

the Maronite **Voice**



"Wise men came from the East."

(MATTHEW 2:1)



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Our Lord's Servant Leadership at Christmas

by Bishop Gregory J. Mansour

*W*e came to know how God enters His world through His beloved Son's servant leadership. How can we as a Church, especially bishops, priests, and deacons in Church leadership, better walk in the footsteps of Christ? How may we, as members of the Church, be true servant leaders to our own faithful and to the world?

Here below are some examples of pastoral outreach based on the servant leadership of Pope Francis:

- To non-believers (note Pope Francis' beautiful visit to Mongolia);
- To other baptized Christians;
- To those on the margins of society (the poor and disenfranchised);
- To those Catholics who feel far from the Church (the divorced and remarried, those who are same sex attracted, the disenfranchised);
- To all women;
- To our Catholic humanitarian agencies (especially those in service to migrants, to the trafficked, and to those in the midst of war.)

We can reflect on the way that Jesus led, and ask ourselves if we could lead more like him.

Servant leadership, in particular, was mentioned specifically by Pope Francis in his call for bishops, priests, and deacons. He reminded us that we need to always go back to the example of our Lord Jesus who intentionally commissioned his apostles at the Last Supper and washed their feet. Jesus was not bound by the cultural taboos of his day. In fact, on many matters he was quite counter-cultural. Perhaps our Lord wanted men to wash feet, a menial task given to only slaves or to women, to help him change the world for the better, and specifically to dismantle the unjust domination men have had over women since the Fall of Adam, which sadly introduced this inequality into the world.

Thus, in the vision of Pope Francis, we as a Catholic Church could do better to serve all people inside and outside the Church. How can we serve them better? Pope Francis says that we need more and more to focus on good governance in the Church, according to our Lord's example of servant leadership.

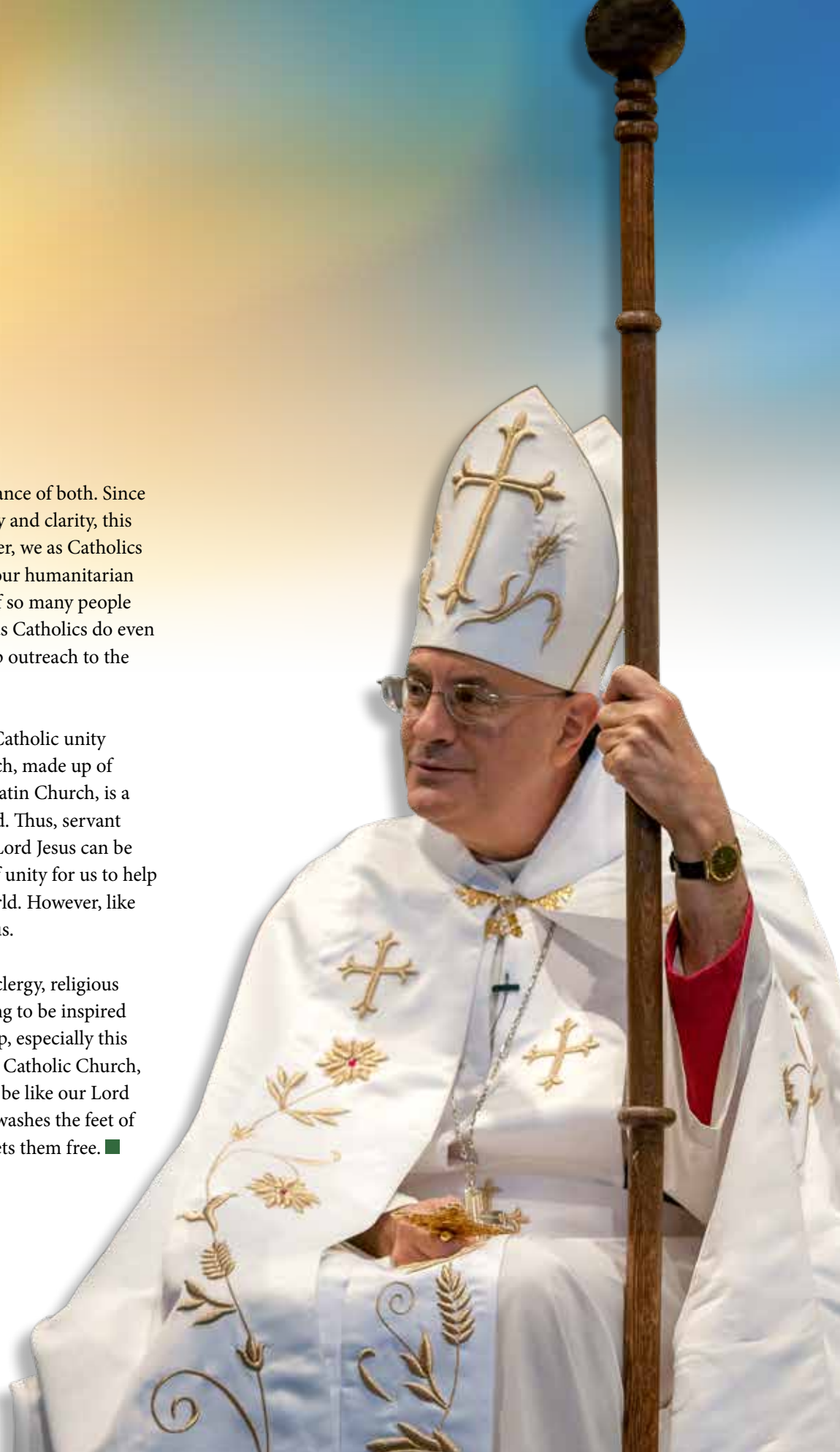
The Catholic Church has good unity, as well as good clarity on the matters of faith and morals. Some Protestant and Orthodox leaders look to

Catholics as having a good balance of both. Since we as Catholics have both unity and clarity, this gift is worth fostering. Moreover, we as Catholics have a most amazing unity in our humanitarian outreach, we serve the needs of so many people across the globe. How can we as Catholics do even better in our servant leadership outreach to the poor and marginalized?

The Pope is essential for both Catholic unity and clarity. The Catholic Church, made up of 23 Eastern Churches and the Latin Church, is a source of unity for all the world. Thus, servant leadership in the name of our Lord Jesus can be and should be a great source of unity for us to help improve our witness to the world. However, like everything in life this is up to us.

May God help each one of us, clergy, religious and laity, to find our own calling to be inspired by our Lord's servant leadership, especially this Christmastime. In this way the Catholic Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, may be like our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, who washes the feet of his apostles, and by his truth sets them free. ■

+ Gregory



Schedule BISHOP GREGORY J. MANSOUR

- 8-10 DECEMBER** New Bedford, MA | Our Lady of Purgatory Church | Dedication of New Church, Hall, and Rectory
- 16-17 DECEMBER** Charlotte, NC | St. Stephen Church | Pastoral Visit
- 18 DECEMBER** Somerset, NJ | St. Sharbel Church | Christmas Novena
- 19 DECEMBER** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Christmas Novena
- 22 DECEMBER** Sleepy Hollow, NY | St. John Paul II Church | Christmas Novena
- 23 DECEMBER** Danbury, CT | St. Anthony Church | Liturgy and Christmas Novena
- 24-25 DECEMBER** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Christmas
- 26 DEC - 2 JAN** Miami, FL | Our Lady of Lebanon Church | Family and Parish Visit
- 7 JANUARY** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
- 8-30 JANUARY** Lebanon | Proposed Meetings with Maronite Patriarchal Liturgical Commission



Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord...

