



# The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

Volume XI

Issue No. XI

December 2015

## CHRISTMAS 2015

### *"The Tree of Life Brings Hope to The Dying"*

These words are contained in one of St. Ephrem's hymns on the Nativity of the Lord. St. Ephrem, the well-known "Father of the Syriac Church," is attempting to find the words to describe what this day that we call Christmas is all about. Above all, the Feast of Christ's Birth, is a solemn holy day. The giving of gifts, the decorations, the Christmas Carols that we sing and the spirit of good-will are all a reflection of the central mystery that God has taken on human flesh; God has become Man. The "Christmas" Tree is one of the dominant visual features of the Christmas Season. Some spend hours of time decorating the tree with ornaments and lights. In addition, our homes are also decorated in a festive and joyful manner. While the Christmas tree has its origins in traditions other than in the Bible, with the eyes of faith we can see it in a new light - one that exemplifies the hope contained in the Birth of Our Lord. The Incarnation of the Son of God becomes the source of joy for humanity as He came to conquer sin and death. Thus, He opened the doors of eternity for us.

In the Book of Genesis we find that there were two trees: Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (known to many of us as the tree of the "forbidden fruit"), which became a curse for us, and the Tree of Life (less well-known by many), which was the source of eternal life. Of course, there were many trees in the Garden of Eden, but these two were identified by name for their great importance: "And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground - trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." (Genesis 2:9).

This Tree of Life represents God's anticipation of eternal life for us. Unlike the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Tree of Life was there to be a continuous reminder that immortality flowed from our obedience to God. As long as Adam and Eve were obedient and did not eat of the forbidden tree, they had access to immortality. Once they sinned, they were driven from the Garden, and God placed an angel with a flaming sword to guard the Tree of Life so they would no longer have access to it. Eternal life was now no longer ours. Just as God had warned, Adam and Eve died, and through



Adam all after him would die as told to us by Saint Paul (Romans 5:12). Jesus is now the new Tree of Life; we are the branches. As an Eparchy, that is, as a visible Church community, we are a vine planted in the vineyard of the Lord. All our parishes are the branches and each member is a leaf of the tree. Of course, we must be fruitful and produce good fruit pleasing to God.

*(Continues on page 9)*

## Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

### December 4 - 6, 2015

Visit of St. Sharbel's Relics, St. Sharbel Church, Portland, Ore.

### December 6 - 8, 2015

Visit of St. Sharbel's Relics, St. Jude Church, Murray, Utah

### December 8 - 9, 2015

Visit of St. Sharbel's Relics, St. Rafka Church, Lakewood [Denver], Colo.

### December 9 - 10, 2015

USCCB International Justice and Peace Committee, Washington, D.C.

### December 12, 2015

Dedication of St. Joseph Church, Riverside, Calif.

### December 20, 2015

St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

### December 24 - 25, 2015

Christmas Celebration, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

### December 27, 2015

Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

### January 2 - 3, 2016

Visit of St. Sharbel Relics, Sts. Peter and Paul Mission, Simi Valley, Calif.

### January 4 - 5, 2016

Visit of St. Sharbel Relics, St. Ephrem Church, El Cajon (San Diego), Calif. □

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- Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan, M.L.M.

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## Maronite Convention 2016

Our Lady of Lebanon Church

San Francisco, California

July 6 - 10, 2016

For more information contact the NAM office at (914) 964-3070 or visit [www.Namnews.org](http://www.Namnews.org)

## Boston, Massachusetts Scripture Retreat

by Natalie Salameh

The Maronite Servants of Christ the Light facilitated a retreat day for the parish of Our Lady of the Cedars in Boston, Mass., on Saturday, November 21, 2015, on the theme of "Seeking His Light in Prayer - Praying with Sacred Scripture."

Mother Marla Marie guided the participants in a *Lectio Divina* (sacred reading), a traditional method of praying with sacred scripture attributed to St. Benedict. Mother Marla Marie highlighted that when we open the Word of God, it is His way of speaking to us, and He has something to tell each of us, but we have to listen. *Lectio Divina* helps us to do that in four simple steps: read, reflect, pray and act.

Mother Marla Marie also spoke on the four movements of prayer, and how the Psalms of the Old Testament capture them so beautifully. Later in the afternoon, Sister Therese Maria guided the participants through each movement of prayer in an hour of adoration before the Holy Mysteries, focusing particularly on the praying of the Psalms.

The Maronite Servants of Christ the Light would like to thank the Parishioners of Our Lady of the Cedars and its Pastor, Msgr. Georges El-Khalli, for their warm welcome and participation. □



## THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL



### Perpetual Members

★ **Salma (Mimi) Nasser,**  
*St. Anthony Church, Fall River,  
Mass.*

### Annual Members

★ **Robert Yamin,**  
*St. Anthony Church, Danbury,  
Conn.*

★ **Mary, Mother of Light  
Church,**  
*West Palm Beach, Fla.*

### Youth Members

★ **Eric Fowler,**  
*St. Maron Church, Torrington,  
Conn.*

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 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
St. Louis, MO 63104

## Brooklyn, New York *Mid-Atlantic East Regional NAM Convention*



From left: Msgr. James Root, Marianne Dergham, Adonis El-Asmar, Marian Sahadi Ciaccia, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Samir Farah, Naomi Karam and Mike Naber.

*by Salma Vahdat*

The excitement of hosting the NAM Mid-Atlantic East Regional Convention was brought to a feverish pitch the closer the committee came to the November 6 - 8, 2015, dates. Adonis El-Asmar and Marian Sahadi Ciaccia, Co-chairs, and many volunteers worked unceasingly to organize and oversee every aspect of the event. The goal was to make every attendee feel at home at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y., while absorbing inspiration from the various workshops which catered to preschoolers, youth, young adults and adults.

Registration began at the Cathedral on Friday afternoon, followed by evening prayer and a welcome *hafli* until midnight. The NAM members came from New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and as far flung as California, Missouri and Ohio. Enthusiasm was rampant, particularly from the youth and young adults. Approximately seventy smiling faces. Twenty-two from Easton, Penn., alone! It is so encouraging to see the youth prepare themselves to assume the reins of stewardship of the Maronite Church in the U.S.

Saturday began with Morning Prayer. The Maronite Sisters of Christ the Light took on the preschoolers and youth. Bishop Mansour met with the MYO; Father Vincent Farhat led the discussion with the MYA, and the adults had the pleasure of meeting with Chorbishop Seely Beggiani.

Saturday evening's *Hafli* was attended by 215 people. It gave all the opportunity to meet, greet and enjoy one another, breaking bread, sharing news and ideas, all accompanied by the music of Amin "Sultan" Khoury.

Sunday morning Bishop Gregory Mansour celebrated the Divine Liturgy. Msgr. James Root, Rector, Rev. Michel Lahoud and Rev. Louis Firgh, concelebrated. Subdeacons Norbert Vogl and Peter Frangie assisted. Mr. Samir Farah, President of NAM, presented an icon of the Massabki brothers made by Judy Soma, to Msgr. Root and the Cathedral Parish as a token of appreciation for hosting the Regional Convention. Following the Divine Liturgy, a Farewell Brunch was served to departing attendees in the Social Hall. It was the consensus that all departed with renewed vigor to promote the success of NAM and the cause of the Maronite Church in the U.S. □

# Danbury, Connecticut Youth Activities

by Jamison Nolan

**S**aint Anthony Maronite Youth Organization in Danbury, Conn., meets every Sunday evening. We are a faith based group of young people who are dedicated to learning more about Christ and how we can find him in our everyday lives. We always welcome new members as we hope to expand our community. Our group is made up of twenty members, ages ranging from 13 to 17, and our usual attendance is sixteen to nineteen youth each week.

There are a variety of topics we review each month, ranging from a general group discussion to guest speakers and a talk with our priest for spiritual guidance. Every Sunday morning following the Divine Liturgies, we host a coffee hour where we prepare and serve a variety of breakfast foods. Two MYO members and an adult supervisor participate in preparing these breakfasts every month. This began on Labor Day and will continue until Memorial Day.

As the holiday season approaches, MYO looks forward to many exciting events. First up, Thanksgiving. Food cards are collected and distributed to needy families in the Greater Danbury area. We also choose two families for whom we provide a full holiday meal that we deliver a week before Thanksgiving.

During the Christmas season, the MYO sets up the giving tree, in the church, which is decorated with ornaments that identify a child's name, age, and what he or she would like for Christmas. Parishioners purchase the presents for at least ten needy families and place them (unwrapped) under the tree, until the MYO delivers these gifts the Sunday before Christmas.

The MYO adopts a family, which includes purchasing a Christmas tree, food, and presents for a family of five. We spend the evening with the family, decorating the tree, watching the children unwrap the gifts, and all around enjoying each other's company.

