



The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

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Christmas 2016

Christmas Makes Us New Again

God is almighty, and yet he chose to become small, to enter his world humbly, to accept suffering and death, to show mercy to his enemies, and to reveal his extravagant love for us. If we are truly his sons and daughters, then we are, by our very nature, like him. Christmas, God's coming among us, makes us even more like him because we see with the eyes of our heart who he really is: Emmanuel, God among us. Christmas makes us new again.

Lebanon has a new President; so does the United States. Soon we will have a New Year. In the midst of all this "newness" we celebrate Christmas, when God became man and dwelled among us (John 1:14). For over two thousand years, our God, or as Saint Augustine refers to him in his Confessions, "Beauty, ancient, yet ever new," dwells with us.

At Christmas time, what is true for us today has also been true for every age since his first coming. Because of Christmas we too become small, enter our world more humbly; we too accept suffering and death, and show mercy to our enemies; we too witness to a God who became small in order to raise us up. "O Beauty, ancient, yet ever new," make us new again; reshape us in your image and likeness. Be for us the source and inspiration of our coming and going, and set us on the straight path that leads to you.

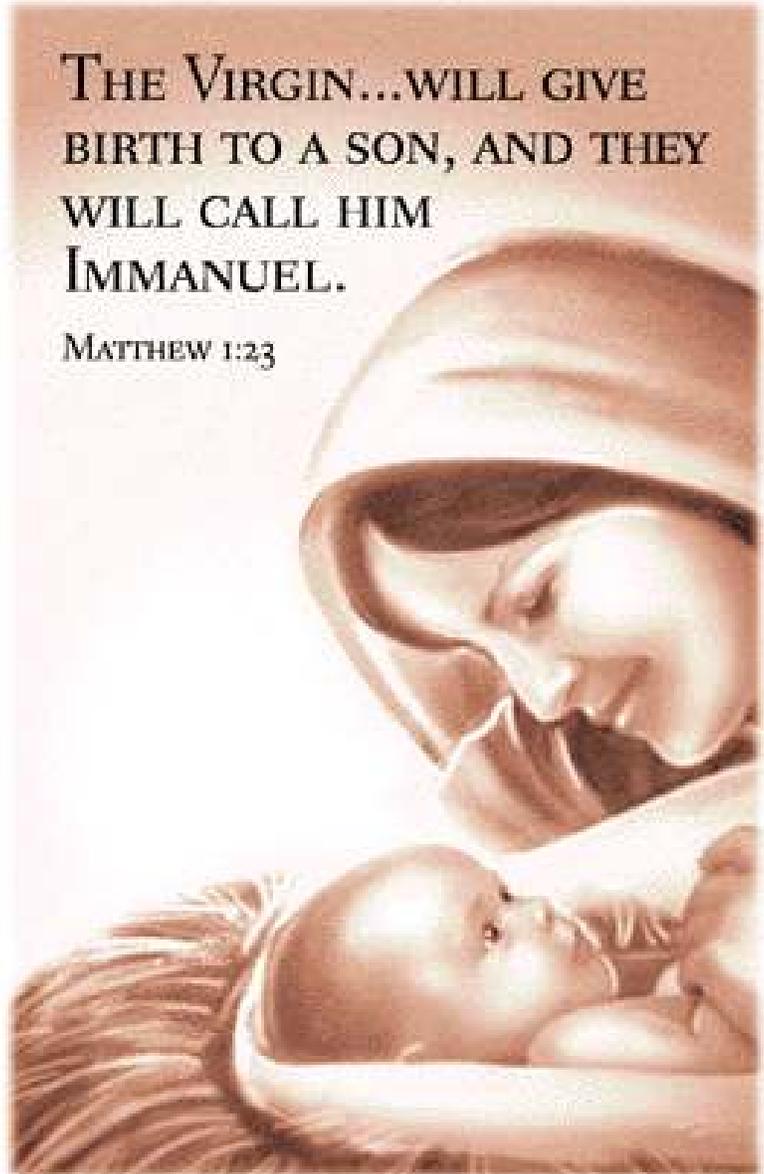
To you be glory forever!

Merry Christmas everyone!

+Gregory John Mansour
Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn

THE VIRGIN...WILL GIVE
BIRTH TO A SON, AND THEY
WILL CALL HIM
IMMANUEL.

MATTHEW 1:23



Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

December 4, 2016

Elevation of Msgr. Antoine Bakh to the honor of *Periodeut*, St. John Maron, Orange, Calif.

December 10 - 11, 2016

Pastoral Visit to St. Ignatius of Antioch, Dayton, Ohio

December 11, 2016

Pastoral Visit to the Maronite Community of Columbus, Ohio

December 18, 2016

Saint Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

December 25, 2016

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

January 1, 2017

Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon - St. Peter Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

January 6 - 8, 2017

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Church, Minneapolis, Minn. ☐

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

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Maronite Convention 2017

Saint Rafka Maronite Mission

Greenville, South Carolina

June 29 - July 2, 2017

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

Dartmouth, Massachusetts Women's Retreat

by Sister Natalie Sayde Salameh

The Maronite Servants Convent in Dartmouth, Mass., hosted and facilitated a day of retreat on Saturday, November 12, for young women on the theme: "Loved as I Am" (not 'who I want to be' or 'who people want me to be,' but just as I am). This is the way that God loves us.