PASSING OF KHALIL YOUSSEF FARAH

Bishop Gregory J. Mansour announced the sad news of the passing of Khalil Youssef Farah, the brother of Father Robert Farah.

He passed at the age of 93. He is survived by his siblings Mona Naffah, Edward Farah, George Farah, and Fr. Robert Farah, as well as his wife Leila, children, grandchildren and many relatives and friends.

The funeral was at Saint Maron Church, Detroit, Michigan.

The Eparchy of Saint Maron, clergy, religious, and laity, extend to Father Robert, and to the entire family and friends of Khalil Youssef Farah, heart-felt condolences and prayers.

May God grant his eternal rest in his kingdom, and grant consolation and peace to his family.

PASSING OF NADIM SLEIMAN

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan announced the passing of Nadim Sleiman, the father of Father Elias Sleiman, in Lebanon on 24 October.

Nadim is survived by his wife, Alice Tohme, and his children Diana, Father Elias, and Dr. Joseph Sleiman, and his grandchild Elie Haber.

Condolences may be sent to Father Elias at Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral, 333 S. San Vicente Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90048.

Now as his heart has stopped beating on earth, it is time for Nadim to enjoy everlasting life in the Father's home.

Please keep Nadim and his family in your prayers.

We pray for the repose of his soul and may our Loving God give comfort to his family and friends. May he rest in peace.

Schedule **BISHOP A. ELIAS ZAIDAN**

- 9-10 DECEMBER** Dayton, OH | St. Ignatius of Antioch Church | Pastoral Visit
- 17 DECEMBER** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | Presbyteral Ordination of Deacon Anthony Simon
- 25 DECEMBER** Los Angeles, CA | Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral | Christmas Liturgies
- 1 JANUARY** Happy New Year!
- 6 JANUARY** Los Angeles, CA | Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral | Epiphany
- 13-14 JANUARY** San Antonio, TX | St. George Church | Diaconal Ordination of Subdeacons Christopher Pond and Joseph Harb
- 15-19 JANUARY** Scottsdale, AZ | Franciscan Renewal Center | Annual Clergy Retreat for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles
- 20-21 JANUARY** Nashville, TN | St. Sharbel Mission | Pastoral Visit
- 30-31 JANUARY** Washington, DC | International Religious Freedom Summit



...and let the perpetual light shine upon them.

PASSING OF DEACON ROBERT “BOB” FOSTER

Deacon Robert Gerald Foster of Our Lady of the Cedars Church in Fairlawn, Ohio, passed away on Thanksgiving Day, 23 November 2023. Deacon Robert was 92 years old.

Deacon Robert was born on 8 March 1931 in East Liverpool, Ohio. He served in the United States Navy during the Korean War with honor. He would retire from LTV Steel after many years of hard work.

Always an active and devoted member of Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Deacon Robert was deeply committed to his faith and serving others. He was known for his kindness and giving nature.

Deacon Robert is survived by his loving wife, Barbara, and his children: Paula (Mike) Anderson, Kimberly Mann, Scott Foster, Krista (Mark) Weber, and his stepdaughter, Barbara Parker (Mike) Casey, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Condolences may be mailed to his wife, Barbara, and family at 1568 6th St. Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44221.

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan expresses sincere condolences to his wife, family, friends, and fellow parishioners. May Deacon Robert rest in peace.

“We Three Kings of Orient Are ...”

by Rev. David A. Fisher



When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.”

— MATTHEW 2:1-2

To appreciate the Magi, it is necessary to understand the terms *Epiphany* or *Theophany*. Epiphany finds its roots in Greek and means “to shine upon,” or “manifestation,” or “appearance.” The term Theophany (*theophaneia*) is used to express the same concept in reference to the manifestation of God. In Syriac, the term *Denho* or *Denha* means “Light.” Jesus Christ the Light who reveals the Triune God.

The origin of the Feast of the Epiphany seems to have begun to take shape in the fourth century, or possibly even earlier in the Syriac and Alexandrian Churches.

The substance of the celebration of Epiphany varied in different traditions. There were two major trends: Eastern and Western.

The birth of Christ, the story of the Magi, Christ’s baptism, His divine manifestation, the miracle at Cana, and the feeding of the crowds formed the festival of Epiphany on January 6 as indicated in earlier Alexandrian and Syrian traditions. (*Nicholas Pokhilko, History of Epiphany*)

Saint Ephrem combines both themes when he proclaims, “O Great One who became a babe, by your birth again you begot me; O Pure One who was baptized, let your washing wash us of impurity.”

Who were the Magi?

Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.” After their audience with the king, they set out.

— MATTHEW 2:7-9

Matthew tells us nothing about the Magi after he reports that they returned to their own country (MATTHEW 2:12). Independent traditions teach that their encounter with the Infant in Bethlehem led them eventually to become followers, either on their own or in response to the later preaching of an apostle. Other traditions insist that the Magi were martyred for the discipleship. (*Where Do We Get the Names of the Magi? stcatherinercc.org*)

How many Magi were there? What were their names? The various traditions of the early Church leave us with different enumerations and different sets of names; remembering that the Sacred Scriptures do not mention their names at all.

The Eastern Christian traditions of the early Church offer another set of names for the Magi. In the Syriac tradition, there emerges the names Larvandad, Gushnasaph, and Hormisdas. The Ethiopians used the names Hor, Karsudan, and Basanater. For the Armenians there developed the names, Kagpha, Badadakharida, and Badalilma.

In the Western tradition of the early Church, we find variations of Casper, Melchior, and Balthazar. Also, there developed in some areas of the Western tradition of Christianity, the notion that Casper was the king of India, Melchior was the King of Persia, and Balthazar was the king of Arabia.

What was a Magi?

And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary, his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage.

— MATTHEW 2:9-11

“We Three Kings of Orient Are ...”

Continued from page 9

Many of us grew up with the Christmas carol, “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” written in 1857 by the rector of Christ Episcopal Church in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The belief that the Magi were kings, comes from the influence of Psalm 72:10 (“May the kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute, the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts”) and Isaiah 60:6 (“Caravans of camels shall cover you, dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; All from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and heralding the praises of the Lord.”) But were the Magi kings? Does the title magi even mean king? The answer is no, magi does not mean king, rather it is closer to our understanding of priest or astrologer in some instances.

In the strict sense of the term, magi refers to the priests of the Zoroastrian religion. At the time of the birth and life of Jesus, Zoroastrianism was still the official belief of the Persian Kingdom. Having developed from a polytheistic tradition, the adherents of the religion believe the prophet Zoroaster had revealed to the Persians that there was only one divinity, Ahura Mazda, meaning Wise Lord, and that the other so-called divinities were only angels of various ranks, some good and some bad. The Magi were therefore, the priests of the Persian “fire temples,” whose main function was to keep the pure fire in the temples burning and to perform the rituals of Zoroastrianism in the presence of the pure fire.

In the wider sense of the term, Magi also came to refer to astrologers, or diviners; those who could predict the will of the divine by reading the stars of the sky. So the expansion of the Persian term “Magi,” became applied to professional “Wise Men.”

