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the Maronite **Voice**



Feast of the Epiphany — 6 January



the Maronite Voice

BISHOP'S MESSAGE

4 For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission

by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan

6 Bishops Schedules

8 Praises of John the Baptizer

by Rev. David A. Fisher

WORKER IN THE VINEYARD

12 Father Roby: "Grow Close to God and Be Nice When You Can"

by Brandon Shulleeta

LIVING CHURCH

14 St. Stephen in Charlotte: A Mission with Prayers and Hope Directed at Growth

by Anna Salloum

SAINTS BE PRAISED

16 Saints in the Maronite Calendar

by Rev. Claude Franklin

COVER: The Baptism of Jesus
by John the Baptizer
(Ethiopian Icon)

18 Ordinations

22 60th Anniversary of Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary

by Chorbishop Seely Beggiani

24 MYA

26 What Can Icons Teach Us?

by Father Anthony J. Salim

28 Parish News

35 MYO National Youth Day

GOING DEEPER INTO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE...

38 Natural Family Planning

by Jessica and John Awad

39 From the Editor

THE MARONITE VOICE

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For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission

Dear Friends,

Pope Francis has opened the preliminary consultation and discussion on a Synod to be held in 2023 to deal with how the Church perceives and

understands her organization and governance. You hear the word “synodality” to express these themes. The synod themes are: *communion, participation and mission.*

As an Eastern Church, the idea and the word *synod* are not foreign to us. Our own Maronite Law tells us: “The Synod of Bishop, presided over by the patriarch, constitutes the highest authority in the Maronite Church...” As we know, this structure facilitates a broader range of consultation and decision-making. It is how we live out our life in the Church. The Holy Father would like something similar for the Universal Church...living as a synodal Church.

In the previous issue of *The Maronite Voice*, Bishop Gregory Mansour explained the meaning and process of the Synod. Now, I would like to share some thoughts about the themes of the Synod.

“*Communion*” implies a commitment to unity in the life of the Church. In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus prays “...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn. 17:21). Communion is an inward movement that aims to unite the heart, mind, and will with the Lord. The word itself is rooted in the idea of coming together as one. An analogy might be of a musical choir or chorus that comes together to create harmony and thus



beauty. The Eucharist is the most fundamental way in which we realize communion — union with the Lord and with our brothers and sisters, as diverse people united in the same faith.

Pope Francis also realizes that *participation*, the second theme, is essential for our Church to be healthy. It is participation in the life and mission of the Church. Our Baptism calls us to be actively engaged in the Church. We are not merely bystanders who never fully commit ourselves to doing the work of the Lord. It also asks us to reach out to all of those in our community, even those on the peripheries. When reaching out to those in the community, we are asked to listen and share our thoughts. By listening, we ensure that we are engaging everyone in participation and encouraging feedback.

Participation is vital; the Church needs everyone with our various talents. Thus, our communities will be enriched by the input and work of every member who shares the responsibility and alleviates the load of obligations. The ideal participation ties the two movements: communion which is the inward movement that nourishes our mind, heart, soul in the sacramental life of the Church and mission which is the outward movement that translates through spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Our *mission*, the third theme of the Synod, is the same that was entrusted by Christ himself when he told his Apostles “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Mat 28:19). That is our basic mission. The Church exists for that objective. It is an outward movement. We also speak of that mission as evangelization — bringing the

Gospel, the Good News, of salvation to the world. That is our mission as well. This mission should flow in a natural way from our communion and participation in the life of Christ through the Holy Church. Reach out to those in the peripheries, whether they are those who have fallen away or those who have not heard the Good News. When reaching out to others, we are fulfilling our mission as Catholics. In the Sedro of the evening prayer of Thursday (Prayer of the Faithful Volume I), we ask the Lord: “We beg you to guard your flock day and night and gather us who are scattered...Exalt your Church and lead her to those who are strangers, those who remain far from your mysteries, and those who do not believe in you.”

Moreover, at the conclusion of our Baptism ritual, the priest prays:

“Grant, O Lord, that after being purified with the waters of your covenant, [he or she] may be a member of a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people, a blessed community.”

(MYSTERIES OF INITIATION, 1987)

This means that as full members of the Body of Christ, His Church, we have the duty and the privilege to live in communion, to participate in the manner appropriate to our calling and to advance the mission. We shall never be satisfied with the status quo. We need to be better, to do better. As we work to mitigate our physical conditions in this world, let us strive to become better Christians, better sons and daughters of God. We are all missionaries! ■

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan

Schedule **BISHOP A. ELIAS ZAIDAN**

- 22 JANUARY** Los Angeles, CA | Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral | Dedication of St. Sharbel Shrine
- 29 JANUARY** Orange, CA | St. John Maron Church | Presbyteral Ordination of Deacon Wadih Kaldawi
- 29 JANUARY** Los Angeles, CA | NAM Banquet Honoring Dr. Elias Ayoub
- 31 JAN-4 FEB** Los Angeles, CA | Cardinal Manning House of Prayer | Retreat for the Syriac Catholic Priests
- 7-9 FEBRUARY** Dallas, TX | 28th National Bioethics Workshop for Bishops
- 13 FEBRUARY** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | Feast of St. Maron Celebration
- 18-19 FEBRUARY** Stockton, CA | St. Sharbel Mission
- 20 FEBRUARY** Carmichael, CA | Our Lady of the Rosary Church
- 26 FEBRUARY** Wichita, KS | Pastoral Visit to the Maronite Community
- 27 FEBRUARY** Tulsa, OK | St. Therese Church | Pastoral Visit
- 14 MARCH** Washington, DC | USCCB | Administrative Committee on Priorities Meeting
- 15-16 MARCH** Washington, DC | USCCB | Administrative Committee Meeting
- 18-19 MARCH** Phoenix, AZ | St. Joseph Church | Pastoral Visit
- 19 MARCH** Feast of St. Joseph
- 21-25 MARCH** Phoenix, AZ | Annual Eparchial Clergy Retreat
- 25-27 MARCH** Phoenix, AZ | Eparchial Married Men Formation Retreat



**Eternal rest grant to
them, O Lord.**



MONSIGNOR MAROUN ASMAR

Bishop Gregory Mansour has received the sad news of the passing of Monsignor Maroun Asmar. He was retired, living in the care of the Sisters of the Cross in their facility in Brumanna, Lebanon. The funeral service was presided over by Bishop Maroun Ammar in Jezzine, Lebanon, Monsignor Asmar's hometown.

Monsignor Asmar was preceded in death by his wife, Genevieve, and his son, Paul, and is survived by his daughter, Mary, and son, Peter.

Condolences can be sent to Mary Asmar Smith at her home at 3202 Chesterwood Way, Somerset, NJ 08873. A fund was established by the Eparchy of Saint Maron at the passing of Paul Asmar to serve the special needs adults in Lebanon. Any donations can be sent to the Chancery in memory of Monsignor and Paul.

On behalf of the clergy, religious and laity of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, we extend to Mary, Peter, their children and the family and friends of Monsignor Asmar heartfelt condolences and prayers.

May God grant his servant of the altar eternal rest in his kingdom, and grant consolation and peace to his family.

Schedule BISHOP GREGORY J. MANSOUR

- 20-21 JANUARY** Washington, DC | Vigil Mass and March for Life
- 22-23 JANUARY** Washington, DC | Our Lady of Lebanon Church | Seminary and Parish Visit
- 29-30 JANUARY** Brockton, MA | St. Theresa Church | Pastoral Visit
- 6 FEBRUARY** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Feast of St. Maron
- 12-13 FEBRUARY** Jacksonville, FL | St. Maron Church | Feast of St. Maron
- 19-20 FEBRUARY** Glen Allen, VA | St. Anthony Church | Pastoral Visit
- 26-27 FEBRUARY** Allentown, PA | Pastoral Visit
- 28 FEBRUARY** Somerset, NJ | St. Sharbel Church | Ash Monday
- 5-6 MARCH** Tampa, FL | Sts. Peter & Paul Mission | Pastoral Visit
- 7-11 MARCH** Lutz, FL | Bethany Retreat Center | Annual Eparchial Clergy Retreat
- 13 MARCH** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
- 14 MARCH** Washington, DC | Eparchial Review Board Meeting
- 19-20 MARCH** Lawrence, MA | St. Anthony Church | Diaconal Ordination of Michael Charchaflian
- 25-27 MARCH** Boston, MA | Our Lady of Cedars Church | MYA Retreat
- 29-31 MARCH** St. Louis, MO | Pastoral Center | Eastern Catholic Bishops Meeting

MONSIGNOR WILLIAM BONCZEWSKI

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan announced the passing into Eternal Life of Reverend Monsignor William Bonczewski. Monsignor Bill passed away on Wednesday, 22 December, 2021, at the hospital in Youngstown, Ohio. He is survived by his brother Peter and wife Mary Bonczewski and his sister Marie and husband Jim Calko, and his nephews and nieces.

Monsignor Bill was a devoted priest for over 45 years. He served our Eparchy and parishes with unequalled dedication. His gentle spirit, warm smile, love for everyone he met, and constant prayer were a source of inspiration to all who knew him. In his passing, we gained an intercessor in heaven. May God send us vocations to the Holy Priesthood with similar zeal and devotion.

