

*the* **Maronite Voice**



*11 October* IS THE FEAST OF SAINT POPE JOHN XXIII, WHO  
OPENED THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON THAT DATE IN 1962.

# the Maronite Voice

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# Human Dignity in a Technological World



There is so much hype and talk these days about “Artificial Intelligence” and its impact on our world now and in the future.

Can you imagine a robot endowed with artificial intelligence celebrating the Mass, hearing confessions, or ministering the sacraments? Can you imagine two robots endowed with artificial intelligence falling in love? The list could go on and on. Simply, are we inventing creatures that could beat humanity in its intelligence, if not replacing it at one point? Would artificial intelligence have the ability to procreate and multiply? What are the moral norms that direct its functions? How are we going to cope with this?

We are at the tip of a transformational technology that could change and alter our lives and livelihood. It is so important to define some moral principles that guide technological advancement.

His Holiness Pope Francis has applauded the benefits of artificial intelligence when used for the common good but warned against using it unethically or irresponsibly. In his address to the *Minerva Dialogues*, a high-level annual gathering of scientists and experts, organized by the Vatican’s Dicastery for Education and Culture, back on March 27, 2023, Pope Francis stated:

*“It is reassuring to know that many people in these fields are working to ensure that technology remains human-centered, ethically grounded and directed toward the good...”*





*“I encourage you, in your deliberations, to make the intrinsic dignity of every man and every woman the key criterion in evaluating emerging technologies; these will prove ethically sound to the extent that they help respect that dignity and increase its expression at every level of human life...”*

*“We cannot allow algorithms to limit or condition respect for human dignity, or to exclude compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and above all, the hope that people are able to change.” (March 2023).*

Dear friends, we realize that new technological advancements make some aspects of our lives easier and more efficient such as connecting with loved ones around the world with a tap of the screen, we can follow up instantly on world events on our handheld devices, and it has become easier to do tasks that were time-consuming and difficult.

Unfortunately, our interpersonal relationships with people around us have not kept up with the advancements of technology. Moreover, our relationship with our loving God has lagged behind as well. As we admire human invention, let us not forget to give praise and thanks to God, the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier. ■

*Bishop A. Elias Zaidan*

## The Order of Saint Sharbel New Members

### ANNUAL

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### PERPETUAL

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**DR. NABIL FEHALI** | *Our Lady of Lebanon* | Los Angeles, CA

**DR. DEBORAH GHAZOUL-MILLS** | *St. Maron* | Cleveland, OH

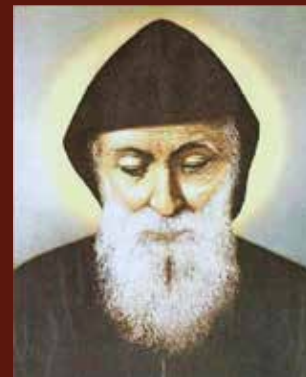
**ANDREW SHEBAY IV** | *Our Lady of the Cedars* | Houston, TX

**IN MEMORY OF JEE HAN PARK** | *St. Anthony of Padua* | Cincinnati, OH

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](http://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

## ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL SUNDAY OCTOBER 8, 2023



All parishes will promote the Order on Sunday, October 8, 2023  
[WWW.ORDERSTSHARBEL.ORG](http://WWW.ORDERSTSHARBEL.ORG)

## Schedule **BISHOP A. ELIAS ZAIDAN**

- 6 OCTOBER** Simi Valley, CA | Sts. Peter and Paul Church | Annual Banquet
- 7 OCTOBER** North Jackson, OH | Our Lady of Lebanon Shrine | Deacons and Subdeacons Retreat
- 8 OCTOBER** Fairlawn, OH | Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon Church | Subdiaconal Ordination of Charles Abraham
- 8 OCTOBER** Cleveland, OH | Maronite Catholic Foundation Board Meeting
- 13-15 OCTOBER** Seattle, WA | St. Naamtallah Hardini Mission
- 16 OCTOBER** Las Vegas, NV | Archdiocese of Las Vegas Celebration
- 28-29 OCTOBER** El Cajon, CA | St. Ephrem Church | Pastoral Visit and Capital Campaign Event
- 8 NOVEMBER** Ruthenian Eparchy of Parma, OH | Episcopal Ordination of Most Reverend Robert M. Pipta
- 11 NOVEMBER** Baltimore, MD | USCCB Committee on Priorities and Plans Meeting
- 13-16 NOVEMBER** Baltimore, MD | USCCB Meetings
- 19 NOVEMBER** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral
- 23 NOVEMBER** Happy Thanksgiving!
- 2-3 DECEMBER** Milwaukee, WI | St. Sharbel Mission | Pastoral Visit
- 8-10 DECEMBER** Dayton, OH | St. Ignatius of Antioch | Pastoral Visit



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

**PASSING OF  
FATHER LOUIS ABDOO, IMC**

Father Louis Abdo was called home to God on 28 July 2023. Father Louie was born on 17 March 1944, in Utica, New York, the son of the late Louis Albert and Helen Theresa Abdo. Fr. Louis was a graduate of Catholic schools in Utica and entered the Consolata seminary in Buffalo, New York immediately after high school graduation. Fr. Louie was a graduate of Catholic University and St. Paul's college both in Washington, DC.

Although Fr. Louie joined the Consolata Fathers, as a lifelong Maronite he was ordained in the Maronite rite by

## Schedule **BISHOP GREGORY J. MANSOUR**

- 7-8 OCTOBER** Worcester, MA | Our Lady of Mercy Church | Parish Centenary
- 9 OCTOBER** Hartford, CT | Archdiocesan Celebration
- 10-11 OCTOBER** Jamaica Plain, MA | Diaconal Ordination of Joseph Dickan, SJ
- 13-15 OCTOBER** Glen Allen, VA | St. Anthony Church | MYA Retreat and Parish Visit
- 17 OCTOBER** New York, NY | St. Vartan's Cathedral | Enthronement of Armenian Orthodox Bishop
- 20-22 OCTOBER** Washington, DC | Our Lady of Lebanon Parish and Seminary | Deacons and Subdeacons Retreat and Parish and Seminary Visit
- 27-29 OCTOBER** Whiting, NJ | MYO Retreat
- 3-5 NOVEMBER** Miami, FL | Our Lady of Lebanon Church | 50th Parish Anniversary
- 11 NOVEMBER** Newtown Square, PA | St. Sharbel Church | 25th Parish Anniversary
- 12 NOVEMBER** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
- 13-16 NOVEMBER** Baltimore, MD | USCCB Meetings
- 18 NOVEMBER** New York, NY | St. Vartan's Cathedral | Visit of Armenian Catholicos
- 19 NOVEMBER** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
- 21-28 NOVEMBER** Michigan | Family Visit
- 2-3 DECEMBER** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
- 5 DECEMBER** New York, NY | CNEWA Benefit Dinner
- 8 DECEMBER** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Immaculate Conception Liturgy and Confraternity Dinner
- 9-11 DECEMBER** New Bedford, MA | Our Lady of Purgatory Church | Dedication of New Church, Hall, and Rectory

Bishop Francis Zayek. The ordination took place at Saint Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, New York on 24 July 1973.

Fr. Louie recently celebrated 50 years in the priesthood at Saint Francis DeSales in Riverside, California where he served the community for 23 years.

Prior to Saint Francis DeSales, Fr. Louie served as a missionary priest in Nyeri, Kenya, Africa and Caqueta, Columbia, South America.

Over the years Fr. Louie filled in at the Maronite Churches in his area in California. Most recently working with Saint Joseph Maronite mission in Riverside, where Saint Joseph was able to celebrate the Maronite Mass at Fr. Louie's parish.

Fr. Louie was predeceased by his siblings Gloria, Anita, and Anne, and brother-in-law Ron Campbell. He is survived by his brother Albert Louis Abdoo and sister Helen Theresa "Terry" Abdoo King, and her husband John. He is survived by eight nieces and nephews and twelve great-nieces and nephews.