The retreat began with Sr. Therese Maria asking, "What gives you purpose and meaning in your life? Why do you think that God created each one of us? What gives you value and self-worth?" The young women were encouraged to remain grounded in God's love for them, because in His love nothing can sway us, not even what people think of us. The day centered on this topic, and with videos and discussions, the women reflected on the truth of their dignity and beauty as daughters of the Father.

Mother Marla Marie and Sr. Therese Maria led a beautiful Eucharistic Adoration, and Fr. James Doran from St. Anthony of the Desert Church in Fall River offered the Mystery of Penance. The Sisters also taught them how to pray with the Word of God.

The afternoon concluded with a conference and group sharing on discerning one's vocation in life to help them discern God's particular path and how they are to find authentic love and fulfillment in their lives.

If you are interested in attending a similar retreat or hosting one in the parish, please contact the Maronite Servants at 508-996-1753 or by email at sister@maroniteservants.org. ☐



Brooklyn, New York *Jesus Run*

by *Salma Vahdat*

Acknowledging this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy and with tender compassion the Youth Organization of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y., along with Monsignor Jim Root, Rector, and several adult volunteers, committed themselves to an act of service towards the less fortunate on the streets of New York City on Friday, October 28, 2016.

This charitable gesture is not only an act of the Corporal Works of Mercy but a lesson to be learned by our youth on the needs of those less fortunate and our responsibility in listening to the homeless who are ignored and unnoticed by millions of people who pass by them every day.

The community donated more than \$750 to help defray the cost of much needed items like socks, hats, gloves, toothpaste, soap, hand sanitizers, water and much more. Three carloads of blankets, pants, sweatshirts, winter coats and jackets, shoes and other clothing items were donated by the parishioners as well. Marwan Dagher of *Le Saji* Restaurant donated more than 150 sandwiches for the effort.

The caravan from the Cathedral set off near midnight and stationed itself in front of the Franciscan Friary, St. Francis of Assisi Parish on 31st Street. Not only was it a wonder to have the children gently and lovingly dispense the clothing and food but a surprise to see many bystanders giving change, candy and a helping hand to all of us as well. "Many people thanked us for our Mission of Mercy," said Monsignor Jim. "We prayed with the youth and explained why we need to do these for the less fortunate," he continued. He was able to pray for some who felt abandoned, some from other cities trying to get back home, and some to have their dignity restored. He said no one seemed to be a drug addict or alcoholic. It was heartbreaking to see little old ladies who could have been youths' grandmas.

It was a sobering awakening, making real what we all imagine to be the plight of the homeless and disadvantaged. The community of faith of the Cathedral intends to do periodic "runs" into the new year. Mercy and Compassion is an all-year-round undertaking to bring us closer to Our Lord and Savior's admonition, "If you do this to the least of my brethren, you do it unto Me." □

Somerset, New Jersey *Food for the Homeless*

by *Deacon Joseph Chebli*

On November 5, 2016, the Youth Organization of St. Sharbel Church in Somerset, N.J., prepared food to feed the homeless. Teaming up with the Archangel Rafael Mission (ARM), the MYO prepared close to fifty sandwich bags to be distributed to the homeless in the neighboring New Brunswick. The founder of ARM met the youth and presented to them some of the challenges that face



the homeless as well as the needed aids. Every night ARM distributes food for the homeless in New Brunswick. Their mission is to seek the homeless and provide them with meals, sometimes sandwiches and other times hot meals. As the winter is getting closer, the MYO has pledged to contribute gloves, socks, hats, scarves and coats. □

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon *Pastoral Appointments*



His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, has made the following eparchial assignments effective on January 1, 2017:

- **Rev. John Nahal** from Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Milbrae (San Francisco), Calif., to Rector of St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.
- **Rev. Gary George CSsR** as Administrator of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Milbrae (San Francisco), Calif.
- **Rev. Freiha Akiki** as Administrator of St. Sharbel Mission, Baton Rouge, La., effective on December 8, 2016.
- After consultation with His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, **Rev. Albert Constantine** was appointed as Spiritual Director of the National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) effective on December 1, 2016. □



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Washington, D.C.*

For more information about the Order
ask your Pastor
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visit www.orderstsharbel.org. ☐

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 20th Anniversary of Ordination



by Gene Kail

On September 24, 2016, approximately 150 people gathered at Our Lady of Victory Church Hall in Pittsburgh, Penn., to pay their respects to Fr. Rodolph Wakim, their Pastor for nine years, on the twentieth Anniversary of his ordination. Many of his parishioners rose to speak their appreciation. One of the evening's main speeches was delivered by Dick Kail, Pastoral Council member, who reminded us:

"We celebrate *Abouna's* 20th anniversary, not because of the passage of twenty years -- the years were going to pass anyway....What we are really celebrating is how he used that time,... For the only way to conquer time is to use it to our advantage...."

Father Rodolph has used the time since his ordination to foster the spiritual growth of the hundreds of parishioners at the three parishes where he has ministered: Our Lady of Victory, St. Elias Church in Roanoke, Va., and St. Anthony of the Desert in Fall River, Mass.

From his youth he had manifested a vocation, according to several of his relatives who were invited for the evening's festivities, but he didn't find it practical to pursue it until his late twenties. He applied for the seminary program at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary in Washington, D.C. He was accepted, and completed his studies to be ordained in 1996.

Speaker after speaker praised him for his humanity, his humor and the care he shows for each one of them. Fr. Rodolph has always been very much a man of the people, keeping the message of salvation clear and simple. There were several priests in attendance, both Latin and Maronite, and Benedictine Father Boniface from St. Vincent Archabbey gave the invocation.