A Divine Liturgy for the repose of his soul was celebrated at the chapel of the Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in North Jackson, OH, on 29 December, followed by a Divine Liturgy at Saint Anthony/Saint George Church, Wilkes-Barre, PA, on 30 December.

ROBERT “DANO” HOWARD

Bishop Gregory J. Mansour received the sad news of the passing of Robert “Dano” Howard, the father of Subdeacon Andrew Howard. Dano was born in Trooper, Kentucky, the son of John and Anna (Shaheen) Howard. He and his wife, Phyllis M. Howard (Stackpole), recently celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary. They had eight children together, Anthony, Jason, Ann Howard Burke, Joachim, Margaret Howard, Subdeacon Andrew Howard, Katie Howard, and Amanda Howard, who passed away in 1977. They have 13 grandchildren and nine great grandchildren. He is survived by his wife, Phyllis.

A Liturgy of Christian Burial was celebrated 2 December 2021 at Saint George Maronite Catholic Church, Dover, NH. Our heartfelt condolences to Subdeacon Andrew, his mother and family.

On behalf of the clergy, religious and laity of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, Bishop Gregory offers to Subdeacon Andrew and his family, heartfelt condolences and prayerful support. May his beloved father rest in God's peace.




Praises of John the Baptizer

by Rev. David A. Fisher

But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John.” Luke 1:13



John the Forerunner

aint John the Baptizer, often called the Forerunner in Eastern Christianity, was born in the Roman-controlled Herodian Kingdom of Judea during the last century before Christ.

The birth of John the Baptist was miraculous and echoes the Old Testament birth of Isaac, who was born of elderly parents as were Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah named the child John, meaning *graced by God*. This was disturbing to the gathered people, who thought he would be named after his father, or as was the custom among the Palestinian Jews of the time, after his grandfather. Naming him John reveals that he has been singled out, given a particular grace for his future ministry.

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb... LUKE 1:39-41

Luke tells us that when the Mother of Jesus greeted Elizabeth, the child leapt in her womb. A Syriac Father of the Church, Jacob of Serugh, suggests that when John leaps in Elizabeth's womb, he is being baptized by Jesus, who is in the womb of Mary.

John and Jesus

The connection between Jesus and John is crucial to the gospel proclamation that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures and the promises made by God to Israel and to all humanity.

And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God

by which the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace." LUKE 1:76-79

According to human genealogy they are cousins, but in the perspective of salvation history, John and Jesus unite biblical revelation (Old and New) into one Sacred Scripture. John is the last of the prophets of old, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Elijah.

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" JOHN 1:23

Yet John knows his time, the time of the prophets of old, is coming to an end:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.'" And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." JOHN 1:29-35

John sees Jesus not as his cousin, but as one he did not recognize until it was revealed to him that he is the Son of God. In doing so John is moving from an earthly relationship with Jesus as his cousin, to a profession of faith that he is the eternal Son of God; for the Holy Spirit allows him and from then on all people to profess faith in the Christ of God.

“Praises of John the Baptizer”

Continued from page 9

From the Age of Prophetic Revelation to Age of the Spirit

The ministry of John—like that of all the prophets—was only for a time, to prepare the way for the One who is eternal, who was before the prophets and who ushers in the age of the Holy Spirit. This movement from the Age of Prophetic Revelation to the Age of the Holy Spirit, is held together by the one eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.” (JOHN 5:46) This is why John is the Forerunner, the voice crying out in the wilderness, preparing those who will listen. Faith has replaced the Law.

The Age of Martyrdom

John died a martyr sometime between 28 and 36 AD, beheaded in the Fortress of Machaerus, Herod’s fortified hilltop palace (see image right).

Now Herod had arrested John, bound [him], and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for John had said to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” Although he wanted to kill him, he feared the people, for they regarded him as a prophet. But at a birthday celebration for Herod, the daughter of Herodias performed a dance before the guests and delighted Herod so much that he swore to give her whatever she might ask for. Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests who were present, he ordered that it be given, and he had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought

in on a platter and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. His disciples came and took away the corpse and buried him; and they went and told Jesus. MATTHEW 14: 3-12



At the end of his ministry, John will in a real sense begin the Age of Martyrdom, which will flourish in the first centuries of the Church. John makes the ultimate witness to his cousin and to his Lord, by the shedding of his blood, in anticipation of the Cross of Christ, and the Church of Martyrs that will transform the world.

While many places claim to have the relics of Saint John the Baptizer, the most reliable sources point towards Damascus, Syria, at the Umayyad Mosque formerly the Metropolitan Cathedral Church of Damascus.

Saint John the Baptizer is worthy of our praise. ■

Rev. David A. Fisher, is a priest of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and Professor of Eastern Christian Thought, St. Charles Seminary, Philadelphia, PA

Hosted by:
St Maron
Minneapolis 
July 13-17, 2021



57th National Maronite Convention
Sponsored by the National Apostolate of Maronites

NAM 57th Annual Maronite Convention will be held in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul. Save the dates July 13-17, 2022, for our FAITH * FAMILY * HERITAGE gathering. Saint Maron Church of Minneapolis will be hosting the convention at the Radisson Blu, Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota.

Enjoy spiritual enrichment, delicious meals, unsurpassed social activities for all ages, and interesting and informative workshops. Days will be spent immersing in our faith, shopping of unmatched delight within steps of the hotel, or touring sites with planned excursions. You will even be offered to cruise in the Land of 10,000 Lakes!

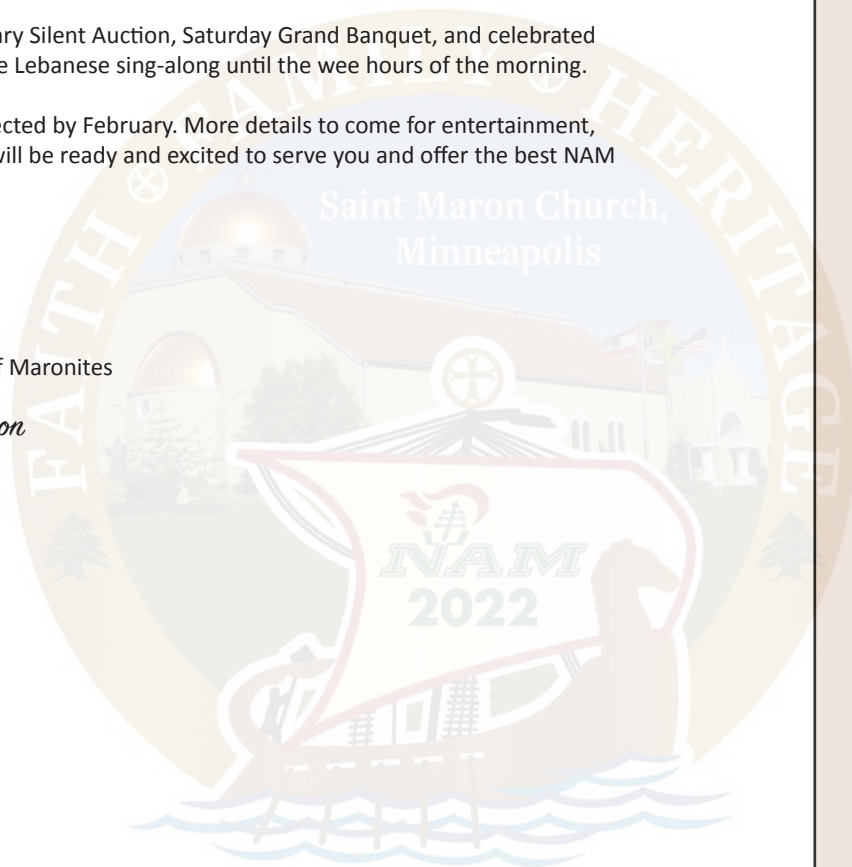
Evenings, we will treat you to the legendary Silent Auction, Saturday Grand Banquet, and celebrated entertainment. And, not to be missed, the Lebanese sing-along until the wee hours of the morning.

Complete registration information is expected by February. More details to come for entertainment, workshops, meals, and tours. In July we will be ready and excited to serve you and offer the best NAM Convention ever!

Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun
Pastor, St. Maron Church

Rose Sahyoun
Executive Director, National Apostolate of Maronites

Elena Elkhoury and Lisa Nasser Gleason
NAM Convention Chairpersons



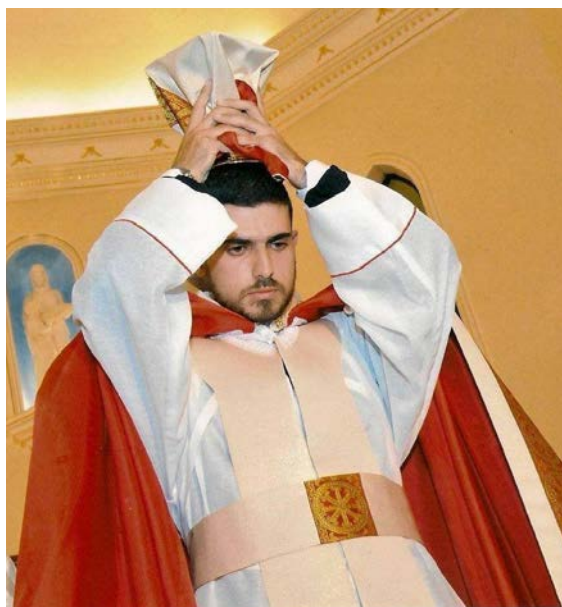
Father Roby: “Grow Closer to God and Be Nice When You Can” *by Brandon Shulleeta*

Father Roby Zibara believes in short homilies — about seven to eight minutes. He likes to keep the message simple, and he tries not to repeat himself.