# The First Seven Ecumenical Councils

by Rev. Aaron Sandbothe

## NICEA, 325

Convened under the Roman Emperor St. Constantine, the First Ecumenical Council mainly battled the heresy of **Arianism**. Three-hundred eighteen bishops participated in this Council, including St. Nicholas the Wonderworker; St. James, bishop of Nisibis; St. Spyridon of Tremithus; and St. Athanasius, who was a deacon at the time. They came together because an Alexandrian priest named Arius rejected the Divine nature and pre-eternal birth of Jesus Christ. Instead, he taught his followers that the Son of God was the highest creation.

At this Council, the Church established the following:

- The Son of God is true God, begotten of God the Father before all ages.
- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was not created and is eternal.
- As the Son of God, begotten from God the Father, Jesus Christ is consubstantial with the Father.
- The Church should celebrate the Resurrection on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring/vernal equinox.
- Various rules for bishops, priests, and deacons, their jurisdiction, and their elections/ordinations respectively.
- Many other canons regarding excommunication, penance, etc.

## CONSTANTINOPLE, 381

The Second Ecumenical Council convened under Emperor Theodosius I. One-hundred fifty bishops attended this Council, including Gregory the Theologian, who presided over the Council, Gregory of Nyssa, Meletius of Antioch, Amphilochius of Iconium and Cyril of Jerusalem. This Council condemned the heresy of **Pneumatomachianism**. This heresy, led by Arian bishop Macedonius of Constantinople, taught

that the Holy Spirit was not divine, but a creature.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit was, according to this heresy, subservient to God the Father and God the Son, like an angel. In response to this heresy, the Church affirmed the following as dogma:

- The Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and is consubstantial (and thus equality) with the Father and the Son. Additionally, the Second Ecumenical Council added five articles to the Nicene Creed. In these articles, the Church declared her teachings about the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Mysteries, the resurrection of the dead, and life in the world to come. After adding these clarifying articles, the Church referred to the symbol of faith as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, because of the two Councils that contributed to its content.

## EPHESUS, 431

Convened under Emperor Theodosius II, the Third Ecumenical Council condemned the heresy of **Nestorianism**. Two-hundred bishops participated in this Council. Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, incorrectly taught that the Most-holy Virgin Mary simply gave birth to the man Christ. He believed that God later united with the man Jesus and dwelt in Him as in a temple, similar to the way God dwelt in Moses and other prophets. Therefore, Nestorius called the Lord Jesus Christ God-bearing, and not God incarnate. Moreover, he insisted on calling the Virgin Mary *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer) rather than *Theotokos* (God-bearer). In response to this heresy, the Third Ecumenical Council declared the following:

- Jesus Christ was fully God and fully Man.
- Because Jesus was true God of true God, the Virgin Mary gave birth to God; thus she should be called *Theotokos*.



The Council also affirmed the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and strictly prohibited making any changes or additions to it.

### **CHALCEDON, 451**

The Fourth Ecumenical Council convened under Emperor Marcian. Six-hundred fifty bishops met at this Council to condemn the false teachings of **Monophysitism**. Taught by an archimandrite named Eutyches, Monophysitism rejected the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, it taught that Christ's Divine nature had completely absorbed His Human nature. Therefore, according to Eutyches, we only need to recognize the Divine nature of Christ, not the Human. In summary, this Council defined the following:

- Our Lord Jesus Christ is perfect God and perfect Man.
- As God, Jesus Christ is eternally begotten of the Father.
- As Man, Christ was born of the Virgin Mary and took on our full humanity, but was without sin of His own will.

Through Christ's incarnation, He unites Divinity and Humanity within Himself as a single Person. Infused and immutable, refuting Eutyches; indivisible and inseparable, refuting Nestorius.

### **CONSTANTINOPLE II, 553**

Convened under Justinian I, the Fifth Ecumenical Council met to quell a controversy between Nestorians and Monophysites. One-hundred sixty-five bishops met at this Council to condemn the well-known works of the Antiochian school of the Syriac churches, entitled *The Three Chapters*. The writers of these works — Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa — clearly expressed Nestorian errors. But nothing was said of their works at the Fourth Ecumenical Council. When debating with Monophysites, Nestorians referred to these works. Monophysites found in those works an excuse to reject the Fourth Ecumenical Council and to slander the wider Christian community, charging that it had deviated toward Nestorianism.

The Council condemned all three works and also condemned Theodore of Mopsuestia himself, as not having repented. As for Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa, they themselves received pardon. The Council limited censure only to their Nestorian works. Theodoret and Ibas renounced their false opinions and died in peace with the Church. Moreover, the Council

reiterated its condemnation of the heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches.

### **CONSTANTINOPLE III, 680**

The Sixth Ecumenical Council convened under Constantine IV. It consisted of 170 bishops who collectively condemned **Monothelitism**. This heresy taught that while Jesus Christ had two natures, both God and Man, He only had one Divine Will. In other words, this heresy rejected that Christ, as a man, had His own free human will. In response, the Council clarified that in Jesus Christ are *two natures*, Divine and human, and in these two natures there are two wills. However, the human will in Christ is not against, but rather is in union with His Divine will.

Additionally, this Council pronounced excommunication and anathema against a number of other heretics, including the Roman Pope Honorius, who acknowledged these false teachings. A Roman delegation of presbyters and deacons signed the formulation of this Council.

### **NICEA II, 787**

Convened under Empress Irene (widow of Leo IV), the Seventh Ecumenical Council fought against the heresy of **Iconoclasm**. At the time of the Council, iconoclasm had raged for 60 years under the Greek Emperor Leo III. Leo III wanted to convert the followers of Muhammad to Christianity, and believed it necessary to do away with veneration of icons in order to convert them. This heresy continued under his son, Constantine V Copronymus, and his grandson, Leo IV.

The Council resolved to provide holy icons and place them in churches, together with the likeness of the Life-giving Cross of the Lord. The faithful were to honor and venerate the icons, elevating their souls and hearts to the Lord God, the Mother of God and the Saints, who are represented in them.

However, after this council, persecution of the holy icons continued under Emperors Leo V, Michael II, and Theophilus. Thus, iconoclasm disturbed the Church for another 25 years. The local synod of Constantinople in 843 finally restored and affirmed veneration of the holy icons under the Empress Theodora. ■

*Father Aaron Sandbothe is managing editor of The Maronite Voice and pastor of Saint George Church, Uniontown, PA*

# Gatherings of Bishops: Lessons from Jerusalem

by Rev. Timothy V. Vaverek

Throughout history, bishops have met to address pastoral issues of Christian faith and morals. A gathering of bishops of a particular region or of a Church *sui juris* (like the Maronite bishops and patriarch at Bkerke) is called a “synod.” An assembly open to the bishops of the entire Church is called an “Ecumenical Council.” Synods and Councils differ (the latter are infallible), but we can trace their roots to the gathering in Jerusalem recounted in Acts 15. That event reveals much about the teaching office of the pope and bishops in the life of the Church.

Behind the Jerusalem meeting lays Jesus’ conferral of his authority and mandate on the Apostles to be pastors of the flock and to make disciples the whole world, Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) alike (Mt 28:18-20). One of the early crises they faced within the Church was over their admitting Gentiles without requiring them to practice circumcision and the Mosaic Law.

Though almost all Gentiles were pagans, a few were “God-fearers” who believed in the God of Israel. They lived uprightly yet refrained from converting to Judaism

to avoid circumcision and because embracing the Law required severing relations with their non-Jewish family and community.

God first bestowed Christ’s life on the Gentiles by summoning St. Peter to the home of Cornelius, a God-fearing Roman centurion (Acts 10). As Peter proclaimed the Gospel, the Holy Spirit fell upon the entire household.

This startled Peter’s Christian companions, but he realized that those God had filled with the Holy Spirit should be baptized without hesitation. He didn’t impose circumcision or the Law.

Some Christians were shocked to hear of Peter’s action and they later confronted him in Jerusalem. After he explained exactly what God had done, they rejoiced that salvation had been granted to the Gentiles (Acts 11).