Eight weeks before Easter, we prepare ourselves to reenact the passion of Christ. MYO members, graduated members, and Religious Education students participate. Rehearsals are once a week for four weeks and then twice a week for the next four weeks, each three hours long.

Some fundraisers that take place throughout the year are the Super Bowl Breakfast, Father's Day and Graduation Breakfast, the Summer Parish Cook Out, a Car Wash, and bake sales. The MYO also plans many special activities and trips, such as picnics, social nights, the annual great adventure trip, and a holiday trip to New York City. MYO demonstrates through volunteer efforts what it really means to put our faith into action. □

## Effective Ways YOU Can Help your Eparchy!

Please consider the following ways in which you can help the Maronite Church!

### Planned Giving: Consider Your Legacy

This is a creative way to support the Church. Planned giving can involve contributing through your **will**, **insurance policy**, or **retirement assets**. You can also create a **Charitable Gift Annuity** to get a tax deduction and provide yourself with a steady source of income!

#### Suggested wording for a bequest to the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn:

"I give and bequeath to the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, located in Brooklyn, New York, \_\_\_\_\_% of the residue of my estate [or: the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_]."

#### Suggested wording for a bequest to the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles:

"I give and bequeath to the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, located in St. Louis, Missouri, \_\_\_\_\_% of the residue of my estate [or: the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_]."

### Tax-Smart Giving of Appreciated Stock or other Assets

The gift of an asset such as common stock or mutual fund shares is a smart way to make a contribution and receive maximum tax benefits based on the value of the asset. Gifts of other appreciated assets such as land, antiques, and homes, can also be utilized as potential gifts with valuable tax benefits. Gifts of these assets should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

For more information on any of these options, please contact Stewardship Director John F. Kurey, Esq., MBA, at 718-237-9913 or 314-231-1021; or by e-mail at [saintmaron@yahoo.com](mailto:saintmaron@yahoo.com) or [maroniteswest@yahoo.com](mailto:maroniteswest@yahoo.com).

## Cincinnati, Ohio NAM Appreciation Day



Mr. Samir Farah, Fr. George Hajj and Mrs. Rose Abiradi.

by Linda Conour

On Sunday, November 15, 2015, St. Anthony of Padua Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, welcomed Mr. Samir Farah, President of the National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) Board from Cleveland, Ohio, to speak to the Parish after the Divine Liturgy for NAM Appreciation Day. Mr. Farah talked about the mission of the Apostolate and the importance - now more than ever - of growing the membership and kindling the strength of the Maronite communities throughout the United States. Mr. Farah and Ms. Rose Abiradi, current President of Cincinnati's local NAM chapter that has been thriving since 1980, presented Fr. George Hajj, Pastor, with an icon of the Blessed Massabki Brothers - the Patron Saints of NAM. Fr. George was very appreciative of the gift and Mr. Farah's visit to the Parish. □

## Newtown Square, Pennsylvania All Saints Day

by Lillian Shahade

On Sunday, November 1, 2015, the children of St. Sharbel Church in Newtown Square, Penn., came dressed as their favorite saint in honor of All Saints Day. The children were included in the Processional and all took their places in the front pews to participate the Divine Liturgy close up. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Fr. Richard Canulli, O.S.A., in the absence of Fr. Raymond Khallouf, Pastor, on the occasion of his trip to Lebanon.

As a change from the traditional Halloween costumes, this dress was to teach the children about the saints and actually what it takes to become a saint. This was the fifth year at St. Sharbel's for the children to dress as their favorite saint and from the continued response it will not be the last. At least a dozen Saints accompanied by a few angels came to join the Communion of Saints during the Liturgy.



The children who participated this year came as: first row: Angel (Maribel Mary Hobeika); second row: St. Anthony (Jayson Hobeika), St. Joseph (Anthony Hobeika), St. John Paul II (Marc Sleiman), St. Stephen (Steve Nasir), St. Mary (Jessica Hobeika), St. Therese (Julia Hobeika), St. Anne (Julie Karam), St. Sharbel (Allesandro Sleiman), St. Mark (Mark Sakr), Angel (Natalie Rocco), Angel (Noora Rocco not in picture). Last Row - Fr. Richard Canulli, O.S.A., and Lillian Shahade, First Communion Instructor.

After the Divine Liturgy, a party was held in the hall for the children, and they all said a prayer of thanksgiving together before eating. □

## Waterville, Maine Annual Christmas Bazaar



Greg and Maryanne Gillespie, parishioners of St. Joseph Maronite Catholic Church, are enjoying a Lebanese Dinner at the annual Christmas Bazaar.

Each year the Parish of St. Joseph in Waterville, Maine, led by the Rosary Sodality, gets together for its annual major fundraiser. There are days of preparation of making it a fun and unifying event for the parish and the area community. From the beautifully painted icons, craft tables,

and the White Elephant sale, to baked goods and dinner tables, there is something for all to enjoy. The kitchen was bustling with preparing the containers for takeout and filling the plates for those eating at the beautifully decorated tables. Fresh made Lebanese Food always brings in a crowd. ☐

## Houston, Texas *Lebanon's Independence Day*

**A**t a sold-out dinner banquet on Saturday November 14, 2015, Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Houston, Tex., commemorated the Independence Day of Lebanon and honored a distinguished guest, Adib Kassis, Manager of Middle East Airlines - USA.

The evening started with a stunning performance of the U.S. and Lebanon national anthems by Our Lady of the Cedars Youth Choir. Following the standing ovation received by the youths, Father George Bouchaaya led the attendees in a prayer for the victims of the terror attacks in Beirut, Lebanon, and Paris, France, that had taken place during the same week. After a dinner of traditional Lebanese dishes mixed in with a variety of continental cuisine features, the Master of Ceremonies, Nabil Joubran, introduced Mr. Kassis, listing his credentials and awards, the most prestigious of which is having been inducted into the Papal Order of St. Gregory by His Holiness Saint Pope John Paul II.

Mr. Kassis gave a brief history of how Lebanon came about, from before the Ottoman rule to present-day Lebanon. He included in his presentation trivia questions that kept the audience engaged and even offered free MEA airline tickets for the correct answers to a couple of the trivia questions. At the conclusion of his speech, Father Milad Yaghi, Pastor, and Dr. Gabriel Habib, the newly-elected Parish Council President, presented Mr. Kassis with a commemorative Texas-shaped plaque "in recognition of years of dedication in the service of the Lebanese community in the United States."

The entertainment for the evening opened up with Loyal Abboud, a singer from Lebanon performing in Houston for the first time. The headliner and famous Amir Yazbeck got the crowd up on their feet dancing in *Dabke* circles until the early morning hours.

Despite the mixed emotions regarding the occasion, Our Lady of the Cedars Church always manages to celebrate the Independence Day of Lebanon in elegant style, away from any controversies or political divisions. ☐

## Orlando, Florida *Festival of Baskets*

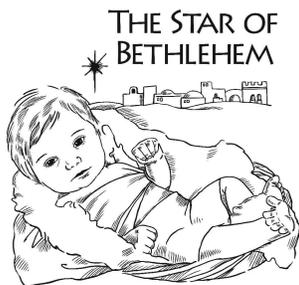


**A**fter months of meeting every Monday evening, hundreds of baskets, donated gifts, merchandise, sponsorships, silent auction and raffle items and hundreds of volunteer hours, and late evenings arranging and sealing the baskets, St. Jude Maronite Church in Orlando, Fla., held its fifth annual Festival of Baskets.

Fr. Bassam Saade, Pastor, brought the fundraiser event to the parish, and each year it has grown in size and success. This year, with over three hundred baskets being offered, over thirty silent auction items, raffles for Disney and Sea World tickets, and over 450 tickets sold, the event had to be moved from the parish hall to a larger venue. Because of the close working relationship Fr. Bassam has established with our neighboring parish, Holy Family provided use of their new social hall and kitchen facilities.

It was a long day, starting at 7 a.m., unloading the baskets from the truck used to transport everything from St. Jude Church to the Holy Family Church, setting up all the various basket tables, arranging the silent auction area, preparing a full menu of food and beverages, selling tickets, and so much more. The doors opened at 1 p.m.

"We are truly blessed with the dedication of the members of our parish. We already have had our first meeting for next year - our sixth annual festival which will be even bigger and better," said Fr. Bassam. ☐



*Our warm personal greetings to you and your families as we celebrate the Incarnation of the Son of God.*

*We are grateful for the support you have given us during the year.*

*May the Prince of Peace fill your hearts with His Love and Peace at Christmas and in the New Year.*

*From all of us here at The Maronite Voice, Merry Christmas and a Blessed and Joyful 2016.*

*the Deadline is...* **Deadline for next month's issue of The Maronite Voice is December 26, 2015.**

The Maronite Voice is the official newsletter of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and of the Eparchy of Saint Maron.

