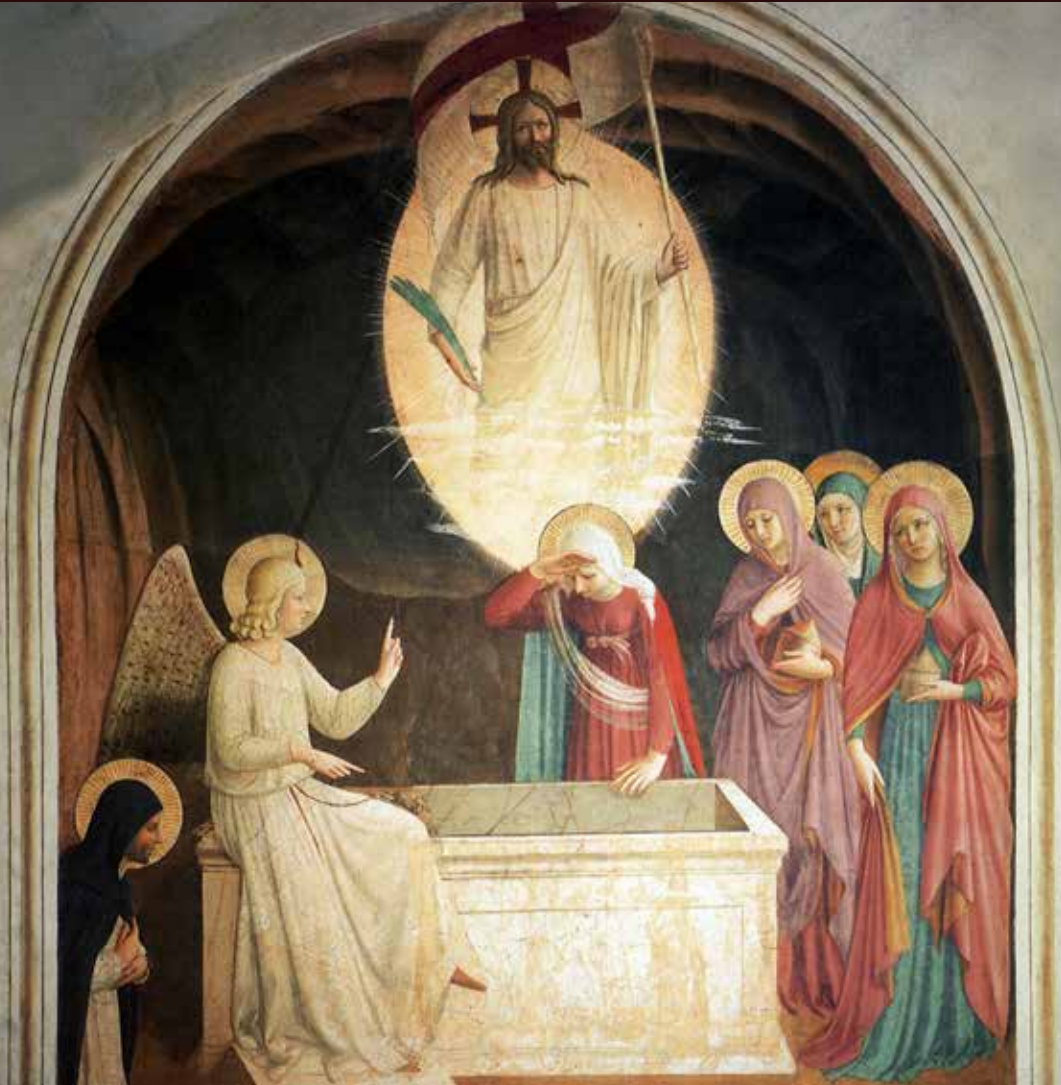


the Maronite **Voice**



“Why look among the dead for someone who is alive?
He is not here; he is risen.”

LUKE 24:5



the Maronite Voice

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Publishers

Most Reverend Gregory John Mansour
Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan

Editor

Chorbishop John D. Faris

Managing Editor

Rev. Aaron Sandbothe

Art and Design Director

Ms. Glory Rasi

Production Coordinator

Subdeacon Michael Maynes

Parish News Editors

Dr. Mabel George Howard
(Eparchy of Saint Maron)
mabelgeorgehoward@gmail.com

Rev. Pierre Bassil
(Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon)
maronitevoicewest@gmail.com

Feature Writers

Brandon Shulleeta
Chet Wade

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Contact Us

Email: MaroniteVoice@gmail.com
Mailing Address:
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Glen Allen, VA 23060

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How Not To Be A Mess

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In my last message in *The Maronite Voice* I wrote “the world is a mess!” Yes, it certainly is a mess, but as I said, we don’t have to be! This is my second installment in “how not to be a mess” ourselves.

First, we can acknowledge that God created us, male and female; he created us with a purpose and with meaning to our lives. Even our bodies, our femininity, our masculinity, have a beautiful purpose in God’s plan. We must make every effort to discover our own masculine or feminine way of living, loving and serving in this world. In humility, when we seek God’s meaning for our own life, instead of imposing our own, we also find that God rejoices to help us find our way. He delights in us — as imperfect as we are — he loves us.

Second, we can acknowledge that when we have fallen from grace, “soiled our garments”, as the Church Fathers would say, we can find grace again in the person of his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. God has saved us personally, not just from the trials and difficulties of our world, he has also saved us from ourselves, our addictions, our anger, our fears, our desolations, our insecurities, and our insistence on doing everything our way. We don’t have to be a mess. As Saint Paul said: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (ROM 8).

Third, a terrible consequence of the first sin of Adam and Eve was that man would dominate over woman. This sad reality completely obscures the original intent of our Creator to make us male and female, with a difference

that is mutually beneficial so as to help us complement one another. Thus, gender is not merely societal norms, but rather something that is naturally designed in our DNA, so that every cell in our body is coded as male or female. We are different for a reason: to complement each other. Viva la difference!

The sin of Adam and Eve, which produced male dominance, is undone by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, who showed all men a new way, the way of humble service, not dominance, but service. This is true of the priesthood — we are called to serve, not dominate. This is true of marriage, a man is called to “lay down his life” for his spouse, and thus lead by a self-gift of himself. His wife, in response, receives his gift, and by virtue of a self-gift of herself, gives herself to her spouse. Thus, both spouses are joined in a Mystery (Sacrament) and a Covenant that connects married people to God, and gives them the capacity, in his name, to bring new life into the world. This is God’s plan. It is wonderful! We don’t always abide by this plan, but still there is grace for us even if we fail.

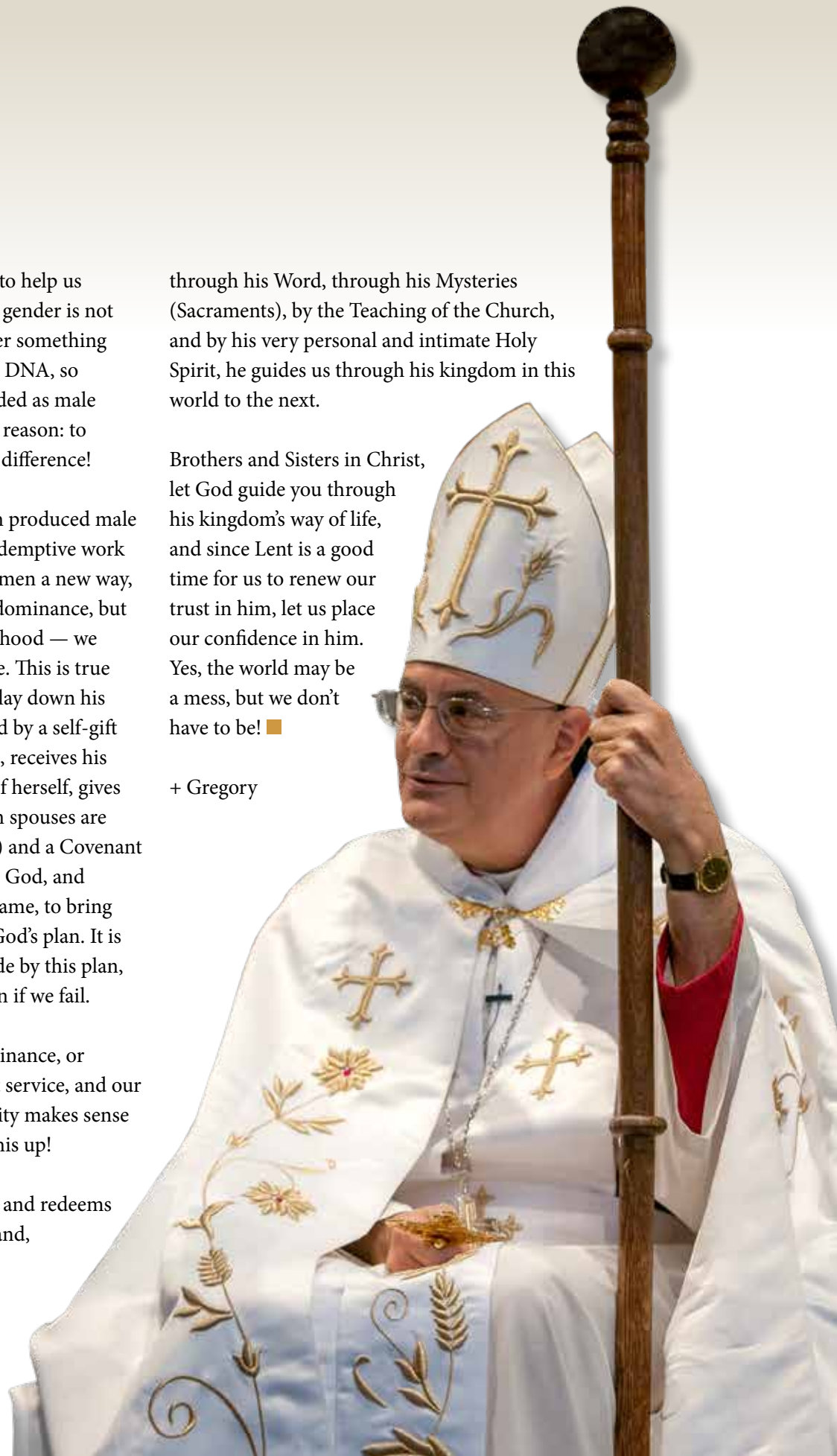
Life and love are not about dominance, or getting what we want, but about service, and our male and female complementarity makes sense out of life. We ought not mess this up!