But Father Roby admits there is a certain phrase he repeats often: that we’re all on “a journey of faith.” He says it’s important for people to recognize life as a journey of faith—one in which we grow as people and grow closer to God. “Each one of us has a journey. ... It’s not easy. We have ups and downs, but we’re moving,” Zibara said. “Whatever we do in our journey, we have someone guiding us if we put our lives in His hands, if we believe in Him. Even if it’s dark sometimes, the tunnel will end one day. At the end, we have the cross. We’re never stuck on Good Friday. We have to go to the resurrection.”

Father Roby, 38, and the youngest of seven siblings, has been a priest for 13 years and has been the pastor of St. Maron Maronite Catholic Church in Detroit, MI, for 3 years. He’s Lebanese-born and had planned on becoming a priest since he was in high school, motivated by the beloved priest of his childhood church. “I wanted to be like him honestly,” Zibara said.

As a priest himself, he’s held onto a philosophy that to be effective, he has to be genuine. “I try to be myself,” he said. That’s true for speaking with parishioners and giving his homily, in which he tries to make the scripture relevant to modern times. He likes to add humor too.





St. Maron Church has 189 registered families, a lot of them Lebanese-born, while others are Jordanian, Syrian or American-born. “What makes the church special is that parishioners treat each other and him like family,” he proudly explained.

While he emphasized different priests have different approaches, he wants to be close to his parishioners and believes that helps him become a better priest. After all, he said, it’s important for people to see him as someone they can approach anytime. When he visits families, he gets to truly see their lives and remain involved, during both happy and sad times. Being close, opens him up to conversations about morality and scripture too.

“I’m telling you, we’re family,” Father Roby said.

Over the years, he’s found that every priest has a different approach, and parishioners all have different expectations of what a priest should be. But he said there’s a simple way to define a good priest: “Every priest that brings people to Jesus Christ is a good priest. That’s why we’re priests — to bring people to God,” he said. “It’s a heavy responsibility.”

When asked how people can become better Catholics, his advice was again straightforward: Pray and get closer to God, “and be nice when you can.” ■

Brandon Shulleeta is a journalist and parishioner of St. Anthony’s Maronite Catholic Church in Glen Allen, VA.



St. Stephen in Charlotte: A Mission with Prayers and Hope Directed at Growth *by Anna Salloum*

The COVID-19 Pandemic is a topic that we all want to put away and stop talking about. Unfortunately, it remains in our conversations, because not only is it still relevant and happening in real time, but it is affecting many aspects of our lives. One of those has been our ability to gather, for family, fun, or even worship. This challenge has touched St. Stephen Maronite Mission serving Charlotte, North Carolina.

However, even before the pandemic, parishioners were unsure of what was next, because there were a few transitions over nearly the past decade. The first priest to lead the mission was Monsignor George Sebaali, who drove from St. Anthony in Glen Allen, VA. Then Father Kamil Al Choueifate, of Our Lady Star of the East in Pleasantville, NJ, made a monthly visit. Father Elie Mikhael and Father Tony Youssef followed.

The Mission is now under the leadership of Father Rodolph “Rudy” Wakim. According to Father Rudy, this church is vibrant and active. Before COVID, there were many functions throughout the year. St. Stephen enjoyed a festival, Valentine’s Day and Christmas party. Thankfully, the Christmas party has since returned with Santa Claus!

Father Rudy had served at Our Lady of Victory in Pittsburgh, PA, for 13 years before moving over to Charlotte in October 2020, at the peak of the pandemic. There has been a silver lining to this dark Covid cloud though—many new parishioners have embraced the Maronite liturgy. “There are a lot of potentials,” said Father Rudy. “They are excited but nervous to commit because they’re not sure the Church is here to stay.” This is why there is hope for growth and stability.

The Mission is small right now, but so was the mustard seed! There are approximately 40 registered families with a mailing list of over





150 people. At this present time, the Mission is using St. Matthew Catholic Church, the largest Catholic parish in the state with over 12,000 families. For daily mass, Father Rudy uses the house where he lives which belongs to the Diocese of Charlotte. It used to be a seminary, and the garage was converted to a chapel. A talented parishioner used his time and talent to make a nice altar and tabernacle with lectern for the chapel. A cross was presented as a gift as well as an icon in the name of our Blessed Mother. Parishioners participate in a St. Sharbel Novena and Mass every Monday, and many Hispanic people are in attendance on these days.

The community hopes to have a church. Father Rudy believes that continuity will help create the growth that is needed to establish a church. He compares it to a stove, it can't be turned on and off, it must remain "on." A beautiful way that Father Rudy connects with the parishioners is by sharing a calendar list of Feast Days in his

weekly bulletin. He feels that it gives the parishioners something to look forward to.

Another thing that the community can look forward to is a celebration fundraiser for the Feast of St. Maron. The planning is already in the works. During the year, there are coffee hours with manaish and fattayeh thanks to very good cooks. Father Rudy also mentioned that the Mission has a lot of youth but they've been at school, and he is looking forward to activating the youth again. There was a dabke group in the past and he is excited about also bringing that back again.

"The mission was building up momentum and COVID hit it badly," recalled Father Rudy. He mentioned that there is a church that may come up for sale. Please join Father Rudy and his flock in praying for the Mission's growth! ■

Anna Salloum is a parishioner of Our Lady of Lebanon in Miami, Florida.



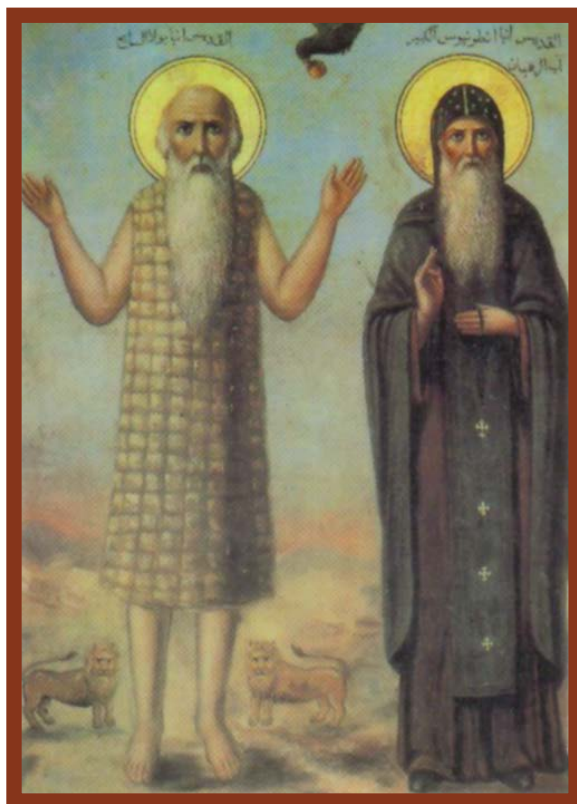
Saints in the Maronite Calendar

by Rev. Claude Franklin

5 January

On 5 January the Maronite Calendar commemorates St. Paul, the First Hermit, also known as **St. Paul of Thebes** (not to be confused with St. Paul, the Simple, commemorated on 5 October).

The Life of Saint Paul the First Hermit composed by St. Jerome around 376. Paul the First Hermit himself was born around 227 in Thebaid of Upper Egypt.



Paul was orphaned and a greedy brother-in-law, in order to obtain Paul's inheritance, plotted to turn him over to the persecutors. Paul, learning of this deception, fled into the wilderness. He settled into a mountain cave and dwelt there for ninety-one years, where he prayed to God day and night. He is said to have lived off dates and bread brought to him by a raven and clothed himself with palm leaves.

St. Anthony the Great believed he himself was the only one living in the wilderness, until God revealed to him: "Anthony, there is a servant of God more excellent than you; you should go and see him."

Anthony went into the desert and met St. Paul. They greeted each other and spoke throughout the night. Anthony explained to Paul how God had revealed to him Paul's location. Paul told Anthony how for sixty years a raven would bring him half a loaf of bread each day, but today there was a double portion in honor of Anthony's visit.

The next morning Paul spoke to Anthony of his approaching death and asked Anthony to bury him, but first to go back to his monastery and bring back a cloak. Anthony did as instructed, and as he was returning to Paul's cave, he saw St. Paul's soul surrounded by angels and ascending to God. He entered the cave and saw Paul on his knees with outstretched arms. Anthony mourned for him and wrapped him in the cloak. He was wondering how he was to bury him, as he did not have a shovel, when two lions came from the wilderness and dug a

grave with their claws; and so Anthony buried St. Paul in the year 341 at the age of 113. While he never established one monastery, he is honored as the “First Hermit”.

12 February

On 12 February, the Maronite Church commemorates **St. Meletius of Antioch**. Before becoming Archbishop of Antioch, he was Bishop of Sebaste in Armenia (ca. 357). He was appointed to the See of Antioch by Emperor Constantius to assist in combating the heresy of Arianism.

