East Brunswick. Due to these efforts, the church became integrated into the town and served as a landmark of Egyptian identity in East Brunswick. Although Coptic traditions and identity generated public interest, when real estate transactions necessitated the acceptance of a large church in their backyards, the Copts encountered a palpable "gentleman's agreement" that patronized their culture but militated against their proximity. As discussed in chapter two, from the 1970s onward, institutions throughout Middlesex County encountered a

prolific NIMBY syndrome that stunted the construction of religious and industrial buildings. Paradigmatic of the 1990s, large religious projects became a popular target of residents and planning boards. This stark atmosphere set the stage for a series of public correspondence between residents and Coptic congregants over religious convention, zoning ordinances, and the church's societal contribution. The strategies adopted by the congregants of St. Mary's to handle congregational congestion sheds light on how the construction and expansion of Coptic churches was dependent on local variables and fomented opposition from Coptic clergymen.

The Advent of New Churches in Central New Jersey

Edison and Howell

Starting in the late 80s and early 90s, a strong Coptic community formed in the Edison region of Middlesex County. Like many Copts attending St. Mary's, they were frustrated with the excess number of Coptic parishioners at St. Mary's, overcrowding, and a severe lack of parking spaces at the church.[1] Additionally, the community in the Edison area lived between thirty and forty minutes away from St. Mary's. In 1989, they decided to create their own church and asked Father Bishoy to help them with their project. Father Bishoy was enthusiastic about this development because it provided an opportunity to relieve church congestion and mitigate increased tensions with the church's neighbors.[2] Father Bishoy appointed the church's treasurer, Onsy Yousef, to assist in the project by helping the community in the Edison region rent a place of worship to host liturgies, establish a board, find priests other than Father Bishoy to perform

[1] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[2] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).

liturgies, and provide finances when needed.[3] Father Bishoy also provided spiritual assistance when needed and obtained approval from Pope Shenouda to construct this church.[4]

Strikingly, although the community was determined to establish their own church, attendance was minimal and Copts in that area continued to participate in liturgy and other religious services at St. Mary's.[5] The reason for this was not only because St. Mary's was better equipped and possessed stronger religious services, but because community members in the Edison area were unable to start their own church due to various obstacles.[6] Unlike other Coptic churches throughout New Jersey, the Copts in the Edison area were unable to find an existing church for sale. Additionally, zoning laws in their area made it difficult for the Copts in Edison to find a suitable lot to build a church on from scratch. Finding a permanent priest to serve their community was also a problem. In the mid-90s, Pope Shenouda sent a priest from Egypt to serve the community in Edison, however, after one year, "problems occurred" that resulted in the priest being sent back to Egypt. My interlocutors did not want to go into detail about why the priest was sent back to Egypt, however, they insinuated that a small group of the congregants showed animosity towards the new priest and complained to the pope.[7] As a result of these problems, the creation of a church in the Edison region did not come to fruition until 2011.

Like the Coptic community in the Edison area, a Coptic enclave took form around Howell Township in the late 80s and early 90s. However, unlike the Coptic community in the

[3] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[4] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[5] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[6] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[7] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English); Mark and Nilly Salem, interviewed via phone call, March 4, 2023 (in English and Arabic).

Edison area, this new enclave was at the southern point of Central New Jersey and around an hour away from St. Mary's. Additionally, this community was relatively small and had around twenty families living in the area. The community was distraught about traveling an hour to attend religious services at St. Mary's, and after hearing about Father Bishoy's support for a church in Edison, requested to create their own church in 1991. Father Bishoy took a more immediate role in facilitating the construction of this church. He helped them establish a board, find a place to hold liturgies, contacted Pope Shenouda on their behalf, and developed a schedule so that a priest from St. Mary's could perform liturgies in Howell twice a month until Father Ishak Mansour was anointed the community's priest in 2000. The construction of a church in Howell was a smooth process, however, since the community was relatively small, they shared a "space with other religious organizations in the area" until the community was large enough to build their own church in 2011.[8]

The conception and construction of these two churches in Central New Jersey were laity driven and provided a solution to congregational congestion at St. Mary's. Father Bishoy approved and supported the creation of these churches because the communities were not too large, and their operations would not directly compete with St. Mary's. His role in the advent of these two churches also sheds light on the role St. Mary's had in facilitating the construction of new churches in the area. Although it was the congregants that decided they needed a church, both communities went through Father Bishoy, rather than directly to the Pope, to petition papal approval and support. The process of utilizing Father Bishoy to build a new church in Middlesex County, as well as the financial and social assistance the church provided these two churches,

[8] Adam Hochron, "Coptic Orthodox Church Festival in Howell This Weekend, and Next," *Patch*, October 7, 2011, https://patch.com/new-jersey/holmdel-hazlet/coptic-orthodox-church-festival-in-howell-this-weekend-and-next.

expanded the church's hegemony over the area and transformed St. Mary's into a mother church in the region.[9] Yet, this was not the case with Holmdel.

Holmdel

Like the communities in Edison and Howell, the Copts in the Holmdel region wanted to create their own church in 1991. The Holmdel community tried to create a church earlier in 1983, however Father A and Pope Shenouda challenged its creation because the community was too small. Additionally, they requested one of Father A's head deacons to become their priest, which Father A militated against and denied.[10] Their project was stalled for eight years until the community was large enough to sustain their own church. During that period the community attended liturgy and religious services at St. Mary's. By 1991, the community in Holmdel contained fifty to sixty families, however, they were dispersed throughout the area and a significant number of them lived only 15 minutes away from St. Mary's.[11] The rest of them, including the three founders, lived thirty to forty minutes away from St. Mary's.[12]

Unlike the communities in Edison and Howell, the Copts in the Holmdel region did not contact Father Bishoy to facilitate the creation of their church, instead they contacted Pope

[9] Sonia, as well as those I interviewed from Holmdel and Edison, referred to St. Mary's as the mother church in the region. There were numerous times in the late 2000s and 2010s when St. Mary's fulfilled its role as a mother church by allowing other churches in the area to use its facilities. Additionally, St. Mary's provided them with financial support when needed and hosted ecumenical meetings between the churches in Central New Jersey. Some children from these communities also attended an elementary school that the church created in 2021 and joined the Coptic American PAC, which the community at St. Mary's created in the same year. To further demonstrate that St. Mary's was a mother church in the region, Pope Tawadros II established St. Mary's as one of two headquarters for Bishop Gabriel, his vicar in New Jersey. The second headquarters was at Cedar Grove in North New Jersey.
[10] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Fady Anis, interviewed via phone call, February 28, 2022 (in English). See Appendix K for Saad Antoun's letter to Pope Shenouda in 1999 which explains the history of Holmdel and the problems he had with the priest Pope Shenouda assigned them.
[11] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Fady Anis, interviewed via phone call, February 28, 2022 (in English).
[12] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Fady Anis, interviewed via phone call, February 28, 2022 (in English).

Shenouda and worked directly with him. They rented a church to hold liturgies in 1991, incorporated themselves as a non-profit religious organization in 1992, and purchased a ten acre lot in 1993.[13] According to these congregants, Father Bishoy was "indifferent" about the creation of their church because the community was large and relatively close to St. Mary's.[14] Additionally, these congregants claimed that Father Bishoy was worried that the creation of a church in Holmdel would become an "unnecessary competitor" of St. Mary's.[15]

Although Father Bishoy facilitated the creation of Edison and Howell because he needed to relieve congregational congestion at St. Mary's, those communities were clustered in specific areas. The congregants in the Holmdel region were dispersed throughout that area and many of them were in the neighboring town of Old Bridge. Father Bishoy did not believe that the community in Holmdel needed their own church, however he did not challenge its creation.[16] On the contrary, he performed their first liturgy in 1991 and provided them with religious services when needed.[17] However, since Father Bishoy did not facilitate their advent, the construction of a church in Holmdel was not a smooth process and the community again encountered turbulence over the selection of a priest from Father A and Pope Shenouda.[18]

The events that transpired above confirm that church development in Central New Jersey was laity driven and at times challenged by clergymen. Moreover, animosity between the Holmdel community, Father A, and Pope Shenouda, as well as the Edison community and priest

[13] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Saad Antoun letter to Pope Shenouda in 1999.
[14] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Fady Anis, interviewed via phone call, February 28, 2022 (in English).
[15] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Fady Anis, interviewed via phone call, February 28, 2022 (in English).
[16] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Fady Anis, interviewed via phone call, February 28, 2022 (in English).
[17] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Fady Anis, interviewed via phone call, February 28, 2022 (in English).
[18] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English). Saad Antoun letter to Pope Shenouda in 1999.

sent over from Egypt, reveals that hierarchical boundaries were negotiated in the diaspora. Absolute power over the direction of Coptic communities was contested by Copts who disagreed with the decisions and visions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This paradigm emerged because of the laity driven construction of religious organizations and their reluctance to relinquish power and direction to clergymen sent abroad from Egypt.

Father Bishoy's indifference towards the creation of Holmdel was not irrational because the existence of Coptic churches near each other often stirred competition over the congregants in an area.[19] It also generated a group of church window shoppers. By this I mean that the choice to attend a church was no longer dependent on proximity but rather affinity. Since church members often drove to their parish rather than walked, they shopped around for communities and priests that fulfilled certain niches they sought in a church. Variables such as friendliness, friendships, community size and direction, priestly charisma, and language became the prominent concerns of individuals looking for a church. For example, Mark Salem and his family were part of the original group of Copts in the Edison area that wanted a new church built there. Yet, a few years after the community began holding religious services in Edison, the family missed the larger community and numerous religious services available at St. Mary's.[20] By the mid-1990s, the family began attending St. Mary's again and eventually moved to Riva Avenue in 1997.[21] Consequently, the organic development of this new group of congregants forced churches to compete with one another and respond to these dynamics accordingly.

[19] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Fady Anis, interviewed via phone call, February 28, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English); Louis Shenouda, interviewed via phone call, June 29, 2022 (in English and Arabic).
[20] Mark and Nilly Salem, interviewed via phone call, March 4, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[21] Mark and Nilly Salem, interviewed via phone call, March 4, 2023 (in English and Arabic).

These events also reveal that Father Bishoy's role in facilitating church building projects in Central New Jersey increased St. Mary's hegemony in the area and transformed their church into a mother church. From the 1990s onwards, all Coptic churches in Central New Jersey were created by Copts who attended St. Mary's. Additionally, most of these churches looked towards St. Mary's for spiritual, financial, and organizational guidance. For example, these new churches adopted Saturday School and utilized sports to encourage youth attendance, a philosophy the Copts of St. Mary's implemented in 1977.[22] Yet, because these communities looked towards St. Mary's for guidance does not mean that they were not unique. Each of these churches had to respond to immediate impediments and define themselves in relation to their local context.[23] Nevertheless, the creation of new churches in Central New Jersey provided temporary relief to St. Mary's, however it was not significant enough to prevent congregational congestion.

St. Mary's Extension Project: 1989-1996

The creation of additional churches in Central New Jersey were well designed attempts to reduce overpopulation at St. Mary's, however the extension of St. Mary's was necessary and urgent. St. Mary's decision to expand their facilities began in 1989 when the community experienced a vast increase in attendance due to a consistent flow of migration into the Middlesex County Area.[24] In that year, the community purchased three neighboring properties, bringing the total size of the church's property to six and a half acres.[25] Additionally, Pope

[22] Saad Antoun, interviewed via phone call, July 22, 2022 (in English); Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic); Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[23] For example, in 1991, the community in Holmdel struggled to build a church on the lot they purchased in 1983 because residents did not want them to, and zoning ordinances prohibited it. The community had to purchase a new lot in 1993, which is where the church is currently located.
[24] Khalil, *Consecration of St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church*, 74.
[25] Khalil, *St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church*, 66; Khalil, *Consecration of St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church*., 74.

Shenouda III visited St. Mary's in the same year for the first time since he laid the cornerstone for the sanctuary twelve years earlier. After seeing multiple families and children cramped in an undersized building and parking lot, Pope Shenouda recommended that the community extend their parking lot and construct a center for various services and youth activities.[26] In response to the pope's support, the congregants of St. Mary's purchased a cornerstone and had Pope Shenouda perform the cornerstone ceremony while he was still in New Jersey.[27] However, like the initial construction of the church in 1977, the proposed project had to overcome daunting obstacles due to an increase of religious building restrictions taking place throughout Middlesex County in the 1990s.

A 1990s Gentleman's Agreement

The onerous obstacles that St. Mary's would experience throughout their extension project was emblematic of institutional and community building projects in a social climate permeated with NIMBY syndrome. Throughout the 1990s, institutions experienced impediments from residents who sought to prevent the construction of any building that would attract outsiders. Although NIMBY syndrome can take many forms, religious institutions in Central New Jersey became the primary target of these battles throughout the 1990s. Increased suburban migration in the second half of the twentieth century compelled townships to preserve historic and rural lands, as well as facilitate residential and industrial development, through master plans. These new zoning ordinances became vital tools to unhappy residents who petitioned against any variance that would allow a large building project in their backyards. Following a series of heated encounters and denied building applications by planning board committees, journalists

[26] Ibid., 66.
[27] Ibid., 66.

and community leaders protested that religious projects were the target of a "gentleman's agreement" that had residents in arms against "anything that may affect their quality of life."[28] This paradigm strongly influenced the construction and philosophy of religious centers in the region as religious groups sought to circumvent these challenges in the 1990s.

To circumnavigate inexorable obstacles, religious institutions seeking land or a debilitated building to renovate, found comfort in rural and industrial zones near highways. This attraction was not arbitrarily fashioned but organically developed on account of increased zoning regulations and a growing affinity towards niche model religious buildings. Niche model religious buildings manifested a new class of commuter congregants who exponentially turned their back on proximity-based places of worship in favor of affinity-based religious centers.[29] Traveling a fair distance to attend a religious center was no longer a burden and became paradigmatic of temple building in New Jersey. For example, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Metuchen quickly theorized this pattern and implemented it throughout Central New Jersey. Although older Catholic parishes in the region were restricted extensions, the attitude towards the construction of new churches followed the "bigger lots in rural areas" philosophy.[30] This viewpoint, which consisted of purchasing "parcels on major highways away from residential developments and big enough for additions that may be needed later," had been implemented by religious groups in North New Jersey since the early 1980s.[31] According to the late Al-Liegro, former pastor of St. Bartholomew's Church in East Brunswick, the Catholic Diocese "was learning from what has happened here."[32] Like the Catholic Church, the Dwarkadhish Hindu

[28] Jennifer Baljko, "Houses of worship struggle to find suitable building sites," *Home News Tribune*, June 5, 1995, 1; "Tale of Two Churches: Fighting back not for everyone," *Home News Tribune*, September 6, 1995, 6.
[29] Sinha et al., "Proximity Matters."
[30] Jennifer Baljko, "Coptic church-expansion vote June 21," *Home News Tribune*, June 9, 1995, 13.
[31] Ibid., 13.
[32] Ibid., 13.

Temple, Islamic Center of Old Bridge, and various ethnic and multi-ethnic Protestant churches adopted this design philosophy in Central New Jersey.

Even though places of worship adopted this strategy of building in industrial and less populated areas of a town, most of them confronted opposition from residents and planning boards. The challenges these religious buildings encountered highlight a growing trend throughout the 1990s, whereby religious institutions were no longer deemed inherently beneficial. Like St. Mary's, religious institutions in the area were forced to justify their creation by demonstrating how they would not adversely impact the township or neighborhood. Religious leaders at the time commented how "around the country… churches are no longer seen as inherently beneficial, whereas a decade ago, that would hardly be a question."[33] This dynamic forced religious leaders to not only demonstrate that their buildings would cause minimal nuisances but that they would not negatively affect the township's stream of revenue. In 1995, Faith Fellowship, a Protestant mega church seeking to buy land in an industrial zone in Sayreville, had to acquire testimonies from developers that their presence would not prevent industries from moving in.[34] Furthermore, leaders of Faith Fellowship had to convince planning board members that the creation of their church would swell local businesses with hungry parishioners and shoppers.[35] The need to outline how a religious institution was inherently beneficial in a secularizing society was even more difficult for immigrant communities in Central New Jersey.