And lastly, the God who creates and redeems us, also gently leads us by the hand,

through his Word, through his Mysteries (Sacraments), by the Teaching of the Church, and by his very personal and intimate Holy Spirit, he guides us through his kingdom in this world to the next.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let God guide you through his kingdom’s way of life, and since Lent is a good time for us to renew our trust in him, let us place our confidence in him. Yes, the world may be a mess, but we don’t have to be! ■

+ Gregory



Schedule **BISHOP GREGORY J. MANSOUR**

- 12 MARCH** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
- 13-16 MARCH** Lutz, FL | Bethany Center | Eparchial Priest Retreat
- 18-19 MARCH** Orlando, FL | St. Jude Church | Pastoral Visit
- 22-23 MARCH** St. Louis, MO | The Chancery | Eastern Catholic Bishops Meeting
- 24-26 MARCH** Washington, DC | Our Lady of Lebanon Church & Seminary | Pastoral Visit and Ordination to the Minor Orders
- 28 MARCH** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Consecration of Myron and Holy Oils
- 2 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Hosanna Sunday
- 3 APRIL** Somerset, NJ | St. Sharbel Church | Monday in Passion Week
- 4 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Chrism Mass for the Diocese of Brooklyn
- 5 APRIL** Brockton, MA | St. Theresa Church | Rite of the Lamp
- 6 APRIL** Providence, RI | St. George Church | Thursday of the Mysteries Washing of the Feet
- 7 APRIL** New Bedford, MA | Our Lady of Purgatory Church | Signing of the Chalice
- 7 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Adoration of the Cross
- 8-9 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Great Saturday and Easter Sunday
- 18 APRIL** Pleasantville, NJ | Our Lady Star of the East Church | New Sunday Pastoral Visit
- 23 APRIL** Waterbury, CT | Our Lady of Lebanon Church | Pastoral Visit
- 25 APRIL** Presbyteral Council Meeting via Zoom
- 30 APRIL** Sleepy Hollow, NY | St. John Paul II Church | Pastoral Visit
- 7 MAY** Philadelphia, PA | St. Maronite Church | Pastoral Visit

Eternal rest grant to him, O Lord.



SUBDEACON THOMAS “DUKE” GEORGE

Subdeacon Thomas “Duke” R. George of Saint George Church, Uniontown, PA passed away peacefully on 7 March 2023.

Duke was born on 19 January 1932, son of the late Thomas and Haseba (Rezek) George. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 70 years, Amelia “Amy” C. (Michael) George on 7 December 2020; brother, Richard; sister, Alice; granddaughter, Michelle; and grandson, Logan.

Duke lived his life in service of his family, his community, and his God.

A graduate of North Union High School Class of 1949, he served in the United States Army during peacetime, and was recognized as soldier of the month in July 1955. He then pursued a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education from Waynesburg University and furthered his education by completing a Master of Arts Degree from West Virginia University in 1967.

In addition to being an educator, Duke owned and operated the Best for Less Gas and Oil Company in North Union township for over 40 years.

Duke was a gentle man of great intellect and wit, and his passing is a tremendous loss to the community he served and the family and friends he loved.

He is survived by the family he and Amy created, which grew from 6 children to 13 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

Schedule **BISHOP A. ELIAS ZAIDAN**

- 13-15 MARCH** Washington, DC | USCCB Administrative Committee Meetings
- 17-19 MARCH** Phoenix, AZ | St. Joseph Church | Pastoral Visit
- 22-23 MARCH** St. Louis, MO | The Chancery | Eastern Catholic Bishops Meeting
- 25 MARCH** West Covina, CA | St. Jude Church | Pastoral Visit
- 30 MARCH** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | Consecration of Myron and Holy Oils
- 1-7 APRIL** Houston, TX | Our Lady of the Cedars Church | Hosanna Sunday and Passion Week Mission
- 9 APRIL** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | Easter Celebration
- 15-16 APRIL** Clinton Township, MI | St. Sharbel Church | Pastoral Visit and Capital Campaign Event
- 18-20 APRIL** Washington, DC | Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary | Clergy Enrichment Days
- 21-23 APRIL** Birmingham, AL | St. Elias Church | Pastoral Visit
- 2 MAY** Virtual | USCCB Meeting of International Justice and Peace Committee
- 5-7 MAY** Lewisville, TX | Our Lady of Lebanon Church | Pastoral Visit and Presbyteral Ordination of Deacons Peter Raad and George Elandary
- 13-14 MAY** Las Vegas, NV | St. Sharbel Church | Pastoral Visit

The Order of Saint Sharbel New Members

ANNUAL

CLAIRE NAOUM | *St. Maron* | Cleveland, OH

DAVID EMRICH | *Our Lady's Parish* | Austin, TX

PERPETUAL

FADI FARHAT | *Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral* | Brooklyn, NY

PATRICIA BUSEKRUS | *St. Raymond Church* | St. Louis, MO

JOSEPH MARINCEL | *Our Lady of Lebanon Church* | Lewisville, TX

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

The Women at the Tomb— “The Myrrh Bearers”

by Rev. David A. Fisher

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb. (MARK 16:1-2)



Why did they go to the tomb?

Although Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had prepared the body of Jesus for burial with the customary embalming spices, his body had not been properly embalmed because they had to complete the task before the beginning of the Sabbath.

The traditional anointing spices and oil that the women would have brought to the tomb were usually poured over a dead body to counteract the effects of decay and to serve as an expression of the loving devotion of family and friends.

Who were the Myrrh bearers?

The gospel accounts differ regarding the number (1-3) and identity of the myrrh bearers.

The Gospel of Mark (16:1) is most clear about the identity of the women who went to the tomb. Mark writes, there was Mary Magdalene whom Jesus had freed from evil. He then indicates that Mary the mother of James was present. This is most likely a reference to Mary the wife of Clopas. Lastly, Mark lists Salome, the mother of the apostles James and John, also known as the sons of Zebedee (“Sons of Thunder”).

The Gospel of Matthew mentions only two women, “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb.” (MATTHEW 28:1) The Mary mentioned by Matthew is most likely, Mary the wife of Clopas. (See MATTHEW 27:56)

The Gospel of Luke adds yet another woman, Joanna; “The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; the others who accompanied them also told this to the apostles” (LUKE 24:10). Joanna was the wife of Chuza, whom Jesus had healed (LUKE 8:2).

In the Gospel of John, only Mary Magdalene is mentioned; “On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb” (JOHN 20:1).

The evangelist Luke helps us to accept the discrepancies by telling us that there were “others who accompanied them...” (LUKE 24:10). We need to note that there is a common thread pointing to Mary of Magdala as a key *witness* to the empty tomb and subsequently to the Risen Lord.

The Fusion of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene in Syriac Thought

Tatian of Adiabene (120-173) created the famous and unique *Diatessaron*, which merged the Four Gospels into one Gospel. Why? Tatian was thought to be somewhat of a rigorist, who had complained about what he felt was the laxity of Christians in the Roman world that he lived in for a time. So in returning to the Syriac world, he merged the written Gospels into a single written Gospel to communicate what he felt was necessary for living and believing as a faithful Christian. The *Diatessaron* was influential in the Syriac world.

The *Diatessaron* was from the second until the end of the fourth centuries, a standard for Christians in the Syriac speaking world. By the fifth century, the leaders of the Syriac Christian communities began to replace the *Diatessaron* with the Four Gospels. However, the fusion of the Virgin Mary and Mary of Magdala at the tomb had become unquestionable truth. Prof. John Fotopoulos, associate professor at St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame, writes:

By the fifth century, there were concerted efforts in Syria by some church leaders to eliminate the *Diatessaron*, although the belief that Mary the mother of Jesus went to the empty tomb and saw the risen Lord had already spread among Syrian Christians. The first orthodox Father to express such belief is Ephrem the Syrian in his *Commentary on the Diatessaron* (c. 363-373). Ephrem promotes, via his use of the *Diatessaron*, a fusion of Mary Magdalene with Mary the mother of Jesus so that Jesus’s mother is the one who sees the risen Jesus and expresses a gesture of affection for him, eliciting Jesus’s response, “Do not hold on to me” (5.1-5; cf. JOHN 20:17).

“The Women at the Tomb— ‘The Myrrh Bearers’”

Continued from page 9

Saint Romanos the Melodist (490-556AD) was a deacon of the church in Beirut before moving to Constantinople where he created the kontakion, the fundamental form of Byzantine chant. He too was influenced by the Syriac use of the *Diatessaron*. In his *Hymn 35*, the Holy Mother of God expresses her agony to her son and Lord. Jesus responds by telling her, “Take courage, Mother, for you will be the first to see me out of the tomb” (35.12).

Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem in the middle of the seventh century, followed the school of Syriac Fathers who fused the roles of Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. In one of his hymns on the resurrection, he stated that Mary saw the light of Christ shining from his tomb, and she alone was greeted by the resurrected Lord with the word, Rejoice!

The importance of the Virgin Mary as the person who emerges in the fusion of Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, is visually represented in the iconography of the Rabbula Gospels (586). The Rabbula

Gospels represent the exchange between Syriac culture and Greek culture and the languages of Syriac and Greek; forming a unique culture that existed in the Christian Near East, during the era of the Fathers of the Church. In the Rabbula Gospels, the Virgin Mary is identified at the crucifixion and the empty tomb by being the only woman with a nimbus, that being a bright halo.

The Virgin Mary as chief witness to the Resurrection

The Virgin Mary had come to represent the Church in many patristic theologies. In representing the universal Church or being an icon of the Church; the Virgin Mary alone knows, loves, and has faith in the Lord Jesus. In this bond between them, Jesus Christ loves the Church represented by the Pure Virgin Mother, and reveals to the Church first, his victory over death; the foundation stone of the Apostolic Church. ■

Father David A. Fisher is a priest of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and a regular contributor.

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Fortieth Anniversary of Chorbishop Michael G. Thomas

Chorbishop Michael G. Thomas celebrated his fortieth anniversary as a priest on 11 February 2023, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Heart of Jesus Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, was filled as he celebrated the Divine Liturgy of thanksgiving concelebrated by several Maronite and Latin priests, and presided over Bishop Gregory John Mansour and Bishop Frank Caggiano of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

After the Divine Liturgy, the parish honored Chorbishop Michael with a reception and dinner in the parish hall, which was bursting at the seams with clergy, parishioners, and friends from Fort Lauderdale and Miami; clergy from Massachusetts, Minnesota, Georgia and North Dakota; and family members including his mother, who stole the show with her heart-felt speech.



It was truly an enjoyable event where everyone present felt like family, and it was a wonderful tribute to the priesthood.



Maronite Priest Appointed Secretary of Dicastery for the Eastern Churches

by TMV Staff



Lebanese Maronite priest Father Michel Jalakh, OAM, until now rector of the Antonine University in Baabda, Lebanon, has been appointed by Pope Francis as the new Secretary of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches.

Born on 27 August 1966 in Baouchrieh, Father Jalakh made his first religious profession in the Antonine Maronite Order on 15 August 1983, and was ordained a priest on 21 April 1991. From December 2000 to July 2008, he served as Secretarial Attaché at the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. He received his Doctorate in Ecclesiology from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome in 2008.