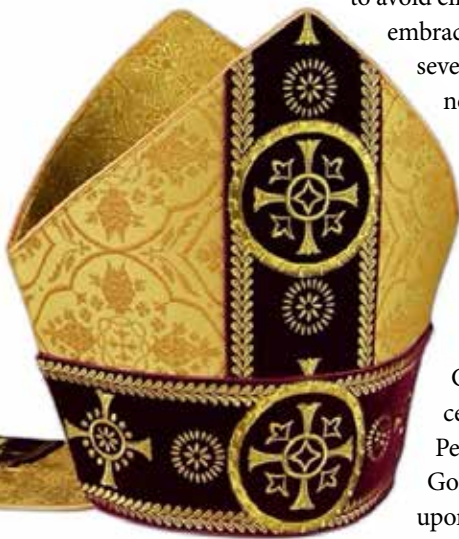
St. Barnabas and St. Paul, missionaries sent by the Church in Antioch, also began baptizing Gentiles—including those converting directly from paganism (Acts 13-14). Like Peter, they didn’t require circumcision or the Law.

Peter, Paul, and Barnabas were clear that Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, are bound to God by being united to Jesus, not by Mosaic practices. Jewish Christians could continue to observe ancient customs but weren’t required to do so.

As Gentile conversions increased, a crisis was provoked by some Jewish Christians who insisted that Gentile Christians must embrace the Law (Acts 15; see also Gal 2:1-10). In response, the Church in Antioch sent Barnabas, Paul, and some others to consult with the Apostles and presbyters (other leaders) in Jerusalem.

Initially, the Christians in Jerusalem rejoiced over the Antioch group’s news regarding God’s work among the Gentiles. However, some Pharisees who had converted demanded that the Law continue to be observed. The Apostles who were present and the presbyters gathered to discuss the matter.

After some debate, Peter reminded them of how God bestowed the Holy Spirit on Cornelius’ household without any reference to the Law. He noted that Jewish



Christians are “saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they [the Gentile Christians]” (ACTS 15:11).

Finally, St. James (likely by that time the bishop of Jerusalem) spoke in agreement. Instructions were sent to Antioch supporting Barnabas and Paul. Unfortunately, the mistaken Christians continued to preach their errors for many years, sowing confusion and misleading Gentile converts to practice the Law.

There were some surprising epilogues to the Jerusalem gathering. Peter later went to Antioch and at first dined with Gentile Christians then ceased after some Jewish Christians from Jerusalem objected, claiming James’ authority (GAL 2:11-14). Barnabas and others followed his example. Paul had to rebuke Peter for his misleading behavior.

Paul himself subsequently circumcised St. Timothy (born of a Jewish mother), but only so Timothy could easily interact with the non-Christian Jews to whom they were ministering — not as a religious obligation (ACTS 16:1-4).

These ancient events contain lessons for the Church in every age.

Note that Jesus mandated the Apostles to make disciples of the Gentiles and that God guided Peter’s encounter with Cornelius. Barnabas and Paul understood Christ’s mandate along the same lines as Peter. The Church in Jerusalem welcomed Peter’s marvelous news just as the Church in Antioch welcomed Barnabas’ and Paul’s. This means that Jesus had formed the teaching and practice of the Church before the crisis was provoked by those who mistakenly thought the approach was inadequate or simply wrong.

The purpose of the Jerusalem meeting, then, wasn’t to *debate or invent* a new teaching that would fit a contemporary need. It was to *affirm* a teaching of Christ that was already known against an error about the foundation and daily life of the Gospel.

The act of affirming fits with the pastoral authority Christ entrusted to the Apostles (which he later conferred

sacramentally on their successors, the popes and bishops). That authority was solely for making disciples and teaching them to believe and observe what he had already commanded. Jesus gave no authority to add or subtract from the Gospel he originally proclaimed.

The motive for Peter’s later actions in Antioch isn’t clear. Obviously, he knew Gentile and Jewish Christians weren’t bound to the Law. Perhaps he was trying to deal gently with Jewish sensibilities like Paul would do by circumcising Timothy. But his actions, unlike Paul’s, drew him away from Gentile Christians and appeared to support the false teachers. Paul was right to confront him about the misleading effect of his behavior.

So, we shouldn’t be surprised that popes and bishops can sometimes say or do things that are mistaken or scandalous. This can happen individually (think of corrupt popes and bishops during the Renaissance) or collectively (all the bishops except the martyred St. John Fisher abandoned the faith under Henry VIII).

The bishops infallibly proclaim the Gospel only when they collectively join the pope in affirming a matter of faith and morals at an Ecumenical Council or in a similarly solemn, world-wide proclamation. The pope also teaches infallibly when as pastor of the entire Church he solemnly affirms a particular teaching of the Gospel (said to be a proclamation “from the chair” of Peter, *ex cathedra* in Latin). Such infallible affirmations are rare — 21 Ecumenical Councils and 2 *ex cathedra*.

The events associated with the Jerusalem gathering remind us that, ultimately, Jesus is the one who is building-up the Church to live and proclaim the Gospel in each of her members — whatever our role in the Body. That’s what he promised when, after giving his pastoral authority and mandate to the Apostles, he declared “behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” May he guide the pope and bishops in fulfilling that mission and make us all his faithful witnesses to the world. ■

*Fr. 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 September – Saint Christopher

On 13 September, the Maronite Church commemorates the *Holy Martyr Christopher*. From the 18th century until the mid-20th century, the Maronite Church commemorated *Saint Christopher the Hermit* on 13 September. *Saint Christopher the Holy Martyr* was traditionally commemorated in the Maronite Church on 9 May.

The *Holy Martyr Christopher* was said to have been a very tall and extremely strong Canaanite, originally named Reprobus, meaning “the reprobate.”

Reprobus had made a vow to serve the greatest king in the world. First, he sought out the local king, but having witnessed that the king feared the devil, Reprobus thought he would leave the king and serve the devil. Then, after learning that the devil feared Christ, Reprobus went in search of Christ. Reprobus professed his faith in Christ

before his baptism. Learning of the persecutions and martyrdoms of the Christians, Reprobus denounced the persecutors. For his denunciations, and due to his renowned strength, 200 soldiers were assigned to bring him before the emperor. Along the way, several miracles occurred, for which the 200 soldiers came to believe in Christ and were baptized

along with Reprobus by Saint Babylas of Antioch (4 September).

Reprobus asked Saint Babylas how he could serve Christ best. Initially, Babylas suggested through fasting and prayer, but when Reprobus answered that he was unable to perform these ascetic practices, Babylas suggested that he could serve Christ’s people by using his size and strength to carry people across a river, in which those who attempted to cross were perishing. So, Reprobus practiced this service daily, becoming a “ferryman.”

One night, there was a great storm. A Child approached Reprobus and insisted on crossing the river without delay. As Reprobus carried the Child on his shoulders, it seemed to him that with every step he made, the Child became heavier and heavier. About halfway across, Reprobus felt that he would not be able to make it and that both he and the Child would drown. When they finally reached the other side, the child told him that the weight he felt was the weight of He Who had created the Heavens and the Earth and Who bore the weight of the sins of the world. He ordered Reprobus to plant his walking stick in the ground and it grew into a giant tree. The Child then told him: “I am Christ your king,” whom you had vowed to serve. Then the Child vanished. It is from this account that Reprobus became known as “Christopher,” that is, the “Christ-bearer”; thus, he became known as the patron saint for travelers.

Eventually, Christopher was brought before emperor Decius (249-251), who attempted to seduce him through harlots into denouncing Christ; rather, Christopher converted the harlots into Christians. After many failed attempts, the emperor ordered Christopher to be thrown into a red-hot metal box, but he escaped without bodily harm. And after many other severe tortures, Christopher was finally beheaded by the sword around the year 250 in Lycia. *May the prayers of Saint Christopher be with us!*





## 11 October – First Council of Nicaea

On 11 October, the Maronite Church commemorates the *First Council of Nicaea* (325). While the sanctoral calendar typically commemorates saints, on occasions it also celebrates other important events in the life of the Church, for example, the various ecumenical councils. Prior to the eighteenth century, the Maronite Church commemorated the Second Council of Nicaea (787) on 11 October, which condemned the Iconoclasts, rather than the *First Council of Nicaea*.

In Alexandria, there was a priest by the name of Arius, who denied the divine nature of Jesus Christ and His equality with God the Father. This heretical teaching became known as “Arianism.” Arius’ own bishop, Saint Alexander of Alexandria (26 February) and Saint Athanasius (18 January) held the orthodox position in opposition to him, that the Son had been “begotten” by the Father from His own Being, and therefore, “had no beginning.”