Send all changes of address, news, pictures and personal correspondence to:

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Pictures must be original. Digital pictures must be in "JPG" format and in high resolution. *The Maronite Voice* is also available online, in PDF format, at [www.stmaron.org](http://www.stmaron.org). ☐

## Dallas, Texas 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Food Festival



by Mattye Thompson

Commemorating its 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Lebanese Food Festival on October 2 - 4, 2015, Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Dallas, Tex., made this its biggest event ever! Fr. Mitch Pacwa, of EWTN, offered a special talk on the challenges of Catholic families in the U.S., heard confession and concelebrated the liturgies throughout the festival weekend. It was an international celebration with dancers and musicians from heritages around the world including Armenia, Ireland, Greece, Canada, and, of course, Lebanon! Attendees enjoyed all of the food that the parishioners worked so diligently to prepare and kept coming back for more. The children had a wonderful time, enjoying entertainment by a clown, bounce houses, and activities with the religious education teachers. Guests also took in the Lebanese culture booth and silent auction for many souvenirs to take home and participated in a raffle for a chance to win at least one of five prizes.

Two weeks later, the Parish hosted a surprise party for Fr. Assaad ElBasha's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was completely surprised and the parish shared a wonderful evening of celebration and heartfelt gifts with its Pastor.

### *The Year of the Consecrated Life*

Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Dallas, Tex., has shared the Holy Family Icon from house to house since January 2015. The priest blessed the icon before it began its visitations and requested that it would come to visit each household in the parish and that the receiving families would pray intercessions for the Year of the Consecrated Life. The icon is returned to the altar in the church every Sunday, then is given to the next family with a blessing from the priest before the final blessing of the Liturgy. The parishioners have enjoyed hosting this icon, and we have heard many stories of the devotion, peace and blessings it has brought to their homes. The parishioners have requested to continue this practice in 2016. Father Assaad has decided to close the year of the Consecrated Life with Pope Francis' Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy commencing on December 8, 2015, and he is looking to present a new art piece for the parishioners' contemplations beginning in January of 2016. □

## Tampa, Florida 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Festival



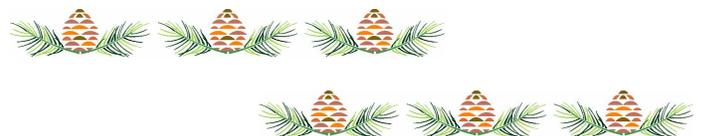
by Dr. Dany Sayad

Sts. Peter and Paul Maronite Mission celebrated its 4<sup>th</sup> annual food festival on November 7 - 8, 2015, in Tampa, Fla., in Loving Memory of Father Peter Boulos. The festival was an amazing collaboration of the parish volunteers who granted their time and work to create a beautiful display of Lebanese cuisine. More than seven hundred people attended the festival, including local priests and deacons of the Roman Catholic Churches, as well as many parishioners of the Coptic and Syriac Churches. It was by far the most attended and most profitable festival that the church has hosted.

Besides the traditional Lebanese food, a Christmas Bazaar display was offered to the attendees at a discounted price. The festival was an awesome success built from a small parish with a big heart. Sts. Peter and Paul Mission would like to thank the parishioners, volunteers, sponsors and especially its spiritual leader, Father Paul Damien, who was the main catalyst for the festival's success.

### *All Saints/Halloween Party With a Twist*

Children of Sts. Peter and Paul Maronite Mission in Tampa, Fla., celebrated this year Halloween party with a twist. Instead of the weird Halloween costumes, children dressed as Saints and Biblical heroes and prophets. It all started with a fashion show where every child introduced his saint to the community. Then the children enjoyed some games, dance, music and finished with food, a small banquet in anticipation of the heavenly banquet with all the Just and the Saints. □



## Boston, Massachusetts *Knights of the Virgin Mary*



by Randa Yazbeck

On Sunday, May 17, 2015, Msgr. Georges El-Khali, Pastor, in the presence of Bishop Gregory Mansour and retired Chorbishop Joseph Lahoud, blessed and accepted thirteen boys and girls (ages 6-13) into the Fraternity of the Knights of the Virgin Mary (*Fersan El A-dhra*) at Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Jamaica Plain [Boston], Mass. During the consecration ceremony, the *Fersan* recited their Ritual of Promise and committed to be true Christians and live according to the statutes of the Knights of the Virgin Mary. Throughout the year, the Leaders, Ibtissam Chahwan and Nisrine El-Hachem, have been preparing the *Fersan* by teaching them how to pray the rosary, and volunteering in charity events for the local nursing home, hospital and orphanage home. In addition, their mission extended to Lebanon, during their family vacations this past summer, where a few had participated in the *Fersan* group activities in their villages and strengthened their Maronite faith. Mr. George Maroun and his family donated the Mosaic. □

## Roanoke, Virginia *Veterans Day*

Seventy years ago this past April, World War II came to an end in Europe. Can you imagine what that meant to a twenty-three year old Polish girl who had been imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp for more than four years, who had undergone the infamous surgical experiments of the monster of Ravensbrück, and who was just days away from her scheduled execution?

Attendees at the annual Veterans' Day Program at St. Elias Maronite Church, Roanoke, Va., were given a glimpse not only of evil gone rampant but also of the triumph of the human spirit. Mrs. Ania Dadak, a parishioner of St. Elias and the daughter of Dr. Wanda Póltawska, one of the "guinea pig" girls of Ravensbrück, presented a soul-stirring account

of her mother's imprisonment, torture and eventual rescue from death by American troops. Her talk concluded with a personal reflection and thank you from her mother to America and its military for intervening and fighting to end the horror of the Nazi conquest of Europe.

Arrested and imprisoned for being a part of the Polish Resistance, Wanda was sentenced, without trial, to death, but her execution was put off so that she, along with several other girls, could be used as subjects for grotesque medical experiments. Some died, others were left crippled, all were scarred deeply both physically and psychologically. Having suffered at the hands of medical doctors who were concerned only with "science" and not with humanity, Wanda determined that if she survived she would become a doctor who would respect life. With the help and collusion of many prisoners, she evaded the execution squad, the war ended, she did survive (although nearly dying of starvation at the end) and became a medical doctor, specializing in pediatric psychiatry. Upon her return home she was plagued by nightmares reliving her experiences. At the suggestion of a former teacher she wrote out her story and in so doing she found relief. Her account was eventually published as *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*.

The program also featured patriotic songs by the children of the Religious Education Program, a beautiful duet by Sophia Asbell and Clara Chahine, a buffet meal, a recognition of living vets, a remembrance of deceased veterans, and the placement of two wreaths at the Memorial Garden on the church's grounds. Father Kevin Beaton expressed his thanks to all the veterans, to Ania Dadak and to the religious education staff and many participants. Attendees presented over two hundred dollars as donations to Chaplain Rev. Ronald Michaux for the Chaplain's Fund of the VA Hospital in Salem, Virginia. The program ended with a benediction by Chaplain Michaux and a rousing and heartfelt rendition of God Bless America. □

## Holiness in Solitary and Communal Living From The Family of St. Maron to San Francisco



## Episcopal Election



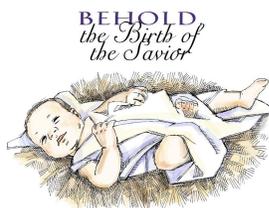
On Saturday, October 31, 2015, His Holiness Pope Francis gave his assent to the canonical election by the Synod of Bishops of the Maronite Church of Fr. Joseph Tobji as Archbishop of Aleppo of the Maronites, Syria.

The Bishop-elect was born in 1971 and was ordained a priest in 1996. He holds a licentiate in Canon Law from the Pontifical Urbanian University and has served as chaplain and parish priest and as promoter of justice and defender of the bond in a number of ecclesiastical tribunals. He is currently secretary of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops. □

## Eparchy of Saint Maron Christmas Directives

### Christmas Novena

His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour has asked that the Maronite Christmas Novena be celebrated in all the parishes of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn from December 15 to December 23, 2015, inclusive.



### Christmas Eve Liturgy

It is not the custom of the Maronite Church to celebrate Christmas before midnight. However, the Chancery Office is fully aware that in many areas the Christmas Eve Liturgy (around 5:00 p.m.) is very popular. Pastors are urged to do all they can to maintain the Midnight tradition if at all possible. □

## Christmas 2015

*Continued from page 1*

With the birth of the "New Adam," Jesus, the Son of God, we have been given access once again to immortality through the new Tree of Life - the spiritual life that is found in Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. His birth in Bethlehem is like the re-birth of the Tree of Life - it buds forth not from the earth, but from the Holy Virgin herself. The Lord wants every human being to be part of that Tree of Life, and to be part of the tree is to enjoy its fruits and reap its benefits as well. Let us remember, when we decorate the Christmas Tree in our homes, to recognize the gift of this "New Tree of Life."