From 2013 to 2018 he was the Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches and a member of the Commission for Ecumenical Relations of the Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops Assembly in Lebanon. He became the Rector of the Antonine University in Baabda in 2017.

On 21 November 2022 Pope Francis appointed the new Prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches: Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, 67, who until then served as Apostolic Nuncio in Great Britain. The prelate began his service on 16 January of this year. ■

Assisted Suicide Isn't an Act of Love *by Rev. Timothy Vaverek*

In the name of compassion, the Netherlands 30 years ago permitted assisted suicide (sometimes falsely called “aid in dying”). Today, it’s legal in a dozen countries, including 10 states in America plus Washington D.C. As laws become more permissive, Christians need to be clear about the meaning of life, suffering, and love. Otherwise, we’ll be drawn into the deadly “compassion” of the world.

“Aid in dying” long ago ceased to be limited to “euthanasia” (killing a person to end intolerable pain). The justification now includes “quality of life” criteria. These can vary widely, such as wanting to escape mental illness, growing old, or living without a deceased spouse. In some places, no reason is required, just a decision to die made with a sound mind.

It’s important to recognize that there’s no moral obligation to extend life by every possible method. A person whose body is unable to sustain itself by ordinary means is naturally dying and can be allowed to do so if the assistance required to preserve life is “extraordinary” (that is, unduly risky, burdensome, or expensive). Extraordinary means can be refused or removed at any time. That action isn’t suicide or murder because the body is failing through its own deficiencies which can’t be remedied by ordinary means.

Food, water, and air are ordinary means for sustaining life. These must be provided as long as the body is able to benefit from them and the method for providing them hasn’t become extraordinary. “Withholding” them to hasten death is an act of suicide/murder. The

person doesn’t die because of bodily deficiency but because they’ve been deliberately denied ordinary support and killed by the resulting dehydration, starvation, or suffocation.

We also need to be clear that compassion is always required. But this compassion isn’t what the world thinks it is. “Compassion” means “to suffer with.” It isn’t an emotion or a willingness to “put someone out of their misery.” At root, it’s the basic human response and duty of being concerned for the well-being of another person. It’s seen, for example, in parents who suffer over a child’s illness or waywardness.

St. Paul describes this response as “bear[ing] one another’s burdens” and says it’s part of “fulfill[ing] the law of Christ” (GAL 6:2). That law is Jesus’ command to love one another as he has loved us. It’s the love he showed by uniting us to himself and carrying us, our joys, and our sorrows in his heart and mind. As he has done for us, so we must do for others with and in him.

From an authentically human and Christian perspective, those who suffer are entitled to compassion and ordinary care, neither of which can ever be withdrawn. We may use extraordinary interventions to prolong life but aren’t obliged to do so or to continue them once they’ve begun. Given these realities, what is to be done when someone asks us to provide (or to permit) interventions or the removal of ordinary care to cause their death?

The secular Western world doesn’t have much of a response other than to verify the person is making an



informed and free request. They believe human life only has the meaning we choose to give it and that we are the masters of our destiny. They find little or no meaning in suffering. Therefore, they're prepared to legally approve and personally support suicide and assisted suicide.

To avoid making that terrible, inhumane mistake, we Christians need to deepen our understanding of the life and salvation Jesus offers humanity.

Every person's existence and purpose is rooted in God, not in ourselves. Our life was meant entirely for joy, but then humanity selfishly turned to sin. Evil and death thereby entered the world. As a result, we and those we love can, guilty or not, be in truly horrifying situations. We weren't created for this and so it causes spiritual, psychological, and physical suffering. To escape that pain some people commit suicide.

God rescues us by offering an embrace rather than an escape. He chose to unite us to himself in the midst of the mess of our lives so that we could share his life while on earth and forever in heaven. That changed our relation to everyone and everything, including to sin, evil, suffering, and death.

Jesus, true God and true man, has always loved us and known the course of our life. In embracing us, Christ in his humanity shared in that divine knowledge and love. This caused him to have a perfect and unique compassion for each person. He made our joys and sorrows his own. In the end, this is the burden and suffering revealed in his Passion and Death. It's also the

joy revealed in his Resurrection. He didn't simply carry our sins; he carried us.

Consider the wondrous outcome: when we encounter evil and suffering in life we find Jesus there waiting for us! We're not alone or without hope. More than that, we discover he already made this pain and sorrow his own so that we could now carry them with him. That's what love does. It unites us and enables us to share each other's joys and sorrows.

This is the love and life Jesus offers us and commands we share with others. St. Paul tells us that in Christ this love endures all things so that we can pour ourselves in love to the moment of death, even an agonizing one (see I COR 13:4-8 AND PHIL 2:5-8). Every person needs to embrace, not escape, this "excruciating" encounter with Jesus (literally, an encounter coming "from the Cross").

We must also compassionately entrust those who nevertheless commit suicide to God's merciful love.

As long as Jesus in his love sustains a person's earthly life through ordinary means, our duty is to share their joys and sorrows and to relieve whatever suffering we can. It's never our place to withdraw such ordinary care, otherwise cause their death, or aid them in doing so. That's murder, not assistance, compassion, or Christ's love. ■

Rev. Timothy V. Vaverek is the author of the recently published book, As I Have Loved You: Rediscovering our Salvation in Christ

Saints in the Maronite Calendar

by Fr. Claude W. Franklin, Jr.

March – Seven Young Men of Ephesus

On 7 March, the Maronite Calendar commemorates *The Seven Young Men of Ephesus*, also known as, The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. According to the eighteenth century *Maronite Synaxarion* of Germanus Farhat, they were also commemorated on 22 October.

The Seven Young Men of Ephesus were Christians and were all in military service. During the persecution of Christians under emperor Decius (249-251), they were commanded to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods; anyone refusing would be tortured to death. The seven youths were denounced as Christians and brought before the emperor, who was visiting Ephesus. They held steadfast and confessed their faith in Christ. The emperor stripped them of their military insignia and initially set them free, hoping that they would change their minds. Instead, the youths ran and hid in a cave near Ephesus, preparing for their ultimate martyrdom.

The emperor learned of their continued refusal to offer sacrifice to the gods and that they were hiding in a cave. He ordered soldiers to seal the cave with stones, so that the youths would die from hunger and thirst. Two dignitaries of Ephesus, who were secret Christians, to preserve the memory of the seven youths, had their names inscribed on two metal plaques, describing their suffering and death, and placed the plaques in a jar in the cave before it was sealed.

The Lord had other plans and placed the seven youths in a miraculous sleep that lasted two centuries. In the meantime, persecutions had ceased against the Christians, and the youths awoke during the reign of the emperor Theodosius (408-450). However, heretics were denying the Resurrection of the Dead at the Second Coming and thus God's plan for the seven youths became known.

The owner of the land where the cave was situated, decided to open it up. The Lord had kept the seven youths alive, their bodies and clothing undecayed. When they awoke, they did not know that two centuries had passed. One of the youths went into town to buy bread and was astonished to see a Cross on the gates of the city. When he paid for the bread with coins with emperor Decius' image, the merchant reported him, and he was detained for holding a horde of old coins. He was taken to the bishop of Ephesus, who was also the city administrator, who after hearing the youth's account perceived that God was revealing a mystery through the youths.



They went to the cave and found the jar with the two metal plaques and understood that God had preserved them as a demonstration of the mystery of the Resurrection of the Dead. Then the youths lay their heads once more upon the ground in the sight of everyone and fell asleep, this time until the General Resurrection.

Though they did not suffer martyrdom in the traditional way, they are often numbered among the martyrs, as we see in the *Maronite Synaxarion* of Germanus Farhat: “The Seven Martyrs, who fell asleep in the cave.”

April – Saint Nathanael the Hermit

On 20 April, the Maronite Calendar commemorates *Saint Nathanael the Hermit*. His first appearance on the Maronite Calendar is in the early eighteenth century *Maronite Synaxarion* of Archbishop Germanus Farhat. The account found in the *Farhat Synaxarion* is a summary of Chapter 16 “Nathanael the Hermit,” from the *Lausiac History of Palladius* (a fourth century collection of lives of the Desert Fathers of Egypt).

The author of the *Lausiac History* recounts that Nathanael built and lived in a cell in the desert away from the monastery. Nathanael made a vow never to leave his cell, for which a demon aimed to deceive Nathanael and convince him to leave his cell and return to civilization. At first Nathanael was deceived by the demon into having a distaste for his first cell, and so he went off and built another cell closer to a village. After he had built the second cell and occupied it for about four months, the demon came at night, appearing as a ragged soldier, and cracked an ox-hide whip like those used by executioners. Saint Nathanael said to him: “Who are you who do such things in my dwelling?” The demon answered: “I am he who drove you from your first cell. I have come to chase you out of this one too.” Having learned of the demon’s deception, Nathanael returned to his first cell and

remained there for thirty-seven years, vowing to never again cross the threshold of his cell. The demon continued to quarrel with Nathanael throughout those years in various deceptive ways.

On one occasion, the demon, knowing that seven holy bishops were passing Nathanael’s way, put it into the deacons’ minds, who were accompanying the bishops, to rebuke Nathanael: “This is an act of pride, Father, not escorting the bishops.” But Nathanael said to them: “I am dead both to my lords the bishops and to all the world. For I have a hidden design and God knows my heart; and why I do not escort them.” Thus did the demon fail once again in moving Nathanael from his cell.

Finally, nine months before Nathanael’s death, the demon disguised himself as a young man, pulling a donkey with baskets of bread. The donkey fell in front of Nathanael’s cell and the young man cried out, “Father Nathanael, pity me and give me a hand.” Nathanael hearing the voice, opened the door of his cell and stood in the doorway, and said: “Who are you and what do you want me to do for you?” The young man said: “I am so-and-so’s servant, and I am carrying loaves for one of the brothers’ offering tomorrow on the Sabbath. I beseech you, do not neglect me, lest I and my donkey be eaten by hyenas.” Nathanael stood troubled in his heart, arguing within himself. He considered that it was better to confuse the demon, than to break his vow. Thus, he spoke: “Listen, young man! I believe in the God Whom I serve, that if you are in need, God will send you help and neither will hyenas harm you nor anyone else. But if you are a temptation, God will reveal the matter now,” and he shut the door of his cell and remained inside. And thus did Saint Nathanael defeat the demon; and he remained in his cell until his dying day. ■

Father Claude Franklin, Jr., is pastor of Saint Joseph in Olean, NY.

Despite the noise, Catholics must keep their eyes on the target!

by Brandon Shulleeta

Ever since he was a young child, the idea of becoming a priest was always in Father George Hajj's heart.

Even as he advanced through his 20s and into his early-30s — establishing a career with his background in archeology and in a relationship with a young woman at the time — the idea of becoming a priest was still with him.

Finally, when he was 32, he decided that he would enter the seminary. “There was part of me saying ‘I’m just going there to get it out of my system,’” Father Hajj said.

But while in seminary school, Father George, who is now 46, says that he found “fulfillment.”