Therezia Alchoufete spoke for the Young Adults group, and Sharbel Sadaka, of the local MYO, presented Fr. Rodolph with a plaque from the parish.

The MYO youngsters also provided handmade posters, and then proceeded to make the most poignant speeches of the evening. Many of them thanked him for their faith, but one young boy brought down the house by thanking "*Abouna*" for making him "want to be a priest."

Father Rodolph closed the formal part of the celebration by thanking all of those present for helping him to become a better priest. ☐



Portland, Oregon *Ordination to Minor Order*



by Fr. Chris Fabre

The weekend of October 20, 2016, marked a historical event in the Maronite Church in the United States – Andre Karam of Saint Sharbel Church in Portland, Ore., was ordained to the Order of Cantors for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan. This is the first time in the United States that we will have an ordained permanent Cantor. Why is this significant? This is a return to our ancient Syriac customs, which all the other Syriac Churches still follow, as do the Byzantines. (The Latins also had minor orders before Vatican II.)

A natural question, then, is what is a cantor and why is someone ordained a cantor? Wasn't Andre singing before he was ordained? To begin, in our tradition, there are nine ranks of ordination (just as there are nine ranks of angels). St. Paul tells us in the Epistle to the Hebrews that our earthly worship reflects the heavenly worship of the angels (each rank of angel having their own task to perform), and the number of ranks is one of these commonalities. Just as each rank of angels has a task, so do our ranks or orders within the Church, and we sanctify (or set apart) men for a specific service. Until very recently, also following this idea of the earthly sanctuary reflecting the heavenly sanctuary, only ordained men were allowed to enter – and why in the ordination rite before Andre became a cantor, he sat outside the sanctuary. Once he was ordained, the Church officially authorized him to not only enter the sanctuary but chant the psalms (like the verse found between the Alleluias for the Gospel).

All the orders below priest in our Church (cantor, lector, subdeacon, deacon) are called *mshamshono* in Syriac (from

which we get our Arabic word *shammās*, deacon), because they *shamesh* or serve in the sanctuary. The custom was to ordain many men to incorporate them into this service and involve them intimately with service of God before His holy altar. It was their job to lead the people in responding to the priest in singing and helping the priest offer the sacrifice of the Mass. Andre's ordination to cantor is more than simply a commissioning – he has served St. Sharbel Church faithfully as choir director for a long time. Now he has been sanctified through the grace of the sacrament of Holy Orders (or ordination) to serve like an angel before God. Through this special grace, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan has called and blessed him to commit himself to this service.

We thank God for giving us Andre and blessing him with the opportunity to be an ordained Cantor. I hope that this is the first of many ordinations of laymen to the minor orders in the United States for the Maronite Church. Noteworthy about Mr. Karam – before marrying and becoming a father, he had explored the vocation of priesthood and attended the Maronite Seminary in Washington D.C., where he formally studied. Back at St Sharbel Church in Portland he has served the parish faithfully for almost twenty years, leading the parish in song during liturgy. □

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania *MYO Retreat*



MYO group picture of all those who attended the regional retreat at Our Lady of Victory Church in Pittsburgh, Penn.

by Peter Harb, MYO member from Cleveland, Ohio

On Saturday, November 5, 2016, MYO members from the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and the Eparchy of Saint Maron came together for a "Giving Thanks" Regional Retreat Day at Our Lady of Victory Church in Pittsburgh, Penn. Sister Therese Maria and Sister Marla Marie from the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light coordinated the retreat along with Rosa Calabria from Saint Maron Church in Youngstown, Ohio, and Christopher Nahra, Seminarian for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon. Father Rodolph Wakim, Pastor, graciously hosted more than fifty teens and chaperones from six surrounding Maronite parishes. We were blessed to have Fr. Claude Franklin from the Newcastle Parish and Fr. Baddoui Habib from the Uniontown Parish join us for the day and assist in Eucharistic adoration and hearing confessions.

The heart of the retreat day was "Giving Thanks" to God for the many gifts in our lives. In one of the small group activities creatively organized by Rosa Calabria the teens

wrote on pumpkins highlighting what they were grateful for. As the MYO family, this retreat day gave us the opportunity to come together to play, pray, and to thank and praise God like Mary, who magnified God for the great mercy he has shown to his people. The retreat day fittingly concluded with the Divine Liturgy celebrated by Fr. Wakim. A huge thank you goes out to all the organizers and attendees for a fulfilling day of prayer and thanksgiving!

2017 MYO Regional Retreats

March 11, 2017

MYO/MYA Mid-Atlantic Eastern Regional Retreat at Saint John Paul II Parish, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

March 31 - April 1, 2017

MYO Southern Regional Retreat at Saint Anthony Parish, Glen Allen, Va.

March 25 - 26, 2017

MYO Far Southern Regional Retreat at Saint Maron Parish, Jacksonville, Fla. ☐

Uniontown, Pennsylvania Bible School



by Mrs. Jennifer Neill

St. George Church in Uniontown, Penn., hosted a "Wild about Jesus" Vacation Bible School from June 13-17, 2016. Students in grades K-5 studied Bible lessons, sang songs, and made crafts that followed the jungle theme. Members of the St. George MYO served as helpers and teachers for the week-long event. On the last day of VBS, the children showcased the lessons and songs they learned in a presentation for family and friends.