Unfortunately, Arius’ position began to spread like a cancer throughout all of the Christian world and sowed discord in the Church. Emperor Constantine (commemorated as a saint on 21 May) convoked the *First Council of Nicaea* in 325 to resolve this dispute, among other issues in the Church. More than three hundred bishops, representing the Church from various lands, gathered in Nicaea, making this not just a local council, which would only affect a local jurisdiction, but “ecumenical,” (“worldwide”). The decisions of this council would be binding on the entire Church.

After much debate, especially over terminology such as “born,” “created,” and “begotten,” which Arius and his followers considered essentially the same, but which Saint Alexander and his followers did not, the council fathers finally declared that the Son was true God, coeternal with the Father and begotten from the Father’s same substance (*homoousia* or *consubstantial*), and ultimately decided this should be formulated into a

creed. This *Nicene Creed* became the basis for the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* we profess daily during the Divine Liturgy.

Some of the distinctive language used in the Nicene Creed in opposition to Arius was: “Light from Light, true God from true God”; “begotten, not made”; and “of one substance with the Father” (*consubstantial*). Furthermore, at the end of the creed, the council fathers listed some condemnations against Arius and those who hold his erroneous teaching:

As for those who say, “There was when He was not,” and “Before being born He was not,” and that “He came into existence out of nothing,” or who assert that the Son of God is “of a different hypostasis or substance, or created,” or is “subject to alteration or change” — these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.

Beyond the condemnation of Arianism, the First Council of Nicaea also set out to establish a “worldwide” agreement on when to celebrate Easter, as well as promulgating 20 canons for the purpose of establishing uniform practices throughout Christendom, such as, no kneeling on Sundays during the Divine Liturgy, nor during the Season of Pentecost (*Can. 20*). *May the prayers of the 318 Council Fathers be with us!* ■

*Fr. Claude W. Franklin, Jr., is pastor of Saint Joseph in Olean, NY.*



## Father Bart — Named After a Saint Who Was Skinned Alive

by Brandon Shulleeta

Father Bartholomew Leon was born in New Orleans with a far more common name: “Robert.” But when it came time to choose a monastic name — a standard practice among priests who are Benedictine monks — his decision was deliberate.

“How many Bartholomews do you know?” asked the longtime pastor of Saint Rafka Maronite Catholic Church in Greenville, S.C. “He was just one of the forgotten apostles,” said Father Bartholomew, 67, who parishioners call “Father Bart.”

Saint Bartholomew was one of Jesus’ 12 apostles and was skinned alive after spreading Christianity to Armenians after Christ’s death. “He died a very terrible death as a martyr. All of his skin was peeled off of him,” Father Bartholomew said. “And he had the courage not only to live for Christ but to die for Christ. And even in this gruesome death, he would not give up his faith in our Lord and died for the faith. And I hope that one day, if I had to, I could be that strong.”

Father Bartholomew was raised in what he called “a very Catholic family” in a “very Catholic neighborhood.” And as much as anyone, his hometown priest in the New Orleans area inspired him to consider priesthood.

He said Father Joseph Tranchina, Jr., known as Father Joe, was a larger-than-life character who was close to God, loved people, and had a big personality. He died



in 2021 at the age of 79. “He was a young priest. He smoked unfiltered cigarettes. He drove a real fast red convertible, and he cursed like a sailor. And the kids loved him,” Father Bartholomew said.

But what stuck with Father Bart, who was a teenager at the time of his dad’s death, was how Father Joe was at his mom’s side and helped her through all the arrangements as Father Bart’s dad died and was buried. “He just had a heart of gold,” Father Bartholomew said.

It wasn’t long after his father’s death that he told his mother that he would be going to the seminary to be a

**“ I just give them the time and the space ... until they spill their guts ... People will say, ‘Thank you for listening to me.’ And I think that’s very important that they realize that they can be heard. ”**

priest. He became a Benedictine monk and was ordained a priest in 1985 at the age of 29 and ran the retreat center at the monastery for 11 years.

He’s been the pastor of Saint Rafka for the past 17 years after what he thought would be a short stint of just a couple of years.

As a priest, he says God has blessed him with an even temperament. “I think God has given me that gift. I don’t anger very quickly,” he said. “I think you must be a good listener. You must be attentive to what people are saying.” He said it’s important for priests to be patient because it takes some people a while to open up about their needs.

“I just give them the time and the space ... until they spill their guts,” Father Bartholomew said. “People will say, ‘Thank you for listening to me.’ And I think that’s very important that they realize that they can be heard,” he said.

At Saint Rafka, he said parishioners are welcoming, come from diverse backgrounds, and get along very well. Families at his church, which is the only Maronite Catholic Church in South Carolina, have backgrounds that include Lebanese, American, Iraqi, Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian. The church is also used at times

for worship by Korean Catholics and Indian Catholics. “It looks like the United Nations,” he laughed.

He said he’s also particularly proud that liturgies are routinely attended by locals who aren’t Maronites. He credits the hospitality of the longtime parishioners with attracting Catholics beyond the Maronite Rite.

Throughout his adult life, faith has been at the center. When asked how someone can maintain a consistent relationship with God, Father Bartholomew responded: “I think it’s constant prayer, whether you want to pray or not. ... It’s getting out of bed when you don’t want to get out of bed.”

“It’s showing up to events that you really want to skip but people are edified when you come,” he said. “I think it’s just being consistent in prayer and consistent in life.”

Father Bartholomew also called upon Catholics to work hard to truly know their own faith. “You talk to some people about the faith, and they look at you like deer in the headlights,” Father Bartholomew said. “We need to know our faith, and we have to know our scriptures. If we don’t know them, how do we know when the Lord’s calling us?” ■

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

## St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Mission El Paso, Texas *by Chet Wade*

Elena Rajme called herself a “cold Catholic” when she and her husband, David, were invited to attend the Liturgy at the St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Mission in El Paso, Texas. Having immigrated from Chihuahua, Mexico, and raised in the Latin Rite, she felt disconnected from her faith.

Rajme’s faith was quickly reignited on that day, 20 years ago.

“From the very beginning, I fell in love with the liturgy,” she said. “We found something. Something different. A calling to be part of the community.” She has remained fully engaged ever since, now serving as church choir director.

Rajme’s story is not unusual at St. Sharbel. Many parish members have family roots in Lebanon and have been Maronites their whole lives. This is especially true of long-time members whose families petitioned for the mission to be formed and provided its initial financial foundation. The mission was founded in 1996 under the name of Saint Anthony of the Desert.

Now, however, a greater number of parishioners have different backgrounds.

Father Mikhael “Chady” Jalkh, mission administrator, said a majority of those attending church are Mexican Americans who live in the El Paso area or Mexicans who commute across the Rio Grande from El Paso’s sister city of Juarez. Most did not grow up in the Maronite tradition. Spanish, not English or Arabic, is the first language for many.

“They are attracted by the liturgy of the Maronite faith,” Father Mikhael said. “It’s closer to their heart, more deep in their prayers. They feel the intimacy of our church.”

Another parishioner, Carolyn Jablonski, shares a story similar to that of Rajme. A native of Brooklyn, N.Y., Jablonski came to El Paso 20 years ago. She attended Catholic school as a child, but—like Rajme—her faith lapsed in adulthood. After the unexpected death of her husband, Sergio, in 2017, Jablonski felt lost.

Jablonski’s travels regularly took her past the church, which was purchased in 2018 from a Protestant congregation and consecrated in August 2019 by Bishop Elias Zaidan. Not knowing much about the Maronite tradition, she looked it up. Jablonski found that Maronites celebrate in the Eastern tradition much like the Ruthenian Catholic Church of her late mother. Jablonski wanted to know more.

“I literally just walked in one day,” Jablonski said. She was met by Father Ronald Eid, who was the mission pastor before transferring in 2021 to Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Catholic Church near Akron, Ohio. “In his warm way, Father Ronald welcomed me,” Jablonski said in a remembrance that still brings tears. “I never looked back. God sent me to where I couldn’t disappear.”







Jablonski now serves as part-time parish secretary as well as a member of the pastoral council.