Christmas is many things to many people, but above all, it is the great manifestation of God's enduring love for all humanity. The wood of the tree in the Garden of Eden, will ultimately be represented in the wood of the Cross. But humanity could not partake of it until after the birth of the Lord. Christ is the "New Tree of Life" from which we may nourish ourselves. I hope that each of us may become a beautiful ornament that shines and brings light to our darkened world. □

A most Blessed and Holy Christmas to all!

+Bishop A. Elias Zaidan  
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon



### Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

#### December 2 - 4, 2015

Catholic Relief Services Board of Directors Meeting, Baltimore, Md.

#### December 5, 2015

Salaam Club Banquet, Brooklyn, N.Y.

#### December 6, 2015

Opening of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, St. Sharbel Church, Somerset, N.J.

#### December 8, 2015

Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

#### December 12 - 13, 2015

Pastoral Visit to Archangel Michael Maronite Church, Fayetteville, N.C.

#### December 14 - 15, 2015

Catholic University Board of Trustees Meeting, Washington, D.C.

#### December 19, 2015

Christmas Novena and Pastoral Visit, St. Anthony Church, Danbury, Conn.

#### December 20, 2015

One Year Memorial Liturgy for Bishop Stephen Hector Doueïhi, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

#### December 21, 2015

Christmas Novena, Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Easton, Penn.

#### December 24 - 25, 2015

Christmas Liturgies, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

#### December 27, 2015

Pastoral Visit to Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Miami, Fla., and Family Time

#### January 3, 2016

Pastoral Visit to Sts. Peter and Paul Mission, Tampa, Fla.

#### January 11 - 15, 2016

Annual Clergy Retreat, North Palm Beach, Fla.

#### January 21 - 23, 2016

Vigil and Pro-Life March, Washington, D.C. □

# What Precisely is The Gospel?

By  
Bishop Robert Barron

Some years ago, I was involved in a Catholic-Evangelical dialogue. One of our Protestant brothers challenged the Catholics in the group to articulate clearly what the Gospel is. I knew what he was getting at: many Evangelicals pride themselves on the fact that they can succinctly sum up the Good News in a way that people find compelling and helpful, whereas many Catholics, it seems, get tongue-tied.

For most Evangelicals, the Gospel is some version of justification by grace through faith. We are sinners, hopelessly incapable of saving ourselves through any accomplishment of our own. But Jesus has died for our sins, and if we place our trust in him we will find eternal salvation. Some refer to the "Romans Road," which is a series of texts from Paul to the Romans that sums up this itinerary. The clarity and simplicity of this teaching allow an Evangelical to respond with a confident "Yes" when asked, "Are you saved?" or even to give a specific date when asked "When were you saved?" I'd be willing to bet that most Catholics would start hemming and hawing when asked those same questions.

And that, in my judgment, is not all bad. Catholics hold that the Gospel cannot be reduced to the mechanics of justification, or to state it differently, that justification is a richer and denser reality than Martin Luther thought. The basic meaning of the "Good News" is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. When the first Christians announced *euangelion* (glad tidings), that's what they meant. "You killed him, but God raised him up" is the basic form of kerygmatic preaching. What this entails is that God's love is more powerful than sin and death, more powerful than anything that is in the world. On fire with this good news, St. Paul could say *Iesous Kyrios* (Jesus is Lord), as opposed to *Kaiser Kyrios* (Caesar is Lord). The Good News is that the new and authentic King has won the decisive victory-and now it's time to join his army. On the Catholic reading, this implies that one should become a member of the mystical body of the Church.

Now there is a further implication of all of this. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus spoke and acted in the very person of God. To the paralyzed man he said, "My son, your sins are forgiven." As the skeptical bystanders rightly observed, only God can forgive sins. In reference to himself, Jesus declared, "You have a greater than the temple here." Within a first century Jewish context, the only one who could coherently make such a claim is the one who is in fact worshipped in the temple. To his disciples, Jesus blithely announced, "Unless you love me more than your mother and father, more than your very life, you are not worthy of me." Who could say that meaningfully except the one who is, in person, the highest good? As C.S. Lewis rightly saw, this leads to a trilemma: Jesus is either liar, lunatic, or Lord. The resurrection was construed as the definitive demonstration that he was who he said he was, as God's own ratification of the extravagant claims of Jesus.

But this means that the dimensions of Jesus' victory are expanded infinitely outward. As the God-man, Jesus represents and affects the deification of humanity. Jesus is God's final and definitive rescuing of the human project. As the Church fathers put it over and over again, *Deus fit homo ut homo fieret Deus*, (God became human that humans might become God). In point of fact, that patristic adage was my response to my Protestant brother years ago. Long before the Reformation, the brightest Christians in the world would have summed up the good news with this ecstatic declaration of deification. This pithy formula includes, I would argue, everything that Evangelical Protestantism legitimately emphasizes but places those truths in a wider and more clarifying context.

For instance, Catholic theology clearly teaches that human beings are incapable of saving themselves. It unambiguously rules out any program of auto-salvation, or to give it its more technical description, Pelagianism. Catholic theology understands that we are like blind Bartimaeus, begging for sight and thereby stands athwart philosophies of perfectibility both ancient and modern. We are broken in such a way that we can't fix ourselves, and hence we are compelled to sing: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel..." Therefore, we rely upon, we accept through faith, what God alone can do for us. Accordingly, the Council of Trent teaches that faith is the *initium et radix omnis justificationis* (the origin and root of all justification). We cannot get into the household of God unless we are graciously invited, unless the door is opened to us through faith.

But Catholic teaching insists that God wants us to live ever more fully, ever more joyfully and lovingly in that house! He wants us to cooperate with his grace and allow our natures to be perfected. This happens precisely in the community and through the life of the Church, which means the saints, the artistic heritage of Catholicism, the apostolic governance of the bishops, and especially the Sacraments and the Eucharist. If I might invoke the Fathers one final time, the Church is best conceived, not as a congregation of like-minded people, not the "Jesus Christ society," but rather as the prolongation of the Incarnation across space and time. The Council of Trent speaks, as Protestantism does, of justification, but it also speaks of the "increase in justification," the deification that comes through the sacramental life of the Church.

So what is the Gospel? God became one of us that we might become participants in his life! ☐

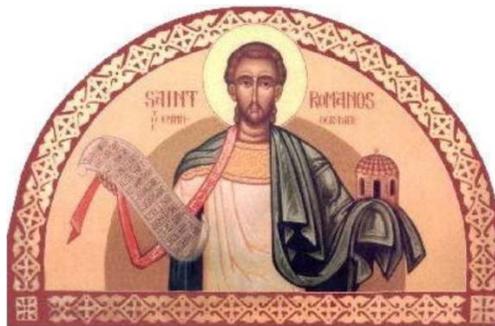
*Bishop Robert Barron is an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries.*



# The Syriac Origins of Byzantine Chant: St. Romanos the Melodist

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Psalm 98:4.  
In this liturgical worship, the Christians of the East pay high tribute, in beautiful hymns of praise, to Mary ever Virgin -  
Unitatis Redintegratio, November 21, 1964, Vatican II.*

The Psalms of the Old Testament of the Bible remind us of how important "sung-verse" was for worship in the ancient world, and especially in the Mediterranean basin (the ancient Near East). Even the founder of the Israelite Kingdom, the anointed chosen ruler, King David, was thought to have been a singer and musician. It is not surprising therefore, that this tradition would be carried into Christian forms of worship, and most identifiably in Eastern Christianity.



Syriac Christianity produced many "saintly singers," although most of their names, biographies, and even works, have been lost in the sweep of time and the destruction of Christian civilization in the Levant. Almost all Christians have some familiarity with St. Ephrem the Syrian (ca.306-373), called "The Harp of the Holy Spirit"; in Ephrem's works and others, it can be seen that these poems and hymns were not only verses of praise, but also of theology and doctrine. For example, many hymns of Ephrem show not only his great devotion to the Mother of God, but an understanding of her Immaculate Conception. In his time this doctrine was in the East often referred to as the pre-purified state of the Virgin, and was not disputed and in need of clarification as was the case in the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. St. Ephrem writes:

*Handmaid and daughter of blood and water [am I] whom  
you redeemed and baptized*<sup>1</sup>

Another son of Syriac Christianity who came to influence the Byzantine tradition of the Church, is Romanos the Melodist (died, ca. 560). Living some two centuries after the great Ephrem and the Syriac thinker Aphrahat, and being more or less a contemporary of the Syriac poet-theologian Jacob of Serug. Romanos (recognized as a saint in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches) lived in a divided Roman Empire, the Western Empire having fallen to the Germanic invaders, and the Eastern Empire (Byzantine Empire) dominated by Greek language and culture. His is the era created by the Emperor Justinian I (Justinian the Great, 482-565), who attempted to recapture the Western Empire, re-codified Roman Law, enhanced the dignity of the city of Constantinople with his building projects, guided the empire through the devastations of the bubonic plague in the 540s, which led to extreme territorial decline, and most importantly in the life of

<sup>1</sup>Hymns on the Nativity 16,10; CSCO 187,76; Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns, trans. Kathleen E. McVey, CWS (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p.150.