Food Drive

by Karleigh Risha

The Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) of St. George Church, Uniontown, Penn., held an annual "Trunk or Treat" and "Food Drive" event on October 29, 2016. "Trunk or Treat" is an opportunity for the youth of the church

to parade in costume and receive treats from parishioners as well as a time for the parish to support the St. Vincent DePaul Society food bank. While the treats are being passed out, the MYO Members collect food and paper product donations. Following the Trunk or Treat, the MYO held a dance party for the parish children and families. It was a nice event for the children to enjoy, and it was great to give back to the community to help those in need. ☐

Tequesta, Florida Boxes of Joy



by Judy L. Harris

When you are forced to stop, literally stop, what you are doing and think about another person, especially a child, it can be an overwhelming feeling, a mixture of feelings really. We at the Mary, Mother of the Light Academy, and Mary, Mother of the Light Church, in Tequesta [Palm Beach], Fla., recently had the joy of such an experience.

Father Jack Morrison, Pastor, who is also the Chaplain at the local Knights of Columbus, partnered with them and had the children and parishioners fill a "Box of Joy" for a child living in Haiti, the Dominican Republic or Guatemala. Most of these children just suffered the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew. We had a tremendous response!

The children had much fun going "shopping for their friends" and filling up their Boxes of Joy with toys, bathroom necessities, clothes, books, snacks and all kinds of fun things. Most children wrote a note or card, and some added their pictures to their boxes for their new friends. It was a wonderful lesson in learning how to give. Talking with our four-year-olds about what they put in their boxes for their new friends was so precious! They were so excited and proud about what they had chosen!

Filling a shoe box with essentials and small toys to give a child who has essentially nothing makes one realize just how fortunate we truly are, just how much God has blessed us. As the Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons begin, we approach these holidays with hearts full of appreciation and blessings. ☐



Raleigh, North Carolina 20th Anniversary Celebration

by Mrs. Lisa Saleh

On Sunday, October 23, 2016, Rev. Elias Khalil and parishioners at the Saint Sharbel Maronite Mission in Raleigh, N.C., welcomed Bishop Gregory J. Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, to their 20-year anniversary celebration. Visiting priests that concelebrated the Divine Liturgy were Rev. Sam Najjar from St. Michael the Archangel Maronite Church in Fayetteville and the Rev. Joseph Thomas. Deacon Benny Yupanqui and Subdeacon Claude Shiver, as well as Subdeacon Chuck VanHeusen from St. Michael Church, also took part in the celebration.

Following an inspirational homily delivered by Bishop Gregory, representatives from a few of the 20-year families brought up the gifts. Six of the parish's young adults received their confirmation, and a baby was blessed as the newest member of the parish. The weekend culminated with a lunch reception prepared by members of the parish.

The anniversary weekend began with a dinner reception on Friday, October 21, hosted by Faris and Zeina Hanna at their Three Seasons Catering Hall in Durham. This was a joyous reunion for Fr. Joe Thomas, who was the founding pastor of the Saint Sharbel Mission. A highlight of the evening was a slideshow presentation with pictures and events from the past twenty years. The mission hopes to break ground on its church property in Morrisville, North Carolina, in the next few months. □



Bishop Gregory Mansour, Rev. Elias Khalil and Rev. Joseph Thomas along with members of St. Sharbel Mission cut a cake for the occasion.



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HAPPY AND BLESSED CHRISTMAS SEASON**



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Houston, Texas Lebanon Independence Day Banquet



From left: Fr. Yaghi, Dr. Sawaya, Dr. Habib, Fr. Hanna, and Dr. Nammour.

by Dr. Nicolas Nammour

On Saturday, November 19, 2016, Our Lady of the Cedars Church in Houston, Tex., commemorated the Independence Day of Lebanon. The evening started with the national anthem of the U.S.A. followed by the Lebanese national anthem, performed by the parish's Choir soloist, Mrs. Linda Koussa. Father James Shadid, Pastor of St. George Orthodox Christian Church, led the attendees in the opening prayer.

After a dinner of traditional Lebanese dishes mixed in with a variety of continental cuisine, the Master of Ceremonies, Dr. Nicolas Nammour, introduced the keynote speaker, Dr. Raymond Sawaya, a world-renowned neurosurgeon, listing his accomplishments and compelling life story as a successful immigrant.

Dr. Sawaya then gave a speech about the Lebanese diaspora and their successes, reflecting on his own experience and story. At the conclusion of his speech, Father Milad Yaghi, Pastor, and Dr. Gabriel Habib, the Parish Council President, presented Dr. Sawaya with a commemorative plaque in recognition of his excellence in Neurosurgical Oncology as a surgeon, researcher, and teacher.

The entertainment for the evening opened up with a *Dabke* dance presented by the MYO *dabke* group, followed by live singing by the famous singer Jabbour. The crowd danced and sang all night in a happy and cheerful atmosphere.

Our Lady of the Cedars Church is thankful to all the volunteers who tirelessly helped to make this sold-out event a huge success. □



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2017 MYO National Retreat

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

June 19 - 24, 2017



Visit Our Upcoming Retreat Location at:

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the Deadline is... **Deadline** for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is December 22, 2016. *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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Digital pictures must be in "JPG" format and in high resolution (300dpi). *The Maronite Voice* is also available online, in PDF format, at www.stmaron.org. □



Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

December 1, 2016

Catholic Relief Services Meeting, Baltimore, Md.

December 4, 2016

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

December 5 - 6, 2016

Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary, Washington, D.C.

December 6, 2016

Installation of Bishop Michael Burbidge, Arlington, Va.

December 11, 2016

Pastoral Visit, St. Sharbel Church, Somerset, N.J.