Father Mikhael, Rajme and Jablonski agree that the blending of cultures and backgrounds of the parishioners helps make St. Sharbel mission special. While the membership is relatively small – about 85 families are registered – it is growing because of the people’s faith and the welcoming environment.

“You can barely walk in the door without someone greeting you,” Jablonski said.

Bringing the parish members together is a big reason the mission community held its first festival on the church grounds in late September. They hope it will become an annual event. While Lebanese food was featured, it also had additional menu items to appeal to other tastes. Two other big events for the parish are the St. Valentine’s Day dinner and a New Year’s Eve party and liturgy.

Mission members say that in the end, the mission’s success comes from St. Sharbel. After being introduced by Lebanese immigrants, St. Sharbel’s popularity in Mexico has extended well beyond the Maronite community. Statues of the saint are found in prominent places at many Latin Rite churches there. The faithful often adorn the St. Sharbel statues with ribbons. The colors of the ribbons correspond to the nature of their prayerful petition.

Parish members, those on a pilgrimage from Mexico and elsewhere in the United States, and other visitors come to pray and venerate St. Sharbel’s relics that are displayed by the altar in a reliquary shaped like a Cedar of Lebanon. The relics include a bone fragment from the saint. Parishioners are offered the opportunity to approach and kiss the relics at each liturgy.

In front of the church is a life-size bronze statue of the Maronite monk. Father Ronald had it commissioned by an artisan in Lebanon.

This is Father Mikhael’s first assignment to lead a parish after he was ordained in January 2021 at Our Lady of Help Church in Sakiet El Misk, Lebanon. Born in Lebanon, Father Mikhael studied for the priesthood in the United States and served as a subdeacon or deacon in California, Ohio, and Minnesota. Rajme said they are glad to help because of the infectious spirit of Father Mikhael.

“He is committed to doing something great for us,” she said. “Something for the ones who want to be engaged more than just on Sunday. He’s one of the reasons we are having more people coming.” ■

*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.*



## 2023 National MYO Conference

In the serene backdrop of Walsh University in North Canton, Ohio, the 2023 National Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) Conference, themed “Awaken,” was held from 27 June to 1 July. It proved to be not just a conference, but a true enlightening; awakening faith, friendship, and love among our Maronite Youth.

The week saw an enthusiastic participation of over 340 attendees, all hailing from various Maronite parishes across the nation, a true testament to the passion and zeal that the Maronite youth hold for their faith and community. At the heart of the conference was prayer and worship. Adoration, an intimate experience with Christ, allowed attendees to dive deep into their faith. The sacrament of confession was also available, giving the youth an opportunity for reflection, penance, and reconciliation. Participants came together each day for Divine Liturgy, in thanksgiving for the graces and blessings of our conference and faith. The highlight was the explained Maronite Liturgy, an enlightening session that delved into the significance, history, and rituals of Maronite liturgical practices.

The invigorating talks fostered growth, understanding, and conversation among our youth. Bob Lesnefsky, along with several other notable speakers, shared their insights on spirituality, the challenges faced by today’s youth, and the beauty of Maronite traditions.

Balancing the spiritual aspects, the conference also ensured moments of relaxation, bonding, and pure fun. The attendees ventured out for a SkyZone outing that provided a change of scenery and an opportunity for the youth to connect in a relaxed environment. With scheduled fun activities, free time, and, of course, a dabke to conclude one of the largest MYO events to date, the 2023 National MYO Conference was truly a transformative experience, living up to its name of “Awaken.”

Through prayer, introspection, discussions, fellowship, and fun, the attendees returned to their respective parishes with renewed spirit, hearts ignited, ready to contribute positively to their communities and live out their faith with vigor. ■







**2024 REGIONAL RETREATS**

**MIDWEST** JAN 12-14, 2024  
DAMASCUS CATHOLIC MISSION - CENTERBURG, OH

**WEST COAST** FEB 2 - 4, 2024  
PAIL RETREAT - RUNNING SPRINGS, CA

**SOUTH** FEB 22 - 23, 2024  
TEJAS CAMP & RETREAT - GIDDINGS, TX

EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON MYO





## They Journeyed in Haste: **Maronite Young Adults at World Youth Day** *by Joseph Fodill and Evelyn Mazloom*

This August, Abouna Tony Massad, Sr. Therese Maria Touma, and Sr. Emily Mary Lattouf led 38 Maronite young adults, including the two of us, on a pilgrimage to World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal. On this journey, we experienced World Youth Day's essential elements — namely, daily prayer and catechesis, including Stations of the Cross and a closing Mass with our Pope — alongside over one million pilgrims from around the globe. Yet, as an MYA event, our trip also reflected the culture, spirituality, and individuality of the pilgrims who were part of it.

Notably, everyone in our group was a Catholic connected to some part of the Middle East —

Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, to name a few — either spiritually or by birth. For this reason, many from our group participated in World Youth Day's Arabic catechesis sessions or bonded through dabke dancing, which helped us connect with other Middle Eastern Catholics. Apart from this, our MYA leadership also arranged group activities — visiting and venerating a Eucharistic miracle in Santarém, traveling to our Blessed Mother's apparition site in Fátima, and praying with other Lebanese Catholics in remembrance of the 2020 Beirut explosion — that highlighted our shared spirituality and helped us deepen our communion through Christ. With any time we had remaining, we received the opportunity





to explore, and our experiences grew even more varied; some of us took in God's creation at the beach, others visited churches, toured monasteries, and convents, or sought out Saints' relics, and others still explored museums, found traditional fado, or roamed through one of Lisbon's many castles. A few of us may have done all these things and more in just a week, embracing every opportunity God handed us.

No matter what activities or places the Holy Spirit led us to, the very nature of this trip invited us to contemplate and live in the spirit of this year's World Youth Day theme, "Mary arose and went with haste" (Lk. 1:39). Whether we realized it or not, to participate in this event, God called us, and like Mary, we needed to hear and accept God's call to go. We trusted that we were each where God meant us to be even in the places or ways we did not expect. In all the various ways we were called, most of all we were drawn to communion with our fellow pilgrims

through Christ. The pilgrims from all around the world, who answered this call, brought the Church's unity and diversity to light, creating a timely icon of Pentecost: the day when the Holy Spirit descended, people from many nations gathered and heard God's message in their language (ACTS 2). Fittingly, the closing mass of World Youth Day coincided with the feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord. Pope Francis, during his homily, addressed the youth and recalled Jesus' message during the transfiguration, "To all of you, dear young people, who are the present and the future ... Jesus now says: "Have no fear." "Do not be afraid!" This served as a reminder as we prepared to journey back home, a reminder to take that command, "do not be afraid" to our hearts. This is so we can be like Mary, receiving God's call and the Apostles, receiving the Holy Spirit, in order that we may return home with the light of Jesus shining in us and the Holy Spirit guiding us. ■





**EPARCHY OF SAINT MARON OF BROOKLYN  
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP**

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August 7, 2023

Prot. No.345/1/23  
Circ No.23.39

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Attached please find a summary of the **2022 Audited Financial Report** for the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. The full audited financial statements are available at the Chancery.

This past year we continued to invest in educating our four seminarians, we paid monthly pensions for our seventeen retired priests, assisted our youth and young adults, and reached out to support our brothers and sisters in Lebanon, Syria and the Middle East. At the same time, we sought to augment our regular income by means of grants, donations, and our Annual Benefit Dinner in New York. The Eparchy showed again this year a net increase after expenses. Nonetheless, we still need your help, because we hope to do even more.

Our finances were audited by the independent accounting firm of Lehman Flynn Vollaro, CPA's PLLC. Likewise, all of our parishes and missions have been directed to have an independent accountant approve their annual financial report, have their parish finance council review their finances every quarter, submit their report to Mr. Anthony Budway, our Eparchial Compliance Officer, and then publish their annual financial report in the parish bulletin.

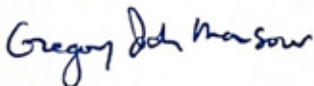
I thank the members of the Eparchial Finance Council for giving good advice and helping implement sound internal controls for all eparchial financial matters: Mr. Tony Richa, our Chief Financial Officer, and members Mr. Edward Massoud, Mr. Albert Ashkouti, Chorbishop Seely Beggiani, Dr. Peter Gabriel, Mr. John Schlageter, Esq., Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Judge Dianne Yamin, Mr. Luke Lewis and Deacon Steven Marcus. Their help has been invaluable.

