



Greek Cypriots in Landmark Easter Mass in Turkish-Held North

Famagusta mayor-in-exile Alexis Galanos said Friday's landmark service at Saint George Exorinos church will send a message of reconciliation on one of the most important dates in the Greek Orthodox calendar.

It will be the Famagusta church's first Easter service for almost 60 years, said Galanos who joined forces with Turkish Cypriot mayor Oktay Kayalp to organize the mass expected to draw about 4,000 worshipers.

"This event is bigger than any of us," Galanos told reporters on Wednesday. "A message of reconciliation will be given through this service."

Because of intercommunal troubles before the island gained independence from Britain in 1960, religious services at St George Exorinos stopped 58 years ago.

The island has been divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded and seized its northern third in response to an Athens-engineered coup in Nicosia aimed at uniting Cyprus with Greece.

Due to an improved climate of trust, the church in Famagusta has hosted Greek Orthodox morning mass twice since last December.

Before the invasion, the medieval city of Famagusta was the Mediterranean island's major port and premier tourist destination, famed for hosting Hollywood stars such as Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

Relaunching peace talks on February 11 after a nearly two-year hiatus, Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders vowed to seek an end to the four-decade division "as soon as possible."

The two leaders met for a second time earlier this month to "scan over" the positions of each side before entering a more detailed phase.

Washington has said it wants to see "historic progress" in the resumed U.N.-brokered peace negotiations.