Meletius was a zealous Anti-Arian and fought against this heresy. Due to the intrigues of the Arian heretics, however, he was deposed from his See and exiled three times. But even in this, Meletius distinguished himself by gentleness, setting a good example for his flock of virtue and kindness.

St. Meletius ordained the future bishop St. Basil the Great as a deacon; and he also baptized St. John Chrysostom, who eulogized Meletius at his death.

Upon his return to the See of Antioch in the year 363, Meletius wrote a theological treatise entitled “Exposition of the Faith.” This document helped convert many Arians to the Catholic faith.

St. Meletius presided over the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, which was called under Emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395). During the Council, Meletius, as its presiding officer, enthroned St. Gregory of Nazianzus as Bishop of Constantinople.

Before the Council began, St. Meletius raised his hand and displayed three fingers. He then withdrew two fingers and blessed the people with the remaining finger extended, saying: “We understand three hypostases (*persons*), and we speak about a single nature.” At this proclamation it is said that a fire surrounded Meletius like lighting.

Meletius did not live to complete the Council. St. Gregory of Nyssa eulogized him at his funeral. His body was later transferred from Constantinople to Antioch for a second funeral service, where he was laid to rest alongside his predecessor, St. Babylas in 381. ■



Ordinations

Ordination of Deacon Tony Boukhalil *by Laura Abinajm Eid*

27 November 2021 was a blessed and long-awaited day for Tony Boukhalil and his wife, Rima, and children, Elian, Abdo and Peter, as well as the parish family of Our Lady of Lebanon in Millbrae, California.

The head of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, celebrated the Ordination Liturgy, a deeply spiritual rite rich in meaning. The ordination was attended by Archbishop of San Francisco, Salvatore J. Cordileone, Father Rami Razzouk, pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Father Toufic Nasr, Father Milad Yaghi, and Deacon Tony Karam. Eli Yarak directed the choir.

Father Toufic Nasr, the candidate's sponsor, held Tony by his right hand and presented him to the bishop, stating that "the God-loving servant is here to receive the order of diaconate." Bishop Zaidan laid both hands on the candidate's head, recited the prayer of election, prayed that the divine grace and heavenly gift be bestowed upon him as the Lord's servant, and elevated him from the minor order of subdeacons to the order deacons.

The bishop imposed his right hand twice on the candidate, each time accompanied by a prayer of consecration and for the Holy Spirit to enrich the candidate with love, strength, and holiness.

After formally announcing the ordination, the bishop vested the new deacon with the alb and stole. A major element in the Rite of Ordination is the handing on of the functions of the diaconal service, consisting of the book of the Epistles of St. Paul, the censor, the anaphora veil, and the Holy Mysteries, each representing an aspect of the ministry of the deacon.

The bishop instructed the new deacon with all that the Lord had called upon him and admonished him about his ministry. He asked him to be diligent, to keep a pure love for prayer, to cling to fasting, and to approach the altar of the Lord with purity and holiness: "judge yourself day and night, and meditate on your end, for the end is standing at the door. Remain alert and do not fall asleep." ■



Ordination of Deacon Chris Nahra

“When you serve at the table of the Eucharist, there you will find the presence of Jesus, Who gives Himself to you so that you can give yourselves to others.”

POPE FRANCIS, JUBILEE MASS FOR PERMANENT DEACONS, 2016

On Sunday, 19 September 2021, many from far and near gathered at St. Maron Church in Cleveland, OH, for the Diaconate Ordination of Subdeacon Christopher Nahra. Among them were the Most Rev. Bishop Elias Zaidan, Maronite Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, Los Angeles, CA, and the Most Rev. Bishop Peter Karam, Patriarchal Vicar from Lebanon. Hosted by Fr. Elias Yazbeck, Pastor of St. Maron, along with the entire St. Maron parish, over hundreds gathered for this joyous celebration to witness the elevation of Subdeacon Chris to the Order of Deacons. Msgr. Peter Azar, Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary in Washington, D.C., Fr. Armando Elkhoury, Vice Rector, and all the seminarians traveled a long distance from Washington, D.C., to be there. The seminary played a crucial role in preparing, serving, and recording the ordination. The young adult choir led by David Farah and Chris Jamhour did a phenomenal job with the ordination hymns and the Divine Liturgy. Finally,

after the ordination, many gathered in St. Maron Hall for delicious Lebanese food and desserts sponsored by Aladdin's Eatery in Cleveland, OH.

Many thanks go out to all who made this day possible — especially those from St. Maron Parish in Cleveland, OH, and the Maronite Seminary! Your support and prayers have been monumental in my discernment and path towards the priesthood. Thank you to all my family and friends who traveled a long distance to be there — I really appreciate it! I look forward to continually serving our incredible Maronite Church as a deacon and, God-willing, as a priest in the near future. My journey towards the priesthood has been such a blessing and a gift to me, and I thank every person that God has placed in my life for walking with me and supporting me. Please keep me in your prayers as I am praying for all of you! Many thanks and many blessings!

Sincerely in Christ, Deacon Chris Nahra ■



Ordinations

Ordination of Subdeacon Vincent Michael



On Sunday, 14 November, I had the great blessing and privilege of being raised from the Order of Lectors to the order of Subdeacons by the imposition of hands of Bishop Gregory J Mansour. The ordination took place at Our Lady of Lebanon Parish in Washington, D.C., with the parish community, the seminarians, and family and friends present.

Celebrating and assisting in the Divine Liturgy were Chorbishop Seely Beggiani, former rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary, Msgr. George Sebaali, pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Parish, Msgr. Peter Azar, the current rector of the seminary, Fr Armando Elkhoury, vice rector, Fr. Reginald Lynch O.P., Fr. Marco Benini of the Diocese of Eichstatt and visiting faculty member of Catholic University of America, Fr. Michael Keiler of the Diocese of St Augustine Florida, Deacon Chuck Van Heusen of Fayetteville, North Carolina, Deacon Christ Nahra, and Subdeacon Christian Hbaiter, and was served and sung by the seminarians of Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary.

In addition to the Ordination, Chorbishop Seely Beggiani was honored with a Papal Apostolic Blessing for his 60th Anniversary to the

priesthood and his many years of service and devotion to the eparchy and the seminary, which can be witnessed to by all those who went through formation under his leadership.

After the Divine Liturgy, a reception was held in the parish hall, celebrating not only the Ordination, but Bishop Gregory Mansour's birthday, followed by a luncheon for family and friends at the Seminary.

Looking back at my journey in my vocation thus far, it is clear that I would not be here without the support, love, and prayers of countless people in my life. Vocations are not fostered alone and we are all called to help each other follow the call of God. God calls us through others, and through your prayers, support, encouragement, and willingness to follow God's will, you can play a part in fostering vocations in the Maronite Church. For all those who played a part in leading me to this point, I give my thanks.



"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; in all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths." — PROVERBS 3:6-7 ■

Ordination of Subdeacon Christian Hbaiter

Many pilgrims that journeyed to the Basilica & National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon for the weekend of the Assumption Feast were able to celebrate more than the Feast! On Saturday, August 14th, the vigil of the Feast of the Assumption, Seminarian Christian Hbaiter was ordained to the Order of Subdeacons by the imposition of hands of Bishop Gregory Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. Subdeacon Christian's family and friends traveled from different places to be with him on this special day that signifies his first of three ordinations, culminating with his future ordination to the sacred Priesthood. Bishop Gregory was assisted at the ordination by Msgr. Peter Azar, Rector of the Maronite Seminary and presenter of the candidate for ordination, Father Armando El-Khoury, Vice Rector, and Father Elie Mikhael, Subdeacon Christian's Sponsor and Pastor of his home parish—St. Anthony Maronite Church in Lawrence,



MA. Bishop Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles was also present at the ordination, along with many priests, deacons, subdeacons, and the Seminarians from the Maronite Seminary in Washington, DC.

Subdeacon Christian's ordination was made incredibly special by the presence of his immediate family, who travelled from Massachusetts, and his closest friends. A most-special moment of the ordination was the presentation of the Alb, Lector's Stole, and then Subdiaconate Stole to the Bishop by Subdeacon Christian's mother, godmother, and spiritual mother, respectively. Subdeacon Christian looks forward to the next step of his journey, which will be his elevation to the Order of Deacons in the year to come. Please keep Subdeacon Christian and all our Seminarians in your prayers, as we also continue to pray that the Lord blesses our Church with more workers for His vineyard.





60th Anniversary of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary*

by Chorbishop Seely Beggiani

The establishment of the Maronite Seminary in 1961 was one of the most significant events in the history of the Maronite church in the United States. In the previous seventy years of the Maronite existence in the United States only four American-born Maronites were ordained as priests to serve the Maronite church in the United States. The effort to establish a seminary was a declaration that the Maronite church was here to stay and the readiness to lay the foundation for the future of the Maronite church in the United States.

The choice of Washington, DC was intentional. The seminarians would be studying at The Catholic University of America which offers pontifical degrees in philosophy, theology and canon law. Catholic University has the Department of Semitics and Egyptian languages. Its library contains classic Maronite works including volumes written by the renowned Joseph Assemani. Washington also includes the Library of Congress and the Dumbarton Oaks Library where Maronite sources are available. Therefore, Washington was the ideal location for seminarians to have the highest level of education.