The Significance of the Magi

Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

— MATTHEW 2:11-12

What is the scriptural, theological, and spiritual significance of the Magi? Why have they been so important in our understanding of the Epiphany of Christ to the world?

The importance of the Magi is related first to the gifts that they bring to the Christ-Child. The bringing of gifts to a king or a deity was common in the ancient world. The Book of Isaiah 60:6 also describes the future restoration of Jerusalem in similar terms, that nations and kings will “bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord” (ISAIAH 60:6). When seen as gifts offered to the Christ-Child, these gifts take on even greater meaning. Gold signifies that Jesus is King, frankincense that he is the true High Priest, and myrrh that by his death and burial he offers salvation to all; those in Sheol, and those who will live and die after his glorious resurrection.

The Magi also represent that the Light of Christ is given not only to the Jewish people but also to the Gentiles, represented by these wise, priestly men from distant lands, who recognize the King of Kings has come into the world. ■

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

Dear Maronite Families across the Nation,

Peace and blessings to you all from our Lord Jesus Christ!

We are elated to extend a heartfelt invitation to each and every one of you to join us at the upcoming **National Apostolate of Maronites Convention** in the vibrant city of Detroit, Michigan, from **July 4-7, 2024**. This convention is not just an event; it is an important call for us to come together and rediscover our treasured *mission* as Maronites. Our theme this year is: **"Maronites on Mission: Created, Called, Sent Forth!"**



Can you imagine the beautiful tapestry we can weave when hundreds of Maronite families from every corner of our nation gather with a single purpose? Our shared mission—to spread the incomparable love of Jesus and the transformative message of the Gospel—has never been more crucial. Our faith, deep-rooted in its rich history and traditions, has always emphasized the importance of community and the collective spirit. This convention embodies that very spirit. As Maronites, we have been endowed with the glorious task of being the light of Christ in this world, and this convention aims to illuminate that light brighter than ever before.

This convention promises a rich and fulfilling experience:

Inspirational Speakers: Learn from some of the most enlightened voices in our Maronite community and beyond. Dive deep into discussions, absorb fresh insights, and leave rejuvenated in your faith journey.

Engaging Workshops: Equip yourself with the tools and knowledge you need to effectively spread the Gospel and strengthen our Maronite Church's presence in America.

Entertainment Extravaganza: We've curated a plethora of entertainment options that cater to all age groups, ensuring that every member of your family feels included and cherished.

Detroit, with its rich history and cultural significance, provides the perfect backdrop for this convention. We're confident that the spirit of the city will complement our collective zeal, making this gathering unforgettable. We are on the cusp of a significant moment in the history of Maronites in America as we approach the 60-year anniversary of NAM. The journey we embark upon during these four days will not only fortify our own faith but also lay the foundation for future generations of Maronites in this great nation. Your presence will undoubtedly contribute to the success of this mission. So, pack your bags, bring along your enthusiasm, and come be a part of this incredible journey of faith, fellowship, and inspiration. Together, we will make memories, create lasting relationships, and fortify our mission for the future of our Maronite Church!

Please mark your calendars for **July 4-7, 2024**. We eagerly await the joy of your company in Detroit. Let's come together as one Maronite family and write a beautiful new chapter in our rich legacy.

Warmest Regards,

Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor
Fr. Chris Nahra, Associate Pastor
Rosemary Kautz, Chair of NAM 2024

Jesus: Savior of Jews and Non-Jews alike *by Rev. Timothy V. Vaverek*

Wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the newborn King of the Jews?” They were directed to Bethlehem, for God had promised that there, in King David’s birthplace, he would raise up a ruler to shepherd his people Israel. No one yet realized that the infant was also the Shepherd and Savior of all peoples, both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). Surprisingly, it was Gentile wise men, not the wise men of Jerusalem, who went to honor Jesus. God, of course, is full of surprises.

The Holy Trinity’s plan of salvation was surprising from the start. God chose to create the universe and to offer the human race a share in his own life through Jesus, God the Son born of Mary. This plan is called the Eternal Covenant. A covenant creates an agreed-upon relationship which binds people in a particular way. The best human example of a covenant is marriage — for a reason Scripture reveals.

In the beginning, God made Adam and Eve as a man and woman who, though two persons, became one in marriage (GEN 2:24). St. Paul reveals that God patterned their creation and union on Christ and his bride, the Church (EPH 5:31-32). Think about that: human beings aren’t only made in the image of God but in the image of Christ and the Church. God intends for us to become one with him!

Even in the face of sin, God didn’t abandon his plan. In time, he spoke to fallen humanity by calling Abraham to know, love, and serve him. He made covenantal promises to Abraham: 1) that Abraham’s descendants (ethnic Jews) would be his people; 2) that they would have the land he granted Abraham; and 3) that all peoples would be blessed through Abraham.

Abraham’s grandson, Jacob (also known as Israel), had 12 sons from whom the Jewish people descend. Scriptures often call the Jews “the people of Israel.” (This isn’t the modern nation of Israel where Israelis belong to various ethnic groups and religions. Unfortunately, today many ethnic Jews don’t even believe in God.)



For almost two thousand years, God revealed himself to his people and taught them how to live. His main emphasis was “Be holy, for I am holy.” He wanted them to imitate his love and to become a witness to his holiness so that one day all nations might come to know him.

God sent Moses to prepare the people for receiving the Sinai Covenant and Mosaic Law during the Exodus and to guide them to the Promised Land. Later he sent prophets to teach and guide them along the right path. Still, at times the people ignored him and made a mess of their lives.

Eventually, God announced he was going to reveal the Eternal Covenant. He said he would pour his Spirit upon them, write the commandments on their hearts, and wed them to himself (EZ; 36:26-27; JER 31:31; IS 62:1-5). He promised that after they were purified, the nations would marvel and seek to learn about him.

The Jews continued to pray and to wait for this new Covenant. They connected it to the promised Messiah (the Anointed One) who they expected would be an heir to David's throne.

As the time drew near, God called John the Baptist to be the last and greatest prophet by calling the people to conversion in preparation for the appearance of the Messiah and the establishment of the New Covenant. John described Jesus as the Bridegroom and the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (JN 3:29, 1:33).

When Jesus appeared, he began to form within the Jewish people a new community (the Church) which would follow his teaching and way of life. Knowing he would be crucified, he chose 12 Apostles (“Ambassadors”) whom he prepared as leaders by having them live with him and assist in his ministry.

Once the Eternal Covenant was instituted by Christ's death, resurrection to glory, and gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church began to make Jesus known to both Jews and Gentiles. Peoples from all nations came to know God and to be saved through Christ, a descendant of Abraham (a Jew) — just as God promised.

The Church is, then, the historical continuation of God's people in the Old Testament, though membership is now by baptism into Christ rather than by physical descent from Abraham. Mary, the Apostles, and the early disciples were and remain ethnic Jews who followed a reform movement in Judaism started by a Jewish Messiah. In fact, Mary lived the Eternal Covenant from the moment of her conception and was always a perfect, faithful Jew — the first Jewish Christian.

It would be a serious mistake to speak as if the Church were disconnected from God's people in the Old Testament or not heir to those promises. That many ethnic Jews, indeed most, rejected Jesus doesn't negate his acceptance by Mary and the Apostles or Christ's call to welcome Jews and Gentiles as members of his people through baptism, “beginning in Jerusalem” (MT 28:19; LK 24:7).