Romanos, built "The Great Church", the Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople<sup>2</sup>.

Saint Romanos was born in Emesa (modern Homs), Syria, of Jewish parents who seemingly converted to Christianity. As a young man he moved to Beirut, Lebanon, and was ordained a deacon, serving in the Church of the Resurrection. From there he moved to Constantinople, to live as an ascetic in the Marian shrine known as "in the Kyros."<sup>3</sup> It was here, living a monastic life, serving as a deacon and cantor, that

Romanos created the *knontakion*<sup>4</sup>. The circumstances that pushed St. Romanos to create and sing his first hymn in the Hagia Sophia reveal the humbleness and holiness of this saint. According to tradition he was asked to sing at Vespers of Christmas Eve<sup>5</sup>, and found himself unable to sing. That evening he remained for hours in prayer before the icon of the Holy Virgin, and after finding peace in prayer he went to his room to rest. During his sleep he had a dream/vision of the Mother of God, who placed a scroll on his lips and told him to consume it. Immediately upon awaking, his heart and mind were full of song and verse in praise of Christ and his Holy Mother; running off to the Hagia Sophia, when the time came for him to sing at Matins, he produced in twenty-four stanzas what was to become the foundation of the Byzantine *knontakion*.

*(Continues on page 20)*

<sup>2</sup>The eight Corinthian columns in the Hagia Sophia were taken from Baalbek, Lebanon, at the order of the Emperor Justinian.

<sup>3</sup>This complex was officially called the Blachernae, this was because it housed the Icon of the Holy Virgin known as the Blachermitissa (now in the Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow). The complex consisted of the Church of Saint Mary, the Chapel of the reliquary, called the Hagia Soros (the holy mantle of the Virgin was kept there), and the Hagion Lousma (the holy fountain).

<sup>4</sup>A "*kontakion*" is a poetic form frequently encountered in Byzantine hymnography. It was probably based in Syriac hymnographical traditions...This form became especially popular after the magnificent work of St. Romanos the Melodist during the 6<sup>th</sup> century. - From St. Romanos the Melodist, On the Life of Christ: *Kontakia* (Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, tr.: Harper, San Francisco, 1995), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>In that time there were points in the Byzantine Liturgy of Hours in which a Cantor/Deacon would sing a homily/sermon-like chant or hymn.

## *Trusting the Future to Divine Providence*

by

*Deacon Joseph Chebli, St. Sharbel Church, Somerset, N.J.*

"If all the Maronite are like him, I would have closed the church long ago." These were the words of Monsignor Maroun Asmar in 1996 when he met my wife. He was curious about her last name and asked her if she was Lebanese. "I am married to a Lebanese," she answered, to which he swiftly, in his very unique way cut to the chase and said to her: "Why don't I know him?" His words were the catalyst to my return to my Maronite roots.

I was born in Lebanon, the oldest of three boys, at the onset of the civil war. My parents' piety was passed on to us,

and can be summarized in one simple sentence: "You owe it all to Divine Providence who guide you, and the protection of *Harissa* (The Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon)." I remember our family's devotion to St. Mary during the month of May praying the Rosary and the *talbeh*. There was no question under whose protection and to whom our home was consecrated. Our summer home was adjacent to the town church, St. Simon the Stylite, where served as an altar boy from an early age. The priest, Fr. Germanous Sfeir, a retired contemplative priest, was a man of very few words who spent his day reading on his front porch and watching the kids play. Under his long grey beard was a smile that comforted and warmed those who greeted him. Daily Mass could not come soon enough for me. I would help light the charcoal and the candles and prepare to read the epistle. I was always nervous reading the epistles; Arabic epistles were hard and I made plenty of mistakes (which I still do - ask the parishioners at St. Sharbel). The daily Mass attendees, not exceeding fifteen people were mostly seniors. Fr. Germanous would stand next to me while I was reading the epistle and managed to whisper the difficult words. Being a teacher, the saintly priest did not find it difficult to teach a willing kid like me. After all, I was his designated alter boy, which was easy considering I was the only boy in church every day at 8 a.m. It is never a coincidence that vocations start with a caring priest, or perhaps the old woman who pinches your cheek as a child, and whispers: "*Yalla boukra bit-seer khoury*" (Oh, one day you will become a priest).

In late 1989, I entered the United States in pursuit of higher education at the College of Pharmacy at St. John's in New York. There I met Elizabeth, who was to become my wife.

When I married Liz several years later, I could not understand why she felt the need to serve in her church, I would say, "We go to church, we pray and we

go home." She on the other hand, would say: "We go to church, we pray, we meet people, we give of our time, it is Sunday after all." Elizabeth always believed "we can give back to the Church what She abundantly gives to us." Little did I know then what I know now, how Divine Providence in its soft touches, through my wife, gently nudged me again one step closer toward diakonia. After several services at St. Sharbel in New Jersey, from workshops for the youth, MYO advisor, to Parish Council, Monsignor Maroun one day popped the question: "Joe, did you consider the deaconate?" My reaction was: Deaconate? What is that? A few books later, a few articles later, some life lessons from Monsignor, and life once again changed directions. To every hesitation, and attempt at a step backward, that priest had a solution. It took a long time, and a long road for Monsignor to see me as a subdeacon. Ordination came in 2007 on the feast of the Annunciation, reminding me of Mary's swift "yes" compared to my slow movement. Then Monsignor retired, and Fr. Tony Akoury became the pastor of St. Sharbel. Fr. Tony began to guide and engage me in the spiritual-pastoral aspect of the deaconate. Through his example such as a silent prayer before Mass, spiritual retreats with parishioners, young and old, focus on the "being" more than the "doing" that characterizes the servant, I began to grow in ways I've never experienced before. Until the day when he will place a stole around me and lead me in procession around the church reminding me that when I was young, I went where I pleased and now someone will place a belt around my waist and lead me where I do not wish to go.

My vocation began with an early seed planted at a tender age, and slowly but surely it grew. The more I reflect on this miracle of spiritual birth, the more I am amazed at what lays at its foundation, and how much lays ahead. □



***If the Lord  
is Calling  
You,  
The  
Church  
Needs  
You!***

If you feel that you have a vocation to the Priesthood or religious life, please contact your Pastor or write to:

Fr. Gary George, Director  
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon  
Office of Vocations  
1021 South 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
St. Louis, MO 63104

Or

Fr. Dominique Hanna, Director  
Eparchy of Saint Maron  
Office of Vocations  
c/o St. Joseph Church  
502 Seminole Ave. NE  
Atlanta, GA 30307

Or

Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary  
7164 Alaska Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20012



# Maronite Vigil For Life & March For Life 2016



Join us as we pray, march and send a peaceful message to the world!!  
ALL LIFE IS SACRED and WORTHY OF RESPECT !!!



The Office of Family and Sanctity of Life of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn is pleased to host the third Maronite Vigil For Life on Thursday Jan 22nd at Our Lady Of Lebanon Maronite Church located on 7142 Alaska Avenue N.W. Washington D.C. 20012. All are invited to join us for an evening of prayer, worship and fun.

## *Thursday, January 21, 2016*

*5:00 pm - Arrival at OLOL Church*  
*6:00pm - Dinner*  
*7:00pm - Welcoming talk*  
*8:00pm - Eucharistic Adoration*  
*9:15pm - Activities, Music & Movie*

## *Friday, January 22, 2016*

*8:30am - Maronite Divine Liturgy*  
*9:30am - Breakfast*  
*11:00am - Maronite Catholics For Life meet at the Starbucks on the corner of Indiana Ave. & 7th St.*

For those who wish to attend the Vigil For Life at the National Shrine at 6:30pm, you are welcome to join us afterwards at Our Lady of Lebanon Church.

**Men and women sleep in different locations.  
Please bring your sleeping bags & plan accordingly.**



**Please RSVP with number of people attending  
no later than Monday, January 19th.  
Contact Joseph and Simona Hallal  
by phone at (540) 815-2104 and (540) 798-8450  
or by email at [jhallal@verizon.net](mailto:jhallal@verizon.net)**

**We kindly ask for a free will donation  
of \$20 per person to cover the cost of the meals**



# Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn

## *Marriage Nullity Process*

On August 15, 2015, Pope Francis issued the *Motu proprio Mitis et misericors Iesus* [*Gentle and Merciful Jesus*], a document revising the marriage nullity process in the Eastern Code of Canon Law. Our Eparchial Tribunal is ready to implement the new norms when they come into force on December 8, 2015. The mass media, including even some Catholic news outlets, have widely reported this event, but some of these reports have contained inaccuracies about the changes. To clarify what the changes really are and how they might affect you, please consult the answers to the following frequently asked questions (FAQs).