Father Hajj was raised in Lebanon in a family of strong Catholics. Among them was his grandfather, after whom he was named. In many ways, his grandfather helped show him how to be a good Christian. He learned from him devotion and prayerfulness and the importance of being a good Christian in both “word and deed,” not only believing in Christ but also showing faith through actions. Just as importantly, Father Hajj said, his grandfather was a cheerful man who was appreciative.

Father George has been the parish priest at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, since 2014. In carrying out his ministry he still draws many of the lessons from his grandfather.

He's a strong believer that being a Christian requires both faith and works. And he also supports tithing, giving 10% of earnings to charitable causes, such as the church, poor people or others in need.

“Everything we have received is from the Lord, and to build the Kingdom of God, we have to invest in it. ... Each and every one of us is to partake in building the Kingdom of God,” he said.

He said that he believes to be a good priest one must be attached to Christ and take the priesthood seriously, but with humility, “not taking yourself too seriously.”





“The way to live our faith is always to trust in God’s providence, but always belong,” Father Hajj said. “This is the essence of our Christian faith—to belong to the body of Christ. ... It is the words of Christ that I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. Christ always wanted ... to bring us to be insiders to his Kingdom.”

Christians have to make “the personal decision that we belong to the Church ... the body of Christ ... (and become) insiders to the Kingdom of God,” he said.

Father Hajj said there’s “a lot of noise around us” nowadays but insisted that we remain focused on what matters — keeping our eyes on the target, which is salvation, and a life centered around Christ, “always looking toward Him.” ■

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



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Our Lady of Lebanon Millbrae, California *by Chet Wade*

Maronite families fleeing the violence of the Lebanese Civil War in the 1970s and 1980s found one thing missing when they settled in the San Francisco Bay area — a church. The nearest Maronite church was in Stockton, a drive of two hours or more for some.

Traumatized by their experiences and working to adjust to their new lives, they prayed for a place to gather and worship. Their prayers were answered by the establishment of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church.

The first priest, Father Paul Mouawad, arrived in 1977, and the church acquired its building in 1981. (Father Paul passed away in January in Lebanon.)

Dr. Nick Makhoul, who was eight years old when his family arrived from Lebanon in 1978, remembers what it was like in the beginning. “We were a handful of families,” Dr. Makhoul said. “You could count us on the fingers of one hand. We naturally bonded because of our similar background and nationality and circumstances. We wanted to spend some days together and pray together, and there was no place for us to pray as Maronites.”

The church gave the new arrivals a spiritual, cultural and community bedrock. It is a role that continues to define Our Lady of Lebanon today. While many parishioners are assimilating into American and Californian cultures, many others maintain strong bonds to their ancestral land.

“The people are more connected with their church, with the land, with tradition,” said Father Rami Razzouk, church pastor. “In some ways, we have a small Lebanon here.”

Our Lady of Lebanon also is becoming a spiritual and cultural sanctuary for Maronite immigrants fleeing conflicts and persecution in other parts of the Middle East.

“We are not only Lebanese,” Father Rami said. “We have Syrian, Jordanian, Palestinian. This is the beauty of the Maronite church. We share the same struggle from the east.”

Our Lady of Lebanon is in Millbrae, about 15 miles south of San Francisco’s city center. It has about 250 members and worships in a building purchased from St. Dunstan’s Roman Catholic Church.

Father Rami arrived at Our Lady of Lebanon in December 2019, only months before the COVID-19 pandemic began. He was ordained by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan in 2018 in Ghadir, Jounieh, Lebanon. His sponsor was his uncle, Father Nadim Abou Zeid, pastor of Saint Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church in Las Vegas. After ordination, Father Rami’s first assignment was as associate pastor of St. Elias Maronite Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

Father Rami said the parishioners work hard to build the church. Resources are limited, costs are high, and many parishioners live a long distance from the church.

“We are growing little by little,” he said.

The church is seeing a “passing of the guard” as founding members pass away. It is still mourning the loss of a founding member and “backbone of the church,” Joseph M. Maroun, who died in December.

As second- and third-generation parishioners increase in population, the church added a Saturday evening liturgy that is primarily in English to go with one on Sunday that is primarily in Arabic. It also celebrates liturgy on the last Saturday of each month in San Jose, about 40 miles south, for the benefit of Maronites in that area.



One challenge to growing Our Lady of Lebanon is the lack of physical space. The church building is small and has no off-street parking. Parishioners sometimes flow out the doors and onto the sidewalk during holidays and other major celebrations. A nearby house must be used for Maronite education and the rectory is in a third building.

Father Rami expressed the hope to find a new location where all the church functions can be held, one with more space for social activities. However, he doesn't want the desire for a new facility to interfere with the primary focus of the church.

"I say, 'Guys, it's not only about that,'" Father Rami said. "Let's first build our faith. Just be strong in faith and then everything will come after. This is what Jesus said."

Despite the limitations of the facilities, Our Lady of Lebanon has several very active organizations and activities. This includes the parish council, financial committee, ladies' guild, and education programs for the youth.

Jackie Kalil, who leads religious education for the church, said a key to the Our Lady of Lebanon's future is in maintaining ties with the U.S.-born generations.

As a long-term member of the church and an immigrant herself from Gaza, she has seen what the church means to the community. She has dedicated herself to the future of the parish through youth education since her husband, Roger, passed away.

"We're hoping that by growing the faith of the youth, the children, that will help ensure the continuity of the church," Kalil said. "It's not just about now, it's about the future."



Our Lady of Lebanon's limited facilities have not stopped it from hosting a highly successful annual Lebanese Festival. The church has made arrangements with Redwood City, about 13 miles to the south, to hold the one-day festival there every Labor Day weekend. The festival has been going on for a dozen years and now draws more than 10,000 people – making it one of the region's most popular cultural festivals.

Church members also stay connected through the annual parties for Christmas and Mother's Day as well as retreats and pilgrimages.

It is all these things that keep the people of Our Lady of Lebanon connected.

Dr. Makhoul, who drives more than an hour to attend the church, said that Our Lady of Lebanon provides more than a mass once a week. He said, "The church offers safe harbor to families of different backgrounds. It provides culture. It provides history. It provides sanctuary." ■

Chet Wade has worked for more than 45 years in mass communications. He and his wife Mary Lou recently returned to his hometown of Pittsburgh and Our Lady of Victory Church.



WELCOME TO PROVIDENCE, RI

58TH NATIONAL MARONITE CONVENTION

JULY 5 - 9 2023

Hosted by St. Anthony of the Desert Church
Sponsored by The National Apostolate of Maronites
namnews.org



OMNI HOTEL PROVIDENCE

\$189/night

Reservations must be made no later than Monday, June 12, 2023.

The Omni Hotel is located in the heart of downtown at 1 W. Exchange St., Providence, RI 02903.

For reservations call 1-402-952-6646 and ask for the National Maronite Convention room block or visit www.omnihotels.com/hotels/providence/meetings nam-national-convention-2023-07022023.

THURSDAY, JULY 6

ENTERTAINMENT



PLATED DINNER FOLLOWED BY WORLD-RENOWNED SINGER **ABEER NEHME** & VOCALIST **CHRISTINE LATTOUF**

NEWPORT, RI

EXCURSIONS



BREAKERS MANSION TOUR
A symbol of the Vanderbilt family's social standing in the Gilded Age, the Breakers is the flagship of the Newport Mansions.

BEACHES OR SHOPPING

Enjoy sun and surf at the popular Easton's Beach or Shopping on famous Thames St. and America's Cup Avenue.



WORK SHOPS

- THE SYNOD
- EUCHARISTIC ADORATION
12:30 PM THURSDAY TO 12:30 PM FRIDAY

FRIDAY, JULY 7

ENTERTAINMENT



HAFLI DINNER FOLLOWED BY TALENTED **AMIN SULTAN** & LOCAL TALENT FROM ST. ANTHONY OF THE DESERT **EVAN MASSOUD & THE KHOURY FAMILY**

ROGER WILLIAMS PARK



ZOO
Enjoy 150 animals from around the globe!

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New England's largest glasshouse garden, a beautiful rose maze and many outdoor perennial gardens to explore.



BOATING
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EXCURSIONS

WORK SHOPS

- PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS ON OUR YOUTH TODAY
- MCF SUMMER CAMP K - 6
- MYO YOUTH ACTIVITIES 7 - 12
- MYA ROUND TABLE AND PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSION: Explore spirituality, investing in real estate, 401K, resume writing and more.

SATURDAY, JULY 8

ENTERTAIN
M E N T



GRAND BANQUET FEATURING INTERNATIONAL LEBANESE SUPERSTARS **GEORGE & ABEER NEHME**



AMAZEMENT ON TAP: MYA
Enjoy meeting with Bishop Mansour and Bishop Zaidan at Reiner's Pub right next door for conversation, drinks and light fare.

PROVIDENCE WALKING TOURS

Choose from five self-guided walking tours: Downtown Historic Tour, Early Black History Tour, East Side Historic Tour, Jewelry District Tour or the West Side Historic tour. Maps will be provided at registration.

EXCURSIONS

WORK
SHOPS

- **CHOIR WORKSHOP**
- **CARL ANDERSON**, former CEO & Chairman of the Board of the Knights of Columbus and **CHORBISHOP SEELY BEGGIANI** will speak on the Commission of Lebanon.
- **MCF SUMMER CAMP K-6**
- **MYO YOUTH ACTIVITIES 7 - 12**

SILENT AUCTION

Our Silent Auction is planned for **Thursday, July 6 and Friday, July 7th**. We will have wonderful items for you to bid on. We hope you will attend as this event **supports NAM service programs and host parish, St. Anthony of the Desert Church.**

For more information: Please visit the NAM website at: www.namnews.org. We also recommend you visit our Convention Microsite at www.goprovidence.com/nam Connect with us on both the NAM and St. Anthony of the Desert Maronite Catholic Church Facebook pages.

SUNDAY, JULY 9

CLOSING

CLOSE OUT THE CONVENTION by attending a beautiful, Pontifical liturgy with our bishops and then enjoy a wonderful brunch.

Safe travels home!
SEE YOU IN DETROIT IN 2024!



St. Anthony of the Desert Maronite Catholic church in Fall River, Massachusetts is proud to host the 58th National Maronite Convention. Our theme this year is: "Eucharistic Amazement - The Maronite Way". We look forward to hosting you and offering an exceptional

convention experience! Enjoy spiritual engagement, liturgies, educational workshops for all ages, sing-a-longs, and New England hospitality.

Our dinner and entertainment festivities will begin on Thursday evening this year and we are proud to present fabulous talent to you!

Our raffle has four cash prizes: \$10,000 grand prize, followed by \$7,500, \$5,000, and \$2,500.

Thank you to all who are considering placing an ad in the Convention Ad Book. It is a tradition that we all look forward to and each family will receive the book at registration!