Immigrant groups in Central New Jersey grappled with subtle and overt acts of discrimination throughout their building projects. The unfamiliar nature of their practices and

[33] Ibid., 13.
[34] Leo Reisberg, *Home News Tribune*, January 15, 1995, 32.
[35] Leo Reisberg, "But growing church's expansion plan raises concerns in Sayreville," *Home News Tribune*, March 20, 1994, 27, 28; Leo Reisberg, "Sayreville Mulls plan for church," *Home News Tribune*, March 11, 1994, 19.

beliefs, as well as their accents and demeanor, made correspondence between parishioners, planning boards, and disgruntled residents incredibly heated. For example, in 1993, members of the future Dwarkadhish Hindu temple encountered resistance from residents in Sayreville when they sought to purchase the borough's recently closed YMCA and convert it into a temple. Indian worshippers were met by an intransigent group of residents who lamented traffic concerns and the loss of the public pool offered by the YMCA.[36] Throughout public hearings, this cohort of individuals unleashed a barrage of racist comments and even accused the Hindu community of being terrorists.[37] Moreover, when trust president Pankaj Sheth testified on behalf of all the good the Hindu community offered the township, angry residents heckled him, yelling, "Speak English" and "Can we get an interpreter?"[38] Although not to the same extent as the Indian community in Sayreville, the Old Bridge Islamic Center also confronted acts of discrimination that made it known to the Muslim community that their building application would be denied "before it even started."[39]

Master plans, discrimination, and the need to prove inherently beneficial use made religious building an innately litigious act in the 1990s. However, to the fortune of religious groups, the Sica ruling and Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) became formidable tools of jurisprudence to combat planning boards. In 1987, Dr. Dennis Sica, a neurophysiologist, was denied variance and site approval to build a facility for the rehabilitation of head trauma victims in a residential zone.[40] The Wall township Board of Adjustment denied Dr. Sica variance

[36] Leo Reisberg and Sunita Boddu, "Hindu Temple Opens: Believers Overcame Obstacles," *Home News Tribune*, November 13, 1994, A5, A6.
[37] Leo Reisberg, "Officials greet Hindu faithful at new temple," *Home News Tribune*, November 14, 1994, 1, 5; Sunita Boddu, "Houses of worship also fills Indians' social, educational needs," *Home News Tribune*, November 16, 1994, 1, 7.
[38] Reisberg, "Officials greet Hindu faithful at new temple," 1, 5.
[39] "Traffic fears, bias fueled mosque vote," *Home News Tribune*, June 15, 1999, 2.
[40] Leo Reisberg, "It's morals vs taxes," *Home News Tribune*, June 11, 1994, 1, 8.

because it could not be granted "without substantial detriment to the public good" and could "substantially impair the intent and the purpose of the zone plan and zoning ordinance."[41] In 1991, Dr. Sica appealed the decision to the State Superior Court in Freehold Borough, New Jersey, who ruled in his favor the next year and reversed the decision of the board because his rehabilitation center was "an inherently beneficial use."[42] The Sica ruling put into place how an "inherently beneficial use" building was to be defined and given variance. First, the board must discern the public interest at stake and any detrimental effects of the proposed use.[43] The board then should evaluate whether the detrimental effects could be mitigated through the imposition of certain conditions.[44] Lastly, the board "should weigh the positive and negative criteria and determine whether, on balance, the grant of the variance would cause a substantial detriment to the public good."[45] As one lawyer who specialized in land-use issues bemoaned, being labeled inherently beneficial made it "easier" to get special zoning variances, "too easy."[46]

Like the Sica ruling, the RFRA made it more difficult for state and local governments to restrict the expansion of religious institutions. The RFRA was passed by Congress in 1993 and stated that governments can only interfere with religious practices if they could demonstrate "compelling governmental interest."[47] Although it was a controversial bill that many saw as an overstep of boundaries by Congress, to many religious groups it was the answer to their

[41] Ibid., 8.
[42] Ibid., 8.
[43] Ibid., 8.
[44] Ibid., 8.
[45] Ibid., 8.
[46] Baljko, "Houses of worship struggle to find suitable building sites," 1.
[47] George W. Cornell, "Coalition challenges Congress to safeguard religious freedoms," *Courier-News*, August 27, 1992, 28.

prayers.[48] Strikingly, the deciding variable for religious building projects in Central New Jersey was not necessarily legislation but attrition.

Understanding that jurisprudence had shifted in favor of religious communities, planning board committees made building projects an incredibly costly and timely endeavor. St. Mary's would spend three years and an estimated $142,560 in legal and designing fees to extend their building.[49] Faith Fellowship had to agree to pay the borough a $65,000 annual fee in lieu of taxes.[50] Both these churches, as well as the Dwarkadhish temple and Islamic center in Old Bridge, had the necessary funds to combat planning boards and guarantee the success of their projects. However, not all religious institutions had the funds to sustain a battle of attrition against planning boards.

The leaders of Corpus Christi proposed a 9,450-foot parish center that would accommodate their growing student population and allow the Portuguese community a foothold in South River.[51] They were met with strong resistance and large legal fees, a definitive burden that the community in South River could not withstand. Unable to find financial support from the Catholic Diocese and other neighboring religious institutions, congregants of Corpus Christi conceded and abandoned their building project. The irony of this situation, as pointed out by a local journalist, was that Corpus Christi assisted many immigrant groups when they first came to

[48] In 1991 a national and multi-religious organization known as The Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion was created to combat impediments religious groups faced throughout the country. Together, the variegated religious groups applied enough political pressure on congress to pass the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993. However, in 1997, the Supreme Court ruled against the RFRA in two religious cases, removing jurisprudence vital to religious building projects. Religious groups continued to lobby throughout the decade and in 2000, the Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act was passed. This legislation dictated that planning boards could not use zoning regulations to prevent religious institutions from settling in any zone. For more information concerning the RFRA and building impediments throughout the U.S see: Carroll Dore, "Planner quits after court loss," *Home News Tribune*, July 10, 1997, 5,6; "Church-state issues loom," *Home News Tribune*, January 25, 1997 4; "Are There No Boundaries in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act?," *Courier-News*, June 29, 1997, 122; "Is Religion Above The Law?," *Home News Tribune*, February 20, 1997, 23.
[49] Baljko, "Coptic church-expansion vote June 21," 13.
[50] *Home News Tribune*, April 4, 1996, 1.
[51] "Tale of Two Churches: Fighting back not for everyone," 6.

Central New Jersey, the Copts among them, yet this giving congregation could not find compassion by residents when needed.[52] Nevertheless, the events that transpired in Central New Jersey throughout the 1990s was concisely summed up by Mark Stern, a former attorney for the American Jewish Congress: "if they want to come, by God they've got to pay for it."[53]

The Proposal

Following the purchase of three neighboring houses in 1989, St. Mary congregants noted to journalists and neighbors that they wanted to build a new facility on the church's property to facilitate increased church attendance.[54] However, it was not until November 10, 1993, that St. Mary's representatives met with the East Brunswick planning board to present their extension project designs.[55] The church proposed two new structures, a 24,058 square foot addition to the sanctuary and a 25,745 square foot building for Sunday School and youth services.[56] The plans also called for two 43-foot steeples, ten feet higher than the township allowed, as well as 240 to 300 additional parking spaces.[57] Accompanying the Copts were concerned residents of Riva Avenue and representatives of the East Brunswick Historical Society. This public hearing was the first time that opposing parties had the opportunity to divulge their latent resentment of the church's plans. Residents opposing the expansion believed the proposed facilities would draw

[52] Ibid., 6.
[53] Rick Malwitz, "One Nations but under whose God?," *Home News Tribune*, June 17, 1999, 15.
[54] Patricia Ferrara, "Coptic Pope visiting E.B. church," *Home News Tribune*, September 9, 1989, 19.
[55] Rafik Wahba and Malak Morgan were tasked with designing the expansion project. Strikingly, the Home News tribune never mentioned Malak Morgan's contribution to the project. If it was not for Rafik Wahba, I would have never known about her participation in this project. Nevertheless, both Wahba and Morgan noted to me that the reason the community took so long to submit the proposal was because they were busy completing the interior designs of the church for Pope Shenouda's papal visit in 1989 and could not complete the designs.
[56] Michelle DeBlasi, "Residents, historians concerned," *Home News Tribune*, November 12, 1993, 1, 2.
[57] Ibid., 1.

large crowds, increase traffic, and threaten the local environment. To them, this project was a superfluous undertaking in an area that "simply cannot support expansion of that type or size."[58]

Members of the Historical Society also expressed their anxiety over the projected demolition of two dilapidated buildings that the parish owned. On the property acquired by St Mary's in 1989 was a one-room schoolhouse that dated back to the mid-nineteenth century and a seventy-year-old private home. Both buildings were placed under the township's Historical District Ordinance Schedule B; a list containing structures of historical significance in East Brunswick.[59] Criticizing the demolition of historic buildings in the past, Historical Society President Estelle Goldsmith asked the township to take over the buildings and preserve them at their current site. However, there was no existing ordinance that allowed townships to take over a property because there are historic buildings on them.[60] Moreover, it did not seem that the township was willing to undertake the costs of the project. Church officials suggested that the Historical Society have the buildings moved to a different site, therefore preventing their destruction.[61] This response did not sit well with Goldsmith, who reprimanded the church because most of its congregants did not live in East Brunswick and did not share the same "connection or feeling for those buildings that we do."[62] This sentimental claim and attempt to disconnect the congregants from East Brunswick made this ordeal a personal and emotional affair. However, it seems board members sought objectivity in this dispute, as can be seen by Mayor Ira Oskowsky's concluding remarks: "It is a very emotional issue for a lot of people, but the Planning Board doesn't make decisions based on emotion."[63]

[58] Ibid., 2.
[59] Ibid., 2.
[60] Ibid., 2.
[61] Ibid., 2.
[62] Ibid., 2.
[63] Ibid., 2.

This first public hearing ended without a resolution, yet residents opposing the building project were distraught that board members spent too much time on trivial matters such as lighting and hours of operations instead of the more material problems such as zoning and environmental issues.[64] In response, on November 15, residents hired an attorney to force the board to address "what's important" such as the inadequate septic system they believed would cause water runoff and damage the Lake Farrington water aquifer, the source of water for the township.[65] The initial complaints propagated by residents and the Historical Society were founded on the idea that the expansion of the church would adversely affect new environmental and historic preservation laws adopted into the East Brunswick master plan. Like other religious centers being constructed in Middlesex County, the Coptic community in Middlesex County not only had to demonstrate that the extension of their church would not adversely affect zoning laws but that the church was inherently beneficial to the township. This need to define how the church, and essentially the Coptic community as a whole, will benefit the township and immediate neighborhood became the dominant theme of discourse between the Copts, residents, and planning board members.

A Game of Optics

On December 4, a few weeks after the Coptic community's proposal, residents of Riva Avenue took out a letter in the *Home News Tribune* to make their grievances public.[66] The letter, titled, "Church Expansion is Intolerable," began by attacking the absence of clarity and organization of the proposed project before reiterating environmental concerns. Additionally, the

[64] Boddu, "Houses of worship also fills Indians' social, educational needs," 1, 7.
[65] Ibid., 7.
[66] Ted Amrein, Michael Ciccarelli, and Andrew Foglia, "Church expansion is intolerable," *Home News Tribune*, December 4, 1993, 9.

substantial size of the project compelled residents to challenge whether the church was intended to serve a "relatively small community" as the Copts supposedly insinuated in 1976.[67] To residents, this expansion did not portray the church as "good neighbors" because the proposal failed to address all the negative aspects the project would have on the location.[68]

Planning board members decided they would hold a second public meeting on December 8 to discuss the expansion plans in greater detail and address concerns found in the letter. It was an opportunity that congregants utilized to plead with opposing parties and discuss matters in a cordial manner. Church representatives believed that if the residents were willing to reason with them, they would understand that the project was "not an expansion" but a "necessity for their children."[69] Moreover, the desire to enlarge the church was not for the congregation only, but for the betterment of the "community as a whole."[70] These claims by the church represent the core of their argument and two themes continuously drawn on throughout public correspondence.

The church's need to portray itself as a good neighbor was emblematic of many building projects in the region. Additionally, Coptic officials took into consideration building regulations first outlined in the East Brunswick township's master plan in 1975.[71] According to the East Brunswick master plan, any proposed site must:

> "1) be sufficient for the intended purposes;
>
> 2) have adequate parking and a septic system that does not adversely affect the groundwater;

[67] Ibid., 9.
[68] Ibid., 9.
[69] Michelle DeBlasi, "Church to alter plans," *Home News Tribune*, December 10, 1993, 16, 17.
[70] Ibid., 17.
[71] Lynch, "Master Plan," 38-40.

3) feature entrances and exits that prevent traffic hazards and congestion and have little interference with adjacent public streets and thorough fares;

4) present building and use that are appropriately located and designed; and

5) meet a community need without adversely affecting the neighborhood."[72]

The church's proposed expansion was ambitious and although the community argued that churches were inherently beneficial, the lake Farrington aquifer poised a serious concern.[73] It was for these reasons that church representatives centered their argument around the positive impact their church would have on people within the township, whether Coptic or not.

Residents and the Historical Society challenged this claim that the expansion would be good for the community, particularly Goldsmith, who suggested that "as members of a house of worship, it would be fitting for you to respect and value these structures so the community would see you as a good neighbor."[74] Residents petitioned that the application be denied because of the adverse impact it would have, but board members agreed that the church should take three months to restructure their plans, get approval from the county for a new septic system, and "bring in expert eyewitnesses to answer questions relating to traffic, water run-off and environmental concerns" raised in the meeting.[75]

Prior to the next gathering, the planning board hired a consultant to evaluate the historicity of the two buildings the church requested to destroy. East Brunswick mayor, Ira Oskowsky, noted that "just because you call them historical doesn't make them historical."[76] With the assistance of a consultant, he hoped to determine the historical significance and cost to

[72] Michelle DeBlasi, "Church to fight East Brunswick," *Home News Tribune*, June 23, 1995, 13, 15.
[73] DeBlasi, "Church to alter plans.," 17.
[74] Ibid., 17.
[75] Ibid., 17.
[76] Michelle DeBlasi, "Buildings' historical value to be judged," *Home News Tribune*, January 7, 1994, 1, 2.

move or leave them at the current site.[77] However, the planning board pushed the consultant bill onto the St Mary congregants, which was "expected to be only a few thousand dollars."[78] The public hearing that was supposed to take place to discuss the church's new design did not happen as planned and was postponed until the following year.[79] Rather, three public hearings were held throughout 1994 to discuss Escrow Deposit Fees. Moreover, on June 29, 1994, congregants of St Mary's were given approval to demolish the two historic buildings after they were digitally preserved.[80]

The events that transpired throughout 1993 and 1994 forced the Copts to face serious issues about how they were portraying themselves and being perceived by the public. The church wanted to be seen as good neighbors and contributing members of the town, yet it is possible that they had become a marginalizing entity rather than a welcoming force. As discussed in chapter two, Coptic congregants were aware of how they were being perceived by the public and continuously reshaped their image and intentions accordingly. When applying this reactionary mentality to the events unfolding in 1993, it is possible to detect how they responded to critics claiming the church project would adversely impact the neighborhood.

A look at the 1992 Egyptian festival flier, in comparison to the one made in 1993, suggests that the St. Mary congregants attempted to temporarily dilute the overwhelming Egyptian nature of their community to better present themselves as ethnic members of East Brunswick instead of outsiders. The Egyptian Festival flier posted in 1992 was beautifully enveloped with hieroglyphs, while emphasizing pharaonic clothing, Egyptian food, and other exotic features that fit the imagination of Western orientalism. In 1993, the Copts took out a

[77] Ibid., 2.
[78] Ibid., 1.
[79] It is unclear why this public hearing was postponed until 1995.
[80] Michelle DeBlasi, "History being indexed," *Home News Tribune*, June 29, 1994, 9, 14.

simple advert consisting of two sentences highlighting the date, time, and "ethnic" commodities offered.[81] This shift from an ostentatious and exotic display of pharaonic culture into a bland advertisement with generic verbiage suggests that the festival committee at the time responded to public opinion by seeking to remove certain facets that may be self-marginalizing.[82] That is not to say that the pharaonic nature of these Egyptian festivals disappeared, they remained vibrant, but that the way the community advertised itself to the public through these fliers took a more ethnic approach that sought to accentuate the Copts as members of a culturally diverse landscape rather than an exclusive entity in the area. This early yet nuanced attempt to present themselves as a contributing ethnic group in East Brunswick was exacerbated following the anticipated hearing to discuss the church's new expansion proposal.

Figure 3: Egyptian Festival Flier in 1992. *Home News Tribune.*[83]

[81] *Home News Tribune,* August 29, 1993, 60.
[82] One church official, Rafik Wahba, told me that the church adopted the word "ethnic" from the Greek festival in Somerset because they believed it would be "better fitting."
[83] *Home News Tribune,* August 29, 1992, 10.

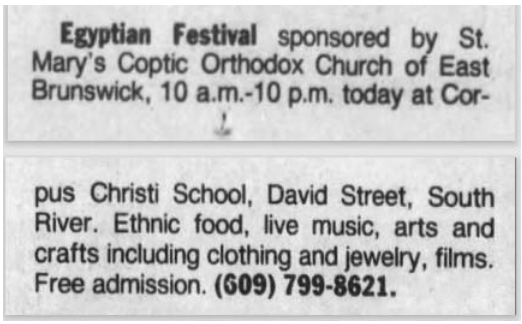

Figure 4: Egyptian Festival Advertisement in 1993. *Home News Tribune*.[84]

A Year of Public Discourse

On January 18, 1995, Coptic congregants met with the planning board for the third time to further demonstrate why their extension project was needed. The meeting was incredibly heated and produced little towards the creation or rejection of their new building.[85] It did, however, incite bitter emotions and set the trajectory for a series of intense public correspondence between St Mary's congregants and opposing residents. The first to react to this new atmosphere were the residents of Riva Avenue, who on March 3, 1995, again published a letter in the *Home News Tribune*. In this paid advertisement, the opposition structured their concerns on the supposition that churches in residential areas were supposed to serve as "neighborhood churches, not religious complexes serving the entire metropolitan region."[86] From this vantage point, religious buildings were to be constructed along the parish model; to serve a neighborhood rather than a metropolis.