I also thank our Eparchial Stewardship Director, Mr. John Kurey, along with the members of the Order of Saint Sharbel, and all our Eparchial donors who are so very generous with their financial help. Lastly, I thank every pastor and parishioner of the Eparchy for compliance to Eparchial policies and their generous support and encouragement.

Because of our careful stewardship over the years, our small eparchy is able to make ends meet, as well as help collect funds for Lebanon and Syria to assist our fellow Christians.

I thank all who have assisted to enable the Maronite Church to fulfill the mission that our Lord gave to her, to be the "light of the world" and "salt of the earth." (Matthew 5:13)

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ 

+ Gregory J. Mansour

Attachment (1 PDF)

Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn  
Statements of Financial Position  
December 31,

	2022	2021
<b>Assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 664,621	\$ 442,526
Pledges receivable, current portion	100,000	-
Loans receivable, current portion	25,750	67,917
Other receivables	14,822	20,372
Investments	2,599,654	2,025,716
Assets whose use is limited	1,305,460	1,294,193
Prepaid expenses	4,724	11,365
Total current assets	4,715,031	3,862,089
Pledges receivable, net of current portion	100,000	-
Loans receivable, net of current portion	266,423	266,423
Property and equipment, net	3,355,748	3,475,151
Total assets	\$ 8,437,202	\$ 7,603,663
<b>Liabilities and net assets</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 244,069	\$ 2,142
Funds held for others– second collections and mideast assistance	53,757	7,990
Funds held for others– disability fund	1,305,460	1,294,193
Funds held for others - Order of Saint Sharbel	927,141	-
Mortgage payable, current portion	79,960	76,829
Total current liabilities	2,610,387	1,381,154
Mortgage payable	406,993	486,952
Total liabilities	3,017,380	1,868,106
<b>Net assets</b>		
Without donor restrictions	5,112,622	5,655,540
With donor restrictions	307,200	80,017
Total net assets	5,419,822	5,735,557
Total liabilities and net assets	\$ 8,437,202	\$ 7,603,663

See notes to financial statements

**LEHMAN FLYNN VOLLARO PLLC**  
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS

3



Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn  
Statement of Activities  
Year Ended December 31, 2022

	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total	2021 Total
<b>Revenue, support and gains</b>				
Diocesan assessments	\$ 513,150	\$ -	\$ 513,150	\$ 506,000
Contributions	275,270	44,500	319,770	237,859
Grants	373,405	300,000	673,405	377,693
Bequests	51,000	-	51,000	-
Diocesan appeal	185,632	-	185,632	179,439
Contributed use of facilities	120,000	-	120,000	120,000
Special events, net	168,650	-	168,650	142,930
Other	34,565	-	34,565	35,314
Net assets released from restrictions	117,317	(117,317)	-	-
Total revenue, support, and gains	<u>1,838,989</u>	<u>227,183</u>	<u>2,066,172</u>	<u>1,599,235</u>
<b>Expenses and losses</b>				
Eparchial program	1,473,128	-	1,473,128	1,313,685
Chancery	353,757	-	353,757	339,328
Stewardship office	146,753	-	146,753	135,000
Total expenses	<u>1,973,638</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,973,638</u>	<u>1,788,013</u>
Changes in net assets before other items	<u>(134,649)</u>	<u>227,183</u>	<u>92,534</u>	<u>(188,778)</u>
<b>Other items</b>				
Investment income (loss), net	(334,911)	-	(334,911)	256,177
Interest forgiven on interest-bearing loans	(3,166)	-	(3,166)	7,917
Interest income on noninterest-bearing loans	9,335	-	9,335	9,335
Contribution of interest on non-interest-bearing loans	(9,335)	-	(9,335)	(9,335)
Interest expense, Heart of Jesus	(21,154)	-	(21,154)	(24,140)
Depreciation and amortization, Heart of Jesus	(49,038)	-	(49,038)	(49,038)
Change in net assets	<u>(542,918)</u>	<u>227,183</u>	<u>(315,735)</u>	<u>2,138</u>
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>5,655,540</u>	<u>80,017</u>	<u>5,735,557</u>	<u>5,733,419</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ 5,112,622</u>	<u>\$ 307,200</u>	<u>\$ 5,419,822</u>	<u>\$ 5,735,557</u>

See notes to financial statements

**LEHMAN FLYNN VOLLARO PLLC**  
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS



**Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn**  
**Statement of Functional Expenses**  
**Year Ended December 31, 2022**

	<u>Program</u>		<u>Fundraising</u>		
	<u>Eparchial</u>	<u>Administrative</u>	<u>Stewardship</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>2021 Total</u>
	<u>Program</u>	<u>Chancery</u>	<u>Office</u>		
Bishop appeal disbursements	\$ 366,810	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 366,810	\$ 168,585
Professional expenses	28,600	217,299	-	245,899	199,243
Grants	231,800	-	-	231,800	222,920
Vocations	204,385	-	-	204,385	70,370
Stewardship expenses	-	-	146,753	146,753	135,000
Rent	96,000	24,000	-	120,000	120,000
Depreciation and amortization	75,361	18,840	-	94,201	88,955
Clergy salaries	67,200	16,800	-	84,000	84,000
Office	58,859	14,717	-	73,576	43,283
Lay salaries	46,538	11,635	-	58,173	60,923
Maintenance and repairs	42,576	10,644	-	53,220	73,218
Conferences and retreats	43,644	-	-	43,644	23,979
Household	32,297	8,074	-	40,371	34,844
Travel	39,356	-	-	39,356	24,507
Donations	32,909	-	-	32,909	182,703
Eparchal programs	28,184	-	-	28,184	-
Publications	27,500	-	-	27,500	39,723
Insurance	-	21,827	-	21,827	22,291
Payroll taxes	13,236	3,309	-	16,545	11,041
Utilities	11,230	2,808	-	14,038	15,380
Telephone	7,912	1,978	-	9,890	11,753
Assessments	9,046	-	-	9,046	4,773
Benefits	7,303	1,826	-	9,129	20,655
Religious expenses	2,382	-	-	2,382	15,929
<b>Total expenses by function</b>	<b>\$ 1,473,128</b>	<b>\$ 353,757</b>	<b>\$ 146,753</b>	<b>\$ 1,973,638</b>	<b>\$ 1,674,075</b>

See notes to financial statements

**LEHMAN FLYNN VOLLARO PLLC**  
 CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS

# Parish News

JAMAICA PLAIN, MASSACHUSETTS

## Our Lady of Cedars Young Adult Retreat

Our Lady of the Cedars hosted a retreat for young adults on 15 July. It was organized by six local young adults (Marc Bou Abboud, Alondra Msallem, Gilbert Gebrael, Geroge Matta, Roland Abichaker, and Mario Jabra) along with Seminarian Mark Farah. The theme was centered on Jesus' liberating power as depicted in the Gospel and our response as disciples. It included talks, adoration, confession, rosary, and group discussions. Monsignor Georges El-Khalli hosted and served during the retreat while the leaders gave several talks concerning the Gospel and discipleship. Fernando Magalhães, a lay Brazilian speaker from his ministry "Mission Make Me Holy," also spoke at the retreat on his personal witness and encounter with Jesus.