It is interesting to note that it was the Maronite laity and some clergy who took the initiative in campaigning for a seminary. Although the idea of a seminary had been discussed among some clergy and laity as early as the 1920's, it was only in 1959 that members of the laity belonging to a group called the Maronite League and some clergy decided to petition for a seminary. The president and executive director of the League traveled to Rome and presented their case to the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

To be a Maronite seminary, it is necessary that the seminarians not only fulfill the requirements of the

program for priestly formation at Catholic University, but also to study Maronite history, liturgy, theology and spirituality. The seminary became a place where all these disciplines were developed, and the first books in English on these subjects were written at the seminary.

In its early years, the Maronite seminary and seminarians expressed the need of reforming the Maronite liturgical books. There had not been any updating of the Maronite liturgy for many decades. The seminarians urged Archbishop Francis M. Zayek to have the Missal and lectionary be translated into English. The first attempt at translations began at the Maronite seminary.

As time went on, the seminary and seminarians raised the question of what the mission of the church in the United States. Is the Maronite church a national church serving certain Catholics of the Middle East and their descendants or is it a universal church? In actuality, the Maronite church is the depository of the ancient Apostolic churches of Antioch and Edessa. It perpetuates the liturgies and early theology of these churches which is founded entirely on the Sacred Scriptures. Christ's instruction to his disciples was to make disciples of all nations and their mission was to all cultures and regions of the world.

While the Maronite church's liturgy has been enriched by integrating elements from the Lebanese culture especially in its hymns and devotions, it has a universal mission wherever it is found throughout the world to share the riches of the Antiochene and Edessan tradition. Besides serving the Maronite community, the Maronite church through its liturgy and theology can provide an opportunity for fellow Catholics to pray and to worship in a liturgy and way of thinking that brings one into intimacy with God.

In fact, at the Maronite Patriarchal Synod held in Lebanon in 2002-5, the Maronite seminary and some of its alumni were instrumental in the Synod's declaration that the Maronite church has a universal mission.

I wish to address myself briefly to the members of the Order of St. Sharbel. I have been intrigued by a passage in the Gospel of Luke, chapter eight, which reads as follows:

Afterward he journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

It is noteworthy that Luke wished to highlight the names of the women who supported financially the mission of Jesus and his disciples. In so doing, their names have become immortal. In a sense, Jesus was the first rector of the first seminary and the disciples were the first seminarians. Their life together was an itinerant one and they relied on the laity's support. In listing their names, the evangelist wished to stress the importance of these women in God's plan of salvation.

You, the members of the Order of St. Sharbel, are performing a similar service. Your names may not appear in a sacred book, but you are known to God for your essential role and you will be rewarded for your generosity.

And so as we celebrate the achievements of the Maronite seminary during these past 60 years we look to the future with great hope. The seminary is strong and in good shape, it has a large class of devoted seminarians, a very capable rector and vice-rector, it has the wisdom, leadership and commitment of our two bishops.

I believe that the next sixty years will be even more successful and the Maronite church representing the ancient churches of Antioch and Edessa will be an integral part of the Catholic church in the United States. ■

*This presentation was given at the annual virtual meeting of the Order of Saint Sharbel

The Order of Saint Sharbel New Members

ANNUAL

ANNEMARIE SABA ESPINDOLA | *Our Lady of Purgatory* | New Bedford, MA
ALBERT HANNOUSH | *St. Ann* | Troy, NY
KATHLEEN HOCHENBERGER | *Mary, Mother of the Light* | Tequesta, FL
PAUL JOSEPH | *St. Joseph* | Atlanta, GA
THOMAS MANSOUR | *St. Joseph* | Atlanta, GA
MIKE & JULIE MCNAMARA | *Our Lady's Parish* | Austin, TX
CALINE MOUAWAD | *Our Lady of Lebanon* | Brooklyn, NY
KAMAL NASSAR | *St. Joseph* | Atlanta, GA
MARY NICHOLAS | *St. Joseph* | Waterville, ME
MATTHEW THOMAS | *Our Lady of Purgatory* | New Bedford, MA

PERPETUAL

AMAL BARBOUR | *Our Lady of Purgatory* | New Bedford, MA
JACQUES BARBOUR | *Our Lady of Purgatory* | New Bedford, MA
BENTLEY HATCHETT | *Our Lady's Parish* | Austin, TX
LILLIAN LANGSTON | *Our Lady's Parish* | Austin TX
GAYL RODRIGUEZ | *Our Lady's Parish* | Austin TX
BETHANY SIMOES | *St. Anthony* | Fall River, MA
BEN AND Wafa RIVERA | *Our Lady's Parish* | Austin, TX
CHRISTOPHER WAKIM | *Our Lady of Lebanon* | Wheeling, WV



The Order of Saint Sharbel is an organization of lay people and clergy who have pledged their spiritual strength and financial support for Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary and the retired Maronite clergy of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA.

For more information about the Order ask your Pastor, visit www.orderstsharbel.org or write to:

EPARCHY OF SAINT MARON
109 Remsen Street | Brooklyn, NY 11201

or

EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON
1021 South 10th Street | St. Louis, MO 63104



One of the main objectives for the National Maronite Young Adult (MYA) organization is expanding the presence of local MYAs across the country. With the guidance of our directors and bishops, we seek to create or renew an active MYA group in every Maronite parish or mission in America. To accomplish this, regional MYA representatives provide resources, programming direction, experience, and encouragement to local level young adult leaders and their priests, to foster spiritual, social, and inclusive MYAs.

In 2021, the South region, in the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, has particularly flourished.

This region includes nine parishes and missions across the states of Texas, Alabama, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. At the start of 2021, only two MYAs were active in this region. By the end of this year, it has expanded to six vibrantly active local MYAs, and one more en-route. Of the 160 attendees at the National MYA conference in Chicago this year, 50 were from the South region—the most from any region. Bishop Elias Zaidan always reiterates the importance of investing in young adults to secure a bright future for the Maronite Church. The priests that reiterate this importance, by supporting their MYA, have shown to produce strongly knit young adult communities.



The South's regional coordinators approach parishes with a fundamental plan for expansion: involve the local priest, find a local young adult leader, and let the team take off. The local MYA groups in Houston, Texas and Birmingham, Alabama, have historically held strong young adult groups. Abouna Edward Hanna in Houston and Abouna Peter Zogbi in Birmingham have continuously invested immeasurable amounts of effort, time, and funding to create an inclusive and loving young adult community at their parishes.

The South has also flourished thanks to the involvement of

Abouna Charles Kachan from St. George Maronite Church in San Antonio, Texas. Together, Abouna Edward and Abouna Charles have generously volunteered to strengthen communication amongst priests in our region. They support our MYA programming by finding guest speakers, hosting events, and guiding the planning of the regional retreat. They are a blessing to Maronite young adults in the South.

Houston has proven itself to be the epicenter of the Maronite young adults in the South region. Having a range of 30 to 125 participants at events, the MYA at Our Lady of the

Cedars Maronite Church in Houston currently holds strong as one of the largest and most prosperous local MYAs in the country. This is attributed to the combination of solid leadership from our young adults and proper guidance from our parish priest, Abouna Edward. Our young adults are extremely connected throughout the region. They attend MYA events in other cities to show their support and encouragement to other local MYAs. As a result, by the end of 2021, a much larger community has flourished in the South, but more importantly, it has become a stronger community rooted in our Maronite faith. ■





What Can Icons Teach Us?

by Father Anthony J. Salim

The computer savvy among us are familiar with the small images that help us to navigate the contents of our computers and the internet. These are called icons.

However, there is another kind of icon, a religious one, much older than those found on our desktops. In fact, religious icons have existed almost from the earliest beginning of Christianity. They have expressed Christian faith and have brought color and beauty to the places in which we publicly worship (our churches) and even in our homes, on walls and in prayer corners. Religious icons have been described as “windows into heaven” and “theology in color.” The purpose of this article will attempt to show how icons, properly understood and used, can captivate Maronites and all Christians by teaching the truths of our precious Faith.

Unfortunately, until recent years, we Maronites — especially here in the United States — have not been as familiar with icons as one might expect of Eastern Christians. Many of us have thought that icons were the patrimony of Greek-Byzantine Churches (Orthodox and Catholic), Armenian tradition or the Coptic/Ethiopian tradition (see the cover of this edition of *The Maronite Voice*). We preferred statues as the religious images that lift our hearts to the Almighty in prayer and meditation. Statues are the preferred form of the Latin Church. Indeed, the history of sculpture in the Western Church abounds in glorious examples. For instance, think of Michelangelo’s magnificent Pietà. Our preference for statues has been rapidly diminishing in recent years.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) called on the Eastern Catholic Churches to return to their ancient ways in its “The Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches.” The Council Fathers urged that any form of renewal in the Eastern Churches must proceed “organically” from authentic traditions, and not to import things, especially in liturgy, art and music, from outside the Tradition. For Maronites, this means the Eastern Syriac-Maronite Tradition.

What does this mean for icons and iconography in our Maronite Church today? Echoing this Council’s decree, the Maronite Patriarchal Synod of 2008 states it this way:

The holy icon has a great value because it reminds the believers of the marvels of God and of what he has accomplished through his saints because it “actualizes” the different moments of the salvific economy. The icon makes present and represents at the same time the absolute newness of “What no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man.” (1 COR 2:9) It does this through special ways and forms inspired by the special cultural heritage and through methods compatible with the holy images, reflecting the faith of the faithful in the heavenly truths.