The determined response by residents was largely constructed around the idea that the church was an exclusive institution that provided no inherently beneficial service to the greater

[84] *Home News Tribune*, August 29, 1993, 60.
[85] Tony Ciavolella, "Church Hearing Heated," *Home News Tribune*, January 20, 1995, 14.
[86] Mr. & Mrs. Theodore Amrein, Mr. & Mrs. Jack Collins, Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Pawlek, and Mr. & Mrs. Chris Roeder, "St. Mary's massive expansion into a whole religious complex," *Home News Tribune*, March 3, 1995, 11.

public. As discussed in chapter three, residents on Riva Avenue were already irritated with the loud noise, numerous cars, and wandering Coptic youth disturbing their neighborhood throughout the week. It is apparent throughout the letter that residents saw the church as a burden rather than an institution designed to help the neighborhood. The persistent mention of traffic and environmental concerns was surpassed only by the number of times they questioned who the recipients were of the church's benevolence. Being that only 200 of the 600 families attending the parish lived in East Brunswick – only five lived within the immediate vicinity of the church – supported their argument that St. Mary's was not designed to serve a neighborhood and violated religious convention.[87] Moreover, none of the locals directly benefited from the social programs created by the church to aid migrants and the youth. The cost-benefit analysis of this construction was aggravated when the church purchased three buildings in 1989, "removing them from the tax rolls."[88] Lastly, residents were cautious of the negative impact the church had on their property value and the lack of financial contribution brought about by a tax-exempt entity acquiring real estate while most of its members lived outside the township.

The accusations against the church in the media reverberated through the parish halls, mobilized the community and "compelled" them to respond.[89] On April 4, 1995, six members of the church took out a paid advertisement in the *Home News Tribune* to respond to the allegations levied upon their community. The motivation of their response was laid out immediately: "The objection raised attests to the fact that the positive impact our congregation has had on the community has either not been grasped or has been ignored."[90] The community believed they

[87] Ibid., 11. They use the word "master plan."
[88] Ibid., 11.
[89], Joy Demetrious, Magea Demetrious, Nadia Girgis, Wahid Girgis, Michael Matta, and Mona Matta, "St. Mary's Expansion Project: A Positive Impact On The Community," *Home News Tribune*, April 4, 1995, 14.
[90] Ibid., 14.

were a benevolent force in East Brunswick, yet they had not demonstrated that well enough. They resorted to a corrective approach, expounding on the numerous positive aspects of their church and community.

The six congregants began by reaffirming that all community members and neighbors desired a "safer and more peaceful environment for their families."[91] To do so, schools and community centers must be constructed to nurture "principles and morals in the children of this community."[92] The congregants based their argument on the philosophy that the creation of youth services and facilities was fundamental to the establishment of a well behaved and prosperous youth. By opposing the expansion project, they questioned where family values would be generated if not in church.[93] Moreover, they questioned the vision, or lack of vision, these neighbors had about the guidance and protection of the youth. They inquired about the opposition's willingness to "see the youth of this community out on the streets at night rather than in a group meeting at their Church."[94] To these congregants, the expansion project allowed the youth to develop in a controlled environment that kept them off the streets and away from crime. Simultaneously, by establishing a civil and utile youth, they believed they were crystallizing the "foundation of not only their church, but also their country."[95] Therefore, by ensuring that their kids remained on a straight path, these congregants saw the church as a beneficent and vital force in the East Brunswick community.

Although the six congregants dismissed the economic accusations placed on their church, they did respond to overcrowding complaints and other tangible issues. Coptic parishioners

[91] Ibid., 14.
[92] Ibid., 14.
[93] Ibid., 14.
[94] Ibid., 14.
[95] Ibid., 14.

believed that the extension project would relieve congregational congestion because the church had "reached a plateau."[96] They made this assumption using "statistical data" and the testimonies of church representatives who claimed that two additional Coptic churches were to be built not too far from St. Mary's.[97] The attempt to regulate and delimit religious expansion was a pressing topic for congregants, opposing parties, and town hall members. It was a matter that compelled many religious communities throughout Central New Jersey to reflect on the future and functionality of their temples.[98]

Residents in East Brunswick, with their multiple synagogues and small churches, had a predisposed notion of how a church should function. According to the opposition, places of worship in East Brunswick were to operate in a parish model and serve township residents. St. Mary's could be seen as the antithesis of this concept, utilizing a niche model structure that encouraged large religious complexes and continuous participation in daily church services. Disagreements regarding the size of the church were not only a matter of logistics but the conceptualization of a migrant church. Migrant churches, particularly ethno-religious churches, can act as landmarks that induce migration into a region and provide essential services on a local and transnational scale. The development of St. Mary's was no small endeavor and was becoming a regional complex because of the efficacy of its programs and growth in attendance. To combat its expansion was to understand it and attempt to contain it, a strategy challengers of the church project employed.

[96] Ibid., 14.
[97] Ibid., 14.
[98] For information concerning regulations and attempts to dictate how religious centers were practiced in Central New Jersey see: Reisberg, "Officials greet Hindu faithful at new temple," 1, 5. For information on the Dwarkadhish Hindu Temple in Sayreville see Reisberg, "Sayreville Mulls plan for church," 19. For information on the Old Bridge Islamic Center see "Traffic fears, bias fueled mosque vote," 2.

In one case, an individual decided that he would take the initiative and gather intel about church worshippers. During an evening Sunday School service, Father Bishoy's wife, Sonia, noticed a car surreptitiously entering and leaving the church parking lot throughout the service.[99] Recently hearing about a string of child kidnappings on the news, she decided to keep a closer eye on the vehicle. Eventually, the car decided to station itself in the back of the parking lot. It was at that moment that Sonia decided she would enter her vehicle and confront the mysterious individual. As she approached the suspect in her car, the vehicle quickly sped off the property and down Riva Avenue. The departure of the vehicle did not satisfy Sonia, who chose to pursue the culprit rather than let him escape. To her fortune, her vehicle was equipped with a phone, and she contacted the police as she drove. About 2 miles down the road, police were able to pull over the vehicle, and out came a recognizable face to Sonia, one of the planning board members. When asked why he was sitting in the church parking lot, he told Sonia and the officers that he was checking license plates to see if any parishioners were coming from out of New Jersey.[100] He was hoping to gather enough intel to prove that church attendees gathered from the whole tri-state area.[101] Sonia did not reveal her interaction to the congregants nor the planning board, believing that it would only worsen tensions between the parties.[102]

Alongside surveillance, residents and some planning board members set out to construct a series of conditions to regulate the expansion of the congregation. Questions concerning whether church officials would turn away parishioners once membership rolls were full or whether they would limit services to once a week permeated conversation.[103] The invasive nature

[99] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[100] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[101] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[102] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).
[103] DeBlasi, "Residents, historians concerned," 2; Amrein, Ciccarelli, and Foglia, "Church expansion is intolerable," 9.

of the planning board and residents suggests that opponents of the building project believed non-attending individuals should have the right to not only regulate a place of worship but define how it should be operated. Strikingly, other places of worship in the township did not encounter these lines of questioning, however it was common among other religious institutions in Middlesex County. This response by residents and planning board members was clearly the result of NIMBYism and a fear of change. For example, during one of the board meetings, residents complained that the number of proposed parking spaces rivaled the parking lot of a Macy's and that the size of the parking lot needed to be limited in order to reduce traffic, noise pollution, and attendance.[104] This attempt to regulate the size of the church as well as its congregation suggests that residents feared that the expansion of St. Mary's would alter their neighborhood into something unrecognizable. Additionally, it instilled strong resentment among the opposing parties and increased animosity towards one another.

While the next three letters published in the *Home News Tribune* continued to discuss the functionality and disturbances of the church, the increased tension between parties transformed rhetoric from a locally heated engagement into a transregional and hostile endeavor. The first of these letters was written by Staten Island Borough President Guy Molinari and published in the *Home News Tribune* on April 19, 1995. Concerned about the situation unfolding in East Brunswick, members of the Coptic community in Staten Island asked Molinari to write a letter regarding the "positive views" of their activities in Staten Island.[105] According to Molinari, his intentions were to demonstrate why the Copts were good neighbors and an embodiment of all that is benevolent in America.[106] He took this opportunity to demonstrate that he was fit to

[104] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[105] Guy Molinari, "Coptic Church is a good neighbor," *Home News Tribune*, April 19, 1995, 10.
[106] Ibid., 10.

comment on this situation because the Coptic community in his borough had recently moved into a large facility a few blocks away from his home.[107] By associating himself with a sentiment only the residents of Riva Avenue would understand, the author attempted to establish an intimate connection that would open the opposition to the reality that the positive aspects of the Coptic community outweighed the disturbances.[108]

Five days later, a cohort of Coptic medical professionals took out a paid advertisement to respond to the allegations placed against their community.[109] The response by these congregants steered along similar tropes as earlier, however, the presentation of this rhetoric took an aggressive twist. Throughout the letter, the medical professionals accused the opposition of misrepresenting figures and being ignorant of "what's really important."[110] They also suspected the residents of fearing change, drawing on the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act as evidence that it was prohibited to impede on the practice of a religion.[111] Unlike earlier letters, these individuals found it necessary to combat the notion that the church had a negative impact on public funds. They began by derisively suggesting that the opposition would prefer a "beer distillery or an oil refinery than the church, just because they would pay taxes - forget the environment."[112] Furthermore, they declared that the numerous properties owned by church members in East Brunswick generated enough taxes to "compensate for ten churches the size of St. Mary's."[113] It is evident from the ensuing letters that the public forum and its overwhelming

[107] Ibid., 10.
[108] Ibid.,10.
[109] Dr. Stephan Fanous, Dr. Venis Fanous, Dr. Karen Farid, Dr. Mourad Henin, Dr. Afifa Istafanous, Dr. Wageeh Istafanous, Dr. Venis Khalil, Dr. Sabri Moawad, Dr. Magdy Shenouda, Dr. Wagih Tadros, Dr. Gina Tanious, and Dr. Sofi Zaki, "St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church A Stronghold for Family Values," *Home News Tribune,* April 24, 1995, 7.
[110] Ibid., 7.
[111] Ibid., 7.
[112] Ibid., 7.
[113] Ibid., 7.

influence manifested contempt between the opposing groups and heightened animosity in their public discourse.

On May 9, 1995, one of the opposing residents published a letter titled: "Coptic Church Not Wanted Here."[114] The heading provides enough transparency about the situation and how rhetoric had escalated into a series of execrable exchanges. Infused with cynical and aggressive verbiage, the author spent his time responding to each claim and group in favor of the project. Of particular concern was the beer distillery accusation by the Coptic medical professionals, which he found to be an "insult to both the health professionals who signed it and to the East Brunswick Planning Board and Town council."[115] Moreover, he portrayed the expansion project as an "invasion" and unnecessary venture into a residential area that had no more than "five Egyptian families living in the vicinity of the church."[116] Like other Riva Avenue residents, he was incredibly skeptical of the intentions of the Coptic community and "whose community" they claimed to be helping. [117]

This animated discourse demonstrates the intensity of public rhetoric and the impact the acceptance of St. Mary's expansion would have on religious convention in the region. The focus of these exchanges was centered on whether the church was inherently beneficial to the area. It is striking that both parties generally strayed away from environmental and zoning issues and solely focused on how the church could benefit the overall community. Additionally, both parties were forced to define the purpose of a church, accentuating the notion that niche places of worship were becoming normalized in the area. Yet, it is surprising the Copts never claimed they were being ethnically discriminated against although their character was constantly attacked by

[114] Ronnie Collins, "Coptic Church Not Wanted Here," *Home News Tribune*, May 9, 1995, 12.
[115] Ibid., 12.
[116] Ibid., 12.
[117] Ibid., 12.

residents. It is probable that the reason the Coptic community continued to claim religious discrimination in their letters instead of ethnic discrimination was because of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and its utilization by other religious institutions in the area. As mentioned above, religious institutions in the Middlesex County area, as well as the U.S., drew on the RFRA to successfully combat planning boards. It is most likely that the Copts of St. Mary's found the use of legislation guaranteeing the protection of their religious rights as a better avenue to address their problem. Additionally, since the Coptic community did not want to single itself out as a separate and insulated community, claiming ethnic discrimination could have possibly incited claims that the community was only beneficial to itself instead of the township. Nevertheless, this series of public exchanges between the Copts of St. Mary's and residents increased tensions in the township and forced individuals to meditate on the role of religious institutions in East Brunswick.

The Project's Fate

Following three meetings and prolific correspondence over 18 months, Coptic officials and congregants met with the planning board for the fourth time on June 7, 1995. The objective of this meeting was to bring in professional witnesses to testify on the durability of the septic system and to have church engineers outline how they would construct their project.[118] After examining the church septic system, Middlesex County Department of Health senior sanitary inspector, Terri Settlecowski, told the board the present septic system was "adequate for the proposed use."[119] Additionally, church attorneys acquired letters indicating that the plans "are in

[118] Jennifer Baljko, "Coptic church back before planner," *Home News Tribune*, June 8, 1995, 17.
[119] Ibid., 17.

order" by "a number of state, county, and local officials."[120] Church engineers told the planning board that the project would take place in three phases and take around two to three years to complete.[121] The first phase would begin with the demolition of the two historic buildings the church was given clearance to knock down on June 29, 1994. Phase two would include the construction of the two-story building that would provide classroom space for Sunday School, summer youth programs, and other church related meetings. The last phase would focus on the sanctuary addition.[122] The official testimonies and discussions embodying this meeting provided clarity to the project and demonstrated how it would not adversely affect the septic system and neighborhood. At midnight, following four hours of debate, the planning board ended deliberations and agreed they would vote on June 21.[123]

Three days before the vote was to be held, residents once again published a letter in the *Home News Tribune* detailing why they were "seriously concerned" about the proposed expansion.[124] In this letter, the residents outlined their skepticism in five points:

1) The expansion was an over utilization of the site;

2) The proposed expansion overburdened area infrastructure;

3) This was becoming a regional, not a community church;

4) Church should correct existing parking and water drainage problems with current codes before expanding; and

5) Only 1/3 of members lived and paid taxes in East Brunswick.[125]

[120] Baljko, "Coptic church-expansion vote June 21," 13.
[121] Ibid., 13.
[122] Ibid., 13.
[123] Ibid., 13.
[124] Michelle DeBlasi, *Home News Tribune*, June 18, 1995, 34.
[125] Ibid., 34.

This letter, which is in essence a reiteration of arguments that were made throughout board meetings in 1993 and 1994, suggests that opponents of the project steered away from discussing the inherently beneficial nature of the Coptic church and community and instead decided to draw on environmental and zoning laws because it was a more proficient route. Continuously drawing on the Coptic community's character and whether they were beneficial was a dangerous precedent that bordered ethnic discrimination. Although their goal was to claim that the church's project was not inherently beneficial, by restructuring their focus to the adverse effects the project would have on zoning and environmental laws, residents utilized established legislation to combat the project. By doing so, they made it possible, although not guaranteed as will be examined shortly, to remove any claims of ethnic or religious discrimination from the legal process.

On the morning of June 21, the *Home News Tribune* published an article informing the public of the vote being held later that evening.[126] At 8pm, anxious parishioners and residents gathered in the municipal complex to make final comments and await a prolonged verdict. Opposing planning board members began the evening by raising numerous questions about the proposed septic tank and whether church officials would limit the size of their congregation.[127] Although these individuals carefully constructed their inquiries to avoid being accused of discrimination, board members in favor of the project could not abstain from accusing their colleagues of being religiously intolerant in their questioning.[128] Board member Robert Van Wagner was highly critical of the questions and stipulations being proffered by opposing board members because they did not apply the same measures to synagogues and other churches in

[126] Michelle DeBlasi, "Church decision tonight," *Home News Tribune*, June 21, 1995, 9, 12.
[127] Ibid., 12.
[128] Michelle DeBlasi, "Church addition rejected," *Home News Tribune*, June 22, 1995, 1, 2.