At the same time, ethnic Jews (even if atheist) who don't accept Christ remain Abraham's descendants and are loved by God. His promises, to be realized in the union of Christ and the Church, remain their inheritance (REV 19:7-8; ROM 11:25-29). No Christian can rightly deny this. For despite human failings, God faithfully continues his eternal plan to save Jew and non-Jew alike through Jesus, the Shepherd and Savior of the world. How his wisdom accomplishes that will surprise and delight us. ■

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 Rev. Claude W. Franklin, Jr.

13 November – Saint John Chrysostom

Saint John Chrysostom was born at Antioch around the year 347. His father, Secundus, was a military commander who died soon after Saint John's birth. His mother, Anthusa, thus was a widow at the age of 20. Anthusa remained a widow and dedicated her life to raising her son John as a pious Christian. As a youth, Saint John studied philosophy and rhetoric, as well as the Holy Scriptures. He was baptized in the year 367 by Saint Meletius, Bishop of Antioch (whose feast is on 12 February). Three years later, he was ordained as a reader and later he studied asceticism under Flavian and Diodorus of Tarsus. After his mother's death, John embraced monasticism, where he met his friend Saint Basil the Great (1 January).

John avoided being ordained as a bishop out of humility and it was during this period that he wrote numerous treatises, including his famous "Six Discourses on the

Priesthood." In 381, he was ordained as deacon by Saint Meletius and, in 386, he was ordained to the Presbyterate by Bishop Flavian of Antioch. Due to his splendid sermons and preaching, Saint John earned the epithet Chrysostom, meaning "Golden-mouthed." It was during this 12-year period in Antioch that Saint John wrote his exegetical works

and commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, as well as his apologetic works.

In 397, Saint John was elected and ordained Archbishop of Constantinople. Due to a number of pastoral issues taking place in Constantinople and its environs, he was unable to preach as often as he had in Antioch. Saint John turned his attention to those in Constantinople leading dissolute lives, including those in the imperial court, especially Empress Eudoxia. Eudoxia held a grudge against Chrysostom on the presumption that his denunciations against the vanity of women were about her. She instigated the calling of a court of bishops in 403, known as the "Synod of the Oak." This synod comprised bishops whom the archbishop had previously condemned with just cause. In turn, they used this opportunity to depose Chrysostom and called for his execution on the premise of his insult of Empress Eudoxia. Instead, her husband, Emperor Arcadius decided to exile him rather than execute him.

This exile was short-lived as a great crowd was angry with the emperor and assembled outside of the church of Hagia Sophia. That night, there was a great earthquake in Constantinople, which Empress Eudoxia took as a sign of God's anger at her. She petitioned her husband to bring the archbishop back from exile, which he did. However, within two months of his return, Saint John once again denounced Empress Eudoxia after a silver statue was erected near the church of Hagia Sophia in her honor. Asserting that the dedication ceremony was pagan, he compared Empress Eudoxia to Herodias (Herod's wife), who asked for Saint John the Baptist's head on a platter.

Another synod was called in 404 and the saint was exiled again. It was during this period of exile that Saint John wrote numerous letters, of which 245 are



preserved, including one in which Saint John asks Saint Maron (9 February) to pray for him.

Saint John Chrysostom fell asleep in the Lord, after having received the Holy Mysteries, on 14 September 407. News of the holy man's death is said to have reached Constantinople on 13 November. Only on 28 January 438 were his holy relics transferred to Constantinople and enshrined in the Church of the Holy Apostles.

20 December – Saint Ignatius of Antioch

Very little is known about the life of Saint Ignatius beyond what can be gleaned from his letters. Later tradition added that he was converted at a young age to Christianity by Saint John the Evangelist, along with his friend Saint Polycarp (23 February), who became Bishop of Smyrna. Later in life, Saint Ignatius was ordained as the third bishop of Antioch, succeeding Saint Evodius (11 August). Saint Ignatius was full of zeal and is said to have instituted the practice of antiphonal chanting during the liturgical services, after having had a vision of the angelic choirs in Heaven singing in like manner.

In the year 106, Emperor Trajan ordered everyone in the Roman Empire to worship the pagan gods, which he attributed to a victory over the Scythians. Any Christian who refused was to be executed. As Trajan was passing through Antioch the following year, he heard that the bishop was openly confessing Christ. To prevent Trajan from persecuting his faithful, Ignatius appeared before Trajan and rejected the emperor's attempts to make him worship the pagan gods. Trajan decided to send Saint Ignatius to Rome where he would be thrown to wild beasts. Ignatius welcomed this sentence and bore witness to his readiness to accept martyrdom.

As he journeyed from Antioch to Rome, he was greeted by throngs of Christians, including his friend Polycarp. Along the way he wrote seven epistles: six letters to various churches (*Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans*) and one to his

friend Saint Polycarp. Saint Ignatius coined the phrase *Catholic Church*: "Wherever the Bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church." (SMYRNAEANS 8).

Ignatius was led into the arena on 20 December, the day of a pagan festival. The executioners then released the lions which tore him to pieces, leaving only a few bones and his heart behind. On his way to martyrdom, he had written, "I am the wheat of God and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep, I may be no trouble to anyone." (ROMANS 4)

In addition to 20 December, the commemoration of the date of his martyrdom, the earlier Maronite calendars commemorated the transfer of the relics of Saint Ignatius from Rome to Antioch on 28 January and the date of the return of his relics to Rome and internment in the Church of San Clemente in the year 637 on 1 February. ■

Fr. Claude W. Franklin, Jr., is pastor of Saint John the Evangelist in Olean, NY.



“Thank God, pray, reflect daily, and be ‘present’ for others.”

by Brandon Shulleeta



Therese Touma was about 20 years old and at a religious retreat when she felt the Lord’s presence unlike anything she’d felt before.

She was a college student from Sydney, Australia, studying to become an accountant — with plans to eventually get married and have a family. But she had an unmistakable feeling during the retreat that God had another purpose for her. “I had a very beautiful and profound experience with the Lord before the Blessed Sacrament,” Sister Therese Maria Touma said, “and just felt in a very personal way him desiring me fully.”

Sister Therese, 39, is now one of three nuns with the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light in Dartmouth, Massachusetts. The sisters take vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, and they set out to be “spiritual mothers in imitation of Mary, radiating the light of Christ.”

She said the vow of poverty, for example, is one of the blessings in her life. The nuns have few belongings and generally share what little they have. “Our treasure is Jesus himself,” Sister Therese said.

They live modest, disciplined lives. They spend about four hours each day praying, and they provide spiritual guidance to many — children, youth, and



young adults, to families, sick people, and those who are dying or grieving.

After graduating from college, she started a career as an accountant but quit after six months, believing she was meant to do something else. She spent five months in Lebanon, praying, serving others, and exploring her faith. She began the process of becoming a nun in 2010, and she took her first vows in 2013 and her final vows in 2017.

Sister Therese heads the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn's Maronite Youth Organization and the Maronite Young Adults. She has a master's degree in pastoral ministry from Boston College.

"People, because they don't have a relationship with the Lord, they're trying to fill a void with things," she said. "They're trying to fill that longing in their hearts. And only God can fill that longing."

