

Religious freedom is synod's signature issue

John L. Allen Jr. | Oct. 11, 2010



Worshippers light candles after attending a weekly Mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Baghdad, Iraq, Oct. 3. The Vatican is hosting a Synod of Bishops for the Middle East Oct. 10-24, turning the spotlight on Christian communities in the region. (CNS/ Reuters)

ROME -- It's only day one of the Oct. 10-24 Synod of Bishops for the Middle East, but already its signature issue has come into focus: Religious freedom, seen as the cornerstone of a healthy democratic society, and as a universal cause rather than special pleading for the region's embattled Christian minority.

Freedom of conscience is "not so much a right to be claimed for Christians," said Patriarch Antonios Naguib of the Egyptian Coptic church this morning. Instead, he said, it's a "universal right, which Christians and Muslims defend together for the common good."

"We must emerge from a logic in defence of the rights of Christians only, and engage in the defence of the rights of all," Naguib said.

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John Allen is in Rome for the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East. Check [NCR Today](#) [2] throughout the day for more coverage. Here are the stories Allen has filed already:

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