East Brunswick.[129] According to him, this "application was an issue of religious freedom, which board members had no right to regulate."[130] Furthermore, he accused opposing residents and board members of rejecting the proposal out of fear of change and what "they are not familiar with."[131]

Following a tense discussion, permeated with accusations of religious discrimination, board members set out to vote.[132] Nine individuals were each given one vote. Mayor Ira Oskowsky, Robert Van Wagner, Anthony Riccobono, and John McKeegan voted in favor of the expansion, while Hy Merson, Michael Opaleski, Richard Sikoral, and John French voted against the project, tying it four to four. The final vote was placed on Doris Fleming, who previously had placed a tie-breaking vote in favor of K. Hovnanian Co. of Central Jersey to build 305 homes on River Road.[133] Turning red and covering her face as she realized fate had once again placed her in a difficult situation, Fleming told the crowd that "my concerns about the septic system force me to vote no."[134] The crowd erupted with gasps, tears, and cheers as both parties reacted to the verdict and dispersed back to their homes.[135]

When examining the vote and the response by board members in favor of the proposed project, it is evident that some supporters of the project believed that the Coptic community was denied their building project because of ethnic discrimination as much as religious discrimination. Van Wagner was particularly upset about the vote and argued that the denial of the church's project was "an issue of civil rights and freedom of religion."[136] From his

[129] Ibid., 2.
[130] Ibid., 2.
[131] Ibid., 2.
[132] Ibid., 2.
[133] Ibid., 2.
[134] Ibid., 2.
[135] Ibid., 2.
[136] Ibid., 2.

perspective, questions about whether the church would limit the number of Coptic attendees on major holidays was an attempt to regulate the size of the church. Moreover, he noted how synagogues and churches in East Brunswick were never asked the same questions or asked to regulate church attendance during holidays. To Van Wagner, the reason the Copts were denied their expansion project was because the Coptic church was a religious institution that many of the board members were "not familiar with."[137]

Likewise, Egyptian Muslim political activist and future president of the New Jersey Federation of Republican Women, Sherine El-Abd, published a letter in the *Home News Tribune* accusing the East Brunswick planning board of discriminating against the Coptic community.[138] She began her letter by criticizing board procedures, inferring that the attitude and behavior of some board members was "vintage Third World bureaucracy."[139] Like Van Wagner, El-Abd reprimanded board members for hammering church representatives with "ridiculous questions" intended to have no right answer.[140] To her, "the message was loud and clear. Don't confuse me with the facts, I've already made up my mind."[141] El-Abd was more direct than Van Wagner in her accusation against board members. She concluded her letter by stating that, "as a very proud

[137] Ibid., 2. This last part is interesting since the Coptic community was in an ongoing integration process as discussed in chapter three. The Egyptian Festival was well known in the area by 1995 and attended by numerous locals. Additionally, the community began engaging in religious and political organizations as early as 1986. However, it was not until 1992 that the Coptic community began participating in local cultural festivals like the East Brunswick Garden Club's Merry are the times" festival, "Our Community is fair Festival" and a multicultural concert held at the New Brunswick State Theatre in 1995. It is likely that since the Copts integration process really began to take form in the late 80s and early 90s that some members on the board were still not familiar with the Coptic church and community in the area, which then brings clarity to Van Wagner's statement and why he accused board members of not knowing the Coptic religion. It is also plausible that the Coptic community's emphasis on their pharaonic culture in festivals obscured their religious traditions and theology to the public. If attendees of the Egyptian festival only cared about the pharaonic trappings and food, it is possible that they would leave the festival with a minimum understanding of the Coptic religion.
[138] Sherine El-Abd, "Board acted badly on Coptic proposal," *Home News Tribune*, July 6, 1995, 8.
[139] Ibid., 8.
[140] Ibid., 8.
[141] Ibid., 8.

U.S. citizen, I am appalled, offended and ashamed of the highly prejudiced and narrow-minded views of the five board members who caused the defeat of St Mary's application."[142]

The response by Van Wagner and El Abd differed greatly from the response by the congregants of St. Mary's. All parties in favor of the project argued that religious discrimination was the reason why the expansion project was being opposed. They also indirectly drew on NIMBYism, noting that the project was contested because board members and residents feared the changes taking place on Riva Avenue. Yet, it is striking that the Coptic congregants refused to claim ethnic discrimination as a reason why their project was opposed.[143] Claims of ethnic discrimination were propagated by non-Coptic supporters of the project in board meetings and letters, yet the Coptic community never adopted this perspective. Nevertheless, in response to the verdict, the congregants and their lawyers followed in the footsteps of the Dwarkadhish Hindu Temple in Sayreville and decided to take their case to Superior Court.[144] Like the Hindu temple, the Copts chose to sue the East Brunswick planning board because board members "rejected expert testimony" and religiously discriminated against the Coptic community.[145]

Litigation

On July 26, board members held another vote to memorialize the resolution passed on June 21. According to township guidelines, only those who voted against the proposal could vote to memorialize the decision.[146] The five members voted unanimously to uphold the verdict. Church officials and lawyers awaited this ruling so they could officially go ahead with the

[142] Ibid., 8.
[143] Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English); Stacie Servetah, "Church sues board to win expansion," *Home News Tribune*, September 1, 1995, 11.
[144] Servetah, "Church sues board to win expansion," 11.
[145] Servetah, "Church sues board to win expansion," 11.
[146] Stacie Servetah, "East Brunswick planners reaffirm church's denial," *Home News Tribune*, July 28, 1995, 14.

lawsuit. Coptic representatives were uneasy about the need to go to court, stating that "this is a different role for us" because "we as a church are peacemakers, not troublemakers, but we will do what we have to."[147] Although intimidating to Coptic congregants, church lawyers were confident that they would win the case because the "board's denial was arbitrary and capricious, and there were a number of other mistakes."[148] The first step in the appeal process was to file suit against the East Brunswick planning board in New Brunswick Superior Court, however, for the congregants of St. Mary's, necessary funds were first needed.

To fundraise and mentally prepare for litigation, the Coptic community held a two-day Egyptian Festival on August 26 and 27 at Corpus Christi.[149] This festival had a "special meaning" for Coptic parishioners who understood that they "all have a goal" to achieve.[150] Alongside the stockpile of Egyptian food and clothing, was an architectural model of the proposed project greeting visitors as they entered the building.[151] One church official, looking down and smiling at the model, told a journalist that "this is my dream… this is all of our dreams."[152] The support the Coptic congregation received at the festival surmounted their expectations, raising more than forty thousand dollars over the weekend.[153] Feeling more confident, and now financially equipped, church officials immediately set out to file suit. On August 30, 1995, the St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church filed a lawsuit against the East Brunswick planning board in Superior Court, claiming they were discriminated against.[154]

[147] Ibid., 14.
[148] Ibid., 14.
[149] Stacie Servetah, "Coptic Church funds set for suit," *Home News Tribune*, August 28, 1995, 1, 2.
[150] Ibid., 2.
[151] Ibid., 2.
[152] Ibid., 2.
[153] Ibid., 2.
[154] Servetah, "Church sues board to win expansion," 11.

In early November, Superior Court Judge Douglas K Wolfson met with attorneys from the township and the church to review the planning board's decision on June 21.[155] Following this preliminary meeting, on November 21, 1995 opposing attorneys and church representatives flocked to the courthouse to hear the judge's verdict.[156] Judge Wolfson, after careful consideration, decided that the board, not the court, should decide the plan's fate.[157] With that being said, he placed a "case management order" requiring the East Brunswick planning board to vote again on the project.[158] Unlike the memorialization vote, all nine planning board members would be allocated one vote each. A public hearing was also scheduled for December 6 so Coptic officials could address two lingering concerns: traffic and the septic tank.[159] Coptic representatives were not too happy with the mediation, particularly since they were hoping the court would overrule the planning board.[160] Ironically, three weeks later, Judge Wolfson would overrule a verdict by the Sayreville planning board denying variance to Faith Fellowship, a worldwide, multi-ethnic, megachurch.[161]

This level of inconsistency is striking but suggests that Judge Wolfson was unsure how to address these religious building issues taking place throughout Middlesex County in the 1990s. His decision to overrule the verdict in Sayreville but not in East Brunswick was not due to racial or ethnic discrimination since Faith Fellowship was an ethnically and racially diverse church. It is more likely that Faith Fellowship's international reputation influenced Judge Wolfson's decision and pressured him to overrule the Sayreville planning board's decision. Additionally, the Sayreville planning board was reprimanded in 1993 for ethnically discriminating against the

[155] Michael Symons, "Board to vote again on church expansion," *Home News Tribune*, November 23, 1995, 3.
[156] Ibid., 3.
[157] Ibid., 3.
[158] *Home News Tribune*, November 22, 1995, 47.
[159] Ibid., 47.
[160] Symons, "Board to vote again on church expansion," *Home News Tribune*, November 23, 1995, 3.
[161] George Francy, "Judge Oks church's relocation in Sayreville," *Home News Tribune*, December 16, 1995, 1.

Hindu community when they wanted to build their temple, therefore it is also plausible that Judge Wolfson questioned the character of the Sayreville planning board and decided to overrule their decision. Nevertheless, the Copts of St. Mary's were given another window of opportunity.

Residents were far less excited about the second chance being offered the Coptic community and took the time before the meeting to publish a letter against the project. Contrasting earlier letters that attempted to dictate the functionality and utility of the church, this letter focused on the adverse effect the project would have on the environment and traffic. Titled, "Hazardous Over-Development," the author began by discussing her experience on the Septic System Management Commission under former mayor William Fox (1976-1988).[162] It was during her tenure that the township first established a master plan and began placing zoning ordinances throughout the township. While surveying Riva Avenue they found evidence concerning "the sensitivity of the soil."[163] On account of this variable, Riva Avenue was zoned Rural Preservation to protect "the quality of the Farrington Lake by limiting (over) development of any type - residential or commercial."[164] Therefore, the inadequacy of the septic system and the "unreasonable size of the proposed expansion on this undersized property" could only be assessed as a "very serious detriment" to the area.[165]

Furthermore, she doubted the viability of a supposed agreement between Coptic officials and the local Home Depot in Milltown.[166] Home Depot told Coptic parishioners that they would be willing to lend 50 parking spaces for the church to use on holidays, to be picked up and dropped off by church vans. In response to this arrangement, the author stated how the church's

[162] Kathleen Turner, "Hazardous Over-Development," *Home News Tribune*, December 2, 1995, 5.
[163] Ibid., 5.
[164] Ibid., 5.
[165] Ibid., 5.
[166] Turner, "Hazardous Over-Development," 5; Sonia Demetrious, interviewed via phone call, March 10, 2022 (in English).

"contention of any agreement with Home Depot leaves me to question - Where will they park the buses?"[167] The agreements taking place behind the scenes irritated residents and portrayed the actions of church officials as clandestine. According to the author, much of the problems taking place could have been avoided had "St. Mary's officials acceded to the wishes of the lawyers and neighbors to sit down together and work toward compatible conclusions."[168] While the Copts certainly had the right to worship, residents believed they also had the right to enjoy quiet homes and neighborhoods.[169] She ended her letter by challenging Mayor Oskowsky and Councilman Anthony Riccobone's impartiality as public officials, claiming their public expressions in the media compromised their positions and that they should be excluded from voting on the church expansion application.[170] This would not be the only time residents attempted to remove a voting member from the planning board.

A Second Chance

The awaited meeting on December 6 provided Coptic officials with the platform they needed to counter concerns responsible for the earlier verdict. They presented the planning board testimonies from the local Home Depot guaranteeing the utilization of their parking lot during religious feasts, and from the State Department of Environment Protection that the church's septic tank was safe and capable of handling 2,000 gallons per day.[171] By doing so, church officials hoped they had resolved all concerns and that a vote would be held. Residents opposing the expansion did not respond to these new testimonies, rather they set their eyes on discrediting

[167] Turner, "Hazardous Over-Development," 5.
[168] Ibid., 5.
[169] Ibid., 5.
[170] Ibid., 5.
[171] Stacie Servetah, "Vote on St. Mary's expansion postponed until end of year," *Home News Tribune*, December 7, 1995, 9.

Oskowsky and Riccobono. Resident lawyers claimed that because both Oskowsky and Riccobono were members of the township's GOP they "could not be impartial because the township's GOP had received campaign contributions from the church."[172] They petitioned the board attorney, Jeffrey Lehrer, to refrain both individuals from voting.[173] However, after Mr. Lehrer found no conflict in the matter, both Oskowsky and Riccobono refused to step down.[174] After long hours of debate, the planning board decided to postpone the vote but promised that it would take place before the end of the year.[175]

One week later, board members and church officials met again to discuss the plans and possibly vote on the matter. Accompanying them were more than thirty "angry" residents who continued to protest the unnecessary grandeur of the project.[176] After agreeing to a set of twenty conditions regulating the operations of the church, residents and opposing board members still believed that the size was "too big for the area."[177] To appease residents and respond to claims that the church was unnegotiable, church officials agreed to scale down their proposed expansion. Following a "raucous three-hour hearing," parishioners agreed to reduce the new service building by 2,320 square feet and the sanctuary addition by 530 square feet.[178] The initiative was pleasing to board members, however residents remained uncertain, stating that "this sounds great on paper but has almost no practicality."[179] As the third hour passed, board members agreed that they would not vote until the church could provide a sketch of their new

[172] Ibid., 9.
[173] Ibid., 9.
[174] Ibid., 9.
[175] Ibid., 9.
[176] "Olive branch offered," *Home News Tribune*, December 15, 1995, 5.
[177] Ibid., 5.
[178] Ibid., 5.
[179] Ibid., 5.

proposal.[180] They concluded the meeting and planned to hold the vote the following year on January 10, 1996.

The expected meeting to vote on January 10th never took place, however, Coptic parishioners did not have to wait much longer to learn the fate of their project. On January 31, Coptic representatives presented their designs to board members, hoping a positive vote would take place. Church engineers agreed to reduce the scale of the project by thirteen percent but altered the designs suggested in their last board meeting. Instead of decreasing the sanctuary addition by 530 square feet and the service building by 2,320 square feet, the community chose to reduce the service building by 3,585 square feet while leaving the addition and two 43-foot steeples intact.[181] Moreover, they added thirteen more parking spots to the design, totaling 259 proposed spots.[182] By exceeding what was expected in their redacted proposal, even the most staunch opponent of the board, Richard Sikoral, noted that the reduction in size was "admirable."[183] The church also agreed to a long list of restrictions:

"1) no school activities while Mass was in session;

2) no cooking allowed in the kitchen;

3) no alcoholic beverages and music allowed unless they are ceremonial;

4) facilities were not allowed to be rented out;

5) schools were to be limited to one hundred children and fifteen counselors;

6) the church must staff two traffic control officers at every religious service;

7) all lights except security lights must be off when the building is unoccupied; and

[180] Ibid., 5.
[181] Stacie Servetah, "Church to try out scaled-back growth plan tonight," *Home News Tribune*, January 31, 1996, C1, C2.
[182] Ibid., C1.
[183] Stacie Servetah, "Coptic church gets ok to expand," *Home News Tribune*, February 1, 1996, 2.

8) the church must build an 8-foot-high fence around the property."[184]

Following these contingencies, board members agreed to vote.

The outcome took a dramatic spin this time, with a 7-2 vote in favor of the new project plans. Upon hearing the verdict, "church members cheered and hugged each other while residents who lived near the church shook their heads in disbelief."[185] Both Richard Sikoral and Hy Merson stood firm against the application because of the negative impact they believed the extension would have on the neighborhood.[186] Board members who did acquiesce, noted how the church had "to be a better neighbor," something they had not demonstrated "in the past."[187] Church officials celebrated the verdict by holding a "special" late night Mass "to thank St. Mary."[188] After a captivating three years of public hearings and debate, church officials said they would begin building as soon as possible.[189]

Prior to the vote on January 31, resident lawyers notified the planning board that if they voted in favor of the application, residents would appeal it in superior court.[190] As time progressed, the appeal process became less promising, and they simply chose not to act. Instead, on March 15, 1996, residents published, for the last time, a letter about the church project.[191] Titled, "East Brunswick Flops on Church," residents began by acknowledging that "tax-paying" residents had lost faith in the oscillating planning board, especially "the mayor and the council president" who "received campaign contributions before the application was filed."[192] According to the authors, township leadership remained hidden "behind political contributions" and

[184] Servetah, "Church to try out scaled-back growth plan tonight," C2.
[185] Servetah, "Coptic church gets ok to expand," 1, 2.
[186] Ibid., 2.
[187] Ibid., 2.
[188] Ibid., 1.
[189] Ibid., 1.
[190] "Olive branch offered," 5.
[191] Chris Roeder, "East Brunswick flops on church," *Home News Tribune*, March 15, 1996, 39.
[192] Ibid., 39.

wavering board members who changed their vote on account of "cosmetic reduction and certain conditions."[193] Yet, the "matter at hand", as residents concluded, was the "adverse impact" the expansion would have; a burden they believed fell "on the residents of this neighborhood."[194]

Figure 5: Rafik Wahba inviting Governor Christie Whitman to the Egyptian Festival in 1996.

With the matter at an end, Coptic officials began phase 1 of their building project immediately. To memorialize their success, Rafik Wahba was sent by the Coptic community to Governor Christie Whitman's office and invited her to participate in the Egyptian Festival in 1996.[195] While in her office, Rafik Wahba gave governor Whitman a brief presentation about the Coptic Church in Egypt and the recent wave of Coptic immigration to the Middlesex County area.[196] Additionally, he relayed to her that the church's mission in Middlesex County was to provide a positive influence to the Copts in Middlesex County and the "entire American

[193] Ibid., 39.
[194] Ibid., 39.
[195] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[196] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic).

community" in the region.[197] At the Egyptian Festival in 1996, Governor Whitman stated that the Copts of St. Mary's were "an example to everyone how a community can work together."[198] The visit by Governor Whitman lifted the spirits of the congregants and demonstrated that they were becoming recognized as a community in the state, not just East Brunswick.[199] Furthermore, on May 18, 1997, Pope Shenouda III attended St. Mary's 20th year anniversary to celebrate how much the community had achieved. On October 27, 1997, Pope Shenouda had Bishop Reweis place three bibles in the foundation of the service building. By 1999, the project was completed and on September 15, 1999, Pope Shenouda visited St. Mary's again and blessed their buildings.[200] The new sanctuary was named after Archangel Michael, while the service center, in honor of the Pope's continuous support, was named the Pope Shenouda III Service Center. On October 24, to further memorialize the success of the project, St. Mary's celebrated the Egyptian Festival for the first time on the church's property.

Conclusion

The events discussed above demonstrate how the construction and expansion of Coptic churches in Central New Jersey were laity driven and heavily influenced by local variables. St. Mary's decision to take a bifurcated approach in hopes of reducing congregational congestion was improvised as well as organized. Since Coptic enclaves were formed throughout Central New Jersey, the construction of churches in certain areas was encouraged by Father Bishoy and congregants. Concomitantly, St. Mary's hegemony increased, and they became a mother church

[197] Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[198] Coria Daniels and Eric Swain, "Festival celebrate heritage," *Home News Tribune*, August 26, 1996, 8.
[199] Ibid., 8; Rafik Wahba, interviewed in East Brunswick, New Jersey, April 27, 2023 (in English and Arabic).
[200] Sylvie Mulvaney, "New facility emphasizes church's focus on youth," *Home News Tribune*, September 5, 1999, 11.

in the region. Although the St. Mary community supported the development of churches in Edison and Howell, the hindrances the community in Holmdel encountered reaffirms that religious boundaries were contested and negotiated. Church competition was a serious concern; however, it seems the more pressing issue was the attempt by the Holmdel community to challenge the pope's decisions. The more adamant the community in Holmdel was the less flexible the pope became.