"St. Augustine has that famous quote: 'Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord,'" Sister Therese said. Sister Therese, who is articulate and has a calming Australian accent, said she was known to be a social butterfly as a teen and young adult. As a nun, she said often being quiet was initially challenging but has been a blessing.

She said a regiment that is heavy on prayers has been a blessing. She said that many Christians aren't called upon to be priests or nuns but can benefit from some of the nuns' practices, including thoughtful prayer. "I would definitely encourage them just to be faithful in their own prayer life," Sister Therese said, "having that daily relationship with the Lord where they can wake up and make the sign of the cross and thank God for a new day." She suggested people end their days with examination and prayer, thanking God for moments when he was present with them. That also entails Catholics reflecting on when they weren't as charitable as they could have been — and asking God for forgiveness and grace to be better next time.

Sister Therese also told Catholics to "not be afraid to witness to Jesus." "I would encourage anyone who is a Catholic to not be afraid, because we need more of Jesus today," she said. "We need more of His love. We need more of His peace. And the more we can radiate that, the more I think our world will be a better place."

More information about the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light is available at <http://maroniteservants.org>. ■

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

The Order of Saint Sharbel New Members

ANNUAL

SHARON ANDREWS (AYOUB) | *Saint Anthony of the Desert* | Fall River, MA
 LEILA BOULOS | *Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon* | Jamaica Plain, MA
 GHASSAN AND MICHELLE HARIKA | *St. Anthony Church* | Glen Allen, VA
 ROSEMARY KAUTZ | *Saint Sharbel* | Clinton Township, MI
 ANGELO MAROUN | *Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon* | Jamaica Plain, MA
 ROULA MAROUN | *Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon* | Jamaica Plain, MA
 KELLY RYAN | *Saint Joseph* | Waterville, ME
 JOSEPH SHAMON | *Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon* | Jamaica Plain, MA
 RICHARD SHAMON | *Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon* | Jamaica Plain, MA
 FADY & TERESA TAWIL | *Saint Maron* | Minneapolis, MN

PERPETUAL

MICHAEL G. ELHAGE | *Saint John Maron* | Williamsville, NY
 BLESSED MOTHER'S LADIES GUILD | *Saint Anthony of the Desert* | Fall River, MA
 PATRICIA MITCHELL | *Saint Elias* | Birmingham, AL
 HITAF NAMMOUR | *Saint Anthony* | Lawrence, MA
 GEORGE SARKIS | *Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon* | Jamaica Plain, MA

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:
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 109 Remsen Street
 Brooklyn, NY 11201 or
 Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
 1021 South 10th Street
 St. Louis, MO 63104



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Fourteenth Annual Benefit Dinner for Eparchy of Saint Maron a Smashing Success!

Over 170 people celebrated at the Fourteenth Annual Benefit Dinner for the Eparchy of Saint Maron on Thursday, 5 October at the Union League Club on Park Avenue in Manhattan. Highlights of the evening included:

- The honoring of **Marian Sahadi Ciaccia, Edward Shiner and Charbel Tagher**. Tributes were received from family members and Bishop Gregory Mansour, who presented each honoree with a special gift.
- Notable tenor Amine Hachem brought down the house with a performance of a selection of songs including the classic “New York, New York”.
- Parishioners attended from all four New York area Maronite communities — Saint John Paul II Parish in Sleepy Hollow, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, the Maronite Mission in Manhattan and Saint Sharbel Parish in Somerset, NJ, as well as from parishes in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Georgia and Florida.
- A Silent Auction of 20 items from reputable businesses including Middle East Airlines, Hannoush Jewelers, Michel Kors, Opus Vineyards, and multiple local favorite restaurants.

Proceeds from the Benefit Dinner help educate seminarians, small parishes, and the ministries of the Eparchy. Donations are still being accepted and may be made online at <https://www.stmaron.org/donate-1>, or by mailing a check to: Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, 109 Remsen Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

Photos from the event can be found online through the Eparchy’s website (www.stmaron.org). ■



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Why do we go to a Shrine? *Edited by TMV Staff*

On 11 November 2023, in Vatican City's Paul VI Hall, Pope Francis had an audience with rectors and pastoral ministers of Shrines. In his reflection, the Holy Father points out three tasks for a Shrine, which are also the reasons why people visit them. The following are some excerpts.

1. To Pray and Experience Mercy

One comes to the Shrine, above all, to pray. On our part, it is necessary for us to remain ever mindful that our Shrines are truly privileged places of prayer. I know how carefully the Holy Eucharist is celebrated there and how much effort is devoted to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In the history of every Shrine it is easy to touch directly the faith of our faithful people, which must be kept alive and nurtured with prayer, primarily the Rosary, which helps to pray through meditation on the mysteries of the life of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. To enter spiritually in those mysteries, to feel one is a living part of what constitutes our history of salvation, is a sweet commitment that brings the flavor of the Gospel to everyday life.

It is important that, in the Shrines, particular attention is dedicated to adoration. We have lost something of the sense of adoration. We must regain it. We must encourage pilgrims to experience contemplative silence — and it is not easy — adoring silence. Adoration is not a departure from life; rather it is the space to give meaning to everything, to receive the gift of God's love and to be able to bear witness to it in fraternal charity.

2. To Be Consoled

One goes to Shrines also to be consoled. The mystery of consolation. How many people go there because they bear in the spirit and the body a weight, a suffering, a worry! The sickness of a loved one, the loss of a family member; so many situations in life are often the cause of loneliness and sadness, which are laid on the altar and await a response. Consolation is not an abstract idea, and is not made up first and foremost of words, but of a compassionate and tender closeness that understands pain and suffering. Compassionate and tender closeness. This is God's style: close, compassionate and tender. This is the way of the Lord. To console is to make God's mercy tangible; that is why the service of consolation cannot be missing from our Shrines. May consolation and mercy abound in our Shrines!

3. To Look at the Future with Greater Confidence

Finally, one goes to the Shrine to look to the future with greater confidence. Pilgrims need hope. They seek it in the very gesture of pilgrimage: they set out in search of a safe destination to reach. They ask for hope in prayer, because they know that only a simple and humble faith can obtain the grace they need. So, it is important that, returning home, they feel this has been fulfilled, and are filled with serenity because they have placed their trust in God.

* * *

From all Shrines, may a hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord be raised for the wonders that He achieves even in our times. And may the intercession of the Mother of God be implored, so that, in these troubled times, many of our suffering brothers and sisters may find peace and hope.



MYA Richmond Conference: A weekend filled with grace, friendship, and lots of love

by Joe Bukuras, MYA Board Member, Boston MA

At the Maronite Young Adult Eparchial Conference in Richmond, Virginia, hosted at St. Anthony Church in Glen Allen, 13-15 October, we had over 150 young adults (and volunteers) come together for a weekend of fellowship, spirituality and growth. The theme was “Navigating Relationships: God’s Plan for Love.”

Our guest speaker, Rachel Ullmann, gave some wonderful tips, tricks, and hacks to dating in a broken world that offers nothing but a confused vision for sexuality and relationships. Some of that

practical guidance was: Don’t move to another city for someone you’re dating unless engaged; don’t move in together; do set limits on physical contact; do get to know their parents. There were several young adults who gave powerful testimonies of the love they share with either their significant others, or with their best friends. The wisdom given from all speakers, including Bishop Gregory Mansour, Rachel, and each of our young adults was a lot to chew on. So, it was fitting that we could take about an hour of eucharistic adoration to pray and reflect in front of the Lord.