Come celebrate July 4th in Providence and thank you in advance for your support.

In Christ,
Monsignor James Root

ADDITIONAL HOTEL OPTIONS

The Graduate Providence, 11 Dorrance St., Providence, RI 02903

Group Registration Code: **2307APOMAR**

BOOKING LINK:

<https://www.graduatehotels.com/providence/#/booking/step-1?group=2307APOMAR&arrive=7/07/2023&depart=7/09/2023>

Hotel Registrations: **401-421-0700**

RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE NO LATER THAN JUNE 8, 2023

**Providence Courtyard Downtown (Courtyard by Marriott)
23 Exchange Ter., Providence, RI 02903**

BOOKING LINK:

<https://www.marriott.com/events/start.mi?id=1661189358566&key=GRP>

RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE NO LATER THAN JUNE 2, 2023



58TH NATIONAL MARONITE CONVENTION

Sponsored by the National Apostolate of Maronites

REGISTRATION FORM

Pre-registration Deadline: **Monday, June 5, 2023**

Please complete all information or register online: www.namnews.org

Incomplete forms will not be processed. Please PRINT legibly. You will receive a confirmation via email or mail.

Primary Registrant: *(Please add additional family members on reverse side)*

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Parish: _____

Check all that apply:

- NAM Member NAM Delegate
- NAM Board Order of St. Sharbel
- Conv. Comm. Child (5-11)
- Youth (12-18) Young Adult (18-35)

Allergies: _____

PACKAGES ONLY – Enter number of packages desired and make sure to fill in Grand Total. Daily Workshops are included with any purchase. NAM members whose 2023 dues have been paid will receive \$15 off of the full adult package and \$10 off all other packages. This discount is void after the pre-registration deadline of June 5, 2023. If you wish to pay for your membership with this registration: send a check payable to NAM.

Excursions are additional and not included in packages. Saturday Banquet seating is available on-line or please contact NAM office at 914-964-3070. The "Covenant of Behavior" MUST be completed for all Child and Youth registrants- if not accompanied by parent. See forms on-line.

**YOUTH: If you are 18 and did not graduate from high school by summer; YOUNG ADULT: If you are over 18 and a high school graduate and younger than 35.

PACKAGE OPTIONS AND PRICING

Package Options	Adult and Young Adult 18+ years		Youth 12 - 18 years		Child 5 - 11 years		
	Before 6/5/2023	After 6/5/2023	Before 6/5/2023	After 6/5/2023	Before 6/5/2023	After 6/5/2023	
DOES NOT INCLUDE HOTEL ROOMS							
Full: Thursday-Sunday	# ____ @ \$390	# ____ @ \$410	# ____ @ \$380	# ____ @ \$400	# ____ @ \$170	# ____ @ \$190	
Weekend: Friday-Sunday	# ____ @ \$350	# ____ @ \$370	# ____ @ \$340	# ____ @ \$360	# ____ @ \$150	# ____ @ \$170	
Saturday-Sunday: Entertainment & Dinner (Sunday Brunch Included)	# ____ @ \$250	# ____ @ \$270	# ____ @ \$240	# ____ @ \$260	# ____ @ \$140	# ____ @ \$160	
Saturday Entertainment Only at 10 PM							# ____ @ \$175

EXCURSIONS AND PRICING

Date	Excursions - transportation is included in pricing below where applicable	Time	# of Attendees	Price
Thursday, July 6	Newport, RI — Explore beaches or shopping on famous Thames St. and America's Cup Avenue <i>All ages welcome, cold beverages and snacks provided</i>	11 AM - 6 PM		# ____ @ \$25
	Newport, RI — Explore the historic Breakers mansion and more <i>All ages welcome, cold beverages and snacks provided</i>	11 AM - 6 PM		# ____ @ \$45
Friday, July 7	Roger Williams Park — Zoo: Admission <i>Toddlers 1 year and younger are free</i>	12:30 PM - 4:30 PM		# ____ @ \$45
	Roger Williams Park — Boating: Swan boats, Electric boats, Kayaks, and Pirate Boat *BUS ONLY: All boat rental tickets purchased on site (Avg. Price \$5-\$15 p/p)	12:30 PM - 4:30 PM		# ____ @ \$25*
	Roger Williams Park — Botanical Center *BUS ONLY: All admission tickets purchased on site (Avg. Price \$2-\$5 p/p)	12:30 PM - 4:30 PM		# ____ @ \$25*
Saturday, July 8	"Amazement on Tap" with the Bishops at Reiner's Pub with light fare (<i>MYA Only</i>)	2 PM - 4 PM		# ____ @ \$25
	Providence Walking Tours — Self guided, maps provided	1 PM - 5 PM		FREE

GRAND TOTAL \$ _____

Please make checks payable to "NAM Convention" and mail to NAM 2110 Redwood Pl, Canfield, OH 44406

Do not send cash. If using a Credit Card register online or call 914-964-3070

Omni Hotel Rate is \$189.00 + tax. For Reservations please call 1-402-952-6646 and ask for the National Maronite Convention room block or visit www.omnihotels.com/hotels/providence/meetings/nam-national-convention-2023-07022023

Reservations must be made no later than **Monday, June 12, 2023**

Please note the nearest airport is TF Green Airport in Warwick, RI.

Ordinations

Diaconal Ordination of George Younes



It has been a long spiritual journey, traveled with studious application and patience, for Deacon George Younes. Since his early seminary days over two decades ago, he has married and established a family with four children and an active business life. With great joy, he welcomed the restoration of married priests in North America. George then was accepted by the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles to resume his seminary studies, which has taken him to the special day of 8 December 2022 on the occasion of his diaconal ordination.

Bishop Elias Zaidan celebrated the ordination at Saint Maron parish in Minneapolis. Concelebrating were Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun, also his sponsor and long-time pastor, Father Anthony Salim, retired, Father Emmanuel Nahkle of our sister parish of Holy Family Church of Saint Paul, Fr. Tony Massad of Saint Maron of Youngstown, OH, and Fr. Milad Yaghi of Our Lady of the Cedars in Houston, TX.

George's family added to the uniqueness and family embrace of this ordination. His eldest son served as lector, and each of his two daughters as soloists in the choir. Several family members carried the gifts and all four children offered intercessions. George's parents and wife presented the diaconal vestments.

The Divine Liturgy culminated with Deacon George distributing Communion to his family. A Lebanese feast and joyful gathering prepared by the Saint Rafka and Saint Anne's Club of our parish wrapped up the celebration.

Deacon George is continuing his required studies in preparation for his ordination to the priesthood. ■

Ordination of Subdeacon Antoine Klaib

On Sunday, 22 January, Antoine Klaib was ordained to the subdiaconate at St. Jude Church in West Covina, California, by Bishop Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. Participating and assisting His Excellency were Fr. Ramsine Hage, Fr. Albert Constantine, and Subdeacons George Haddad and Fouad Francis. In attendance was Antoine's wife of 30 years, Rita Saade Klaib, along with their four daughters, Maya, Lana, Clara and Dema Hattar, son in law, Khalil Hattar, and their two grandchildren Jacob and Naya. They were joined by family, friends, members of the Family of St. Sharbel, and St. Jude Parishioners. Rita and their daughters brought up the offerings during the liturgy, with grandson Jacob carrying the candle that was lit during the ordination. A celebratory luncheon was held in the church hall with both clergy and parishioners. Subdeacon Antoine has been an active member of the parish since its establishment over 25 years ago, serving as an usher and founding member of the Brotherhood of St. Jude. He began his journey to ordination two years ago with the help of Fr. Ramsine Hage, his sponsor and pastor of St. Jude, and Fr. Patrick Kassab, Director of the Office of Ministries of the Eparchy of Los Angeles. ■





MYA Southern Regional Day Retreat – St. Sharbel Church

by Maria Harb, MYA Member from Raleigh, NC

The MYA Southern Regional Day Retreat at St. Sharbel Church in Raleigh, NC, was a major success! With almost 30 attendees from 3 parishes, we had a diverse group of young adults join us in prayer, share their thoughts, and build new friendships.

For some of our attendees, the retreat began on Friday with the Stations of the Cross with Fr Robert. Afterwards, we participated in a lectio divina with Sister Therese Maria. The rest of our attendees joined us Saturday morning for a day packed with religious and social events meant to bring us closer to one another and God.

Our first activity, the infamous icebreaker, was a great way to quite literally “break the ice” and get everyone acquainted and comfortable with speaking up. Then, we enjoyed a heartfelt and uplifting talk led by Sister Therese Maria on God’s mercy and love through the story of the healing of the hemorrhaging woman. We were reminded to reach out with courage to the Lord the same way the hemorrhaging woman did when she was in need of healing, whether it be physically, emotionally, or spiritually. We split up into smaller groups and delved deeper into the topic of healing with an interactive

Q&A session. We were all given the space to share our thoughts and feelings and to unpack the content and brainstorm ways to encourage faith and healing.

Then, we socialized over a delicious, traditional Lebanese lunch sponsored by Neomonde. Given the beautiful weather, we took our retreat outside for the next activity. We played a fun game of “guess the name stuck to your forehead.” We played this game using popular modern-day celebrities as well as religious and biblical figures to get us ready for the next planned event: a talk about forgiveness led by Fr. Youssef Mariam, CFR. We were incredibly blessed to have this wonderful Lebanese priest and friar join us for our retreat all the way from Nicaragua! He gave a passionate presentation about the power forgiveness has in bringing us peace and closer to God. Similarly, we followed his talk with a small group Q&A session to probe further into the topic of forgiveness.

Later in the afternoon, we had adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and confession in the church. For two hours, we opened our hearts to the Lord by collectively praying the Rosary and spending time with the different movements of prayer (adoration, contrition, thanksgiving and supplication). We concluded our prayers with Saturday Liturgy, where we thanked God for the heartwarming and spiritually uplifting day. Our attendees led the choir, read the epistle, and offered the intentions, and the gifts.

After Liturgy, we enjoyed a home cooked dinner made by the women of the church, socialized and made smores at the bonfire, and danced the night away with a dabke! What a blessed day for all! ■



Maronite Youth Organization

The Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles MYO Office has concluded our 2023 regional retreat season, and what a powerful season it was. The Eparchial MYO Board traveled to three retreat centers in the West, Midwest, and South in which our teens embarked on their “Set Free” journey together.

We can't wait to see our teens as we regroup this summer for our 2023 National MYO Conference, with the theme “Awaken,” as well as for our regional retreat season next year! Stay tuned for our dates, locations, and registration information coming soon! ■



Stay up to date with the Eparchy of OLOL MYO
Instagram: www.instagram.com/olol_my
Facebook: www.facebook.com/ololeparchy.myo



Pope Benedict XVI and His Legacy for Lebanon

by James Salamy



On 31 December 2022, at almost 96 years of age, His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, passed to eternal life.