Additionally, St. Mary's extension project encapsulates the struggles religious groups experienced throughout the 1990s. Although the freedom to assemble remains a pertinent facet of American society, the debates that enveloped religious communities throughout Central New Jersey focused on where these groups could assemble. The burdens immigrant religious groups experienced was a neophobic response to the ethnic and niche style of their places of worship. In East Brunswick, the creation and extension of St. Mary's encouraged residents to prepare for change, particularly the restructuring of religious convention and the demographic dynamics accompanying it. This fear galvanized residents and congregants to engage in heated exchanges and insightful debate, making religion a dinner table topic at the time. Likewise, the correspondence that took place sheds light on the way ethno-religious communities influence how religion is observed and practiced in a region. Opposing parties were forced to conceptualize what a church meant, not only to them, but to the greater public. Immigrant communities in Central New Jersey were not only required to reflect on the functionality of their places of worship, but whether they were portraying themselves as an exclusive and self-marginalizing entity. St. Mary's, on account of local resistance, media attention, and political participation, were compelled to mobilize and quickly identify how American society functioned, particularly its litigious character. It also obligated individuals to confront a national

trend of migration and niche model suburban church building. To accept it would require variance and the restructuring of their township's master plan. In other words, it would necessitate change and compliance.

Conclusion: A Field of Endless Opportunities

This dissertation has demonstrated that the construction, expansion, and direction of the Coptic community and church in Middlesex County was laity driven, reactive, and dependent on local variables. To demonstrate this, three main arguments were examined throughout this dissertation. First, any community capable of demonstrating they could build and sustain a church was permitted to do so. While Pope Shenouda had nominal supervision over church development, predominately sending priests from Egypt to start and oversee new churches, his role in directing the construction of new churches was limited. This phenomenon allowed the community in Middlesex County to construct their church according to their preferences and financial capabilities. Consequently, the bottom-up nature of church building projects occasionally stirred animosity between the ecclesiastical hierarchy and laity.

Second, the creation and expansion of St. Mary's revealed that the Copts in Middlesex County had to circumnavigate a prolific NIMBY syndrome to successfully complete their building projects. This phenomenon forced the community to define itself to the public, usually in relation to the public's imagined perceptions of the Coptic community, through festivals and cooperation with local organizations. Additionally, the Copts, like other religious organizations in Central New Jersey, had to negotiate their presence within suburban development. They did this by engaging in public discourse over the role of religion in society and proving that their church was beneficial to the public.

Lastly, migration severely affected the community's Americanization process and forced the community to continuously restructure and adopt programs to accommodate new waves of

migrants. Initial Coptic migration into Middlesex County in 1969 was undertaken by relatively wealthy, Americanized, and established Copts. Upon their arrival, they implemented an Americanization process that encouraged the anglicization of religious services and the religious, cultural, and political integration of the community into East Brunswick and Middlesex County. Maintaining their ethnoreligious roots and traditions was also fundamental to this process. Starting in the late 80s and 90s, Coptic migration from Egypt to Middlesex County increased and the community was forced to adopt social and non-liturgical roles to facilitate their settlement and integration into the area. The creation of the Anba Abraham committee facilitated this process, but cultural clashes and tensions between the English and Arabic-speaking congregants infiltrated the church. This development revealed that communal and personal identities were contested and renegotiated according to intracommunal and intercommunal dynamics.

The importance of this research lies in its regionalized approach, which sheds light on how each Coptic community's development was contingent on local variables and communal resources. The study of the Coptic diaspora has been gaining momentum in recent years, and this dissertation contributes to that literature by providing a case study that examines the Coptic community within the overall trend of suburban migration and development. The study of suburban Coptic communities is crucial as it moves away from examining the community's integration into diverse urban areas and instead highlights the Copts' contribution to the diversification of white neighborhoods. By doing so, this dissertation highlighted the Coptic community's contributions to suburban identity and how they negotiated their presence in this new environment. This dissertation also challenges existing scholarship that portrays the Coptic community as a homogenous entity, showing that local factors, job titles, ambitions, and individual perspectives are all necessary variables that shape the community's identity. Finally,

this research is significant because it addresses a gap in Coptic diaspora scholarship by examining one of the largest and fastest-growing Coptic communities in the U.S., which has been overlooked by scholars in the past.

The study of the Coptic diaspora is a rich field that offers ample opportunities for future research. While this dissertation has made significant contributions to this field, there are still many areas that require further investigation. For instance, future research could explore the role of churches in the creation and expansion of other Coptic diaspora churches. Researchers could investigate how existing Coptic diaspora churches influence the creation of new ones, and how they contribute or hinder the growth of other Coptic churches in the area. For example, throughout my research I detected a pattern by which other Coptic churches in Middlesex County mimicked St. Mary's religious services and strategies. The communities in Holmdel and Howell both purchased land that exceeded five acres to build their churches on, were close to highways and in isolated suburban areas, and were large enough to accommodate congregational growth and the expansion of facilities. Additionally, both churches adopted Saturday School and used sports to encourage youth attendance in religious services. An examination of these intracommunal relations should avoid homogeneity and instead explore these dynamics from a perspective of ecclesiastical hegemony.

Researchers could also examine contested boundaries between the hierarchy and laity within a church. As discussed in this dissertation, absolute power over the direction of a church was contested by congregants who disagreed with the ecclesiastic visions of priests being sent abroad from Egypt. This pattern revealed that hierarchical boundaries were negotiated in the diaspora, particularly since the salary of a priest was paid for by the congregants. Throughout my research it was clear that disagreements over the priest's vision often resulted in the removal of

the priest or a lapse in his payment by congregants who used his salary as bargaining strategy. Further investigation into why these events happen is needed to better illustrate the way cultural differences affect the functionality and leadership of churches. However, I do not believe Copts will be so open about the negative aspects of their church and I do not see this field gaining much momentum in the future.

Another important area that requires further investigation is the role of sports in Coptic churches. Sports provide an avenue for Coptic communities to integrate into the local context and keep the various Coptic churches and communities in a region united. The concept of using sports to integrate into society was a philosophy quickly implemented by congregants at St. Mary's. My research on sports at St. Mary's revealed that sports was a useful tool in their integration process and allowed them to develop friendship with local ethnic groups as well as Copts from other churches. Sporting events provided an atmosphere for unity but also induced animosity and competition between the churches. Researchers could explore how sports become a platform of conflict that propagates stereotypes and church patriotism rather than unity.

In addition to the avenues for future research outlined above, there are two specific subjects that warrant further exploration in relation to the Coptic diaspora: their economic history and the experiences of single women immigrants. Future research could focus on how Coptic migrants have contributed to the fields of science, technology, and medicine in the U.S., as well as how they have established businesses and created job opportunities for themselves and others. For instance, one potential area of study could examine the role of Coptic-owned businesses and how they impacted local economies. By doing so, researchers can illustrate the contributions of Coptic migrants to the U.S. economy and how their migration patterns impacted the economy of Egypt as well.

Moreover, researchers need to explore the experiences of single women immigrants from Egypt. Future research could investigate the challenges and opportunities that single Coptic women face when migrating to the United States, including cultural inconsistencies and discrimination. It is important to examine what it was like for them to migrate on their own, how they challenged Coptic gender roles they were accustomed to in Egypt, and how their migration was viewed by Copts in Egypt and in the diaspora. Since there is a significant lack of attention given to single women immigrants, it is essential that we examine their experiences in more detail.

Overall, the study of the Coptic diaspora offers various avenues for future research. By exploring these areas, researchers can gain a better understanding of individual Coptic communities in the diaspora and how they contribute to their new society. By doing so, researchers have the potential to expand our understanding of how Coptic communities grow and develop, elucidate the challenges they face, and accentuate the individuality of each community. It is the goal of this dissertation to encourage future researchers to take advantage of the localized context of each Coptic community and approach the Coptic diaspora from a perspective of heterogeneity.

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Oral History Interviews:

Amged Salib (1 session. 00:37:19. New Jersey, USA)

Andrew, Magdy, and Mona Yousseff (1 session. 00:34:24. New Jersey, USA)

Basem and Wafa Eskander (1 session. 00:51:40. New Jersey, USA)

Dr. Ibrahim Habib (2 sessions. 01:58:47. New Jersey, USA)

Dr. Mourad Takla (1 session. 01:18:03. New Jersey, USA)

Dr. Mourad and Aida Henein (1 session. 00:46:18. New Jersey, USA)

Fady Anis (1 session. 00:57:33. New Jersey, USA)

Louis Shenouda (4 sessions. 04:48:05. New Jersey, USA)

Mark and Nilly Salem (1 session. 00:32:31. New Jersey, USA)

Meshriti Mina (1 session. 00:56:21. New Jersey, USA)

Michael and Mona Matta (2 sessions. 01:37:05. New Jersey, USA)

Rafik Eskander (1 session. 00:49:16. New Jersey, USA)

Rafik Wahba (7 sessions. 12:38:13. New Jersey, USA)

Ramsis Sedra (1 session. 00:43:56. Florida, USA)

Saad Antoun (2 sessions. 01:08:55. New Jersey, Florida)

Sherif Fawzy (2 sessions. 02:09:23. New Jersey, USA)

Sherif Habib (1 session. 01:03:46. New Jersey, USA)

Sonia Demetrious (8 sessions. 14:13:29. New Jersey, USA)

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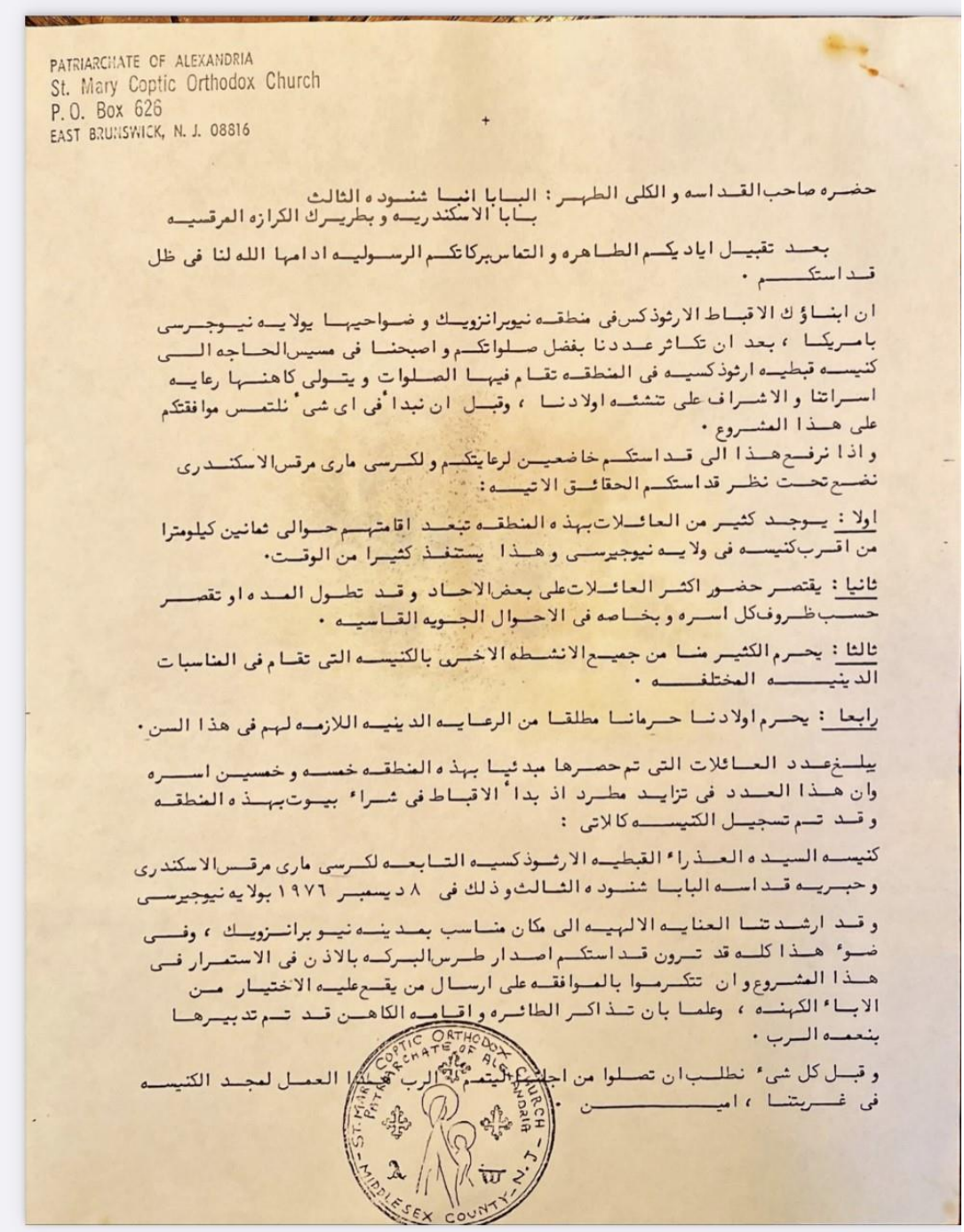
Appendix A – Papal Letter 1: Requesting the Pope's Permission to Build a Church



PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA
St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church
P. O. Box 626
EAST BRUNSWICK, N. J. 08816

حضره صاحب القداسه و الكلى الطهر : البابا انبا شنوده الثالث
بابا الاسكندريه و بطريرك الكرازه المرقسيه

بعد تقبيل اياديكم الطاهره و التماس بركاتكم الرسوليه ادامها الله لنا فى ظل قداستكم .

ان ابناؤك الاقباط الارثوذكس فى منطقه نيوبرانزويك و ضواحيها يولايه نيوجرسى بامريكا ، بعد ان تكاثر عددنا بفضل صلواتكم و اصبحنا فى مسيس الحاجه الى كنيسه قبطيه ارثوذكسيه فى المنطقه تقام فيها الصلوات و يتولى كاهنها رعايه اسراتنا و الاشراف على تنشئه اولادنا ، وقبل ان نبدأ فى اى شئ نلتمس موافقتكم على هذا المشروع .

و اذا نرفع هذا الى قداستكم خاضعين لرعايتكم و لكرسى مارى مرقس الاسكندرى نضع تحت نظر قداستكم الحقائق الاتيه :

اولا : يوجد كثير من العائلات بهذه المنطقه تبعد اقامتهم حوالى ثمانين كيلومترا من اقرب كنيسه فى ولايه نيوجيرسى و هذا يستنفذ كثيرا من الوقت .

ثانيا : يقتصر حضور اكثر العائلات على بعض الاحاد و قد تطول المده او تقصر حسب ظروف كل اسره و بخاصه فى الاحوال الجويه القاسيه .

ثالثا : يحرم الكثير منا من جميع الانشطه الاخرى بالكنيسه التى تقام فى المناسبات الدينيه المختلفه .

رابعا : يحرم اولادنا حرمانا مطلقا من الرعايه الدينيه اللازمه لهم فى هذا السن .

يبلغ عدد العائلات التى تم حصرها مبدئيا بهذه المنطقه خمسه و خمسين اسره وان هذا العدد فى تزايد مطرد اذ بدأ الاقباط فى شراء بيوت بهذه المنطقه و قد تم تسجيل الكنيسه كالاتى :

كنيسه السيده العذراء القبطيه الارثوذكسيه التابعه لكرسى مارى مرقس الاسكندرى و حبريه قداسه البابا شنوده الثالث و ذلك فى ٨ ديسمبر ١٩٧٦ بولايه نيوجيرسى

و قد ارشدتنا العنايه الالهيه الى مكان مناسب بمدينه نيو برانزويك ، وفى ضوء هذا كله قد ترون قداستكم اصدار طرس البركه بالاذن فى الاستمرار فى هذا المشروع و ان تتكرموا بالموافقه على ارسال من يقع عليه الاختيار من الاباء الكهنه ، وعلما بان تذاكر الطائره و اقامه الكاهن قد تم تدبيرها بنعمه الرب .

و قبل كل شئ نطلب ان تصلوا من اجلنا ليتمم الرب هذا العمل لمجد الكنيسه فى غربتنا ، امين .

ST. MARY COPTIC ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA CHURCH - MIDDLESEX COUNTY - N.J.

Appendix B – Translation of Papal Letter 1

Patriarchate of Alexandria

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church

Middlesex County

Your Holiness and all pure Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark the Apostle. After kissing your pure hands and beseeching your apostolic blessings, may God keep you for us under your Holiness' reign.

Your Coptic Orthodox children in the area of New Brunswick and its suburbs in the state of New Jersey in America.

After our numbers have exponentially increased through your prayers, we are in dire need of a Coptic Orthodox Church in the area where prayers can take place and a priest take charge in administering to our families and supervising the rearing of our children. Before we begin anything, we seek your approval for this project. We raise this to your Holiness in submission to your shepherd hood and the See of St. Mark in Alexandria, we place before your holiness the following facts.