That's when we had a bit of a sanctifying

crisis, if you will. The Holy Spirit began working and the confession lines began piling up. Even with six priests there, we couldn't keep up with the demand! Thank God that Bishop Gregory and Father Peter Frangie were willing to continue hearing confessions later in the day, so everyone had the opportunity to go. Some even confided in me that this was the first time they had ever confessed in their life — what a moment of grace!

That grace continued to both social gatherings on Friday and Saturday night as we all danced, Dabked, sang, and grew to know each other in deeper ways.

In addition to Bishop Gregory, Rachel Ullmann, and Father Peter, a big thank you must go out to all of the volunteers at St. Anthony Church, Chorbishop John Faris, the whole MYA Eparchial board and its director Sister Therese Maria for putting on this event.

There's so much more to mention such as the beautiful Liturgies, the wonderful hymns by our participants and seminarians, and the amazing work of the volunteers who cooked loads of food for the whole weekend!

The MYA conference was such a blessing and if you are a Maronite young adult, we would love to see you at the next one! Stay tuned by following the MYA Instagram account at @MYAEparchy StMaron. ■



MYA | Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

The *Maronite Young Couples* is a new initiative that began earlier this year. This committee exists under the umbrella of the MYA of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon. Its leaders are devoted to enlightening young adult singles and couples who are discerning or have discerned a vocation to marriage, aligned with traditional Maronite values and spirituality. We have held four virtual Zoom events, with appearances from guest speakers, Vivian Akel, Father George Hajj and committee leader/event host, Hana Chemaly. In addition to each presentation, we have had wonderfully insightful testimonies and panelists from young adults across both eparchies, including: Sarah & Logan Fritz, Alex & Gui Soares, Marian & Alex Nasser, Sandy & Santino Napolitano, Caline & Joe Bsaibes, Maya Khoury and Mario Saleh. Their willingness to be open and vulnerable with our young adults has helped this initiative blossom over time.

We aim to proceed with online events to maintain a safe and welcoming community for all single young adults who are discerning married life as well as married couples. So far, our events have covered the following topics: “Choosing a Life

Partner in Christ,” “Praying Together,” “Faithfulness in Marriage,” and the “Betrothal Ceremony.” To keep content relatable and enticing for our participants, we collect feedback to assess the quality of the topic, the guest speaker, and overall layout of each event! We pray to provide a reliable outlet for young adults to voice their needs. This communication is crucial towards staying true to MYC’s mission!

Event planning for MYC is ongoing, but we are seeking new committee leaders to join our Eparchial board for this initiative! Applications are open on our website. Applicants are required to have been married for at least three years. They must be active parishioners within their local church and obtain a recommendation from their parish priest. Those chosen will coordinate the creation of content and hosting events to support this initiative.

As we prepare for our upcoming events, we thank you for your continuous support and prayers for all our board members and initiatives. Stay tuned via our website www.ololmya.org and our Instagram @ololmya. ■



Maronite Young Couples

Join us for an introduction to our newest initiative under the MYA of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon.

Welcoming all adult singles and couples, who are discerning or have discerned a vocation to Marriage.



@lolmya



Maronite Young Couples Presents

Faithfulness To



Marriage

Single and Couples Encouraged to Attend



“

The MYC events I attended helped me visualize and articulate the meaning of being in a relationship that is God centered. I also enjoyed being able to listen to married young adults and how they have God as the center of their relationship.

—Amanda Touma

The MYC events have been a blessing to attend with my husband. My husband and I have been able to reflect together on the reality of marriage through the presentations, discussions with other young adults and couples, and the witnesses of lived Christian marriages. It's also been really helpful to get practical advice on the spiritual aspect of the relationship like prayer.

—Alex Soares

I enjoyed being at the MYC meetings because I was able to hear the experience of people in different stages of life. We learned from priests, married couples and young Catholics looking to find a spouse on what it means to have a God centered relationship, and how it plays out practically in our lives. I am thankful for Hana for putting these meetings together and creating the space for us to talk about these important topics.

—Guilherme Soares

”

Women of the Church *by Vivian Akel*

There are so many positive images of women found in both the Old and New Testament; this is intriguing, especially in the context of the dominant male culture. The Scriptures portray the women of Jesus' time as significant and influential members of Jesus' inner circle, especially as He leaves his home in Galilee, travels toward Jerusalem, and ultimately his death and Resurrection.

During his life's journey, Jesus was followed by many women inspired by his message of love and service, as well as his teachings and miracles. Some of these women were plagued by fear and disappointment which caused them to abandon Jesus and the mission along the way. Others, however, persevered even to the crucifixion. These followers became the disciples and missionaries who spread the message Jesus entrusted to them when He said, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (MATTHEW 28:19).

The Gospels paint a vision of equality, as Jesus performs miracles for mothers and daughters. He speaks in parables using feminine images of baking bread and sweeping floors as well as masculine images of landowners, farmers, and vine growers. These images helped describe what the Kingdom of God truly looks like. Women in the Gospels are portrayed positively, and no woman encountering Jesus leaves unchanged or unhealed. Mary of Bethany, the mother of James and John, the Canaanite woman, (MATTHEW 15:28, MARK 5:34) are some good examples of Christ's women disciples. These women of the Scriptures inspire and call us all to come out of the shadows of our fear and timidity and take our place as Jesus' disciples and claim our roles, inherited from the courageous and faithful women in Jesus' life.

In today's Church, we have many women in leadership positions. There are so many needs in the Church. There

is room for leadership and service by so many women, alongside the ordained ministries. For women to seek parity or equality strictly focused on "ordained" ministry restricts and limits the opportunities to live out Christ's mission of love and generosity.

Here are some facts about women in today's Church: As of 2021, 34% of CEOs in Catholic health systems are women. Also, 34% of presidents of Catholic colleges and universities in America are women.

Sixty-seven percent of principals of Catholic Schools are women. Forty-nine percent of Catholic school superintendents are women. Forty-seven percent of Catholic Charities agencies are led by women. Of the 88 Catholic Media Association members, 462 are women with 200 holding leadership titles (i.e. editor, director, vice president, manager, coordinator).

In addition, in many dioceses, women serve as chancellors, CEOs, COOs, CFOs, and planning directors. Parish pastoral ministers are often women as are directors of religious education.

A study completed within the past 20 years by the Leadership Conference of Religious Women showed that Catholic women participating in high-level administrative positions in the Church are making executive decisions affecting Church property, policies, and personnel. The study explored the roles of women as chancellors, tribunal judges, diocesan finance director, director of Catholic Charities vicar/delegate for religious and pastoral director of a parish. Women have also been regularly appointed to vacant positions at the Holy See under Pope Francis.

Here are some more facts to counter the misconception that Church leaders do not advocate for women leaders in Catholic ministries.