Msgr. Francis J. Marini, JD, JCOD  
Judicial Vicar

### **1. What is the Marriage Nullity process and why does it Exist?**

Jesus taught that marriage is indissoluble. Once people get married, they are married until one of them dies, even if they someday separate, justifiably or otherwise. Since they remain married for life, if one of them goes on to live in the manner of husband and wife with someone else, then he or she is living in an irregular state. A married person's vocation is to lifelong fidelity to the marital covenant, even when (in cases of abandonment or necessary separation) that means living as though celibate. Christ knew our human nature and He knew that this was a hard teaching. He was already challenged and ridiculed for it in His own time, but He did not back down from it one bit.

With that being said, there are certain marriages that are invalid from the start. They have the outward appearance of a marriage and are usually entered into in good faith, but because of some impediment, some defect of consent, or some problem in the form of the marriage celebration, they are never really marriages at all. If there was really no marriage at all, and if that fact is publicly proven, then those two parties are free to marry someone else in the Catholic Church. The Church and society as a whole have the responsibility to uphold and support couples in their marriage vows even when one or both of them no longer want to be married. That is why there has to be proof of nullity before a new marriage can be recognized. The spouses themselves, let alone one of them, cannot simply decide privately that the marriage is invalid and that they are free to move on.

The marriage nullity process is a judicial process developed over the centuries to allow people who believe that their marriage was invalid the opportunity to prove that fact, all the while safeguarding the rights of both parties and upholding the dignity and indissolubility of marriage. A declaration of nullity does not and cannot dissolve an existing marriage; rather it is an official declaration by the Church that it has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt that a given marriage was invalid from the start. When a marriage is actually invalid, declaring the nullity of the marriage is a good and just thing.

### **2. Why is Pope Francis changing the Marriage Nullity process?**

Pope Francis teaches exactly what Christ taught: that marriage is indissoluble. Indissolubility is part of the Good News! It tells us that God wants us to love and be loved unconditionally, and that He made us capable of that kind of love. Nothing that Pope Francis has said or done has changed

or could change any of that. There is nothing merciful in finding a pretext for calling a marriage invalid when it is really just broken, or in declaring that a marriage is probably invalid even when real doubt remains, which is why Pope Francis very prudently retains the principle that a marriage cannot be declared invalid unless it has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt. His concern is not to have more "annulments" regardless of the truth of the matter, but to eliminate any unnecessary, artificial, or unduly burdensome barriers toward obtaining a just and expeditious judgment. He also wants to minimize as much as possible the amount of time people spend in a state of uncertainty while their case is pending.

The existing marriage nullity process, when followed faithfully, is both effective and (under ideal circumstances and considering the complexity of the matter) relatively expeditious. But like any fallible, human process it can and should be reformed when necessary. Pope Francis, working with a commission of experts, has reformed the process in order to make it as accessible as possible, without in any way undermining the integrity of the process.

### **3. How is the marriage nullity process going to change?**

The document contains a number of "tweaks" to the process, but there are five major changes: (1) new rules for tribunal competence, (2) new requirements for tribunal personnel, (3) the elimination of the requirement for a second conforming affirmative, (4) a shorter and more streamlined process, judged personally by the diocesan bishop, for certain rare and exceptional cases, and (5) a change in the approach to recovering tribunal expenses.

### **4. When do these changes take effect?**

The revised laws take effect on December 8, 2015.

### **5. What is tribunal competence, and how will it be different?**

Almost every eparchy or diocese has a tribunal, but not just any tribunal can hear any marriage nullity case. The tribunal has to have competence (jurisdiction) over the marriage in question. After December 8, 2015, there will be three ways that a tribunal can be competent: (1) if the marriage took place in that eparchy or diocese, (2) if either party lives in that eparchy or diocese, and (3) if for whatever reason the majority of the relevant evidence is located in that eparchy or diocese.

## **6. How do the changes in the rules for competence affect me?**

If your case is already pending, or if you introduce it before December 8, 2015, they don't. If you introduce your petition on or after December 8, 2015, you may have one or more additional options for where to introduce your petition.

## **7. What does it mean that the requirement of a second affirmative is being eliminated?**

For cases decided after December 8, 2015, if nobody (i.e., neither party nor the defender of the bond) appeals an affirmative decision within fifteen days, it becomes executory, meaning the parties can act on it, usually by remarrying in the Catholic Church. That is true at the first instance level or at any appellate level: one unappealed affirmative sentence definitively establishes the nullity of the marriage. This applies to cases whose final sentences are published on or after December 8, 2015.

## **8. How long is the process supposed to last?**

The marriage nullity process is not something that can be rushed: marriages are complex and unique, and in order to know beyond a reasonable doubt whether a marriage is invalid from the start, it is necessary to gather a great deal of information. That means questioning the parties, interviewing witnesses, and collecting documents and other evidence. All the while, both parties' rights have to be carefully protected, and all of this takes time. The law says that the process should normally be completed in a year in the first instance, but when delays arise it can take even longer. In many cases, it can be completed significantly sooner, and every tribunal aims at maximum efficiency, but never at the expense of the integrity of the process as a search for the truth.

## **9. What is the new shorter process?**

Even before the reforms, there were shorter processes that could be used in special cases when the nullity of the marriage is obvious and indisputable. The "documentary process" involves cases when an official document (e.g., a marriage certificate proving a previous marriage bond) proves the nullity of a marriage beyond a reasonable doubt; in some cases it can be finished in a matter of weeks. The so-called "lack-of-form" process, which deals with Catholics who marry outside the Church without a dispensation, is not even a judicial process at all but a simple administrative verification of facts; in urgent cases it can be finished in days. However, there are certain cases—rare and exceptional, they do occur—that are not "lack of form" cases or "documentary process" cases, but in which all the relevant facts are readily available and clearly demonstrate the nullity of the marriage. In such cases, some of the more time-consuming formalities of the ordinary process can safely be omitted without sacrificing the integrity of the process. For cases such as these, Pope Francis has created a new, shorter process.

## **10. What cases qualify for the shorter process?**

The shorter process is designed only for those rare cases when it can be employed without injustice. Three strict qualifications have to be met. (1) Both spouses have to

petition for it together, or if not, then the other party must freely and knowingly consent to it in writing. (2) The nullity of the marriage must be manifest (clear and obvious). Since most marriage nullity cases deal with a defect in marital consent, i.e., with an internal act of the will placed by one or both of the spouses, often several years prior, it would be exceptional for such a defect to be obvious today. (3) All the facts that make the marriage manifestly null have to be readily available. Unlike the documentary process, the shorter process can involve the questioning of both parties and knowledgeable witnesses, but this is to be done all in one session when possible. Even though both spouses petition, the second and third requirements must still be met. The fact that the eparchial bishop has to oversee the process personally is an indication that Pope Francis does not believe that the majority of nullity cases could be processed in that way because an eparchial bishop would not have the time to do that in addition to all of his other duties.

## **11. How does the shorter process work?**

First, the parties (or one of them with the written consent of the other) have to submit a petition for a declaration of nullity, which in addition to all the information normally contained in a petition, has to demonstrate why the shorter process could be used, i.e., why the nullity of the marriage is obvious and also how it will be proven by readily available evidence. If the case is admitted to the shorter process, the judicial vicar issues a decree stating the grounds in the case, nominating an instructor (an official in charge of gathering the evidence) and an assessor (an official in charge of advising the bishop) and citing them along with the parties and the defender of the bond to come to a session at the tribunal within thirty days. At that session, the parties will be questioned along with their witnesses, and other evidence may be presented. Afterwards, the defender of the bond and the parties have fifteen days to present their closing arguments in the case, at which point the whole case is presented to the bishop for his judgment.

If, based on all the evidence presented, the bishop is certain beyond a reasonable doubt that the marriage is invalid, he can issue a sentence declaring the nullity of the marriage. If the bishop is not morally certain, then he must send the case back to the normal process in the tribunal, starting from the beginning. Appeal against the bishop's affirmative decision can be made by either party or the defender of the bond within fifteen days.

## **12. How long does the shorter process take?**

A number of news outlets reported that the shorter process will last forty-five days. Some of them even reported that number as if it applied to all marriage nullity processes! However, this is inaccurate. The law allows up to 120 days for the shorter process from start to finish, and that is if everything goes perfectly. If there are delays for any reason, it will take longer.