Following the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected to the Chair of Peter, taking the name Benedict XVI. He served in this role for almost eight years until his resignation in 2013. He then lived a quiet life of prayer as Pope Emeritus for almost 10 years until his passing.

In 1995, Pope John Paul II called for a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be held for Lebanon. This was the second and the last time that a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was called for a particular country, rather than a large geographic region. This Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops showed the care and concern of the Pope for the people of Lebanon, especially after the Lebanese civil war from 1975 to 1990.

Fifteen years following Pope John Paul II's Synod of Bishops, in June 2010, Pope Benedict XVI made his sixteenth Apostolic Journey outside of Italy and his third to the Middle East. The goal of this journey was to highlight the dual role of the Middle East as the cradle of Christianity and a witness of the Christian faith. During this time, the Pope visited Cyprus for three days. It was in Cyprus that Pope Benedict XVI gave the bishops of the Middle East a working document to frame the discussion for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be held later that year at the Vatican. This was the first time that a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops had been called for the Middle East, highlighting the importance of the Catholic Church in the region.

While in Cyprus, Pope Benedict XVI also paid special attention to the Maronite Archeparchy of Cyprus which comprises more than half of the island's very small Catholic population. Not more than three percent of Cypriots are

Catholic, the majority being Orthodox. Pope Benedict XVI visited the Maronite Archeparchy of Cyprus on two separate occasions, the Maronite Cathedral of Our Lady of Graces and Saint Maron Primary School, both in Nicosia.

In September 2012, for what would be his final Apostolic Journey outside of Italy, Pope Benedict XVI visited Lebanon, only the second pope since apostolic times to do so. The first was Pope John Paul II, who visited Lebanon on 10 and 11 May 1997. Pope John Paul II visited Lebanon to sign the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, "A New Hope for Lebanon." By personally visiting Lebanon, Pope John Paul II also sought to give Lebanon a new hope and a vision for its future. It should be noted that on 2 December 1964, on his way to visit India, Pope Paul VI landed at the Airport of Beirut and disembarked to address the President of Lebanon, Charles Helou.

Throughout his Apostolic Journey to Lebanon, Pope Benedict XVI, repeated the message of peace that he first offered at the welcome ceremony, "I have come to Lebanon as a pilgrim of peace, as a friend of God and as a friend of men. Christ says, 'My peace I give to you' (Jn 14:27)." Pope Benedict XVI also reminded the Lebanese people of his closeness to them and his prayers for them. Pope Benedict told the Lebanese people that he is always reminded of them by the statue of Saint Maron that was installed in one of the few remaining niches on the outside of Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican in 2011 to commemorate the 1600th Anniversary of the death of Saint Maron in 410.

Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Journey to Lebanon was from Friday to Sunday, 14 to 16 September 2012. After arriving in Beirut and the welcome ceremony at the airport, Pope Benedict XVI went directly to Harissa to sign the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East. "The Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness." (It was also in

Harissa, 15 years earlier, that his predecessor, Pope John Paul II signed the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “A New Hope for Lebanon.”)

As a sign of the communion and witness of the Church in the Middle East, while in Lebanon, Pope Benedict XVI visited four of the Eastern Catholic Churches in Lebanon, that are also present throughout the Middle East. On 14 September, Pope Benedict XVI visited the Melkite Greek Catholic Basilica of Saint Paul in Harissa to sign the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in the Middle East. Then on 15 September, the Pope visited the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate in Bzommar for a meeting and luncheon with the patriarchs and bishops of Lebanon. Later that day, Pope Benedict XVI visited the Maronite Patriarchal Residence in Bkerke for a meeting with the youth. On 16 September, Pope Benedict XVI visited the Syriac Catholic Patriarchate in Charfet for an ecumenical meeting with the Orthodox and Protestant Christian Communities of Lebanon and the Middle East. On Sunday morning, 16 September, Pope Benedict XVI celebrated Holy Mass in the Beirut City Center Waterfront and consigned the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the local Churches of the Middle East.

The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East was called to highlight the role of the Church in the Middle East as a sign of communion and witness. It recognized the beautiful communion of all the Eastern Catholic Churches that are present throughout the Middle East. They represent the richness, diversity, and universality of the Catholic Church.

The Church in the Middle East is a witness to the entire history of Christianity from its beginnings to the present. Pope Benedict XVI referred to the Middle East

... as a land especially chosen by God, it was the home of Patriarchs and Prophets. It was the glorious setting for the Incarnation of the Messiah; it saw the raising of the Savior’s cross and witnessed the resurrection of the Redeemer and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Traversed by the Apostles, saints, and a number of the Fathers of the Church, it was the crucible of the earliest dogmatic formulations.” (n. 8)

The Pope emphasized that there must be a Christian presence in that part of the world.

The Christian presence in the biblical countries of the Middle East is much more than a sociological factor or a mere cultural and economic success story. By rediscovering its original inspiration and following in the footsteps of those first disciples whom Jesus chose to be his companions and whom he sent out to preach (cf. Mk 3:14), the Christian presence will take on new vitality. (n. 71)

Pope Benedict concluded by urging pastors and faithful to be courageous in the mission.

“Fear not, little flock!” (Lk 12:32). With these words of Christ, I wish to exhort all the Pastors and Christian faithful in the Middle East courageously to keep alive the flame of divine love both in the Church and in all those places where they live and work. In this way, they will preserve in their integrity the essence and mission of the Church as willed by Christ. Legitimate historical differences will enrich the communion existing among the baptized with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.” (n. 95)

Mindful of Pope Benedict XVI’s words to us, we Maronites must remember our rich history of faithful witnesses, both in the land of ancestors and in our present home, the United States. ■

James Salamy, is a parishioner of Saint Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, NY



Blessing of a Statue of Saint Maron

On 23 February 2011, Pope Benedict XVI blessed a statue of St. Maron, in commemoration of the 1600th anniversary of the death of the founder of the Maronite Catholic Church. The 15-foot marble statue of the 5th-century monk stands in a niche in the outer wall of the Basilica of Saint Peter.



Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles Maronite Catholic Diocese

REPORTING CHILD/VULNERABLE ADULT SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE EPARCHY

You have the right to report your story, and we are here to help, listen and connect you to the right services. To ensure the best resources and investigation practices are engaged, we encourage all allegations concerning the abuse and/or neglect of minors and vulnerable adults are reported to the Office of Protection of Minors and vulnerable adults and/or the local police department first before reaching out to the Office of the Protection of Minors and vulnerable adults. If you need to report historical abuse, please contact our office.

WHEN TO REPORT

The Office for Minors and Vulnerable Adults Investigations and Review is available to all who choose to report their abuse as children/vulnerable adults or who have the knowledge of the abuse in our Church. Eparchial staff collaborates with all necessary Eparchial Offices to investigate and process allegations. While our process is conducted efficiently, our overarching goal is to work with those who choose to report with compassion, and to connect them with the proper authorities and resources.

In cases where reported abuse did not take place by personnel of this Eparchy, the staff will provide individuals with the necessary information and support so that the report can be made to the appropriate authority. To ensure the best resources and investigation practices are engaged, we encourage you to contact public authorities first or simultaneously as you reach out to our office.

Below you can find information on the Eparchial Response Team when the abuse involves:

- ✓ A Cleric (Priest or Deacon)
- ✓ A Member of a Religious Congregation
- ✓ A Lay Employee or Volunteer

WHO TO CALL

Dr. Laura Kahwaji, Victim Assistance Coordinator at (323) 428-6815
Father Elias Sleiman, Director of the Office for
the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults at (310) 275-6634

EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON OF LOS ANGELES

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

The Eparchy's Safe Environment Program is designed to safeguard children and vulnerable adults against any form of abuse. The Safe Environment Program provides education, screening, and training to ensure safety for children, youth, families, and vulnerable adults in any of the parishes and missions of the Eparchy.

MISSION

The mission of the Safe Environment Program is to maintain the safety of children, youth, families, and communities in all parishes, missions, and pastoral activities of the Eparchy. This mission is grounded in the biblical teaching that all human beings are in the image and likeness of God, revealing the love of God for all creation.

The mission of the Safe Environment Program reflects the commitment to Catholic teaching, namely that all human life, at every age, is to be respected, nurtured, and protected. The teachings of the Church call for action on the part of Catholics to safeguard the life, health, and faith of all people.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

All Clergy, Religious Men and Women, Employees and Volunteers of the Eparchy are required to fulfill all mandatory Safe Environment Program requirements PRIOR TO THE START OF SERVICE. The following steps must be completed prior to the commencement of employment or volunteer service in the Eparchy:

- I. Application for Employment or Volunteer Application for Ministry: Individuals seeking employment in the Eparchy are required to complete an Application for Employment, including the names and contact information of references, who will be contacted. Individuals seeking to volunteer in the Eparchy are required to complete and submit a Volunteer Application for Ministry, including the names and contact information of three references, who will be contacted.
- II. Criminal Background Check: All individuals seeking employment or seeking to volunteer in the Eparchy will sign an "Authorization for Release of Information" and must receive an acceptable Criminal Background Check result before a Letter of Hire or clearance for volunteer service can begin.
- III. Safe Environment Training: All individuals seeking employment or to volunteer in the Eparchy will attend the safe environment program training sessions before employment or volunteer service can begin.
- IV. Code of Conduct Agreement Form: All individuals seeking employment or to volunteer in the Eparchy must read the Eparchial Code of Ethical Conduct and sign the Code of Conduct Agreement Form.

THE MANDATE OF THE U.S. BISHOPS' DOCUMENT: CHARTER FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The mandate of the Safe Environment Program originates in the document of the United States Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, first published in 2002, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 2005, made particular law in the United States in 2006, and recently revised in 2018.

The Charter is a directive for all bishops in the U.S. and a guide for establishing safe environment programs; screening all clergy, employees, parents, volunteers, children and youth; and responding to allegations of abuse. In addition, the Charter provides for the screening and education of seminarians, orientation of new and foreign clergy to the dioceses/eparchies, and evaluation of each diocese/eparchy regarding effective implementation of the Charter.

To fulfill the requirements of the Safe Environment Program, contact the Eparchial Office for the Protection of Children and Young People at (314) 231-1021.

Seminary Celebrates Saint Maron Feast

“Pierce the Veil” is a term that is sometimes used when remarking on what occurs between Heaven and Earth during our celebrations of the Divine Liturgy. Saints stand among us, shoulder-to-shoulder during Liturgy, and the fullness of unity is realized when all souls unite to praise God. In many ways, the Maronite Seminary’s celebration of St. Maron’s Feast Day also pierced the veil. Not just because during the Liturgy we had several priests of different Churches, nor just because the congregation, made up of lay, seminarians, various religious orders, all united to sing our Maronite Hymns (even though many had not heard them before). No, it was because our celebration of St. Maron’s Feast Day was a rich celebration of unity among brethren, and because it was marked by our Maronite Charism of Hospitality. During the Liturgy, the Seminary rector, Msgr. Peter Azar, delivered a beautiful homily in which he emphasized what defines us as Maronites. From my vantage point at the organ, I was able to observe the full effect of his words on the entire congregation; Josephites, Dominicans, Ukrainian Catholics, Franciscans, etc. were all in attendance, united in prayer and fully experiencing the richness of our Maronite Church. Particularly striking to me was the Seminary Choir’s rendition of the Qadish (Holy, Holy, Holy), sung in Syriac, our liturgical language. Because the Qadish precedes the Words of Institution (also chanted in Syriac), the experience of the Liturgy that

the attendees were able to leave with was both ancient and modern.