Therefore, the Holy Synod recommends that this ancient heritage be brought back to our Church, eliminating from our Maronite Tradition all the influences which



are foreign to it. It also orders that action must be taken to make the faithful aware of the importance of the veneration of the holy icons, exhibiting them in an orderly fashion and in accordance with Maronite Church spirituality, in a special place in the church and in the celebrations in which they should appear, compatible with the liturgical celebration.

So where can we find some sources in our Syriac-Maronite Tradition? I suggest the following.

In his book on the topic, Ignatio Peña tells us that early Syrian churches did indeed have paintings, but today examples are few. Yet, they point us to the origins of religious iconography in our own later Maronite tradition.

Similar painting and murals still exist today in ancient Maronite Churches in Lebanon, Syria, and elsewhere, including the well-known mural of the Coronation of the Virgin at the Maronite summer patriarchal residence

in Dimaan, Lebanon, as well as the beautiful ceiling mural in the main church.

Two other examples illustrate the point, and they have become familiar to us: the illustrations of the Rabbula Gospel book, and the icon of Our Lady of Elige.

The first is the famous sixth century Syriac Gospel manuscript (of the Peshitta version), which was beautifully illustrated by a monk named Rabbula (not the famous Syrian bishop of the same name). It was in the possession of Maronite monks from 1179-1514 and now resides in the Laurentian Library in Florence, Italy. Its art serves as an inspiration for contemporary iconographers to create icons for our Churches today.

Secondly, the beautiful icon, also known as Our Lady of Elige of the Maronites, depicts the Virgin Mother supporting on her lap, the Child of her womb, Jesus Christ (a favorite theme of St. Ephrem).

It was discovered at the Patriarchal monastery of Elige, in Maifouq, Lebanon, and is dated to around the 10th century. The icon itself previously hung over the entryway.

Until its restoration in the last decade, when one gazed upon the painting, one could not tell it was an Eastern icon at all. During many centuries, the overpainting — seen as an “updating” — depicted a typical medieval Italianate Madonna and Child, surrounded by diminutive naked cherubs. This Western-Latin updating in fact reflected the growing latinization of the Maronite Church over several centuries. However,



What Can Icons Teach Us?

Continued from page 26

after several pictorial layers were scientifically removed, its original “writing” (iconographic term for painting) was revealed. This restoration marks an historic event in the history of Syro-Maronite iconography, as it represents the oldest known authentic Maronite icon. This painting continues the Syriac tradition initiated by the Rabbula manuscript of the 6th century and is now seen in many of our churches today.

Contemporary attempts to produce icons by Maronite iconographers help us in our revival of an important aspect of our religious tradition of beautiful sacred art. More importantly, icons teach us the truths of our biblical faith, and about the genius of the Liturgical Year which we annually celebrate. As we gaze upon them, may our hearts be lifted up in praise to God’s glory. ■

Father Anthony Salim is a retired priest of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, and lives in his hometown of St. Paul, Minnesota. He serves part-time at Holy Family Church (St. Paul) and St. Maron Church in (Minneapolis)



Parish News

DARTMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS

“Come and See” Retreat

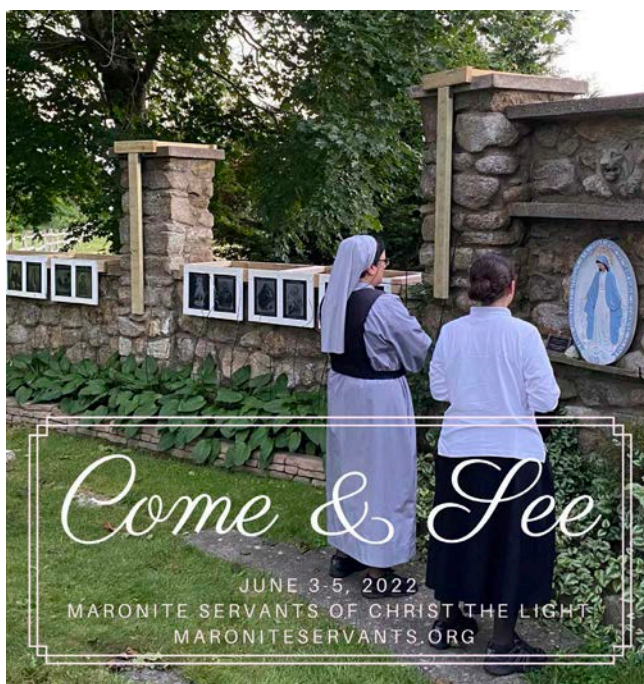
by Sister Therese Maria

Is Jesus inviting you to “Come and See?” The Maronite Servants of Christ the Light invite young adult women to prayerfully consider participating in the “Come and See” Retreat Weekend. The retreat will be held on 3-5 June 2022, at the Mother of the Light Convent in Dartmouth, MA. This retreat is designed to give women an opportunity to observe the lives of the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light from inside the convent.

Additionally, the women will experience the rhythm of prayer and the joys of community life. Those attending will receive conferences about religious life and guidance in their discernment. Above all, it is a time to be with Jesus as He reveals His love and the desires of His Heart.

Ideal candidates for the “Come and See” Retreat are single women (ages 18-35) who are healthy, live life faithful to prayer and the sacraments, and attend a Maronite parish. Also, previous contact with the Maronite Sisters is required.

If there are any questions or a request for more information, please contact the Vocation Director, Sister Therese Maria at sister@maroniteservants.org or maroniteservants.org. ■



CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN
Ordination Anniversary

On the weekend of 25-26 September 2021, the congregation of St. Sharbel Church in Clinton Township, Michigan, recognized a great milestone in the life of their pastor, **Chorbishop Alfred Badawi**. They celebrated the 30th Anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood.

To honor Chorbishop Badawi, a gala was held on Saturday at the Palazzo Grande. More than 650 guests including: dignitaries, parishioners, friends, and family attended this momentous occasion. Chorbishop Badawi was blessed by the presence of our Bishop A. Elias Zaidan and several other bishops, priests, and clergy from our Maronite Church and surrounding parishes. Everyone enjoyed an evening of festivities, delicious food, and entertainment.

Chorbishop Badawi concelebrated Sunday's liturgy with Bishop Elias Zaidan, Bishop Peter Karam, Fr. Milad Yahgi, Deacon John Sfire, and Deacon Mike Magyar. Several groups participated in the liturgy including: the St. Sharbel Choir led by conductor, Mr. Aziz Charabaty, director, Mrs. Christiane Yasso Bousho, and organist, Mrs. Jessy Srour.



In his homily, Chorbishop Alfred expressed his deepest gratitude for the prayers and loving support he received throughout his life from his parents, siblings, family, friends, and the community of St. Sharbel Church. Several of his nieces from Lebanon and his brother were present while the remaining family members were able to join via livestream. A very tender and emotional moment was shared when Chorbishop Alfred gave a special tribute to his late mother, Mona Badawi, who entered Eternal Life in February from COVID. The

liturgy concluded with everyone giving thanks to God for his vocation to the priesthood.

Following liturgy, everyone was invited for cake and light refreshments to give parishioners and guests an opportunity to extend well wishes and congratulations to Chorbishop Badawi. This occasion recognized the importance of praying for vocations to the priesthood. ■



Parish News

UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Fall and Winter Events

by Dr. Mabel George Howard

Music, food, games, candy, laughter, and the “Spooktacular” Trunk or Treat describe the Halloween Party held after liturgy on 24 October 2021, at St. George Church in Uniontown, PA. This year’s exciting event was held outside where the children collected overflowing treat bags. Parents and children enjoyed a variety of delicious foods and a bonfire to roast marshmallows and make smores. The children and several adults sported an array of original and colorful costumes from Superheroes to Dinosaurs.

On 14 November, the Altar & Rosary Society celebrated a Memorial Liturgy honoring the deceased members of the Society. Loved ones were remembered, and prayers of “thanks” were offered for their many spiritual, cultural, and supportive contributions to the church. The Society members recited the rosary and litany in prayer for the deceased, and Father Aaron Sandbothe acknowledged the importance, dedication, and love of these women. Following the liturgy, Father Aaron gave a presentation about the altar and the meaning of the consecrated wood or stone “*tablitha*.” Altar & Rosary Society Officers prepared a delicious lunch in the church hall for all to enjoy. The following weekend, the Ladies Guild held their annual Holiday Food Sale, and the Altar & Rosary Society held their annual Holiday Bake Sale for the benefit of the church.

The Fall Season is a special time for mutual kindness, caring, sharing, giving “thanks” for one’s good fortune, and feeling compassion for God’s less fortunate. On 21 November, volunteers from the Saint George Ladies Guild, Altar & Rosary Society, and parish organizers prepared over 200 Thanksgiving dinners. Parishioners, community members, needy, depressed, homeless, and the lonely were invited to share a delicious meal in fellowship with one another in the church hall.

Lastly, the Ladies Guild and Altar & Rosary Society held their annual Christmas Party celebration in the parish hall. This was a wonderful opportunity for the ladies to relax with family and friends, enjoy a delectable meal, and win holiday prizes. These peaceful, festive, and joyous seasonal events show gratefulness for God’s love and blessings. ■



DALLAS, TEXAS

All Saints Day Celebration!