December 12, 2016

Eparchial Review Board for Protection of Children and Youth meeting, Washington, D.C.

December 13, 2016

Catholic University of America, Board of Trustees' Meetings, Washington, D.C.

December 14, 2016

Evening with men and women of the Cathedral Parish, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

December 17, 2016

Ordination of Robert Farah as a Deacon, Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Washington, D.C.

December 18, 2016

Parish Visit, Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Washington, D.C.

December 20, 2016

Christmas Novena, St. Ann Church, Watervliet [Troy], N.Y.

December 22, 2016

Christmas Novena, Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Waterbury, Conn.

December 24 - 25, 2016

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

December 26 - 31, 2016

Family Visit, Miami, Fla.

January 1, 2017

Parish Visit, Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Miami, Fla.

January 7, 2017

Parish Visit with Bishop Antoine Chbeir of Syria, Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Miami, Fla.

January 9 - 13, 2017

Annual Clergy Retreat, North Palm Beach, Fla.

January 13, 2017

Parish Visit with Bishop Chbeir, Mary, Mother of the Light, Taquesta, Fla.

January 14 - 15, 2017

Parish Visit with Bishop Chbeir, Heart of Jesus Mission, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. □

What Does God Ask Of Us? The Call To Holiness

by
Reverend David A. Fisher

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" Matthew 7:7 - 8, New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE).

So often it is easy to get so caught up in all the elements of "religion" and seeing the Church as an institution, that we forget the central mission of our Christian faith: the call to "put on Christ," to be holy. In the fourth beatitude, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). In other words, if we unceasingly seek, knock, hunger and thirst for the right relationship with God - if this becomes the desire of our hearts - it will be satisfied.

St. Augustine, after his journey which took over thirty years of his life to finally find Christ and embrace the faith exclaimed, "Our hearts are restless, until they rest in you" (St. Augustine, *The Confessions*). The holiness to which we are called is not found by reason, or strength of will, nor even moral perfection. On the contrary, it begins when we let go of the illusions of self-sufficiency and confess that each moment of our lives is dependent on God's grace. The seventeenth-century French philosopher and Christian Apologist, Blaise Pascal, expressed most eloquently our self-deception: "There are only two kinds of men: the righteous who think they are sinners and the sinners who think they are righteous" (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*).

The Christian faith is indeed an "Ascent of the Will" as Blessed John Henry Newman described it, an ascent or acceptance of belief in the propositions/doctrines of Christianity, what we commonly call orthodoxy/knowing the truth. However, just as with St. Augustine, the journey does not end there, for it also involves living the truth of Christianity, that is, orthopraxis/doing the truth. The epistle of James reminds us that, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17). The link and guidepost between knowing the faith and living the faith is prayer. That is why in the traditions of Eastern Christianity, those who are truly regarded as "theologians" are not the ivory tower academics but the solitaries, hermits, monks, ascetics, men and women who give their total lives to prayer.

The famous British convert to Catholicism, G. K. Chesterton wrote, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult; and left untried" (G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong With The World*). Judged by this world's standards of self-esteem, self-affirmation and material gain, the call to Christian holiness seems in comparison to be a failure, for the focus of one's life becomes less about myself and more about Christ and my neighbor. The Lutheran martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazi regime in Germany, felt that there could be no true Christian confession of faith that did not embrace Christlike suffering. Bonhoeffer once wrote that, "When Christ calls a person, he

bids them come and die" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*). While speaking primarily about the culture of nineteenth-century Denmark and the Protestant State Church, which he felt had nothing to do with true Christian discipleship, the Father of Existential philosophy Søren Kierkegaard, levies criticisms that are apt descriptions of our culture today: "Let others complain that our age is wicked; my complaint is... it lacks passion. Men's thoughts are thin and flimsy like lace ... They think that even if the Lord keeps a careful set of books, they may still cheat Him a little" (Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*). His criticism is that we Christians have become so "lukewarm" that our lack of passion does not spur us on to become great sinners, nor great saints!

What does God ask of us? The call to holiness is summed up for us in the Gospel of Matthew, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides" (Matthew 6:33). Saints are sinners who realize that all things of earth and flesh are passing, flickering lights that dim and die. Christ is the light that never fades. In his light there is no darkness, and his light is the path to our true and eternal home: the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The righteousness of Christ is the bond of love, the relationship of love we have with God, purchased through the blood on the Cross. Jesus taught us to love God with all our being, and to love our neighbor as if they were ourselves. This is the wisdom of holiness, this is what God asks of us. □



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 2017.



Three Lessons for Young Catholics

by
Bishop Robert Barron

Last week, I had the privilege of speaking to around nine thousand middle school and high school students from the Catholic schools of the Los Angeles Archdiocese. They were gathered in the cavernous Galen Center at the University of Southern California, and the atmosphere in the room was electric. There was a good deal of upbeat music and games, but when Archbishop Gomez processed into the arena carrying the Blessed Sacrament for Benediction, you could hear a pin drop. There is just something uniquely moving about seeing nine thousand energetic kids suddenly falling to their knees in silent adoration.

At the very end of the morning, I came on stage to address the crowd. My first move was to ask all of the young people to scream as loudly as they could. What ensued could be compared to about ten jet airplanes taking off at the same time, or, perhaps, to a Beatles concert circa 1964. When they finally settled down, I said, "I want you to remember that sound, because if we could harness that energy for the purposes of Christ, we could transform this entire city overnight." I do indeed believe that Vatican II's universal call to holiness is a largely unrealized dream. Most Catholics still don't get that their vocation is to carry their faith into the marketplace, into schools, into office buildings, into the corridors of government, into sports stadiums, and into the streets. I wanted those kids at USC at least to start thinking about this great mission.