## **13. How do I know if my case qualifies for the shorter process?**

You will only know for sure after your case is submitted to the tribunal. However, because all three of the requirements

for the shorter process have to be met, most marriage cases will probably not be able to be treated in the shorter process. Nevertheless, with the elimination of the need for two conforming sentences, even cases handled in the ordinary process will be shorter after December 8, 2015.

**14. Why is it important for both spouses to agree to the shorter process?**

There is a common misconception that if both spouses agree that the marriage is invalid, a declaration of nullity is somehow automatic or guaranteed. This has never been true, and the new law does not change that. Actually, the facts of the case, and not the spouses' agreement or disagreement, determine whether the marriage has been proven invalid. So why does it matter whether they both agree to the shorter process? This requirement helps protect both spouses' right to defend the validity of their marriage, including by insisting on the full, ordinary judicial process.

**15. What did Pope Francis change with regard to tribunal fees and why?**

In the Catholic Church, justice can't be bought or sold. What many tribunals, including our own, have done, fully in keeping with canon law, is to pass on some portion of their expenses (salaries, supplies, office space) to the parties who request their services. If these expenses are not paid for by the parties, then it has to be borne by the Church, which is really means the other people in the pews. No one is ever denied access to the tribunal due to inability to pay and anyone who demonstrates the need for a partial or total reduction of fees receives one.

Generally Church tribunals operate at a heavy loss. Pope Francis said that the process should be gratuitous whenever possible. Our eparchy is an expanding eparchy, and has never had a large cash reserve. The Tribunal has not been regularly subsidized by the Chancery, and has always operated on a "shoestring budget." It is not possible for the eparchy to completely absorb all the costs of the tribunal, but Bishop Gregory has reduced the tribunal fee to \$500, which is not enough to cover the costs of the average annulment case. The Bishop has agreed to subsidize the tribunal to cover the expenses in excess of the filing fee.

**16. When and how is the new law going to be implemented in the Eparchy of Saint Maron?**

The new law comes into effect on December 8, 2015. Our tribunal is committed to implementing it fully by that time, but there are a lot of adjustments to be made. In the meantime, our heavy caseload continues to progress at full speed. Feel free to call or email the tribunal with general questions or questions about your case and we will respond as quickly and fully as we are able, but please be patient with us. If you have a case pending, we will contact you if the changes in the law have an important bearing on your case. □

## *The Relics of Saint Sharbel Visit the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon*

### **Cincinnati, Ohio**



*by Linda Conour and Maggie Samaan*

As this year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beatification of St. Sharbel (December, 1965), his holy relics traveling throughout the United States made a visit to St. Anthony of Padua Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Sunday, October 25, to Tuesday, October 27, 2015. The Church altar was beautifully decorated with white flowers and lit candles, and the parishioners along with other Maronite Catholics from Columbus and Dayton, Ohio, and Lexington and Louisville, Ky., gathered to await the arrival of St. Sharbel's relics. At 3:00 p.m. there was a welcoming ceremony and procession as the holy relics arrived and were carefully placed just below the bronze statue of St. Sharbel.

The Divine Liturgy followed and was concelebrated by Fr. George Hajj, Pastor, and Fr. Benedict O'Cinnsealaigh, Rector, Mount St. Mary's Seminary, with Subdeacons Tom Simon and Don George, Jr. assisting. Several of the current Seminarians at Mount St. Mary's attended the Maronite Liturgy and took part in the opening procession. Music filled the Church with beautiful singing from the Choir of St. Anthony of Padua, and the children in attendance presented the Offertory Gifts during the Liturgy. Fr. George presented a cross from Lebanon to Fr. Benedict to show his appreciation. After the Liturgy, attendees were given the opportunity for personal prayer and reflection with the relics of St. Sharbel. A movie on the history and life of St. Sharbel was played during the reception that took place in the Monsignor Joseph A. Abood Maronite Center immediately following.

Fr. George was interviewed on Sacred Heart Radio - Cincinnati's Catholic programming station, and he told the story of the humble Monk from Lebanon and how, through his intercession both during his life and after had caused many to be healed both physically and spiritually. From that broadcast, many visitors from throughout the area came to St.

Anthony of Padua Church over the next two days to attend the many prayer services and for personal reflection and devotion. As Fr. George said, "It was a shining of our Church throughout the city," all coming from this historic visit. The final Divine Liturgy that took place in the evening of Tuesday, October 27, was a special healing Liturgy, and all were anointed with the blessed oil that came from St. Sharbel's tomb in *Annya*, Lebanon. Final prayers and reflection took place as St. Sharbel's relics were taken the next day to continue the journey throughout the Maronite communities across the United States. More information can be found at [www.stsharbelusa.org](http://www.stsharbelusa.org) and [www.staparish.org](http://www.staparish.org). □

## Flint, Michigan



by Subdeacon Joseph Pavlovich

On Saturday, November 14, 2015, the clergy and parishioners of Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Flint, Mich., were blessed to have the relics of St. Sharbel arrive at their church. We Maronites have a special devotion to St. Sharbel. The veneration of relics has a long history in the church, and the people want to be close to the holy ones.

Parishioners and non-parishioners alike turned out for the services venerating St. Sharbel Relics. It was very moving to see the respect and devotion shown to him. Many prayed, most asked for his intercession, and others had tears of joy to have this holy monk of Lebanon among us. Some did not want to leave his relics presence. The relics brought an opportunity to the faithful for a renewal of their faith in God and their connection to the Maronite Church. It was an opportunity to repent and to follow the example of St. Sharbel by prayer and silence. The many services offered and the collegiality of the people at the luncheons afterward made this a time for grace and hope.

A procession to the Church was led by Fr. Pierre Bassil, Pastor, along with other clergy and parishioners. Divine

Liturgy was celebrated by Father Pierre followed by *Ramsho* and Eucharistic Adoration and Veneration of the Relics.

On Sunday, November 15, again the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Father Pierre followed by Eucharistic Adoration and Veneration of the Relics. Father Ayad Hanna and members of St. Paul Chaldean Catholic Church joined Our Lady of Lebanon parishioners for the evening Liturgy. This was followed by *Ramsho* and Eucharistic Adoration and Veneration of the Relics. The wonderful turnout for this and all services was a tribute to this holy saint and to those who love him.

On Monday morning, November 16, Father Pierre once again celebrated the Divine Liturgy. This was followed by a procession to place a statue of St. Sharbel in the flower garden outside the Church. The Relics then left Our Lady of Lebanon, but the blessings and intercessions of St. Sharbel will not be forgotten. □

## Livonia, Michigan



by Holly Hilu

As part of the nation-wide tour commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Saint's Beatification, the parishioners of Saint Rafka Church in Livonia, Mich., welcomed the relics of St. Sharbel on Sunday, October 4, 2015. The relics' four-day visit to the parish began with a welcoming procession, during which, the relics were carried to their place of honor atop the steps of the altar. The children of the community, who had prepared hand-written prayer intentions, followed behind and placed their special intentions at the foot of the altar. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Fr. Aziz BouMaroun, honored guest from Lebanon, together with Fr. Tony Massad, Pastor. During his homily, Fr. BouMaroun discussed the poignant relevance of the Holy Father's World Meeting of Families to the lives of the saints, and in particular, to that of St. Sharbel.

This marked the beginning of four beautiful days of prayer and worship as over one thousand visitors came from near and far to venerate St. Sharbel's relics. Members of the Parish's Worship Committee and Music Ministry collaborated with Fr. Tony Massad to coordinate the program. The faithful participated in St. Sharbel's Liturgy and Novena, the Holy Rosary, Reconciliation, Maronite Evening Prayer (*Ramsho*), Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament. Each day, visitors had opportunities for individual veneration of St. Sharbel's relics and silent prayer. During daily Liturgies, Fr. Tony Massad inspired listeners by describing St. Sharbel's holy life

and the miracles attributed to his intercessions. He focused on the example of St. Sharbel's monastic virtues of poverty, obedience, and chastity as well as the intensity of his consecrated life as a hermit, all of which laid the groundwork for spiritual renewal through the life of the saint based on the life of the Church.

The prayerful, four-day relic visit could not have been possible without the talents and contributions of all the St. Rafka parishioners. The Worship Committee meticulously decorated the church to reflect the austerity of the monk's life and incorporated meaningful decor to represent St. Sharbel's work in the vineyards and forest. The Ladies' Social Committee provided refreshments for the visitors throughout the four days in the Social Hall and continuously staffed the information booth, video, and gift areas. Members of the parish MYO and MYA served as greeters and hosts alongside the ushers to welcome guests who entered the church. A special video was presented that included a depiction of St. Sharbel's life and a specific account of the beloved saint's intercession by a St. Rafka parishioner.