During the 6:30 pm liturgy on All Saints Day, the children of the parish, dressed as saints, processed to the front pews behind the priest, altar servers, and the processional cross. Following the Gospel, Father asked each child to describe the saint that he/she portrayed. One notable saint, portrayed by a child who comes to the church from the Roman Rite, was St. Sharbel. This saint was wearing an Eastern style cross and carrying the Book of Offering. Emiliano Bautista was dressed in an outstanding costume as Pope St. John Paul II with full papal regalia. He impressed parishioners by making the Sign of the Cross as if he were Pope, something his mom said he practices in his spare time. The parish prayed together that our children would become future saints.

Catholic Talk on Difficult Topics

On Sunday, 14 November 2021, between the two morning Liturgies, our pastor invited a Catholic counselor, Bernice Simmons, for an hour discussion with parents and their children ages (13-20) about the trauma of bullying. She had excellent points, stating that "Bullying is any experience where someone treats you with less dignity than your actual being. People are created in the image and likeness of God. The right and left hemisphere and the prefrontal cortex work together in a three-way "Trinitarian Image." Those attending were grateful for this important and interesting information. ■

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Congratulations

On Sunday, 12 September 2021, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, bestowed a papal marriage blessing on the following couples:

- Joseph & Mary Ojile (63 years)
- Charlie & Theresa Miller (62 years)
- Ralph & Sandra Wahby (57 years)
- Joseph & Diana Butrus (57 years)
- Elias & Nazha Hitti (51 years)
- Dan & Ruth Abodeely (50 years)
- Dennis & Roxanne Elking (46 years)
- Deacon William & Deborah Meister (45 years)



Bishop Elias also bestowed the Patriarchal Medal of St. Maron upon Dr. Edmond & Rima Cabbabe.

Congratulations and God's blessings on many happy years of marriage and service to come! ■

Parish News

OLEAN, NEW YORK

Parish Events

by Fr. Claude Franklin

On Sunday, 7 November 2021, the children of St. Joseph Church in Olean, NY, assisted Fr. Claude Franklin in vesting the altar for the Sunday of the Consecration of the Church. The altar was stripped before the liturgy, and prior to the "Qadeeshat," Fr. Claude sprinkled the four walls of the church and the four sides of the altar with holy water. In preparation for the Consecration of the Church, the altar servers and other children carried the altar cloths, candles, cross, and anaphora book from the back to the front of the church to assist in vesting the Altar. Children assisting: John Paul Cavallo, Dominic Cavallo, Daria Cavallo, Marek Oszwaldowski, Aneta Oszwaldowski, Beata Oszwaldowski, and Silence Karl.



Recently, a program called "Cor ad Cor," meaning "Heart to Heart" began at St. Joseph Church. This method of prayer is a way of learning to speak with

God from your heart to His Heart. The program is based upon St. Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises spanning over a period of 30 days. To be more practical for most people, the "Cor ad Cor" retreat was split into sessions over a 30-week timeline. For example, during the first eight weeks, a workbook and video series called Oremus introduced the participants to the basics of Spiritual Exercises: "Lectio Divina," "Imaginative Prayer," and "Rules of Discernment" leading to full Spiritual Exercises.



St. Joseph parishioners hosted a "Pancake Breakfast for Dinner" fundraiser on Saturday, 13 November. Guests enjoyed a "hot chocolate bar" and sweet treats donated for the fundraiser. This event supplied funds to help support the church financially. It also gave the church and community members an opportunity for family and friends to share time together. ■

YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO

Santa Claus Comes to Visit "Seniors"

On Wednesday, 8 December 2021, St. Maron Church congregation in Youngstown, Ohio, celebrated both the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and Christmas for the Silver Bullets, parishioners who are at least 60 years young. Sixty-four people attended this joyful event.

The celebration began with liturgy, followed by a Christmas Luncheon, Christmas Carols Sing-Along led by Joe Warino, and a very special visit by Santa Claus (better known as Fr. Jacques Kik). Our Silver Bullets were delighted with Santa, especially when he distributed a special treat to everyone in attendance. ■



DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Icon Tour



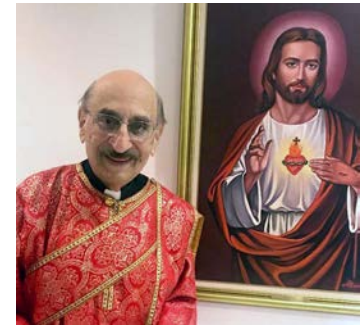
The Archdiocese of Detroit's Center for Mission, with the help of Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun, partnered with the Maronite Archeparchy of Damascus, Syria, to spiritually and materially support the Maronite community in Damascus. An icon of the Conversion of St. Paul was commissioned to depict this partnership. The icon was made available for veneration at a number of parishes from September 2021 to January 2022. ■



FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

Honoring Deacon Andre Nasser

Diakonia is a Greek biblical term meaning "service," technically service to God and the Church performed by individuals specifically ordained for specific roles in the church. From the early beginnings of the church, deacons have played one of these most important service roles. We know that Stephen, the first male martyr of the Church, was a deacon. The clergy and congregation of St. Anthony of the Desert Church in Fall River, MA, were pleased to have the privilege of working with Andre Nasser, one very fine deacon who serves their church.



Deacon Andre graduated from the University of Alexandria, Egypt, as a Doctor of Medicine. Later, he was ordained in the Melkite Catholic Church on 1 June 1980, at Saint Basil's Seminary in Methuen, Massachusetts, under the leadership of Archbishop Tawil, who also celebrated Andre and Mimi Nasser's marriage. Since there was no Melkite Church in the area, Deacon Andre graciously served as deacon for the Maronite Church with approval from his Eparchial Bishop and Archbishop Francis Zayek. Deacon Andre was recognized by the congregation as a gift to the church and community for his endless and valuable work.

On 23 October 2021, Deacon Andre and Mimi were honored for their 40 years of service to the church at the annual Founders Day Hafli held at St. Anthony of the Desert Parish Center. Deacon Andre and his family were blessed by Bishop Gregory Mansour and Msgr. James Root, pastor of St. Anthony, in the presence of 250 parishioners and friends. Even though Deacon Andre was ordained as a Melkite Deacon, he is part of the first class of permanent deacons from the Diocese of Fall River. Deacon Andre is truly a "man of faith who serves God and the church." He and his wife, Mimi, are blessed with two wonderful children and two grandchildren. ■



Parish News

FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Parish Activities

St. Michael the Archangel Church in Fayetteville, NC, is blessed to have families and their children participate in parish groups such as: Knights of Columbus, Ladies Guild, and the Religious Education Program. On 16 October 2021, the Knights sponsored a Pine Car Derby contest. Twenty-seven cars competed in the race, and prizes were awarded for First Place, Second Place, Third Place, Best Design, and Best Paint Work. As Halloween approached, many families gathered in the social hall for a pumpkin carving party. Family members brought their pumpkins to carve and paint while enjoying food, fun, and fellowship.

On 31 October, for All Saints Day, the children of the parish attended liturgy dressed as various saints such as: St. Sharbel, St. Maron, St. Rafka, Mother Teresa, and many others. The children processed into the church at the beginning of the liturgy, and their names were announced after liturgy in the social hall.

On 3 December, the Ladies Guild hosted a "Wine & Cheese" Christmas Party for an evening of fun and friendship open to all the women of the parish. The women were pleased with a surprise visit from Subdeacon Ron Foster and his wife, Wanda Foster (organizer of the Ladies Guild). Due to illness, this was the first time in 18 months that they were able to attend church.

The Ladies Guild Sunshine Committee reaches out to parishioners in various ways to show the love and support of the parish. The Sunshine Committee was quite active this year with the births of many new babies. As the families rejoice over the births of their little ones, the Sunshine Committee organizes a meal for each family and provides a prayer blanket and gift card for every new arrival. Currently, St. Michael Church has seven expectant mothers going into the New Year. Obviously, the Sunshine Committee will be very active throughout 2022. ■



UTICA, NEW YORK

Honoring Veterans

by Deacon Paul Salamy

On Thursday, 11 November 2021, Veterans Day, Father Boutros El Hachem, Pastor, and 30 parishioners of St. Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, New York visited the local Veterans Memorial. They offered prayers for both the living and deceased veterans, and for the men and women who continue to serve in our country's military. Veterans from the parish and their families were present. It was a solemn day, but one that many will remember for years to come. ■



LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Bible Study



It has been said that blessings are everywhere, and they can be found if one seeks them. During the Covid pandemic this past year, one such blessing was the initiation of a Bible Study program led by Father Elias Sleiman of Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral in Los Angeles, CA. Participants joined the hour-long weekly sessions via Zoom. One participant, Mireille Hilal, said the bible study has been an answer to her prayers. Mireille commented, "I have always been looking to join a bible study group, but circumstances were not favorable until last year during the pandemic." At that time, Father Elias asked us to join virtually on Monday nights to explore the Gospel of Mark."

Bible study provided an opportunity to continue to grow in faith, which is of great significance during these challenging times. During the sessions, participants were asked to provide a brief summary of individually assigned scriptures, followed by time allotted to discuss the scripture readings and ask questions. In addition to learning more about the Bible, the camaraderie between parishioners helped

ease the separation from the church, Liturgy, and the community. Mireille added, "It made my life happier knowing that I was connecting with other parishioners like myself who were in seclusion or quarantined at home, unable to attend church, and physically receive the Body of Christ."