I then shared three spiritual truths that I invited them to internalize. First, I said, if they want to be happy, they have to play an emptying game rather than a filling game. The secular culture, in a thousand ways, tells them that the key to happiness is filling up their lives with the goods of the world, more specifically, with money, sensual pleasure, power, and fame. Watch, I told them, practically any movie, listen to practically any popular song, attend to practically any pop star, and you'll hear this message over and over again, repeated *ad nauseam*. But precisely because we have all been wired for God, which is to say, for an infinite happiness, none of these finite goods will ever satisfy the longing of the heart. Indeed, the more relentlessly we seek them, the less satisfying and more addictive they become. The game, instead, should be contriving a way to make your life a gift. The formula behind this resolution, I explained, is rather straightforward. Since God alone fills up the emptiness of the heart, and since God is love, then only a life of radical love will actually fulfill us and make us happy. Though it conforms to the strictest logic, this message has always been hard to take in. It has always appeared as counter-cultural.

The second lesson I shared was this: Don't settle for spiritual mediocrity! Quite appropriately, we strive for excellence in every arena of life: business, sports, medicine, the arts, etc. But somehow we think it's alright to ignore the spiritual life or, if we think of it at all, to give it a modicum of our time and attention. But compared to worldly activities, the spiritual endeavor is infinitely more important, for it has,

literally, eternal implications. When the young Fr. Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) took young people on camping and kayaking excursions in the forests around Krakow in the mid-twentieth century, he was instilling in them a sense of the high adventure of life with Christ. At a time when the Communist government of Poland was endeavoring to stamp out the Catholic faith, Wojtyla was summoning his young charges to be saints. And when those kids came of age, they were the great Catholic business leaders, great Catholic writers, great Catholic scientists and politicians who spearheaded the revolution that eventually led to the breakdown of the Soviet Empire. They weren't satisfied being lukewarm Catholics, and neither, I told the young people at the Galen Center, should you.

The third spiritual lesson that I shared was this: Be rebels! We worship the crucified Jesus, someone who stood so thoroughly athwart the religious, cultural, and political powers of his time that they saw fit to put him to death. Every one of Jesus' apostles, with the exception of St. John, died a martyr's death. Every single bishop of Rome, for the first century of the Church's life, was put to death for his faith. And if you think the age of martyrs is over, I informed the young people, think again. The twentieth century had more who witnessed to the faith with their lives than all of the previous centuries combined. We Christians are a rebellious lot—and this should appeal to the idealism and contrary spirit of the young. And don't tell me that the rebels are singers and pop stars! Such people, obsessed with wealth, pleasure, fame, and power, are absolutely mainstream, run of the mill, ordinary as dirt. If you want to see a real rebel, I said, take a good hard look at the recently-canonized St. Jose Sanchez del Rio, the fourteen-year-old boy killed during the Cristero uprising in the early twentieth century. Tortured, mocked, forced to march on lacerated feet, shot on the edge of his own grave, he never renounced his Catholic faith. Stand, I said, with the great rebels in the company of Christ.

What a joy it was to see so many of our young people gathered together in fellowship and enthusiasm for the Lord Jesus. May their tribe increase! ☐

About the Author

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

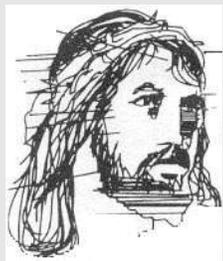


Mary, Mother of Vocations

by
Father Tony Massad

"**E**very aspect of priestly formation can be referred to Mary, the human being who has responded better than any other to God's call. Mary became both the servant and the disciple of the Word to the point of conceiving, in her heart and in her flesh, the Word made man, so as to give him to mankind. Mary was called to educate the one Eternal Priest, who became docile and subject to her motherly authority. With her example and intercession the Blessed Virgin keeps vigilant watch over the growth of vocations and priestly life in the Church" (*Pope John Paul II, I Will Give You Shepherds*, 1992).

In thinking about this article and what I



*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 10th 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

wanted to reflect on, I found myself staring at an icon of our Blessed Mother holding the child Jesus and asking myself, "What should I write?" After a while, I changed my focus and began to work on my homily for the Divine Liturgy for the upcoming Sunday. At the time we had celebrated the Annunciation and were approaching the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. While working on my homily it dawned on me, "Write something about our Blessed Mother." This almost certainly is a safe and fruitful path, and how could I go wrong?

Our Blessed Mother Mary is known by many beautiful and honorable titles, yet as I have grown in age and in my priesthood, there is one that I have come to respect her for that is very personal to me: Mary, Mother of Vocations. As St. Pope John Paul II so eloquently stated in his quote, "Every aspect of priestly formation can be referred to Mary." I did not recognize this early on in my vocation and priesthood. I have always loved our Blessed Mother and prayed for her intercession, but I did not seem to see her as one I could relate to in my vocation. She was and is a woman, and the mother of God, and I am a man who feels called to the priesthood. What do we have in common?

I have always been around good men and women who have had a devotion to our Blessed Mother. For the women, it made sense to me; they are women and they are mothers, a very clear connection. For the men, perhaps they see Mary as the epitome of the role of the mother, of a woman of great devotion, purity, and love. Yet, the similarities that I draw from my vocation and priesthood and our Blessed Mother's vocation have only more recently become evident to me.