Firstly, there are many families in this area who live at a distance of about 80 Kilometers (50 miles) from the nearest church in New Jersey and that expends a lot of time.

Secondly, the attendance of most families does not go beyond some Sundays and even the rate of their attendance could be longer or shorter based on the circumstances of each family and especially in severe weather conditions.

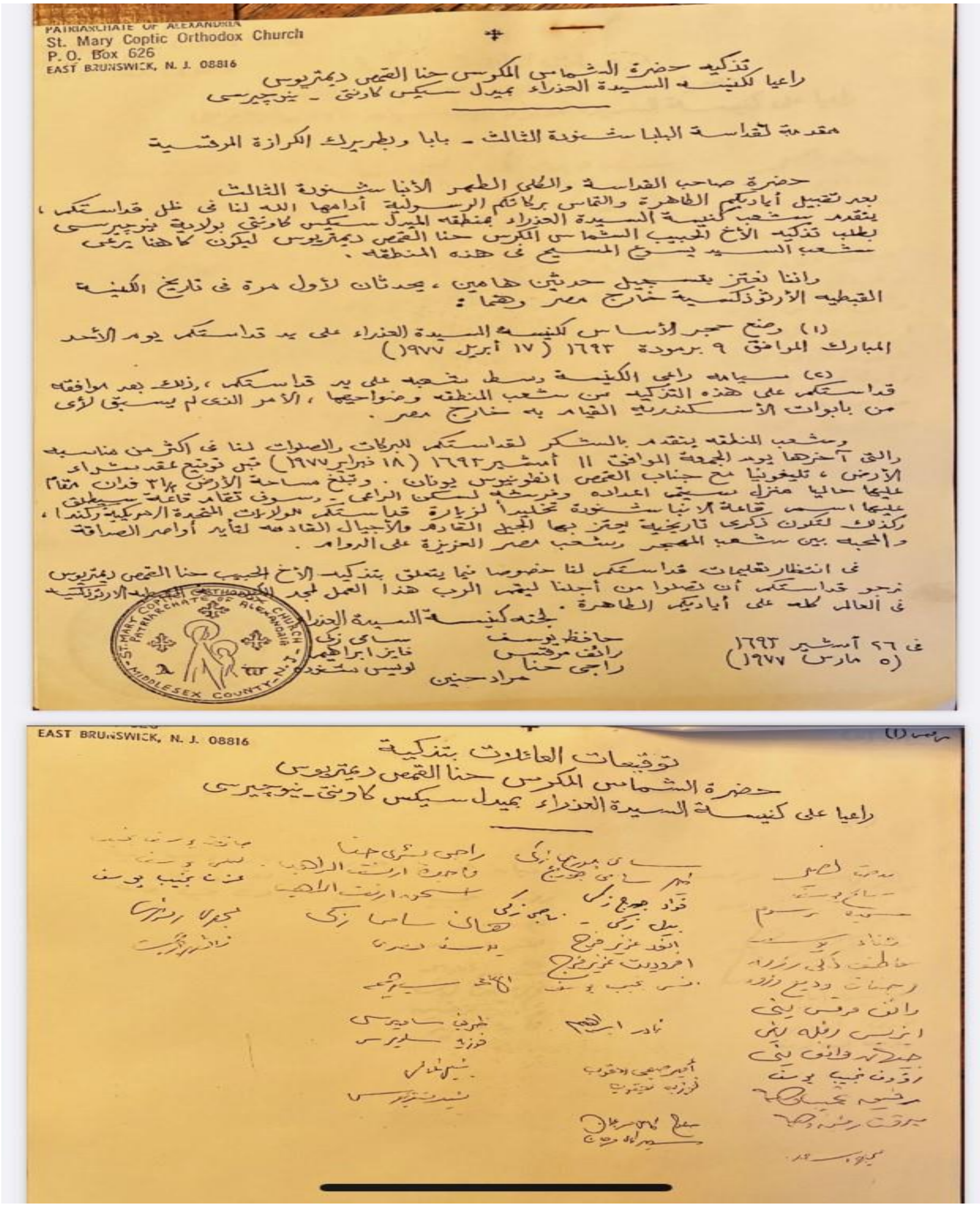
Thirdly, many of us are deprived of additional church activities which are held on various religious occasions.

Fourthly, our children are completely deprived from religious care that is necessary for them at this age.

The number of families that have initially been accounted for in this area are 55 families and this number is in an exponential increase as Copts have begun to purchase houses in this area. The church has been registered as follows: the church of the lady, the virgin Saint Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, which is affiliated to the See of Saint Mark of Alexandria under the auspices of his Holiness Pope Shenouda III on December 8th, 1976, in the state of New Jersey. Divine

providence has guided us to a suitable location in the city of New Brunswick. In light of all this, may your Holiness republish a proclamation of blessing permitting us to continue with this project and to honor us with your acceptance on sending who would be chosen among the fathers as our priest. Bearing in mind that the air ticket and accommodations of the chosen priest has already been arranged for through the grace of God. Before any of this, we ask for you to pray for us, so the lord may continue this work for the glory of the church in our land of migration. Amen.

Appendix C – Papal Letter 2: Requesting the Consecration of Deacon Hana Demetrious



PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA
St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church
P. O. Box 626
EAST BRUNSWICK, N. J. 08816

تذكية حضرة الشماس المكرس حنا القمص ديمتريوس
راعيا لكنيسة السيدة العذراء بميدل سكس كاونتي - نيوجيرسي

مقدمة لقداسة البابا شنودة الثالث - بابا وبطريرك الكرازة المرقسية

حضرة صاحب القداسة والطوبى الطهر الأنبا شنودة الثالث
بعد تقبيل أياديكم الطاهرة والتماس بركاتكم الرسولية أدامها الله لنا فى ظل قداستكم، يتقدم شعب كنيسة السيدة العذراء بمنطقة الميدل سكس كاونتي بولاية نيوجيرسي بطلب تذكية الأخ الحبيب الشماس المكرس حنا القمص ديمتريوس ليكون كاهنا يرعى شعب السيد يسوع المسيح فى هذه المنطقة.

واننا نعتز بتسجيل حدثين هامين، يحدثان لأول مرة فى تاريخ الكنيسة القبطيه الأرثوذكسية خارج مصر وهما:

(١) وضع حجر الأساس لكنيسة السيدة العذراء على يد قداستكم يوم الأحد المبارك الموافق ٩ برمودة ١٦٩٣ (١٧ أبريل ١٩٧٧)

(٢) سيامة راعى الكنيسة وسط شعبه على يد قداستكم، وذلك بعد موافقة قداستكم على هذه التذكية من شعب المنطقه وضواحيها، الأمر الذى لم يسبق لأى من بابوات الأسكندرية القيام به خارج مصر.

وشعب المنطقه يتقدم بالشكر لقداستكم للبركات والصلوات لنا فى أكثر من مناسبه والتى آخرها يوم الجمعة الموافق ١١ أمشير ١٦٩٣ (١٨ فبراير ١٩٧٧) قبل توقيع عقد شراء الأرض، تليفونيا مع جناب القمص انطونيوس يونان. وتبلغ مساحة الأرض ٢١/٤ فدان ومقام عليها حاليا منزل سيتم اعداده وفرشه لسكن الراعى. وسوف تقام قاعة سيطلق عليها اسم قاعة الانبا شنودة تخليدا لزيارة قداستكم الولايات المتحدة الامريكية وكندا، وكذلك لتكون ذكرى تاريخية يعتز بها الجيل القادم والأجيال القادمه لتأييد أواصر الصداقة والمحبه بين شعب المهجر وشعب مصر العزيزة على الدوام.

فى انتظار تعليمات قداستكم لنا خصوصا فيما يتعلق بتذكية الأخ الحبيب حنا القمص ديمتريوس نرجو قداستكم أن تصلوا من أجلنا ليتم الرب هذا العمل لمجد الكنيسة القبطية الارثوذكسية فى العالم كله على أياديكم الطاهرة.

لجنة كنيسة السيدة العذراء

حافظ يوسف — سامى زكى
رائف مرقس — فايز ابراهيم
راجى حنا — لويس شنوده
مراد حنين

فى ٢٦ أمشير ١٦٩٣
(٥ مارس ١٩٧٧)

ST. MARY COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH — PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA — MIDDLESEX COUNTY, N. J.

EAST BRUNSWICK, N. J. 08816

مرفق (١)

توقيعات العائلات بتذكية
حضرة الشماس المكرس حنا القمص ديمتريوس
راعيا على كنيسة السيدة العذراء بميدل سكس كاونتي - نيوجيرسي

فؤاد جورج زكى
نبيل زكى
انور عزيز فرج
راجى زكى حنا
نادر ابراهيم
رائف مرقس
نبيل ابراهيم
فايز نجيب يوسف

Appendix D – Translation of Papal Letter 2

Patriarchate of Alexandria

St Mary Coptic Orthodox Church

Middlesex County

Endorsement of the Honorable consecrated Deacon Hana Hegumen Demetrious as the shepherd of the Church of St. Mary in Middlesex County New Jersey.

Introduction to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III the Pope and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark:

Your Holiness and all pure Pope Shenouda III, after kissing your pure hands and seeking your apostolic blessings, may God keep us with you always through your holy reign. The congregation of the church of St Mary's in the Middlesex County area in the state of New Jersey asks you to grant the endorsement of the beloved brother consecrated deacon Hana Hegumen Demetrious to be a priest and shepherd the congregation of our lord Jesus Christ in this area. It is also our honor to report to you historic events that happened for the first time in history of the Coptic Orthodox Church outside of Egypt and they are:

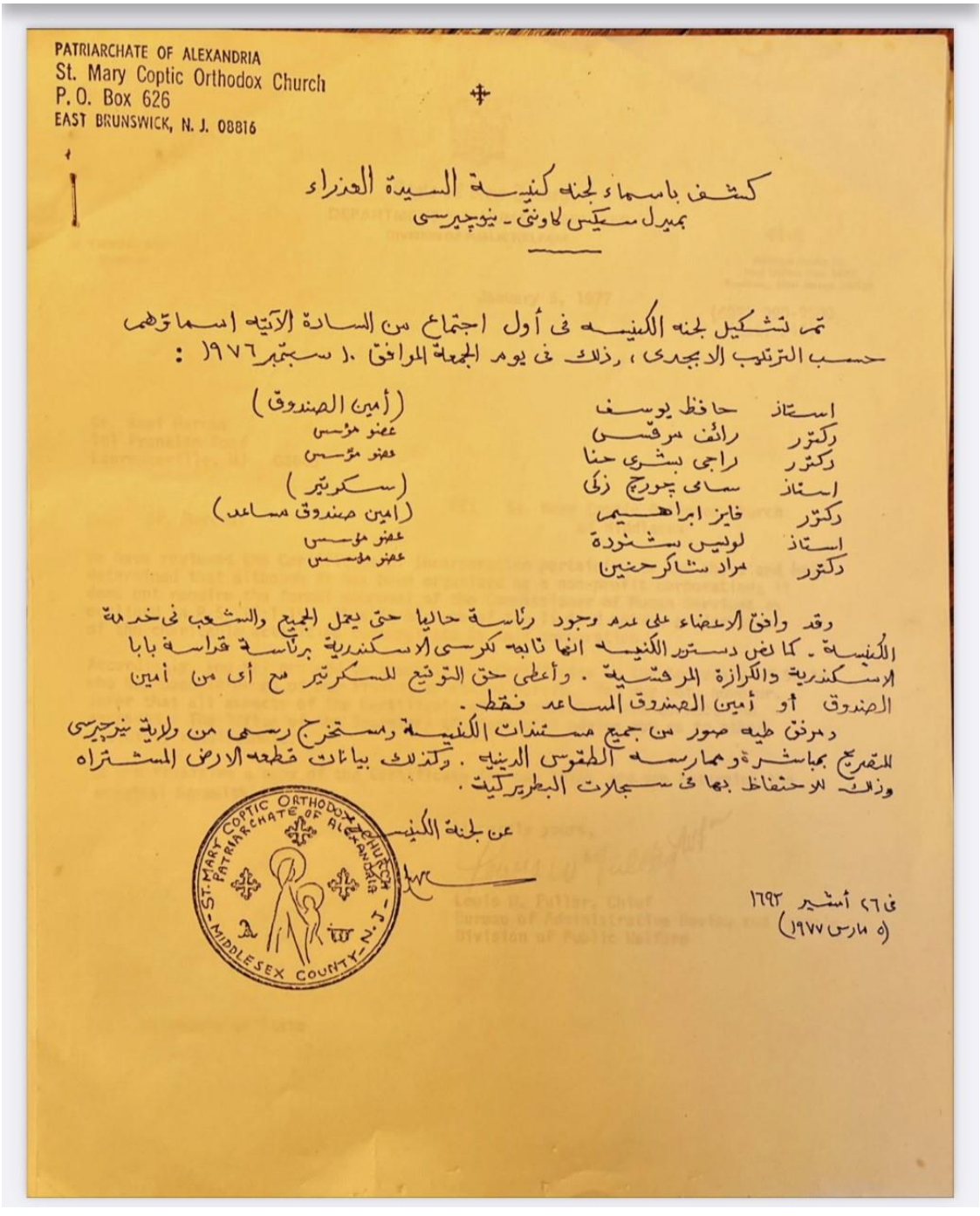
1. The placing of the Cornerstone of the church of St Mary by your Holiness' hands on Sunday, the 9th of Baramouse 1693 (April 17th, 1977)

2. The ordination of the shepherd of the church in the midst of his congregation by your Holiness' hands after your Holiness approves this endorsement from the congregation in this area and its surroundings, which in itself has never happened before by any Pope of Alexandria outside of Egypt.

3. The congregation of the area would like to thank your holiness for all the prayers and blessings you gave to us on more than one occasion, the last of which was on Friday 11th of Bashir 1693 (February 18th, 1977), for signing the contract to buy the land telephonically with Reverend Hegumen Antonious Younan. It is a lot of land, three and a half acres, which currently has a house on it and will be prepared and furnished for the accommodation of a priest. A church hall will be erected and will be called the hall of Pope Shenouda as a way of commemorating the visit of your Holiness to the United States of America and Canada, and this will be a historic landmark that this congregation and many generations to come will be proud of in order to always confirm the friendship and love between the diaspora congregation and the beloved congregation in Egypt.

We are awaiting your instruction, specifically in reference to the endorsement of the beloved brother Hana Hegumen Demetrious, we ask your holiness to pray for us so the lord may continue this work for the glory of the Coptic Orthodox Church all over the world by your pure hands.

Appendix E – Papal Letter 3: Informing the Pope of the Board of Deacons



PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA
St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church
P. O. Box 626
EAST BRUNSWICK, N. J. 08816

كشف باسماء لجنة كنيسة السيدة العذراء
بميدل سيكس لاونتى - نيوجيرسى

تم تشكيل لجنة الكنيسة فى أول اجتماع من السادة الآتيه اسماؤهم حسب الترتيب الابجدى ، وذلك فى يوم الجمعة الموافق ١٠ سبتمبر ١٩٧٦ :

استاذ	حافظ يوسف	(أمين الصندوق)
دكتور	رائف مرقص	عضو مؤسس
دكتور	راجى بشرى حنا	عضو مؤسس
استاذ	سامى جورج زكى	(سكرتير)
دكتور	فايز ابراهيم	(امين صندوق مساعد)
استاذ	لويس بشنودة	عضو مؤسس
دكتور	مراد شاكر حنين	عضو مؤسس

وقد وافق الاعضاء على عدم وجود رئاسة حاليا حتى يعمل الجميع والشعب فى خدمة الكنيسة . كما نص دستور الكنيسة انها تابعة لكرسى الاسكندرية برئاسة قداسة بابا الاسكندرية والكرازة المرقسية . وأعطى حق التوقيع للسكرتير مع أى من أمين الصندوق أو أمين الصندوق المساعد فقط .

ومرفق طيه صور من جميع مستندات الكنيسة ومستخرج رسمى من ولاية نيوجيرسى للتصريح بمباشرة وممارسة الطقوس الدينية . وكذلك بيانات قطعة الارض المشتراه وذلك للاحتفاظ بها فى سجلات البطريركية .

ST. MARY COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA MIDDLESEX COUNTY N.J.

عن لجنة الكنيسة

فى ٢٦ أمشير ١٦٩٣
(٥ مارس ١٩٧٧)

Appendix F – Translation of Papal Letter 3 on March 5, 1977

List of the names of the Board for St. Mary's Church in Middlesex County, New Jersey.

A board for the church has been formed and the first meeting for the church board meeting with the name of the members in alphabetical order was put together on Friday September 10, 1976.