Over the past 50 years, the Holy See has proclaimed the importance of the gifts of women. At the close of Vatican II on Dec. 8, 1965, Pope Paul VI stated: “Women, you know how to make the TRUTH sweet, tender, and accessible. He went on to say that “it is you who are entrusted at this grave moment in history to save the world.” Thirty years later, on June 29, 1995, St. John Paul II referred to the “feminine genius” emanating from Mary at the center of the salvific event, manifesting the extraordinary dignity of the woman. He again offers his thoughts in his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*: “the witness and achievement of Christian women have had a significant impact on the life of the Church as well as society.” More recently, Pope Francis credits the leadership of women as a blessing during the global pandemic and credits them with clarity in timely decision-making.

Another misconception that needs to be addressed is that lay ministry is of lesser value than ordained ministry.

Many lay people (men and women) assume that their ministries are inferior to those of ordained ministers, but the truth is that lay leaders share responsibility with the ordained to proclaim the good news and witness to the Gospel while serving their neighbors, brothers, and sisters in Christ. This is grounded in each person’s dignity in virtue of one’s baptism in Christ. A pastoral minister, Jennifer Fiducia describes how, empowered by her baptism, she carries out her ministry in meaningful ways day to day. She says, “I am called to make holy the places and spaces in which I find myself. This includes my family, my social circle, my workplace, my community, and the larger society. I do not need to be employed by the Church to do this. I can do this by accompanying others on their faith journey and I observe many volunteers and ministry leaders doing this week after week.”

Another misconception is that women are not well-suited for leadership roles in Catholic ministries.

These stereotypical attitudes are promoted by both men and women who believe women should continue to serve as mothers, spouses, and other family roles not as professionals. They doubt women’s consistency in financial decision-making, self-confidence in groups of male board members and/or higher-ranking



clergy boards at the diocesan level. I refer us back to the statistics I cited in the First Untruth. The women in these positions of leadership have been driven by attributes they share, namely the following:

A deep love for God and neighbor which is the COMPASS by which they live and find their way.

They are compelled to serve those in Need. Leaders bring their gifts to wherever they are called to serve.

They (women) are committed to serving their staff because the impulse to serve people in need includes care for one’s colleagues.

Women take ownership of problems and challenges with limits on creativity once the job is accomplished or mastered.

Women are capable of healing and bridging differences, they recognize that leadership requires engaging constructively across different points of view.

Most importantly, their work is rooted in Faith and above all an undying faith that paves the way to hope.

Finally, with Mary as the impetus, women live out her instructions on Cana Sunday when she simply says, “Do as He tells you,” thereby establishing the Lay Apostolate. And here you are, each one of you living out your own personal YES as Mary did when she declared to the Angel Gabriel on that Annunciation Day, “My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” ■

REFERENCES:

Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women of the Gospels*
Carolyn Y. Woo, *Rising*

Parish News

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Parish Festival



Saint Stephen Church's festival in Charlotte, North Carolina, was held on 30 September 2023. Parish families, community members and travelers from several different states gathered to celebrate St. Stephen's Middle Eastern culture. Many adult and youth volunteers worked cooperatively to make the festival a successful event. Lebanese foods were prepared including: tabbouleh, kibbeh, grape leaves, chicken and beef shawarma, kabobs, hummus, falafel, zaatar bread, baklava, nammoura, and

more. A variety of activities were featured such as: a cultural booth with souvenirs from Lebanon (cedar wood keychains, St. Sharbel icons, handmade scarves, etc.), kids games, prizes, music and a Dabke entertainment youth dance group from Raleigh. Father Rodolph Wakim, pastor, commented, "I was pleased to see everyone working together toward a common goal . . . to establish strong bonds in our Maronite faith." ■



GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA

Trunk or Treat

A dozen vehicles decorated for Halloween and stocked with candy, six pots of chili and several dozen kids with their families made for a fun Halloween celebration on 19 October at Saint Anthony Church in Glen Allen, VA. The parish is blessed with a lot of land and on that day there were children running everywhere playing or sometimes just shouting. The occasion was simple but it is a sign that the parish family of Saint Anthony has a great future. ■

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Fall Activities



During the months of September and October 2023, the parishioners of St. Maron Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, hosted spiritual and community-building outreach activities for the congregation and community. Even Hurricane Ophelia did not dampen the enthusiasm for the parish's annual "End of the Summer/Welcome to the Fall Festival" block party held on 23 September. The collaboration and planning of the festival board members allowed participants to enjoy Middle Eastern cuisine, raffles, prizes, games, and socialization. Fr. Andrawos stated, "When we come together, nothing is impossible."

On 29 September, parishioners held their annual First Responders Appreciation Day honoring local police officers, firefighters, Coast Guard, EMT, etc. for their service to the community. Fr. David Fisher, St. Maron's weekend assistant, celebrated the liturgy recognizing the first responders in their efforts to provide a secure environment. Fr. Andrawos El Tabchi, pastor, commented to the attendees, "Thank you for your service, and may God bless you and keep you safe." Fr. Andrawos maintains strong ties with the local law enforcement, and he currently serves as chaplain for the local police district. With the generosity of parishioners and sponsors, a luncheon was served following the liturgy.

On 9 October, Fr. Andrawos hosted an Appreciation Luncheon for parishioners, volunteers, senior church members, and long-time custodian, Harold Smith, as gratitude for their hard work, support, contributions, and dedication to the church. They received an Apostolic Blessing, courtesy of Bishop Gregory Mansour. October activities culminated with the annual St. Jude's Novena. Those attending listened to nine different reflections of the Seven Spiritual Acts of Mercy presented by Fr. Andrawos, Fr. Fisher, and several deacons and priests in the Philadelphia area. ■

Parish News

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Celebrating Eucharistic Revival & Village Night

Eucharistic Revival Sessions

At Our Lady of the Cedars, a spiritual awakening is sweeping through the hearts and minds of both youth and adults, illuminating the profound significance of the Eucharist in the spiritual journey. The Eucharistic Revival sessions hosted every Wednesday by this vibrant community have been nothing short of a resounding success. Understanding the depth and richness of this sacred mystery is essential for every believer. One of the remarkable aspects of these sessions is the diversity of attendees. Both youth and adults have enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to learn and grow in their faith. The engagement and active participation of the youth are especially inspiring, showcasing a genuine hunger for understanding and integrating the Eucharist into their lives, while enjoying a delicious dinner throughout every session. The success of the Eucharistic Revival sessions at Our Lady of the Cedars

underscores the importance of fostering a robust understanding of the Eucharist within the community.

Fall Village Night

Our community at Our Lady of the Cedars radiated joy and togetherness during our much-anticipated Village Night on 14 October 2023. Families gathered for a night of celebration, laughter, and camaraderie, creating unforgettable memories. The event was a hit with the kids, offering them lots of fun activities. Entertainment graced the evening, adding a magical touch to the lively atmosphere. A star of the night was undoubtedly the Lebanese food, a culinary delight that united everyone in the celebration of culture and flavors. This wonderful evening exemplified the warm and welcoming spirit that defines our church, leaving all in attendance eager for more joyful gatherings in the future! ■



UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Fall Events

On 9 September 2023, the First Responders Committee of Saint George Church in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, paid tribute to the men and women of their community who serve and protect our citizens. A Blue Mass was celebrated by Father Aaron Sandbothe, pastor, giving thanks to our local first responders. Father Aaron honored them with a special blessing for their health and well-being. Following Liturgy, to show appreciation for the brave efforts of these compassionate individuals, the first responders were invited to enjoy a delicious dinner in the church hall.