Every day I pray the Angelus, a beautiful and powerful prayer that recalls God's choosing Mary and his invitation to her vocation, our Mother's answer of "yes" to her vocation in

following God's will, and the fulfillment of her vocation when her son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, is born. Through my recitation and meditation on this small prayer, I have come to see how Mary's vocation and the steps of her vocation is a model for my own vocation and priesthood. The beautiful words of St. Pope John Paul II now come to life in a new and rejuvenating way, in a way that makes real sense to me. Like our Mother I felt God inviting me to have a role in His plan and follow His will in my life. Like our Mother I, too, had to say "yes" to God, and must continue to do that every single day. Like our Mother who gave birth to Jesus and was by his side every day of His life, a messenger of the Gospel of Good News, I find myself trying my best to show Jesus Christ to the world, sharing His Gospel of Good News with my words and actions.

In looking critically at the life of our Blessed Mother, I can now see in a very real and impactful way how her vocation is not only a model for my vocation, but for our vocations. A real person chosen from humanity, in a society that was unforgiving, in a time where life was difficult, with circumstances beyond her control, Mary was called to heed God's will in her life. She made no excuses. She relied on her Lord, lived her faith, and followed her Son, Jesus Christ. Her example is extraordinary. We read in Scripture the episodes of our Lord Jesus' life and we can only imagine how His mother felt in seeing all of those trials and tribulations he endured. She, too, had trials and tribulations that she had to bear and, through all of that, she lived her life according to God's will and her vocation of being the mother of the Lord. In her fidelity our Lord gave her to us as our mother, a grace and gift of God our Father. Mary is our mother and the Mother of Vocations. With a heart full of joy and gratitude to our Lord, I can say Mary is the model of my vocation. □



The Gift of Spiritual Direction by Vivian M. Akel, LCSW

During this Christmas season, which has become synonymous with gift-giving, it is especially relevant to reflect upon the unique gift of Spiritual Direction.

Spiritual Direction is a relationship between a director and a directee aimed at fostering one's relationship with God. "Those who have regular Spiritual Direction should recognize it as a Gift from God" (Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*).

Each of us initially encounters God in our own way. It might be through our parents, our Church, or a personal life changing event or conversion. A Spiritual Director helps us respond to an invitation to a closer and greater union with God. When we become more open to God's presence in our lives, our inner freedom is increased, as is our feeling of gratitude.

Those not familiar with Spiritual Direction might ask what exactly does a director "do?" Although this is a question with a myriad of answers it is best answered by Barry and Connolly in their book *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*.

They describe the Director as one "listening empathically, paying attention, affirming, assisting in clarification, raising questions when the directee wants them and helping the directee to recognize the affective attitudes that influence his or her attitude towards God." In addition, the Director has the utmost responsibility to maintain absolute trust and confidentiality in the relationship with the directee.

There was a time when Spiritual Direction was recommended exclusively for members of the clergy and religious. However, lay people in many walks of life have been seeking out Spiritual Direction in their quests for a deeper relationship with God. Once a directee has made a commitment to Spiritual Direction he or she can expect to meet with the director monthly for a one-hour session. The relationship should be rooted in honesty and humility and in helping the directee discern the presence of God through the

Holy Spirit. If the Director is a priest a monthly session may end with Confession and absolution.

Our Christian life, a relationship between each of us and God, requires ongoing communication and conversation. The gift of Spiritual Direction can be described as "the Gift that Keeps on Giving." Over time it impacts every aspect of our lives as we grow in our relationship with God and others and become more and more generous and open to God's presence in our lives. □

Prayer For Priestly Vocations

Father, in every generation You provide ministers of Christ and the Church.

We come before You now, asking that You call forth more men to serve our eparchies in the ministerial priesthood.

Give us priests who will lead and guide Your holy people gathered by Word and Sacrament.

Bless us with priestly vocations so that we can continue to be a truly Eucharistic Church, strengthened in our discipleship of Jesus Christ, Your Only Son.

Raise up, we pray, men who are generous in their service, willing to offer their lives and all their gifts for Your greater glory and for the good of Your people.

We make our prayer in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, through Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.

San Antonio, Texas *52nd Magic is the Night Celebration*



Fr. Charles Khachan presents Minister Gebran Bassil with the flag of Texas flown over the Alamo.

by Regina Aune

Saturday night, September 24, 2016, was truly a magical night as St. George Maronite Church in San Antonio, Tex., celebrated its 52nd *Magic is the Night Gala* in the Phoenician Ballroom. The theme was a masquerade, and many guests wore creative and colorful masks to complement their evening attire. The St. George community was delighted to have Minister Gebran Bassil, Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, as the evening's honored guest. He spoke thoughtfully to the group regarding the challenges faced by Lebanon and the West because of current world events.

To honor his presence and participation in the gala, Minister Bassil was presented with several special gifts and remembrances of his visit. Former Judge Michael Lahood, on behalf of the City of San Antonio, presented His Excellency with the Alcalde Award, which appoints the recipient as Mayor of *La Villita*, old San Antonio, for one day. On behalf of Bexar County, District Attorney Nicholas Lahood presented His Excellency with the Hidalgo Award making him an honorable citizen of Bexar County. The two Awards are the city's and the county's highest awards. Fr. Charles Khachan, Pastor, presented Minister Bassil with a Texas flag flown over the Alamo in honor of his visit.