After celebrating Divine Liturgy, the Seminary then hosted a spectacular Lebanese dinner which further exemplified our Maronite charism of hospitality. As the night grew, laughter increased and the good vibes kept rolling on. The seminarians then hosted karaoke night. Covers of Frank Sinatra, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Fairouz (and yes, even Lady Gaga) all graced the hallways of the seminary as everyone sang their hearts and voices out. When the night finally came to a close, the seminarians stayed up into the wee hours of morning, cleaning and breaking down all of the facilities, ensuring that everything was put into proper order for the Divine Liturgy the next day.

I reflected on the evening and was again struck by the realization that this is what our Maronite Church so beautifully highlights: joy. Throughout our sufferings, persecutions, and wars, we have always maintained that joy and happiness. Our Liturgy is teeming with references to the Wedding Feast where we are given to Our Lord, the Bridegroom. The world today is in desperate need of joy, and if we can take even one ounce of the joy we experienced at the Feast of St. Maron’s, we can set the world on fire, burning with joy for Her Bridegroom. ■



Parish News

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Birmingham's Early Middle Eastern Community: Celebrating Life and Liturgy

Vulcan Park and Museum, along with St. Elias Maronite Church and St. George Melkite Church in Birmingham, joined forces to honor and showcase Birmingham's early Middle Eastern Community dating back to the late 1880's and early 1900's. The exhibit features artifacts regarding religious, economic, and social lives of the Middle Eastern Community in Birmingham. A VIP premier opening for the exhibit was held on Thursday, 2 February 2023 with rave reviews. The exhibit will be on display until February 2024 at Vulcan Park and Museum, home to the world's largest cast iron statue. Vulcan Park and Museum is a destination site in Birmingham, logging tens of thousands of visitors from around the world annually.



Birmingham's Early Middle Eastern Community thrives on a foundation of people and culture that made Birmingham what it is today. During the early 1900's, Birmingham's population tripled with immigrants from around the world including the Middle East. About 65 Lebanese families immigrated to Birmingham, mostly, but not exclusively, from the towns of Zahlé and Wade-Al-Arayech, located east of Beirut. Jobs were abundant during this time because of the iron and steel industry. As the area grew, the immigrants introduced their languages and cultures as merchants, peddlers and traders into an already diverse population. Their descendants continue impacting the community by becoming leading professionals, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists.

Once these families relocated to Birmingham, their faith endured and blossomed. They formed parishes such as St. Elias Maronite Church, which dates back to 1910.

The work for the exhibit took almost a year of planning, gathering information and documents to tell the story about how St. Elias Maronite Church and its parishioners shaped the city of Birmingham. The St. Elias committee members who worked on the project are Abouna Peter Zogbi, Gary Bostany, Richard Kassouf, Jeanette Wyrick, LaVonne Williamson, and Beverly Kimes, as well as the parishioners who submitted the hundreds of documents and artifacts used in the museum.

The Exhibit will coincide with the St. Elias 25th Annual Food and Cultural Festival celebration on April 21-22.

For more information, visit our website at: <https://stelias.org>. Or, for information regarding Birmingham's Early Middle Eastern Community: Celebrating Life and Liturgy at Vulcan Park, visit: <https://visitvulcan.com>. ■



WILLIAMSVILLE, NEW YORK

First Holy Communion St. John Maron Church

Cecelia Lattanzio, Gianna Rivera, Abigail Mansour, Christian Behlok, and Mateo Harfouche.

Parish News

LAWRENCE, MASSACHUSETTS

Christmas Season Events

Saint Anthony Church in Lawrence, Massachusetts, held their children's Christmas party on 11 December 2022, organized by the Knights of Mary and the Religious Education teachers. The American Lebanese Awareness Association (ALAA) sponsored the event for over 100 children. They enjoyed music and dancing, crafts and artwork, face painting, food, decorating cookies, and pictures with Santa.

On 17 December, Saint Anthony Church's adult and children choirs performed a Christmas recital of beautiful hymns. Directed by Fr. Neemtallah over three months, the choirs practiced singing new and old hymns in five languages: English, Arabic, French, Spanish and Italian. Special guest, Maestro Lehman Khalil, violinist, composer, and conductor, presented an amazing spiritual performance. The recital was followed by a reception in the parish hall. Fr. Elie Mikhael, pastor, was very pleased with the success of the event.

Finally, the regional MYA visited the National Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette in Attleboro, MA. In 1846, at La Salette, a small hamlet in the French



Alps, the Mother of God appeared to two children. She gave them her message of hope and future happenings in the world. The MYA members prayed together, discussed topics such as forgiveness and the Christmas Season, and enjoyed dinner as a group. The MYA is actively involved in other activities including a Lenten Retreat, volunteering in the community soup kitchen, a holiday season charitable drive where they collect and send medicines and medical supplies to support the people of Lebanon. ■



NEWTOWN SQUARE, PENNSYLVANIA

Pastoral Visit

The faithful of Saint Sharbel Church in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, were pleased to welcome Bishop Gregory Mansour on his pastoral visit to the parish on the 6th night of the Christmas Novena. During his visit, he met with the Parish Council to discuss activities and events over the past year as well as future church projects. Bishop Gregory also concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with Father Joseph Daiif. In his homily, Bishop Gregory expressed his love for Our Lord, who was humiliated and beaten, but stood unafraid before Pontius Pilate and the high priest. He commented that "God is gentle, sweet, humble, and powerful. . . .the God of the universe that we should worship and want to know with a deeper understanding." Following the Liturgy, everyone was invited to dinner in the church hall prepared by the parishioners in honor of Bishop Gregory. ■

SIMI VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

Parish Activities

Saints Peter and Paul Church began the new year with Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” as the guiding theme for the spiritual and pastoral life for 2023. We launched the year with a retreat for all ages on 14 January 2023. The participants enjoyed spiritual discussions and activities that allowed them to begin the year with a strong spiritual foundation.

The parish held its third annual Mouneh. The idea began with an homage to our homeland tradition with homemade items such as zaatar, jams, makdous, shankleesh, labneh, etc. The community enjoys purchasing homemade products and it has helped the younger generation become familiar with the more traditional food heritage.

The Lenten season will be filled with spiritual retreats throughout the months of February, March, and April. Encompassing the theme of the year, the retreats will include all ages, beginning as young as five years old. The retreats will be split according to age group and the groups will enjoy prayer, spiritual activities, and social bonding to help strengthen their Maronite faith.

The parish also participates in two campaigns: the 2022 Christmas Campaign proceeds helped three different local charities: The Children’s Center for Cancer; Casa Pacifica Orphanage; and Forever Found Child Trafficking. The 2023 Easter Campaign was launched on 22 January during the monthly St. Charbel Liturgy. The proceeds will be donated to local charities. ■



PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Caring for Friends



Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta is credited with saying, “If you can’t feed a hundred people, then feed just one.” The CCD members of the religious education program at St. Maron Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, are doing their best to fulfill Mother Teresa’s simple command. In response to the 16 January 2023 Day of Service, with the help of parents, MYO, and religious education teachers, the CCD students prepared 75 meals for families through the “Caring for Friends” Organization in Philadelphia.

Also, to help pay expenses for summer activities at St. Maron Church, the MYO sold Philadelphia’s famous soft pretzels to parishioners after the Sunday liturgy. As a parish fundraiser prior to the beginning of Lent, the adult faithful held a Saj breakfast (bread with thyme or cheese) to celebrate the Feast of St. Maron. A Marfaa take-out day (last Sunday before Ash Monday) featuring a variety of Lebanese foods and delicacies (chicken and beef kabobs, kafta, hummus, baba ghanoush, etc.) was held for the congregation. In the end, food isn’t just about calories. . . it’s about kindness and sharing your values and identity with your fellow man. ■

Parish News

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

“The Jesus Run”

This year, the MYA of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, New York, began the Lenten Season by holding a “Jesus Run” on the streets of New York City to benefit the homeless. Organized by MYA President, Isabelle Hazar, Vice President, Peter Nemeh, and Secretary, Matthew Nehmeh, the group met on 18 February 2023 to prepare 120 meals containing sandwiches, snacks, and water for those in need. They also distributed thick socks, winter hats, gloves, and blankets to the less fortunate around Penn Station, an area well-known for the number of people who are homeless and seeking refuge. All supplies were provided by the MYA members as one of their bi-annual missions to help others. Appreciation is extended to Chris Safi, Elias Diab, Jude Bato, Tiana El-Adem, Daniel Interdonati, Fidelle El-Asmer, Mike Marino, Mario Takle, Remy Kaldaway, and Rebecca De La Garza for helping to feed over 100 homeless.

Separate from the “Jesus Run,” the Cathedral MYO gathered together for a fun afternoon of bowling and pizza. The MYO challenged an adult team of bowlers, including Tiana El-Adem, Lily El-Haje, MYO President Loriana El-Adem and Father Dominique Hanna. Father Dominique held the high score for the adults, but the youth triumphed with the most strikes. ■



CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN

Christmas Events

On 10 December, St. Sharbel Church's Choir offered a Christmas Concert in English and Arabic. The Christmas recital was very inspiring and magnificent. With melodious voices, the choir rejoiced the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ by sharing the good tidings of joy. The recital was not only a musical, but also a prayerful experience. On 18 December, the Maronite Children

Organization (MCO), from kindergarten to 6th Grade, performed a Nativity Play for the community. It was a marvelous presentation made even more special by the fact that the children concluded the play with a Christmas recital singing Christmas Carols with their angelic voices and beautiful performance. On 27 December 2022, the Maronite Young Adults gathered

for an incredible breakfast/reunion at Ike's Restaurant. Coordinated by Chorbishop Alfred Badawi and Deacon Chris Nahra, the MYA had over 35 young adults gather for food, fellowship, and laughter. The turn out of college students that wanted to connect with other students within the parish through the Lord was a beautiful expression of the community fostered by this group. ■



SLEEPY HOLLOW, NEW YORK

Christmas Season Events



On 4 December 2023, the parishioners of Saint John Paul II Church in Sleepy Hollow, New York, celebrated their annual Christmas Fair. A variety of Middle Eastern items and foods were sold including: Lebanese olive oil, wines, jewelry, baked goods, mlabbas (candy coated almonds), delectable chocolates, and traditional Lebanese foods (kibbee, hummus, grape leaves, majadra, and much more). As always, the Christmas Fair was a successful and pleasant event.