The retreat was a blessing full of spiritual fruit, high spirits, and good fellowship and discussions. Many had the opportunity to go to confession and receive the mercy of Christ. It culminated with a Divine Liturgy in which the attendees got to experience the beauty of the Maronite tradition. We are grateful to all those involved and look forward to having more opportunities like this in the future. ■

## FIRST HOLY *Communion* 2023

### ST. EPHREM CHURCH | EL CAJON, CA

Mateos Abdullah, Michael Abdullah,  
Naveen Al Sheikh, Sophia Boiri, Jacob Chalingo,  
Reginea Estiphan, Simon Estiphan,  
Sienna Farrage, Mariam Fawzi, Naya Hanna,  
Remely Marqus, Christian Nassar,  
Arendy Perez-Vasquez, Joseph Rahi, Kayla Sawaya,  
Chris Thomas, Kayla Thomas, Elena Toubia,  
Alex Yakub, Pauly Yakub, Fr. Toufic Nasr,  
Mrs. Liliane Massery



UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

## Bible Study and Middle Eastern Food Festival

St. George Church in Uniontown, PA, continues its new bi-weekly Bible Study Program led by Father Aaron Sandbothe and offered to parishioners and community members. Participants gather for the celebration of vespers before each bible study. Participants discussed numerous topics related to the prophets, the Gospel of John, and have begun a new study on the Book of Psalms. Their journey through scripture helped them to understand God's revelation of Himself to creation. Learning from the prophets' lives and how to solve the difficult issues they faced, was similar to the realization of struggles in today's world. The Bible Study has allowed for more detailed discussions, a forum for informal interactions, asking questions, sharing thoughts, helping each other, strengthening Christian values, and acquiring more knowledge about our faith. At the conclusion of each meeting, participants enjoyed "potluck snacks" and socialization.

Also, the annual St. George Church Festival was held on 23 July 2023. Local parish families, community members, and out-of-towners gathered to celebrate Uniontown's Middle Eastern heritage. Parish groups and volunteers organized the activities and prepared traditional delicacies including: lamb and chicken shish kabobs, lubia, falafel, kibbee, grape leaves, tabouli, hummus, laban, zalabia, pita bread, baklava, and much more. There were many activities featured at the festival such as: basket raffles, a bake sale, games & prizes, food truck treats, water slides, wine booths, and a kids' bouncy. Father Aaron Sandbothe commented, "Strengthening spiritual bonds and celebrating our culture and ancestry is truly a reflection of our Maronite faith." ■



BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

## New Church

Building a Maronite Church in Louisiana has been a dream for over 100 years, a vision for 40 years, a plan for 17 years, and a reality since 15 August 2023, when the Mission finally acquired a new property to call its own in Baton Rouge. Maronite priests have been sporadically serving the Maronites of Louisiana since at least the 1890's. Since that time, Maronites have been involved in every level of Louisiana life from professors to politicians, to innovative doctors, to professional athletes, to developers, to traveling salesmen, to engineers, to manufacturing, and members of the service industry. Groups of Maronites organized liturgies and cultural events and promoted strong family unity.

For over 40 years we have celebrated a Maronite Liturgy on the anniversary of the ordination of St. Sharbel. Seventeen years ago, Bishop Robert Shaheen established the St. Sharbel Maronite Mission of Louisiana. Currently, the community in Baton Rouge supports missions in a half dozen other cities across Louisiana, helping Maronites and Eastern Christians unwrap the gift that is theirs and sharing with everyone the good news of Jesus Christ. The new facility is facilitating our work and mission to proclaim the Gospel to all nations, and we are eagerly awaiting the completion of renovations and the dedication of our new parish home. ■



# Parish News

FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

## Scholarships

In 2023, Dr. Mouded and Saint Anthony of the Desert in Fall River, Massachusetts, celebrated their annual Scholarship Award Ceremony held on 11 June following the 10 AM Divine Liturgy. These scholarships are granted to financially help graduates with educational necessities such as: school tuition, books, housing, etc. Six high school graduates were awarded scholarships this year.



Front Row: Left to Right: Deacon Brian Dunn (recipients): Dalia Karam, Bella Simoes, Edwina Zaarour, Miuna Bouramia, Stephanie Housiss, and Deacon Christian Hbaiter. (Not Present: Branden Heneine)

St. Anthony of the Desert Church's parishioners and clergy wish all of the graduates continued success in their endeavors. ■

GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA

## Holy Land Pilgrimage

Parishioners of Saint Anthony Church in Glen Allen, VA, participated in a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, sponsored by the Eastern Lieutenancy (USA) of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre from 11-20 September.

The pilgrimage began with a Mass at the Church of the Annunciation, where the Word became flesh. After visiting and praying at holy sites in Galilee, the pilgrims traveled south to Judea. After praying the Stations of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa, the pilgrims celebrated the Liturgy in front of the Tomb of Jesus, where the Resurrection took place. ■



FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

## Vacation Bible School



In August 2023, the children of St. Michael the Archangel Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, participated in a successful week of Vacation Bible School. The children explored the Maronite Divine Liturgy while learning to pray the “Our Father” and the “Glory Be” in Syriac. Abouna Paul Damien and Tresa Van Heusen were instrumental in providing an entire week of lessons that focused on Maronite traditions. At the conclusion of Bible

School, the children presented their diorama projects depicting the altar with an explanation of the Divine Liturgy for the parishioners to enjoy. Saint Michael Church’s youth were blessed with another year of instruction from Marie Van Heusen and Marie Reale who have dedicated over 60 years of combined service to their youth ministry. ■



# Parish News

FLINT, MICHIGAN

## Summer Events

What an amazing summer it has been for the Clergy, Parishioners and children at Our Lady of Lebanon in Flint, Michigan!

The summer began with our Mid-East Festival, the “cornerstone fundraiser” for our parish, held 14-16 July. This was our first festival since the pandemic.

It takes a lot of planning, people and work to support an event of this magnitude. The wonderful men and women of our parish came together and prepared delicious food. We had music, live Arabic singers and dancers for entertainment, special entertainment for kids, tours of our church, and fireworks at night.

The weather predictions were not in our favor, so the big question was “will people come?” With lots of prayers and rosary beads strung over our bushes, the Lord blessed us with abundant sunshine and a tremendous turnout! We estimate that over 5,000 people/families from surrounding communities in Michigan enjoyed the weekend with us. Thanks to all the hard work and generosity of our parish volunteers (including our children) and the support of the outside communities, it was an overwhelming success!

Led by our dynamic Theresia Zeydan, our youth attended the national MYO conference in North Canton, Ohio. It was an amazing retreat and good participation from our youth to experience and “catch up” with Jesus.

Our religious education program sponsored a vacation Bible school on Saturday, 12 August. Many children attended along with several teachers. Thanks to Tiffany Joubnan who was the leader of the Bible school and the organizer of the activities. She talked to the children about the Bible, the Old and New Testaments, and encouraged them to read. They were shown a video on the Assumption of Mary and the kids enjoyed coloring pictures of the Virgin Mary along with many other activities. They ended their day with a nice lunch, which was a good time for fellowship and sharing. The children enjoyed it very much and learned a great deal.

With summer vacations coming to an end and the return to school just around the corner for our parish children, a Parish Summer Appreciation picnic was held on 13 August for all of our parish families. The focus of the picnic was to show our appreciation for all their support for our church and this summer’s events. The food was wonderful and having time just to spend with our families together was priceless. With sunshine and blue skies, a good time was had by all. ■





MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

## Pentecost Mosaic

3... 2... 1... and down came the huge white drape behind the altar! A beautiful mosaic masterpiece was unmasked. The curved apse (23"x 14") of St. Maron Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, was covered in an estimated half-a-million small, colored, half-inch mosaic stones depicting the descent of the Holy Spirit. Above it, in 14 karat gold, the following prayer is emblazoned in English and Syriac, "O Christ, who sent us the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us." The Pentecost is depicted with 12 figures of the Apostles flanking the Mother of God, Our Lady of the Apostles, as they receive the tongues of fire of the Holy Spirit upon their heads. A packed congregation applauded the sacred art in astonishment and joy.

This Divine Liturgy and dedication took place on Sunday, 30 August 2023. An honor guard of the Order of Saint Sharbel welcomed Bishop Elias Zaidan. Concelebrating with the Bishop were our Pastor Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun, Father Anthony Salim, and Father Bob Rossi. Also serving were Deacon George Younes, and Subdeacons Gabe Gubash and James Farhat.

"Church art is always a window into heaven," Bishop Elias assured us. He continued, "Hopefully it will inspire us by the beauty of the one behind it and inspire us to do God's work in our own life."

He hopes each of you can find yourself represented in the Pentecost. He encouraged every one of us to use the power of the Holy Spirit within us to bring one or more non-believers to Jesus. While discussing the Parable of the Sower, he compared us to the four soils on which seeds fall – the closed mind, the shallow, the busy, and the receptive mind. Twelve men changed the world. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, make it your mission to bring more people to Christ.