Throughout the visit, parishioners and guests spoke of the great honor and blessing it was to have the opportunity to venerate the relics of St. Sharbel. The faithful felt that, just as this Maronite Lebanese monk made silent prayer a prominent part of his life, they too, found themselves closer to God through quiet prayer and veneration of his relics. Moreover, this event was significant during this Year of Consecrated Life as parishioners were inspired to find ways to incorporate and emulate the monk's holiness in their own lives. Now, as the Universal Church prepares for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, St. Rafka Parish is grateful for this opportunity which planted in them the seeds of renewal and grace and inspired them to grow stronger together as a community in faith and to reach out to others thirsting for Christ's love. □

## Tulsa, Oklahoma *Caritas Lebanon - USA*

Father Elias Abi Sarkis, Executive Director of Caritas Lebanon USA, has announced that the website of the organization, [www.caritaslebanonusa.org](http://www.caritaslebanonusa.org), is up and operating and can receive donations. The organization exists to unite the U.S. and Lebanon to improve the lives of the vulnerable in Lebanon with medical, social and economic aid. The influx of 1.6 million refugees into Lebanon due to the Syrian war and Middle East unrest has created severe problems not only for the refugees but also for the Lebanese themselves.

In addition to the current refugees, Lebanon has a long-term presence of 400,000 Palestinian refugees. The unemployment rate stands at over 20%, and the basic income per person is 500 U.S. dollars. Around 50% of the Lebanese population is not assured of basic medical needs, the elderly have no public support at all, and those having difficulties covering their own families have trouble helping their parents. Of course, children bear not only the uncertainties of shelter, food and health care but also education.

Father Abi Sarkis reminds us that Pope Francis stated to the Maronite Patriarch, the Melkite Patriarch, and the Chaldean Patriarch on November 21, 2013, "We will not resign ourselves to imagining the Middle East without

Christians." Further, Pope Francis stated on May 13, 2015, "Whoever lives the mission of *Caritas* is not a simple charitable worker, but is a true witness of Christ. He is a person who seeks Christ and allows Christ to seek him."

Those desiring to assist people in need in Lebanon regardless of religion or race with any of the causes shown on the website may donate directly from the website. All donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law; all donations will be acknowledged and those of \$250 or more will receive a letter sufficient to support the donation for the IRS. Also, contact information with Caritas Lebanon USA is there. Father Abi Sarkis notes that well over 95% of the amount donated will reach the end user in Lebanon. □

## San Francisco, California *NAM Convention 2016*



Our journey has begun, and NAM Convention committees are working hard to prepare a good program for all conventioners. We would like to highlight Hyatt Regency hotel and some of the Bay Area attractions. Through mid-April 2016 the hotel will have a complete remodeling transformation of guest rooms, event spaces and public spaces. We look forward to the new Hyatt Regency in Spring 2016!

Hyatt Regency in Burlingame is a sophisticated lifestyle hotel located fifteen minutes from downtown San Francisco and just minutes from San Francisco Airport (SFO).

The NAM Hotel for the 2016 Convention is near San Francisco Airport and offers free in-room Wi-Fi. The Stay-Fit gym is open twenty-four hours a day, and the heated outdoor pool and whirlpool are the perfect place to relax, with attentive services and emphasis on sustainable green practices.

Convenient location and complimentary 24-hour airport shuttle service makes it easy for your attendees to fly in and out for meetings. With over 54,000 square feet of flexible – and eco-friendly – event space, it is ideal for conferences and special events.

Located in Burlingame, Hyatt Regency San Francisco Airport is near Silicon Valley businesses and attractions and is the perfect starting point for exploring the Bay Area. Drive across the Golden Gate Bridge, dine at Fisherman's Wharf or tour Alcatraz Island. Afterward, you can explore Lombard Street and enjoy dining, entertainment, and shopping at Pier 39.

Discover Silicon Valley attractions and some of the top things to do in San Francisco, all within easy reach from Hyatt Regency hotel. Explore exciting museums like the California Academy of Sciences, catch a game at AT&T Park, enjoy fun activities at the Exploratorium or take a tour of the California Wine Country.

Hyatt Regency hotel is nestled next to the San Francisco Bay Trail, which, when complete, will encompass 500 miles of hiking and biking trails. Currently about 67% of the trail has been finished, and ultimately it will link all nine counties in the Bay Area. Bay Trail takes you on an amazing exploration of wildlife while providing a safe and easily accessible recreation area.

We hope that you are planning to come and be part of the NAM Convention on July 6 -10, 2016. Come as a family and enjoy the San Francisco Bay Area, all Liturgical Services, Cultural Education Workshops, excursions, entertainment, and more. □

## *US Becomes Less Religious Nation*

The United States became a less religious nation between 2007 and 2014, according to the Pew Research Center.

During the seven-year period, the percentage of Americans who say they believe in God fell from 92% to 89%, the percentage who said they pray daily fell from 58% to 55%, and the percentage who attend church at least monthly fell from 54% to 50%.

Monthly church attendance is much more prevalent among those born before 1946 (67%) than among adults born in the 1980s (27%) or 1990 - 96 (28%).

Between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of Catholics who said they attend church weekly fell from 41% to 39%, and the percentage who attend once or twice a month declined from 19% to 18%. However, the percentage of Catholics who say they read the Bible at least weekly rose from 21% to 25%. □

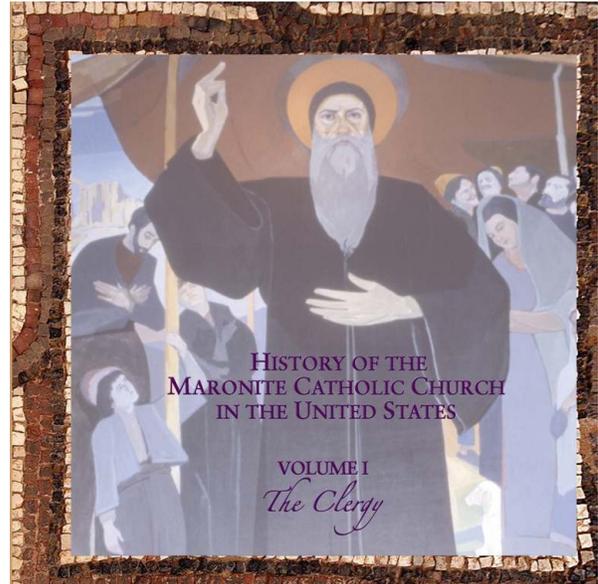
*Catholic World News, November 5, 2015*



# *From the Book Shelf*

## *History of the Maronite Catholic Church in the United States*

### *The Clergy*



*by Evelyn Karam Small*

In 1890, the first assigned Maronite Catholic missionary arrived in New York City. Like many Lebanese immigrants, he brought with him his faith and the hope of building a better tomorrow.

Now, modern-day parishioners can read about the complete history of the Maronite Church in America in a new book called *History of the Maronite Catholic Church in the United States, Volume I, The Clergy*. Five years of extensive research were needed to unearth never-before published documents and to translate historical records and correspondence from their original French or Arabic into English. To further understand the evolution of the Church, the authors also analyzed interviews conducted with parishioners and pastors over the past seventy years.

This 440-page book is an essential addition to the bookshelf of any Maronite curious about the contributions our Church has made over the last 125 years.

*The Clergy* is available for \$30 plus \$7 shipping from  
Saint Maron Publications,  
4611 Sadler Road, Glen Allen, Virginia 23060  
<http://stmaron.org/store>.

*Saint Maron Publications accepts Visa or Master Card.*

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## Fall River, Massachusetts Annual Youth Day - Family Day



by Subdeacon Brian Dunn

On October 24, 2015, the Parish of Saint Anthony of the Desert in Fall River, Mass., held its Annual Youth Day-Family Day at the Saint Sharbel Center. As part of the youth day, family members from the parish decorated their cars and trucks for our first Trunk-or-Treat. The parking lot was decorated with many cars that the children went to as part of the evening's events. The children also enjoyed pumpkin decorating. Pizza and refreshments were served for the families and the children. □



## St. Romanos the Melodist

Continued from page 11

He sang:

'Save the world, O Savior. For this you have come. Set your whole universe aright. For this you have shone on me and on the magi and on all creation. For see, the magi, to whom you have shown the light of your face, fall down before you and offer gifts, useful, fair and eagerly sought. For I have need of them, since I am about to go to Egypt and to flee with you and for you, my Guide, my Son, my Maker, my Redeemer, a little Child, God before the ages' *St. Romanos the Melodist, On the Life of Christ: Kontakia* (Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, tr.: Harper, San Francisco, 1995), p. 12.

St. Romanos went on to produce, it is believed, over a thousand hymns, of which around eighty-five still exist. □

(Rev.) David A. Fisher  
Philadelphia, Penn.

## Appeal from Caritas Lebanon

Christians in Lebanon are suffering! If you are able to relieve some of the suffering, please visit Caritas Lebanon at <http://www.caritas.org.lb>. Thank you for your consideration. □