Mr. Hafez Yousseff (Trustee Treasurer)

Dr. Raafat Morcos (Member)

Dr. Ragy Boshra Hanna (Member)

Mr. Sami George Zaki (Secretary)

Dr. Fayez Ibrahim (Assistant Treasurer)

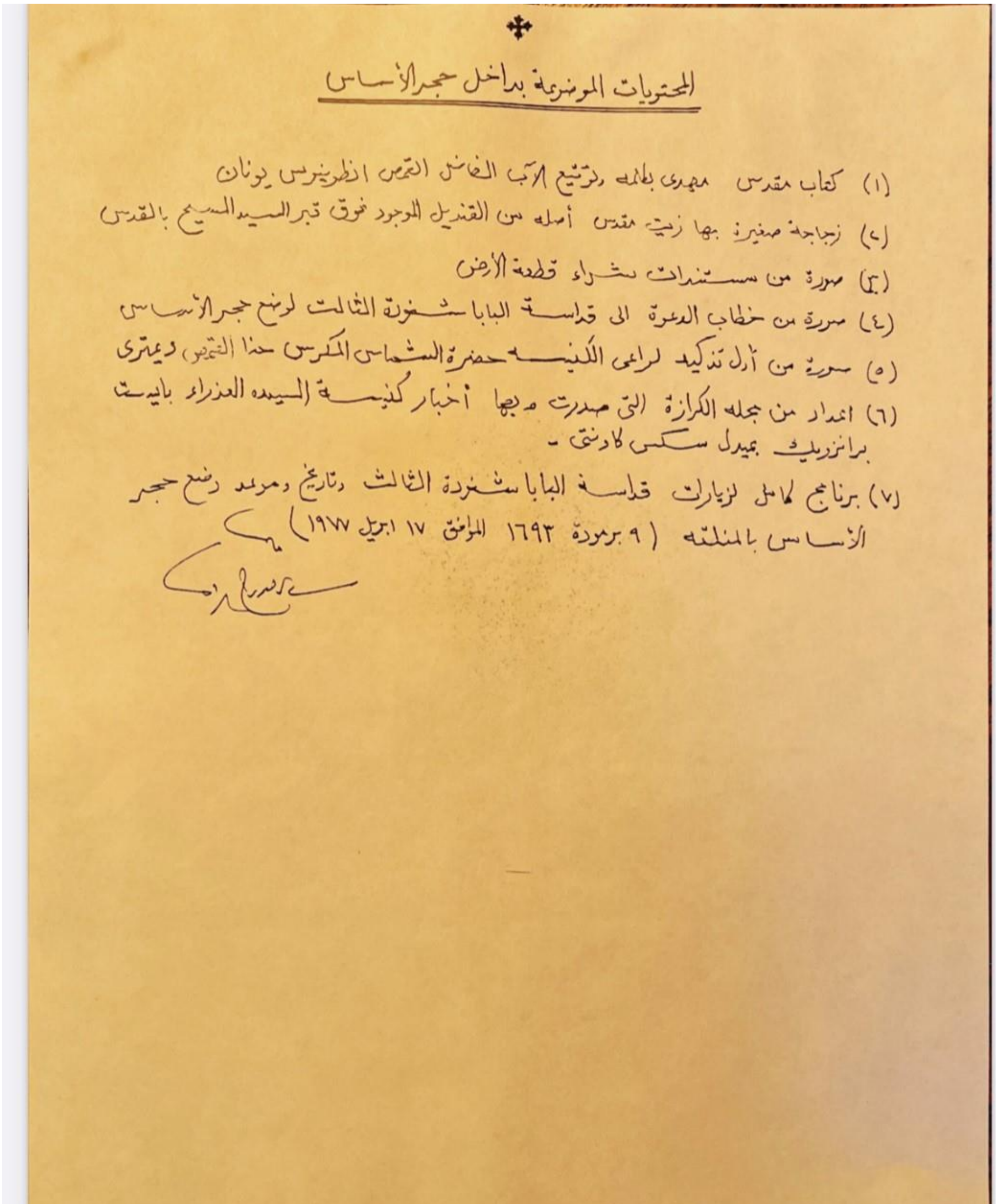
Mr. Louis Shenouda (Member)

Dr. Mourad Shaker Henin (Member)

The members have all agreed to not have a president for the current time for the purpose of involving all of the congregation in serving the church. Furthermore, the bylaws of the church declared that it is subject to the seat of Alexandria, which is led by His holiness the Pope of Alexandria and the See of St. Mark. The secretary was given the right to sign with either the treasurer or deputy treasurer only.

And attached are photos of all of the church documents and officially produced permits by the State of New Jersey to officiate and practice religious rituals. As well as, documents pertaining to the purchased lot of land to be kept for the record of the Patriarchate.

Appendix G – List of Items Placed in the Cornerstone in 1977



✠

المحتويات الموضوعة بداخل حجر الأساس

(١) كتاب مقدس مجهزى بطلبه وترتيب الأب الفاضل القمص اثطونيوس يونان

(٢) زجاجة صغيرة بها زيت مقدس أصله من القنديل الموجود فوق قبر السيد المسيح بالقدس

(٣) صورة من مستندات شراء قطعة الأرض

(٤) صورة من خطاب الدعوة الى قداسة البابا شنودة الثالث لوضع حجر الأساس

(٥) صورة من أول تذكيد لراعى الكنيسة حضرة الشماس المكرس حنا (القمص) ديمترى

(٦) اعداد من مجله الكرازة التى صدرت وبها أخبار كنيسة السيده العذراء بايست برانزويك بميدل سكس كاونتى -

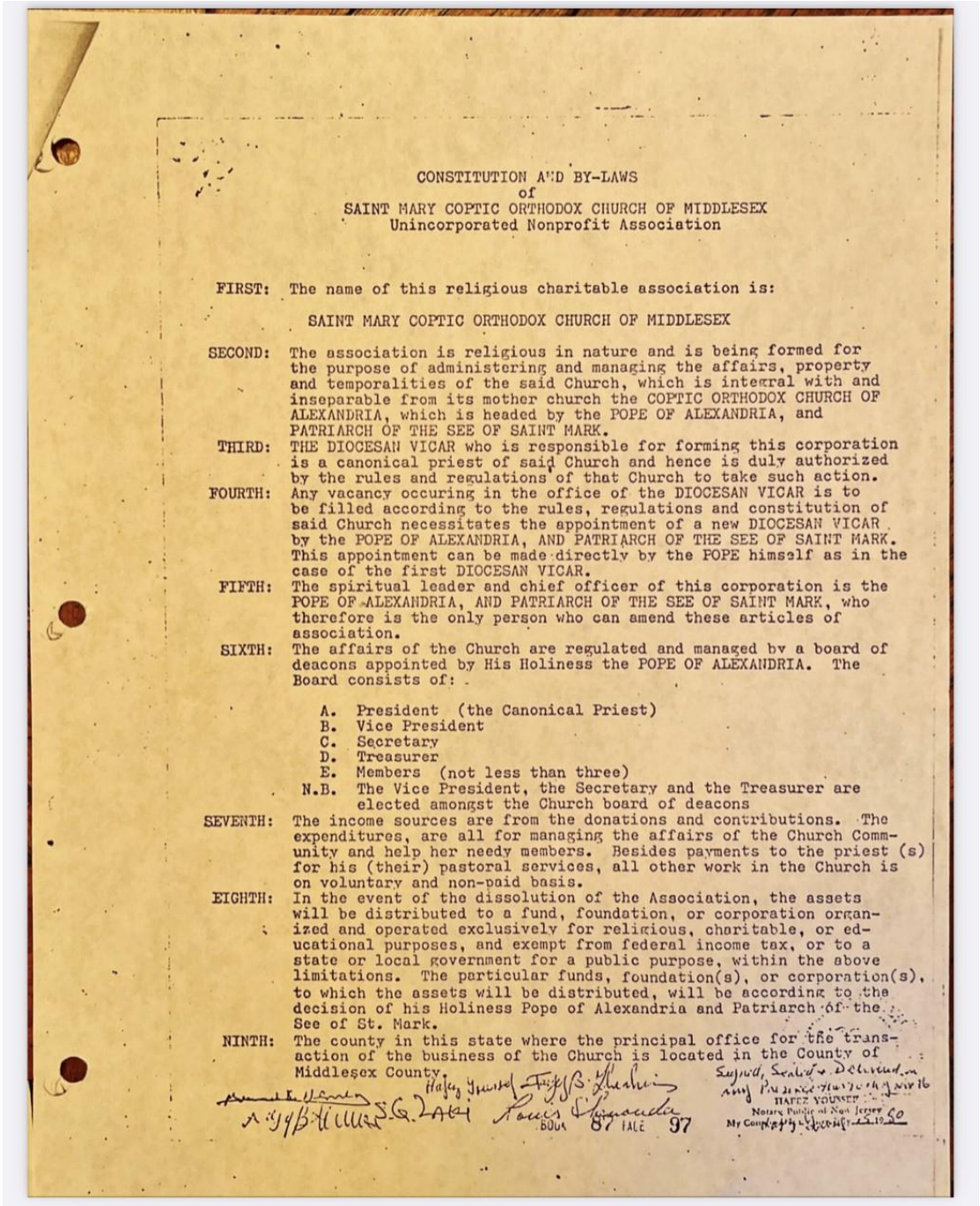
(٧) برنامج كامل لزيارات قداسة البابا شنودة الثالث وتاريخ وموعد وضع حجر الأساس بالمنطقه (٩ برمودة ١٦٩٣ الموافق ١٧ ابريل ١٩٧٧)

Appendix H – Translation of Cornerstone Items

The Contents Placed in the Cornerstone

1) A Holy Bible gifted and autographed by Father Antonious Younan
2) A small bottle containing holy oil from the oil lantern above the tomb of Jesus Christ in the Holy Sepulcher
3) A copy of the documents pertaining to the lot of land
4) A copy of the invitation letter sent to His holiness Pope Shenouda III for laying the cornerstone
5) A copy of the first letter recommending the consecrated Deacon Hana Hegumen Demetri to be ordained as the potential shepherd of the church
6) Copies of al-Kiraza magazines containing stories of St. Mary's Church in East Brunswick Middlesex County.
7) The entire itinerary for the visit of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III with the date and time for laying the cornerstone in the vicinity. (9^{th} of Baramoda 1693 which fell on April 17, 1977)

Appendix I – St. Mary's Bylaws in 1977



CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS
of
SAINT MARY COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF MIDDLESEX
Unincorporated Nonprofit Association

FIRST: The name of this religious charitable association is:

SAINT MARY COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF MIDDLESEX

SECOND: The association is religious in nature and is being formed for the purpose of administering and managing the affairs, property and temporalities of the said Church, which is integral with and inseparable from its mother church the COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA, which is headed by the POPE OF ALEXANDRIA, and PATRIARCH OF THE SEE OF SAINT MARK.

THIRD: THE DIOCESAN VICAR who is responsible for forming this corporation is a canonical priest of said Church and hence is duly authorized by the rules and regulations of that Church to take such action.

FOURTH: Any vacancy occuring in the office of the DIOCESAN VICAR is to be filled according to the rules, regulations and constitution of said Church necessitates the appointment of a new DIOCESAN VICAR by the POPE OF ALEXANDRIA, AND PATRIARCH OF THE SEE OF SAINT MARK. This appointment can be made directly by the POPE himself as in the case of the first DIOCESAN VICAR.

FIFTH: The spiritual leader and chief officer of this corporation is the POPE OF ALEXANDRIA, AND PATRIARCH OF THE SEE OF SAINT MARK, who therefore is the only person who can amend these articles of association.

SIXTH: The affairs of the Church are regulated and managed by a board of deacons appointed by His Holiness the POPE OF ALEXANDRIA. The Board consists of:

A. President (the Canonical Priest)
B. Vice President
C. Secretary
D. Treasurer
E. Members (not less than three)

N.B. The Vice President, the Secretary and the Treasurer are elected amongst the Church board of deacons

SEVENTH: The income sources are from the donations and contributions. The expenditures, are all for managing the affairs of the Church Community and help her needy members. Besides payments to the priest (s) for his (their) pastoral services, all other work in the Church is on voluntary and non-paid basis.

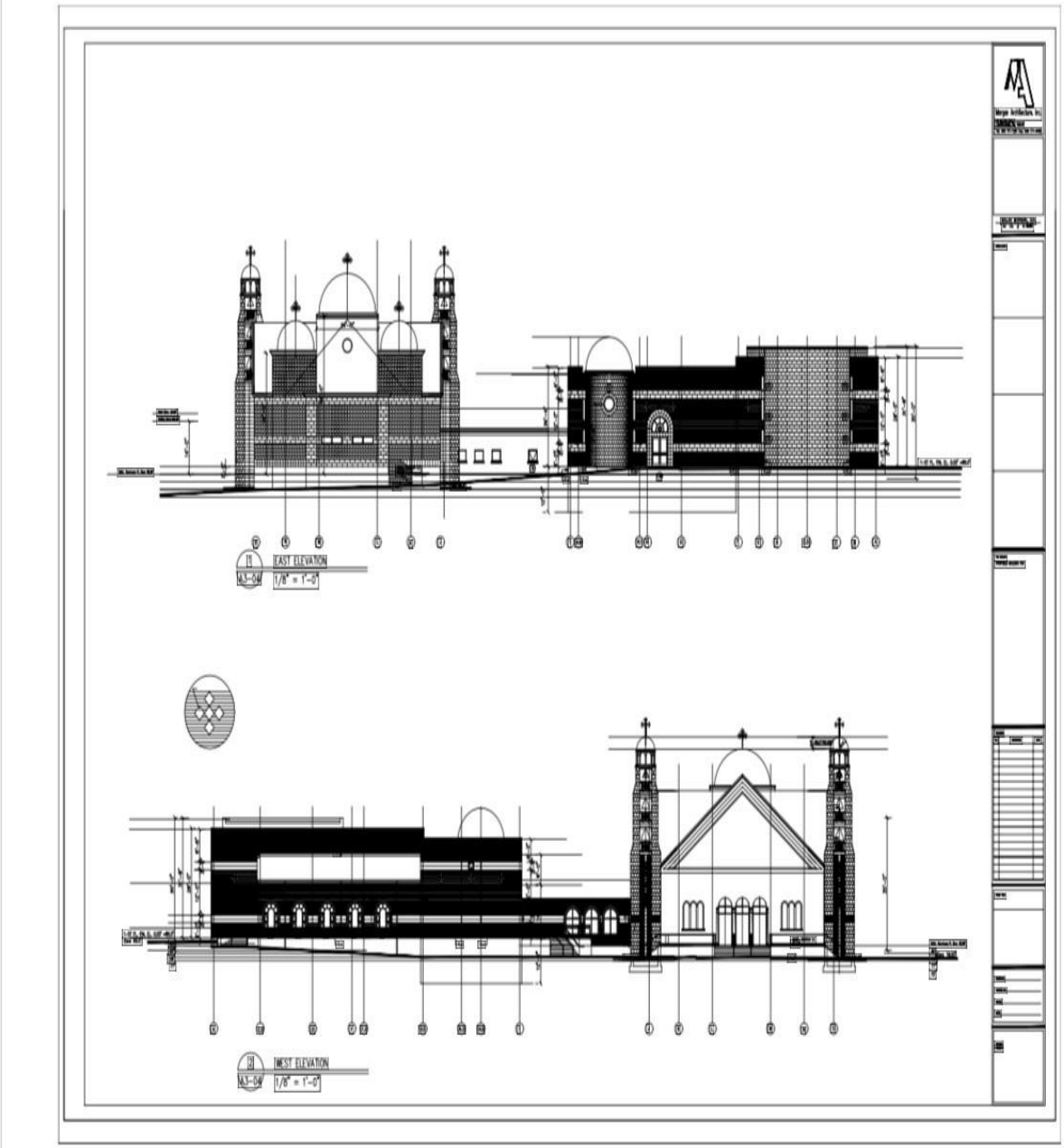
EIGHTH: In the event of the dissolution of the Association, the assets will be distributed to a fund, foundation, or corporation organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, or educational purposes, and exempt from federal income tax, or to a state or local government for a public purpose, within the above limitations. The particular funds, foundation(s), or corporation(s), to which the assets will be distributed, will be according to the decision of his Holiness Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.

NINTH: The county in this state where the principal office for the transaction of the business of the Church is located in the County of Middlesex County.