The expansive mosaic was sponsored by Raymond, of blessed memory who left this wish in his will. Chorbishop Sharbel



acknowledged the great generosity and attendance of the family. He also lauded Bratt Rugo of the Rugo Company in Virginia and Fabrizio Travinuto and team in Italy, and Matteo Randi, master mosaicist, plus his assistants Giovanni and Grace and the parish staff. Following the dedication, the congregation exited pews and formed a cross for an overhead photo including the Pentecost mosaic. A reception was followed in the Cedars Hall of our parish. Amira Farah was instituted by Bishop Elias as a perpetual member of the Order of Saint Sharbel.



# Parish News

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

## Father's Day

A Father's Day celebration was held on 18 June 2023, at Saint Stephen Maronite Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Father Rodolph Wakim, pastor, offered the liturgy to honor the fathers and their parish families. He blessed the fathers and encouraged them to pray the Holy Rosary. In his homily, Father Rodolph commented that a father's role is to defend his family and lead his children toward God and the church. The fathers were presented with a blessed rosary in a leather pouch. The fathers appreciated being recognized as a very important family figure. ■



HOUSTON, TEXAS

## A Joyous Feast of the Assumption Celebrated with Shawarma Delight

The Feast of the Assumption, observed on 15 August, holds deep significance for Christians around the world. It is a day to honor the role of the Mother of God in the Christian narrative and to reflect on her unique place in salvation history. The belief that Mary was taken up to heaven body and soul at the end of her earthly life speaks to her exceptional closeness to the divine.

For us at Our Lady of the Cedars, this feast is a time of prayer, contemplation, and attending

the Divine Liturgy. It is an occasion to draw closer to God and to remember the values of humility, faith, and devotion that Mary embodies. The Feast of the Assumption often serves as a reminder that, just as Mary's life was marked by a unique calling, everyone's life has a special purpose and connection to the divine.

Following Liturgy during this feast filled with spiritual reflection, it's not uncommon for families and communities to come together

for a meal, sharing both nourishment and fellowship. In a delightful twist, the Knights of the Cedars opted to celebrate this feast with a shawarma dinner, merging tradition with a delectable culinary experience.

As parishioners left the church grounds, their hearts were full, not just from the delicious shawarma, but from the experience of a day that truly epitomized the spirit of community and faith. ■

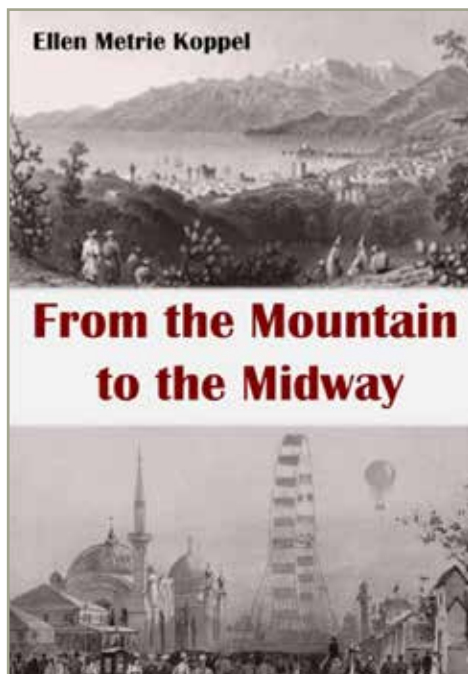


## From the Mountain to the Midway

Ellen Metrie Koppel recently published a book *From the Mountain to the Midway*, a story of how the bloodlines of the Arabian horse were established in the United States, a pedigree that grew to be the most significant number of authentic Arabian horses of any nation in the world.

For the first time in history, the Sultan allowed desert horses to leave the Ottoman Empire in order to be a part of an exhibition at the 1893 World's Fair. This is also the story of immigrants from a village in Mount Lebanon who participated in the World's Fair and collaborated in the established of an Eastern Catholic Church in Chicago.

To obtain a copy, contact Ellen at 445 E. NORTH WATER STREET, 905, CHICAGO, IL 60611 or 8889 E. FLATHORN DRIVE, SCOTTSDALE, AZ 85255.



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# Sister Emily Mary Professes First Vows

Watching Sister Emily Mary Lattouf take her first vows in the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light on 7 September was like being offered a window into the call of Jesus to the first apostles.



“Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men,” Our Lord said to Saints Simon and Andrew. It must have taken great faith for them to leave their nets “at once” and follow Jesus.

Despite being on different shores across the world and at a different age, it seemed as if the same great faith was at work at St. Anthony of the Desert Church in Fall River, Massachusetts, as Sister Emily Mary vowed that night to live the Evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity, and poverty for one year.

“I glorify and praise you, O Christ, your Father, and your living Holy Spirit, for calling me to a vocation of greater perfection, and I joyfully lay down my life in your service and that of your Church in this congregation,” she said while kneeling at the foot of the altar.

Bishop Gregory spoke in his homily about the joy that was radiating from Sister Emily Mary and the whole room could undoubtedly feel it. I know I could. There was total peace radiating off of her. She was a living testament to the Sisters’ mission to “radiate the Light of Christ.”

One last thing worth mentioning is a little moment from the Liturgy that most probably did not see. As the congregation stood in line to receive Holy Communion, a little girl passed Sister Emily Mary and looked at her with a huge smile offering a quick and subtle wave before the

line kept moving. Sister smiled and waved back at the girl. At that moment, I was reminded that Sister Emily Mary does such great work with children in religious education.

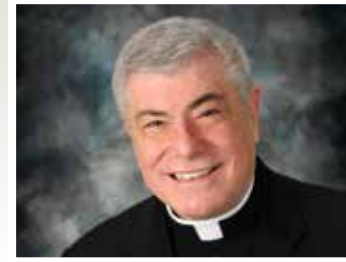
Sister is also very approachable and kindhearted. And I was reminded of that, too, when the little girl was so excited to see her. But above all else, I was reminded that she is a great role model.

I don’t know what God’s call for that little girl will be someday, but I do know that if other courageous women like Sister Emily Mary take the brave step to surrender everything to Jesus, then many more will be able to witness the happiness that flows from loving Our Lord with one’s whole life.

And with this inspiration, God willing, many will be moved to pursue the freedom that is offered by Christ, and perhaps may even ask the question if a full surrender to Jesus in religious life is something God is calling them to, as well.



## From the Editor



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I know of an elderly gentleman who was not known for his meekness. After his death, his family found the file containing all the material pertinent to his funeral. (Let's be honest: the funeral instructions were not their primary concern — they were looking for the will.) With the funeral instructions, they found an envelope with the obituary that was to be published in the local newspapers, which is understandable, just to be sure that the facts are straight. They also found a stack of envelopes addressed to family and friends. In each of the envelopes was an individualized eulogy prepared for that person to deliver. The deceased had given a lot of thought about how he wanted to be remembered!

Most of us are more subtle in creating a legacy. Others are even more grandiose. U.S. presidents spend hundreds of millions of dollars building libraries to create their legacy. Sometimes this works and sometimes it doesn't. Some people can have buildings, bridges, schools, and statues dedicated to them. However, those who knew them may not hold them in such great esteem. So, what do we do?

**We need to create memories of ourselves when we are living.**

If you want to be remembered as being a generous person — be generous with your time, money, and

attention. If you want to be remembered as a gentle person — be gentle and kind with family, friends, and strangers. If you want to be considered as a clever person — write books or invent something. And so forth. The person we create will be the person who will be remembered, for whatever it is worth.

And even if we are not remembered — so what? If we are working only for that purpose, we are missing the point.

Mother Marianne Kope left Central New York in order to serve lepers in Hawaii. Maximillian Kolbe took the place of the father of three to be executed in a concentration camp. Mother Teresa of Calcutta left the security of her convent to comfort the dying on the streets of Calcutta. Francis of Assisi had the vision that he was to rebuild the church and began to repair the decrepit church in which he was praying.

All these saints took paths that would seem to condemn their memory to oblivion. Marianne Kope did not set out for a leper colony to be remembered...it was just not that important to her. She set her sights higher. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great..." (MATTHEW 5:12).



Devotedly yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John D. Faris". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Chorbishop John D. Faris

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