The participants recently completed the Gospel of Mark. Parishioner Sandra Nahra, commented, "That this experience has changed the way she views the Bible and her understanding of it. Father Elias gave us a deeper and better understanding of the events that took place in Jesus' life according to St. Mark. His insight into these events and many other scripture passages have given us a sense of hope in facing the challenges that confront us daily."

The conclusion of the 2020-2021 Bible Study Session was celebrated at Liturgy with a graduation ceremony on 10 October 2021, followed by a reception in the parish hall. The 2021-2022 sessions began on 6 December 2021 with an Introduction to St. Paul. ■

SET FREE
2022 Eparchy of OLOL MYO Regional Retreats

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January 28-30
Running Springs, CA

South
February 25-27
Giddings, TX

Midwest
February 18-20
Centerburg, OH

MYO National Youth Days

The National Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) is excited to announce the 2022 National Maronite Youth Days from 23-27 June at St. Vincent College in Latrobe, PA. "Introducing Me" will remind our youth that they are chosen, they are forgiven, they are transformed, and they are the Lord's masterpiece. Mark your calendars and don't forget to follow the National MYO social media pages on Facebook and on Instagram @maroniteyouth. Be assured of our prayers of good health, safety, stability for you and your families and parishes. We hope to see you this summer! God bless you all. ■

Introducing Me

WHO AM I?

JUNE 23-27, 2022
ST. VINCENT COLLEGE
LATROBE, PENNSYLVANIA

www.maroniteyouth.org
[@maroniteyouth](https://www.instagram.com/maroniteyouth)

Parish News

HOUSTON, TEXAS
OLC is back!

The first Maronite Christian Formation class this year at Our Lady of the Cedars Church in Houston, TX, began on 11 September 2021. Considering the uncertainties due to the pandemic, the children and youths of the parish were eager to return to church. A wonderful group of 183 children registered for the program. Following a family Liturgy, the children were led to their classrooms while the parents stayed for a brief meeting explaining the program. On Catechetical Sunday, Liturgy was con-celebrated by Fr. Milad Yaghi and Fr. Edward Hanna and dedicated to the catechists. Fr. Hanna blessed the 25 catechists and 16 substitutes.

On Saturday, 9 October, Our Lady of the Cedars congregation hosted "Village Night." The Village Night event is a beautiful tradition held in May and October each year; however, due to the pandemic, this event was postponed until recently. A great number of parishioners and non-parishioners enjoyed an evening of delicious Lebanese food, drinks, hookah, entertainment, and an array of kids' games and activities.

In the spirit of getting back to "normal," a new group called "MYKids" was organized for children from Kindergarten - 6th grade. The Halloween Party, held on Friday, 15 October, was attended by 72 children. The MYO group hosted several activities including



a fun Game Night for 43 youths (grades 8 - 12). Finally, the MYA group held several basketball tournaments and are currently organizing a parish cookbook containing various recipes submitted by the parishioners. This cookbook was sold at Christmas time as a fundraiser for the MYA in December. . . just in time for Christmas!

Our Lady of the Cedars parish members are trying to adapt to the "new normal." The parishioners are generous and supportive, and they feel blessed to worship as a family in the House of God. ■

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
Thanksgiving and Sharing

Annually, during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, the Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) at St. Maron Church in Philadelphia, PA, participates in two community service projects: the “Thanksgiving Food Drive” and the “Giving Tree.” The area’s Community Service Program circulated information soliciting help for the less fortunate from local churches. In tandem with the quote, “We love you because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19), a campaign was launched to collect food items (turkeys, vegetables, fruits, etc.) so that families in need could afford



to prepare Thanksgiving meals for their loved ones. Saint Maron’s MYO members also wrapped donated Christmas gifts for children through the Community Service Program. Every designated child received a Christmas gift purchased from the donations of very generous parishioners throughout the region.

Additionally, a Christmas Concert was held at St. Maron Church on 12 December 2021. The Maronite Christian Formation (MCF) and MYO groups performed certain concert selections in English and other selections in Arabic. Following the concert, a potluck dinner was held in the church hall. Lastly, the MYO members organized a Christmas fundraising event by selling cookies and hot chocolate after the Christmas Concert. The children learned a valuable lesson: that it is important for people to feel worthy and loved during the holidays and throughout the year. ■



Natural Family Planning

by Jessica and John Awad

You could say we stumbled upon Natural Family Planning (NFP) by accident. It was around the time we became pregnant with our third child, I was reading a religious article when I discovered the method we were using to avoid pregnancy was a serious sin. We knew this was an error we had to correct but that's not to say we were excited to do so. We felt obliged to commit to a method we knew nothing about and we had many questions. "Is this just a thing the Church made up? Does it even work? Why weren't we taught this in Pre-Cana?"

The next day, my husband discussed our findings with a local priest. His sister happened to be a Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System Practitioner. He gave us her contact information and so our journey began!

The more I learn about NFP, the more I am in awe—it's truly miraculous! Contrary to popular belief, it's just as effective as other forms of spacing children without the unhealthy side effects or cheapening of intimacy. NFP via NaProTECHNOLOGY and the Creighton Model FertilityCare System also has many other advantages; including treatment for infertility, reproductive disorders, PMS, postpartum depression and more. To answer my former questions, it is abundantly clear to me now that this is a gift from God. He has designed our bodies with all the tools we need. To learn about the true beauty of the female body is empowering!

On the other side of the birth control spectrum, many couples have undergone permanent sterilization procedures or are taking hormonal contraceptives that can cause an array of health issues. Side effects include, but are not limited to, an increased likelihood of stroke, certain types of cancer, depression, and anxiety. Unfortunately, hormonal contraceptives are still the main method of birth control promoted by doctors, making it a \$15 billion industry annually. Not to mention, the hundreds of millions of tax dollars that go annually to Planned Parenthood for abortions. The sad truth is, most doctors aren't taught NFP in medical school and therefore don't know it's a valid option.

We have a free, all-natural tool within us and the majority of us don't know it exists.

As I continue to learn more, I've been trying to spread the word. I recently brought it up to someone in Lebanon that I called to congratulate on her pregnancy. I started with, "Mabrouk! Why didn't you tell me before?" as she was already 5 months along. She went on to tell me that she and her husband weren't excited and had even considered doing something that "went against their faith." I immediately knew what she was implying and couldn't imagine this woman, who before marriage had considered becoming a nun, had contemplated having an abortion. With the atrocities happening in Lebanon, she and her husband are worried about having another mouth to feed. After telling her about NFP, she was eager to learn more.

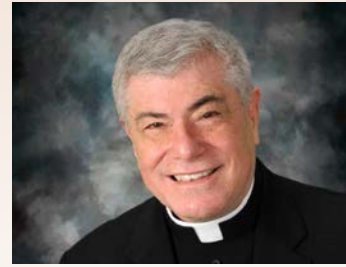
Let us, as the people of God, be pioneers in teaching every woman to fully understand the miracles of their own bodies. This way, couples can experience the fullness of their marriage with God and we can optimize the gifts He has given us!

With love and reverence to God,
Jessica and John Awad

To connect with Jessica about her own experience with NFP email Jessicatallah@gmail.com or for more information, visit the Cedar of Lebanon FertilityCare Center website @ cedaroflebanonfcc.com ■



From the Editor



Super Bowl LVI will be on Sunday, 13 February. This football game has become a larger-than-life event not only of the sports world but of big business. Even the commercials have taken on a life of their own. CBS opened the bidding for 30-second spots at \$5.6 million. Advertisers must pay this as the production cost of the commercial. But it is still good business. The Super Bowl draws 100 million viewers. To do the math, **advertisers are willing to pay \$5.60 for a 30-second opportunity to speak to each of the potential customers.**

Let us now move to the Church. The latest figures indicate that there are 1.1 billion Catholics. Let us take a pessimistic approach and say that 550 million Catholics attend Mass on any given Sunday. We all know that attendance is higher on Christmas and Easter.

The Catholic Church is given the weekly opportunity to communicate directly, in person, with 550 million people for about 10 minutes.

Do we the preachers—bishops, priests and deacons—take advantage of that opportunity? How much time and effort do we take to prepare a homily? Some homilists take their job seriously and are diligent. There are others who are zealous, but perhaps misdirected—if, for example, a priest spends all his time decorating the church for Christmas, but fails to prepare a thoughtful, inspiring homily to celebrate the birth of the Savior.

A poor homily is a missed opportunity to explain the Word of God.

Let's all pray for Saint John Chrysostom (Chrysostom is his nickname meaning "golden mouth"), the patron saint of preachers to help them understand the richness of the opportunity to teach God's people.

And then there is the congregation. Does your mind wander as the homilist begins? Please, **give the preacher the same attention you give to the Super Bowl.** Listen to the homily. It is important—perhaps a matter of spiritual life and death.

I don't know where to direct you for the spiritual strength to listen. St. Francis de Sales is the patron saint of hearing. **We don't have—but really need—a patron saint of listening.** Mary of Bethany is an excellent candidate. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John D. Faris". The script is cursive and fluid.

Chorbishop John D. Faris

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