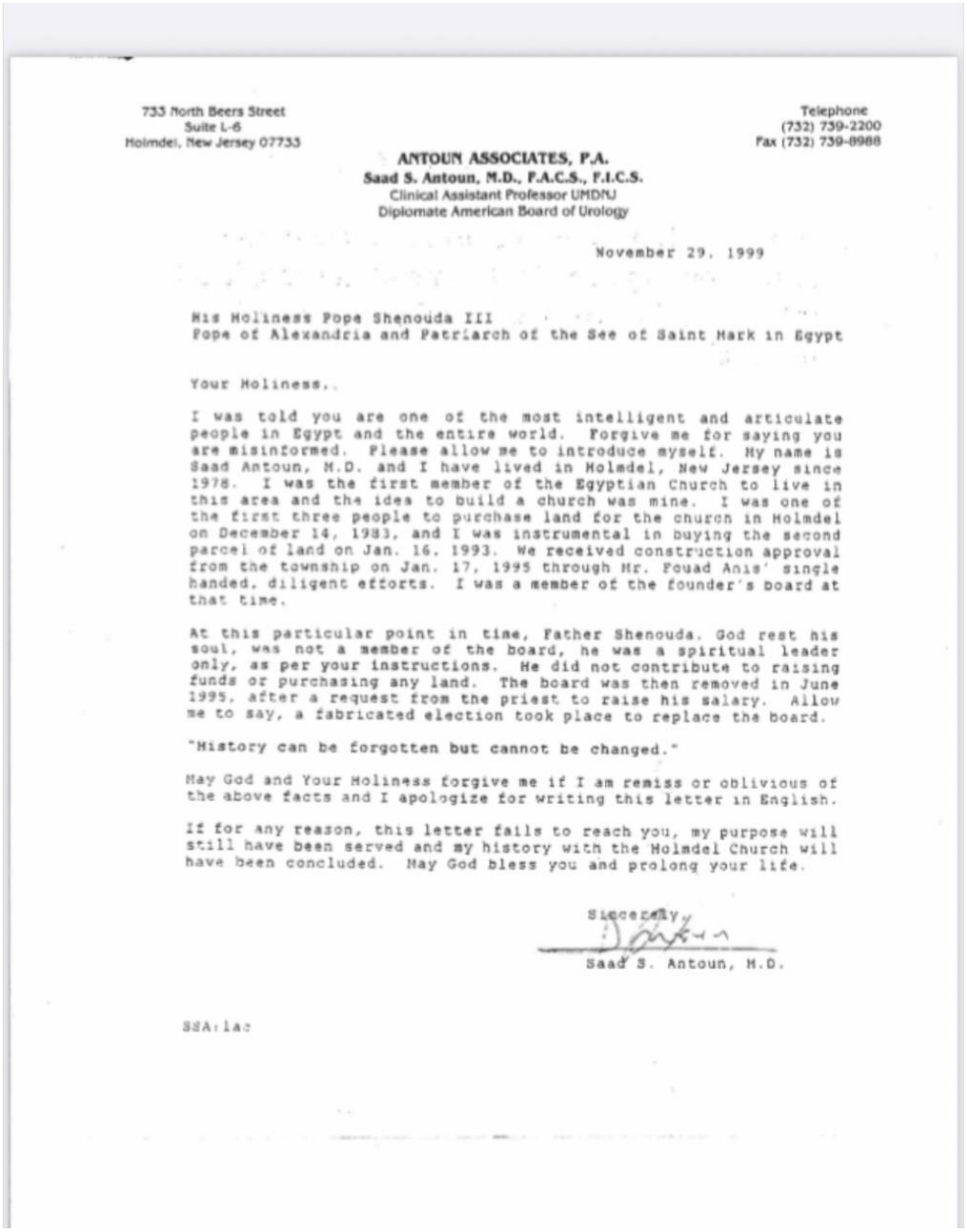
Signed, Sealed & Delivered in the Presence of
HAFEZ YOUSSEF
Notary Public of New Jersey
My Commission Expires

BOOK 87 PAGE 97

Appendix J – Final Church Extension Blueprint in 1996



Appendix K – Letter from Saad Antoun to Pope Shenouda in 1999



733 North Beers Street
Suite L-6
Holmdel, New Jersey 07733

Telephone
(732) 739-2200
Fax (732) 739-0988

ANTOUN ASSOCIATES, P.A.
Saad S. Antoun, M.D., F.A.C.S., F.I.C.S.
Clinical Assistant Professor UMDNJ
Diplomate American Board of Urology

November 29, 1999

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III
Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark in Egypt

Your Holiness,.

I was told you are one of the most intelligent and articulate people in Egypt and the entire world. Forgive me for saying you are misinformed. Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Saad Antoun, M.D. and I have lived in Holmdel, New Jersey since 1978. I was the first member of the Egyptian Church to live in this area and the idea to build a church was mine. I was one of the first three people to purchase land for the church in Holmdel on December 14, 1983, and I was instrumental in buying the second parcel of land on Jan. 16, 1993. We received construction approval from the township on Jan. 17, 1995 through Mr. Fouad Anis' single handed, diligent efforts. I was a member of the founder's board at that time.

At this particular point in time, Father Shenouda, God rest his soul, was not a member of the board, he was a spiritual leader only, as per your instructions. He did not contribute to raising funds or purchasing any land. The board was then removed in June 1995, after a request from the priest to raise his salary. Allow me to say, a fabricated election took place to replace the board.

"History can be forgotten but cannot be changed."

May God and Your Holiness forgive me if I am remiss or oblivious of the above facts and I apologize for writing this letter in English.

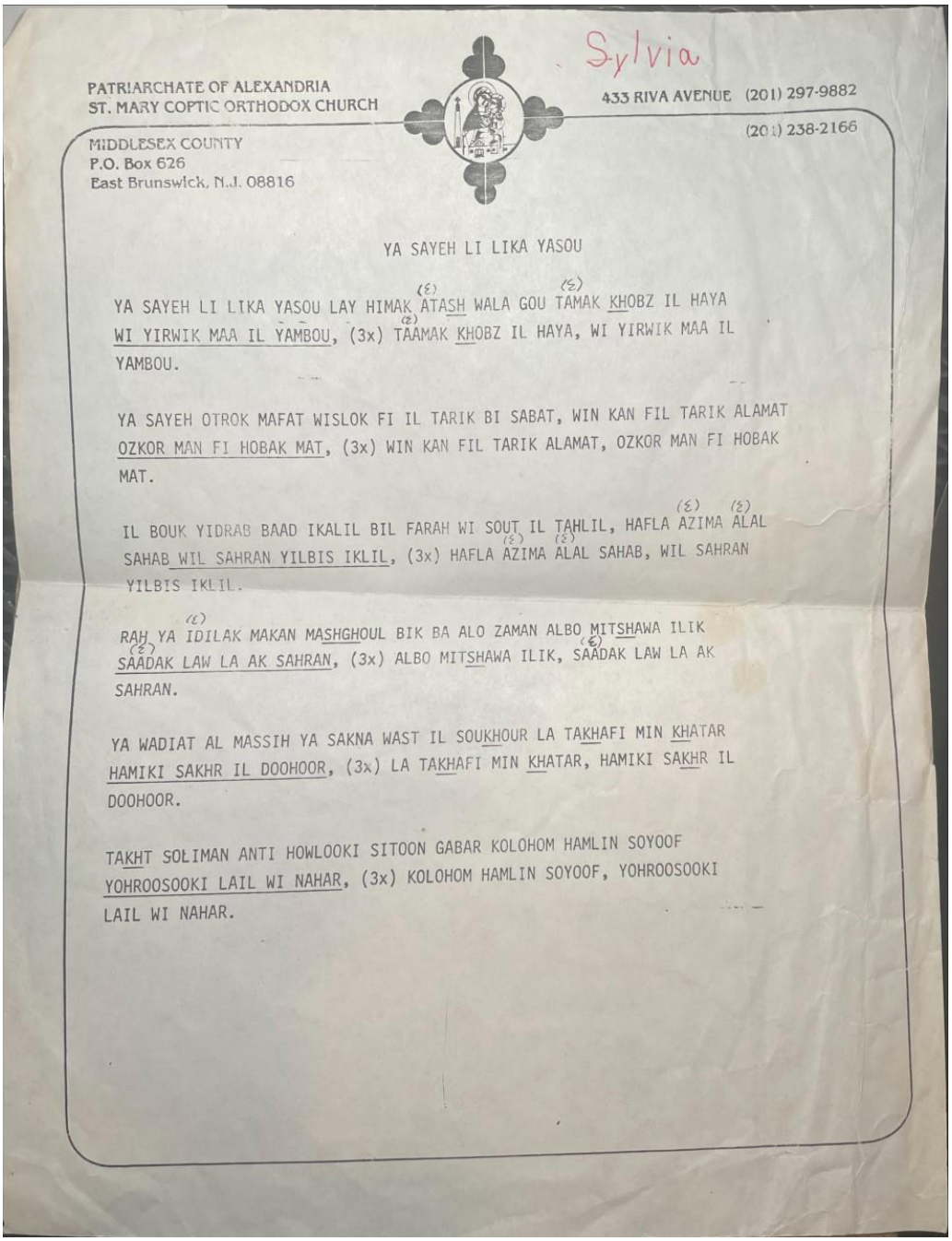
If for any reason, this letter fails to reach you, my purpose will still have been served and my history with the Holmdel Church will have been concluded. May God bless you and prolong your life.

Sincerely,

Saad S. Antoun, M.D.

SSA:lac

Appendix L – Example of Transliterated Hymn written in Arabic with English Characters



Sylvia

PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA
ST. MARY COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

433 RIVA AVENUE (201) 297-9882
(201) 238-2166

MIDDLESEX COUNTY
P.O. Box 626
East Brunswick, N.J. 08816

YA SAYEH LI LIKA YASOU

YA SAYEH LI LIKA YASOU LAY HIMAK (ع) ATASH WALA GOU (ع) TAMAK KHOBZ IL HAYA WI YIRWIK MAA IL YAMBOU, (3x) (ع) TAAMAK KHOBZ IL HAYA, WI YIRWIK MAA IL YAMBOU.

YA SAYEH OTROK MAFAT WISLOK FI IL TARIK BI SABAT, WIN KAN FIL TARIK ALAMAT OZKOR MAN FI HOBAK MAT, (3x) WIN KAN FIL TARIK ALAMAT, OZKOR MAN FI HOBAK MAT.

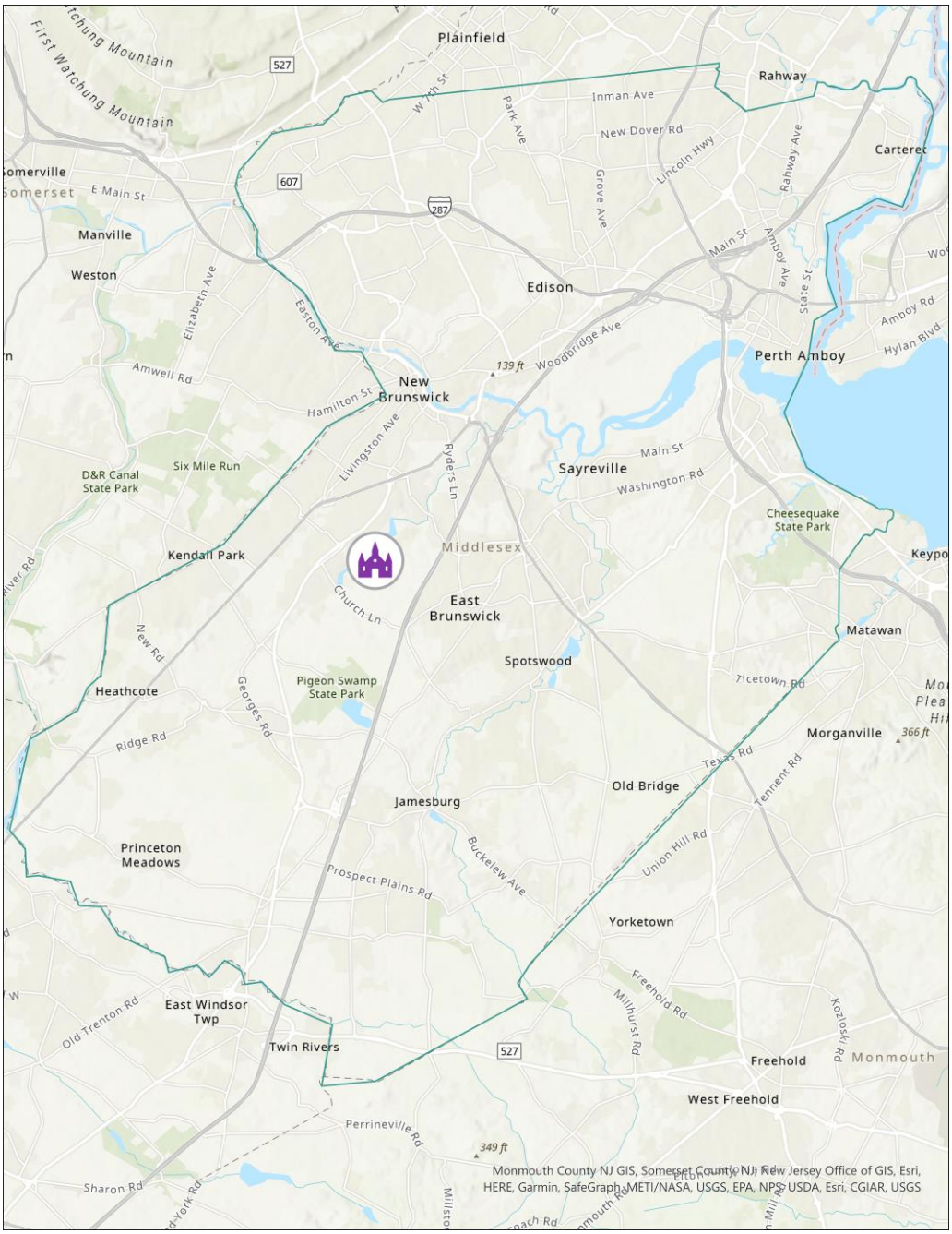
IL BOUK YIDRAB BAAD IKALIL BIL FARAH WI SOUT IL TAHLIL, HAFLA (ع) AZIMA (ع) ALAL SAHAB WIL SAHRAN YILBIS IKLIL, (3x) HAFLA (ع) AZIMA (ع) ALAL SAHAB, WIL SAHRAN YILBIS IKLIL.

RAH YA (ا) IDILAK MAKAN MASHGHOUL BIK BA ALO ZAMAN ALBO MITSHAWA ILIK (ع) SAADAK LAW LA AK SAHRAN, (3x) ALBO MITSHAWA ILIK, (ع) SAADAK LAW LA AK SAHRAN.

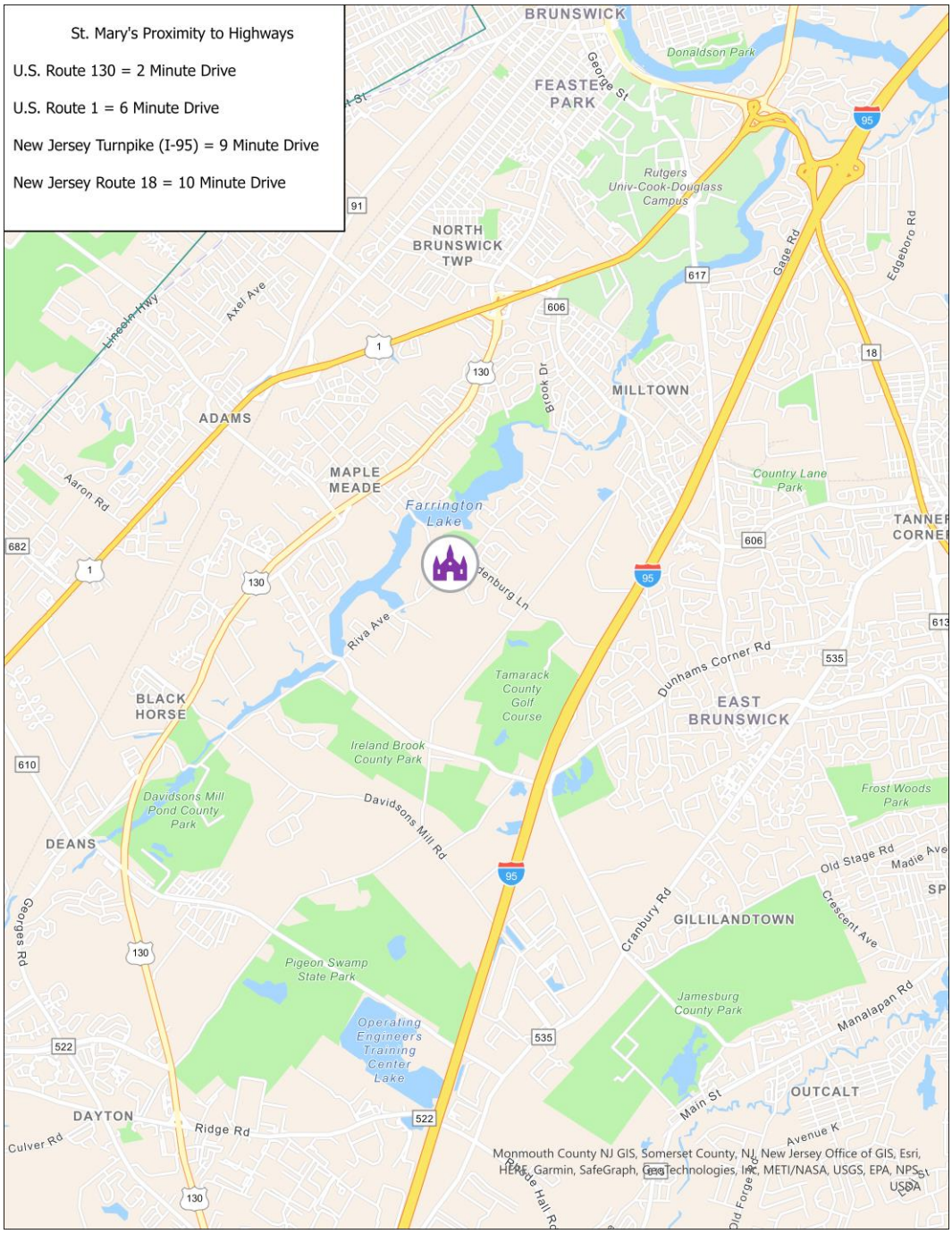
YA WADIAT AL MASSIH YA SAKNA WAST IL SOUKHOUR LA TAKHAFI MIN KHATAR HAMIKI SAKHR IL DOOHOOR, (3x) LA TAKHAFI MIN KHATAR, HAMIKI SAKHR IL DOOHOOR.

TAKHT SOLIMAN ANTI HOWLOOKI SITOON GABAR KOLOHOM HAMLIN SOYOOF YOHROOSOOKI LAIL WI NAHAR, (3x) KOLOHOM HAMLIN SOYOOF, YOHROOSOOKI LAIL WI NAHAR.

Appendix M – Map of Middlesex County and St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church



Appendix N – Map of St. Mary's Proximity to Highways



Appendix O – Map of Coptic Churches in Central New Jersey from 1982-2011