The children in the religious education program learned a medley of holiday songs for the Christmas Pageant and Recital held on 18 December. They performed beautifully for the congregation singing Christmas songs in English, Arabic, and French. At the Christmas party, everyone enjoyed eating delicious Middle Eastern foods and dancing to Arabic music. The highlight of the event was a visit from Bishop Gregory on 22 December. Fr. Dany Abi-Akar concelebrated the liturgy with Bishop Gregory. In his homily, Bishop Gregory expressed that “We are in God’s hands, and we must keep Him close to us. . . He comforts us. . . He takes care of us. . . He is always with us.” He continued to emphasize, “Today, 22 December, we celebrate Saint Sharbel and how he integrated God into every aspect of his life. . . prayer, work, and spiritual reflection.” Following liturgy, everyone enjoyed refreshments served by members of the Altar Rosary Society. ■

FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

March for Life

Parishioners from Saint Michael the Archangel Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, are dedicated to supporting the Pro-Life movement. In January 2023, several parishioners traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the March for Life. They marched in the main Pro-Life march and attended the “Life Fest” activities hosted by the Knights of Columbus and the Sisters of Life. The “Life Fest” was interesting and informative, and the participants attended liturgy, adoration, rosary, Pro-Life testimonies, and a religious concert. Locally, St. Michael’s Knights of Columbus invited parishioners to pray the Rosary monthly near the Planned Parenthood Clinic outside the gates of Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Since the Department of Defense does not finance abortions, the clinic offered their services specifically targeting women serving in the military and the spouses of soldiers.

During Lent, in an act of giving, parishioners of St. Michael the Archangel were encouraged to fill a baby bottle provided by the parish with extra change. The bottles were returned by Easter, and the money was donated to local crisis pregnancy centers that serve women in need of support and guidance. ■



Parish News

UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Lenten Season



On Ash Monday, 20 February 2023, St. George Church in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, was pleased to welcome a special guest visit from Bishop Larry Kulick of the Diocese of Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Bishop Kulick attended the liturgy and blessing of ashes with the parishioners to begin the Great Fast. At the conclusion of the liturgy, Bishop Kulick expressed the importance of Great Lent. He commented, "Lent is a time for prayer, fasting, almsgiving, spiritual reflection, and forgiveness. It is a time to make personal sacrifices and to move forward in a positive direction." He thanked Father Aaron Sandbothe and the congregation for inviting him to share in the beautiful Maronite tradition. Following Liturgy, everyone was invited to enjoy a traditional Lenten meager meal in the parish hall.

Also during the Fast, members of the parish held their third annual Lenten Fish Fry for parishioners and community members. Saint George Church's "Fish Fry" was voted by the public as the (2021 and 2022 # 1 Church Fish Fry in the county). Take-out and eat-in lunch and dinner meals offered fish and shrimp platters with a variety of side dishes. Great Lent at Saint George Church is certainly a busy but prayerful time to prepare for Passion Week and Easter. ■

WATERVILLE, MAINE

Legion of Mary

On 8 December, 2022, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Saint Joseph Church in Waterville, Maine, established their Maronite Praesidium (Chapter) of the Legion of Mary, a lay apostolic association of Catholics. The first Legion of Mary was created in 1921 spreading across 170 countries worldwide. The Legion's goal is to bring the faithful closer to the Mother of God as a means of connecting them to Jesus. Saint Joseph Legionnaires follow this global goal by devotional prayer, acts of kindness, and voluntarily helping others through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Saint Joseph's Legion of Mary was named "Mary, Queen of the Clergy." Their main priority is to enhance the spiritual, apostolic, and social welfare of Catholics.

In order to reach a majority of the congregation, a census of Saint Joseph Parish members was taken via phone calls, visits, mailings, and emails to include as many people as possible. Father Doran worked cooperatively with the Legion of Mary officers and auxiliary members in organizing and scheduling meetings to discuss the program. Active participants visited families and the sick in their homes and hospitals, and involved them in various apostolic missionary projects sponsored by the parish. ■



Walking with Mary in Discernment

by Sr. Therese Maria, MSCL

Mary is and always has been the mother of my vocation. Before entering the convent, I remember praying to her during my thanksgiving after receiving the Eucharist: “Mary, guide me and pick me up when I fall. Give me your sacrificial heart and help me to love Jesus as you did.”



Turning to Mary for guidance in your discernment journey is foundational as you seek to better understand God’s will and call for your life. I invite you to imagine Mary walking with you and to ask her daily to carry you to the Father’s will. We can’t do discernment on our own. We need Mary our Mother. She

can assist us to courageously follow her son in the ups and downs of life. Her intercession will enlighten us to see what we have been made for, and for Whom. *Show me Mother Mary, how I am meant to love and follow and serve your son Jesus in my life?*

The Blessed Virgin Mary can help you to respond like she did in saying “yes” with generosity, joy and conviction. Praying a daily Rosary or even a Hail Mary for clarity, peace and light to know your vocation is helpful. Mary seeks to intercede for us as our tender and merciful Mother. There is nothing better than holding her loving and secure hands in this pilgrimage of life.

Many saints consecrated themselves to Mary. Total consecration is making a complete gift of yourself to Jesus through Mary. This devotion is “the surest, easiest, shortest, and most perfect way of approaching Jesus,” (True Devotion to Mary, 55) of becoming

who you were created to be. Total consecration entails: renouncing the devil, the world, sin and self, as expressed in the act of consecration, and giving oneself entirely to Jesus through Mary (Ibid, 126).

Total consecration brings about a number of special graces. St. Louis de Monfort makes clear the benefits which are received by those who make Mary their Mother through total consecration to Mary:

1. She loves them tenderly
2. Promotes their interests and manages their affairs
3. Gives them excellent advice
4. Prepares them body and soul to be a gift to God
5. Clothes them in virtue and merit
6. Obtains for them the blessing of the Father
7. Provides for their needs
8. Leads and guides them
9. Defends and protects them
10. Intercedes for them

Let us run to Mary with all our needs (and especially in discernment) as she will never fail us. She seeks to bring all souls to her Son, the fruit of her womb. When we look at the Annunciation we are inspired by her receptive obedience and humility as she said “yes” to being the Mother of God, despite not knowing the full plan. She trusted that God will always be with her. Yes, even at the foot of the cross.

The Virgin Mary is the perfect model of religious life and Christian discipleship. Her “Fiat” and total surrender to God is what we strive to live daily in our religious life and consecration. May God grant us this grace through the powerful prayers of our Blessed Mother.

To learn more about discernment and/or the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light, contact Sr. Therese Maria at 508-996-1753 or through our website: maroniteservants.org. ■

The Gift of Making a Good Confession

by Abbot Patrick of the Maronite Monks of Adoration

I must have been in high school when I made my first confession; I don't remember exactly. What I do remember is that I knew next to nothing about going to confession. There I sat heart pounding, mind blank, with no idea what I was expected to say or do. To his credit, Father was very patient and understanding; going through a list of sins to which I responded with either a nod or a shake of my head (I don't think I uttered a single word). In the end, he absolved me and I went back to my place, relieved that it was over. Despite many more confessions with the same priest, who gently tried to teach me something about the sacrament, it would be many years before I learned how to make a good confession.

So, for all those who also know little to nothing about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, it is good to start with the question: why go at all? More than one person I have encountered has told

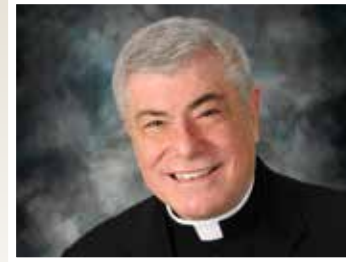
me he prefers to confess his sins directly to God. That is well and good, but it is not how God intended for us to have our sins ordinarily forgiven. When Jesus gave His Apostles, and their successors, the power to forgive sins, He meant for them to do just that! Besides, there is no surer way to know that our sins have been forgiven than to hear it from the mouth of a priest. It is also worth adding that there is more to Confession than the forgiveness of sins, although that is its main purpose. Other benefits include growth in God's grace, help in overcoming sinful habits, the breaking of demonic strongholds, and spiritual advice from a priest. Indeed, the better the confession, the greater the graces received.

How should we prepare for Confession? The first step is an examination of conscience for the sins and faults that have offended God. There are plenty of available lists of examinations of conscience for Catholics on the internet. The next step is to have true sorrow for having committed those sins. Here it is good to meditate on the Passion and death of Our Lord, recalling that He died out of love for each of us so that we may be set free from our sins. Lastly, true repentance is incomplete unless there is a sincere desire to make amends. This is why, at the end of the sacrament of Confession, the priest ordinarily gives the penitent a penance to perform.

Confession is a great blessing available to each of us. In it, we find God's mercy, pardon, and peace, things that we are in constant need of in this life. The better we understand it and prepare for making our confession, the more graces we will reap. The more graces we receive, the closer we draw to God, and the happier we become. ■



From the Editor



*The heavens proclaim his saving justice,
God himself is judge* (PSALM 50:6)

God himself is the judge: when I stand before him, am I going to demand justice — or plead for mercy?

Justice is all about fairness and equality, about being sure that we are all treated fairly and impartially. When I was a boy, I was a strong defender of justice. If my mother distributed candy to my brothers and me, I was concerned that neither of them got more than me. I wanted what I felt was due to me.

I wanted justice!

Now that I am no longer ten 10 years old with an exaggerated concern over the distribution of jellybeans, I ask myself: do I still want justice? All of us will face the Lord, the ultimate performance appraisal. We know what we did, no number of excuses or twisting of the truth will get us anywhere. Some of us have done better than others, but none of us deserves eternal life in the glorious presence of God.

I do not want justice—but beg for mercy!

When I stand before the divine judge, I seek the mercy of God even though I have wronged Him and my neighbor and do not deserve it.

The beauty of all this is that the Lord is more than ready to shower mercy on me, to forgive me, to welcome me to Paradise. The Parable of the Prodigal Son (LUKE 15:11-32) explains it all. The actions of the father show us that sometimes we don't even have to ask, but just want this bountiful expression of fatherly affection. The son is an example of how to approach judgment: no excuses, no trying to blame someone else, just *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son..."* (LUKE 15:18-19)

If I want mercy, I must show mercy.

Mercy is a compassionate response to the sufferings of others, especially the weak and the disadvantaged. It may involve showing kindness, forgiveness, and understanding to those who may not deserve it or who have wronged us in some way.

Nevertheless, if we want God's mercy, we need to show it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (MATTHEW 5:7)

Blessings.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John D. Faris".

Chorbishop John D. Faris

THE MARONITE VOICE
ST. ANTHONY'S MARONITE CATHOLIC CHURCH
4611 SADLER ROAD
GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA 23060-6108

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