17 September marked the annual Uniontown Rosary Walk sponsored by the Altar & Rosary Society of Saint George Church. This annual event, honoring the Mother of God, began at Saint George praying the first decade of the rosary and singing Maronite hymns. The Knights of Columbus led the procession to five other parishes where the faithful from three Catholic traditions (Maronite, Roman, Byzantine) prayed in unison. The Rosary Walk concluded with the final Benediction and Litany to the Mother of God.

Annually, Christians worldwide celebrate the Feast of Saint Francis, patron saint of animals. St. Francis is one of the most venerated religious figures recognized for his love of animals, nature, and all God’s creatures. On 4 October, the Feast Day of Saint Francis, parishioners and community members brought their pets to Saint George. Chanting prayers and sprinkling holy water, Father Aaron Sandbothe offered a special Blessing of Animals.

28 October was a fun filled spooktacular night at the Saint George Halloween Trunk or Treat for the children. Dressed in colorful costumes, the children enjoyed food, candy bags, pumpkin egg hunt and prizes.

On 12 November, the Saint George Altar & Rosary Society celebrated their annual Memorial Liturgy honoring the deceased members of the Society. They gave thanks to their loved ones for their spiritual and cultural contributions to the church. The members recited the rosary and litany, and read the names of the deceased aloud. Following Liturgy, the Altar & Rosary members enjoyed a reception in the parish hall. ■



Parish News

WEST COVINA, CALIFORNIA

St. Jude Feast Day

St. Jude Church came together as a community to celebrate their patronal feast of St. Jude on 28-20 October 2023. It was a celebration to honor St. Jude, the patron saint of desperate cases and lost causes, and ask him to intercede for our prayers. The weekend began with an All Saint's Day celebration hosted by the MYA group for the students of the Children's Program. The event was not just about enjoying candy

and costumes but also learning about the inspiring lives of the saints. On Sunday, Bishop Antoine Chbeir celebrated the Liturgy and invoked St. Jude's blessings on the parishioners. Liturgy was followed by a delicious lunch in the Church Hall. St. Jude's Feast Day served as a reminder of the importance of coming together as a community. May St. Jude intercede for our prayers. ■



FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

50th Parish Anniversary



During the weekend of 22-24 September 2023, the parishioners, clergy and Bishop Gregory Mansour celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Saint Michael the Archangel Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Throughout the celebration, Bishop Gregory was involved in all gatherings and activities held for the congregation, founding families and visiting guests. Over his three-day visitation, Bishop Gregory blessed the parishioners and the church, and he concelebrated the Divine Liturgies with Fr. Paul Damien, Fr. Chuck Van Heusen, Fr. Claude Franklin, Fr. Ian Van Heusen,

and Fr. Jack Morrison. Bishop Gregory also participated in numerous events featuring: a Friday night retro-themed party with 1950's style clothing, decorations, music, dancing, and a pinewood derby for the children sponsored by the Knights of Columbus. On Saturday, Bishop Gregory met with the Parish Council, Ladies Guild, Knights of Columbus, and the Choir to discuss future parish plans, and he answered challenging questions posed by the children. Two catechism teachers, Marie Van Heusen and Marie Reale Catalana, were each presented with an award

honoring them for their outstanding service and dedication to the children's catechesis program. Dinner was served after the evening Liturgy. During the Bishop's Sunday Divine Liturgy, two catechumens, Lucas Vaughan and Cindy Sullivan, made their profession of the Catholic faith, and Bishop Gregory renewed the marriage vows of all couples present. Following Liturgy, a wonderful lunch was provided for all in attendance. It was a beautiful weekend celebration! ■

Parish News

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Charitable Efforts



The Charity Committee of St. Elias Church spent 3-4 November 2023 working for charitable organizations in Birmingham, Alabama.

Community Food Bank operates as a food distribution center by receiving surplus food from local grocery stores to sort and box. Food is then sent to local pantries for distribution to those in need, free of charge.

feedingal.org

Firehouse Ministries serves homeless men in Birmingham with basic needs as well as counseling and education programs to help break the cycle of homelessness. firehouseshelter.com

The Catholic Center of Concern of the Diocese of Birmingham provides direct aid to the poor by helping with food, clothing and utilities. Our children learned the importance of giving to the poor; along with the adults present, they made over 300 snack bags for the Catholic Center of Concern to give to children as after school snacks.

catholiccharitiesbhm.org/the-catholic-centers-of-concern.html ■

TORRINGTON, CONNECTICUT

Autumn Events

On 13 August 2023, the Divine Liturgy at St. Maron Church in Torrington, Connecticut, was offered by Father Fady Khawand, pastor, for Mayor Carbone and the first responders of the community. They were recognized for their efforts in helping others in need. The first responders were represented by a group of local firefighters. The children were excited to see a fire truck parked outside the church.

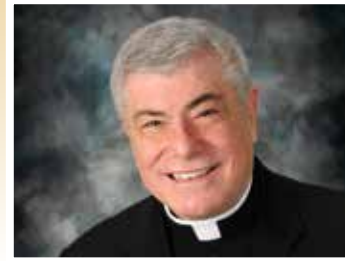
A Divine Liturgy was offered on 8 October for the Friends in Service to the Humanity of Northwest Connecticut (FISH) and their director, Deirdre Houlihan DiCara. Since their founding in 1972, the mission of FISH NWCT has been to provide the basic human necessities of food, shelter, and hope to those in need. FISH operates the region's largest emergency homeless shelter and a much-needed food pantry.

In November, Fr. Fady celebrated his one-year anniversary as pastor of St. Maron Church. During his first year, Fr. Fady established a rapport with neighboring



partners by inviting community leaders and personnel to attend the Divine Liturgy at St. Maron followed by coffee hour to socialize, meet many parishioners, and discuss ways to help the less fortunate. At coffee hour, Ms. DiCara was invited to speak about many FISH projects including St. Maron Church operating as a drop-off point and helper in their annual winter coat drive. Fr. Fady's Outreach coffee hour with local organizations is a monthly event giving parishioners an opportunity to become more involved in community activities. Fr. Fady stated, "I want people to know that St. Maron's Church is alive, and although we are small; we are accomplishing much with what we have." ■

From the Editor



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

No big deal.

These three words serve a variety of purposes, all to do with **consequences**.

When someone makes a mistake, I may say “No big deal” because the consequences can usually be dealt with.

When someone is critical of me. They can be right or wrong. If I want to dismiss their opinion and its consequences in the community, I say “No big deal.” I may or may not be correct. (“No big deal” is rarely used when someone is praising me.)

When I do something or fail to do something and want to lighten the consequential guilt, I may dismiss my actions with, “No big deal.”

There is also a danger with the phrase. When I am tempted to cut corners or do something wrong and **I want to ignore the consequences**, I may say, “No big deal.”

In most cases, there is a consequence, small or great. At times our misdeeds will go undetected. But then there are consequences far worse than a nightmare. Perhaps I have been drinking and want to drive home. No big deal. The consequence can be a tragedy.

At the end of the day — well, actually at the end of time — we must stand before God and the consequence can be Hell. “No big deal” won’t work!

But we have God’s mercy. **Heaven is not a consequence — it is a gift.** ■

Devotedly yours in Christ,

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

Chorbishop John D. Faris

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