Also participating in the event and honored for their attendance were U.S. Army Major General (Retired) Simeon Trombitas and the San Antonio veterans representing Operation Comfort. The proceeds from the evening's Silent Auction were given to Operation Comfort, a local non-profit organization founded in 2004 to support the needs of wounded, ill and injured service members who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan and are recovering at the San Antonio Military Medical Center and the Audie Murphy VA Hospital in San Antonio.

The dinner featured traditional Lebanese fare. Music was provided by the Austin Nine, and entertainment was provided by the Lebanese Folk Dancers of St. George. The 2016 Ralph and Josephine Karam Award was presented during the

evening's festivities to Sandi and Gerry Karam for their leadership, faith and dedication to St. George Church. □

Charlotte, North Carolina *Bishop's Visit*



Bishop Gregory Mansour with members of the Maronite Mission in Charlotte, N.C.

On Saturday, October 22, 2016, His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, accompanied by Fr. Elias Khalil, Administrator, visited the young Maronite Mission in Charlotte, N.C. At a banquet honoring the visit, Amanda Nassar, a member of the Mission's youth group, welcomed the Bishop: "I'd like to welcome everyone today and acknowledge the loving presence of Bishop Mansour. This is a very special night for everyone and I am going to keep it short and sweet.

"One question always encourages me to be a part of this Maronite Church. What is so special about the Maronite Church? Is it different than the Roman Catholic Church? I have heard this question many times in my life. Why do I attend the Maronite Church when there are so many other religions to choose from? When I am asked this question, I usually refer to an analogy. All men are similar. They have heads, eyes, mouths, arms, and legs. Why would a woman choose one man over another? The response is simply because she fell in love with who he is. She loves the way he treats her, thinks, walks, dresses, talks, and the list goes on. He is different from the other men she has met. Analogously, all Churches are similar. However, they are also different. A believer who falls in love with God through the unique eyes of the Maronite Church chooses to remain in or join the Maronite Church. Who the Maronite Church is separates her from all other Churches and makes her attractive. Therefore, the need to be true to the heritage of the Maronite Church is essential to our evangelical Mission. This is why I love my Church. Jesus entrusted this Church to us so that we might live in harmony with him in Heaven. I attend our Maronite Church as much as I possibly can so that I may be filled with the food and drink Jesus is offering. Why do I go to church so often? Our approach to life cannot be emotional. It has to be faithful. Our approach cannot be preference, but

principles. People of preference do things the way they want or feel. People of principles do things according to principles founded upon the Truth, the Word of God, and stick to those principles. That is why I go to Church, to stick to the principles God wants for me and all of you. What kind of person will you be? My Maronite Church is a home for me; you all are my family. And like a family, we build each other up, not knock each other down. There is love, love like no other. You are my family, and I thank you for many memories that I have shared with you all and many more to come. And again, welcome Bishop Mansour, to Charlotte. ☐

Lakewood, Colorado Closing of the Door of Mercy



Article & Photo by Dennis Kolehmainen

In 2015, the Holy Father announced a Holy Year of Mercy to begin the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary. Pope Francis reminded us to not forget that God pardons always and that we should never tire of asking for forgiveness. Saint Rafka Maronite Church in Lakewood, Colo., was designated as one of the pilgrimage churches by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. The Door of Mercy at St. Rafka was opened on December 8, 2015, in a celebration that began with the reception of the Relics of St. Sharbel and continued with the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception with Bishop A. Elias Zaidan. After the Divine Liturgy, we were joined by the Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, Archbishop of Denver. Together, with Fr. Andre Mahanna, Pastor, the two bishops opened the Door of Mercy.

During the past year both parishioners from St. Rafka Church and other visitors and pilgrimage groups from the Denver area came through the Door of Mercy to seek

forgiveness and returned to our parish when we hosted the relics of Saint Anthony of Padua on October 14. The First Communicants celebrated the beginnings of their faith this past year with passage through the Door. This year, St. Rafka has begun a series of open community discussions called "Coffee with God" and conducted both ladies' and men's retreats.

The Year of Mercy was also marked with a number of ecumenical and interfaith events organized by Fr. Andre: an ecumenical prayer breakfast in May; an ecumenical dinner meeting attended by the Orthodox Metropolitan Isaiah; Archbishop Sam Aquila and retired Cardinal James Francis Stafford. Leaders from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Church Stakes of Northern Colorado, the Centennial Institute, and Colorado Christian University also attended. Finally, an interfaith meeting called "A Cry in the Desert" was held in Lakewood with the head Muslim Imam of the Colorado Muslim Society, Bishop Zaidan, and Orthodox and Jewish faith dignitaries at the headquarters of the Latter-Day Saints Church in Lakewood.

The Door of Mercy was closed November 13, 2016, by Father Andre Mahanna. The church was also blessed with a hundred-year-old Polish framed icon titled *Figura Cudownej Matki Bozej* or Miraculous Image of Our Lady. It beautifully portrays three women and one man looking upward into a tree whereupon appears the crowned Queen Mother Mary holding a crowned Baby Jesus. This icon now helps to seal the Door of Mercy from inside the sanctuary. ☐

Newtown Square, Pennsylvania Parade of Saints



On November 6, 2016, in honor of All Saints Day the children at St. Sharbel Church, Newtown Square, Penn., came representing Sts. Joseph, Anthony, Maron, Rafka, Elias, Sharbel, and the angels, The children processed to the Altar with Fr. Tony Mouanes, Pastor, and took their places in the Sanctuary while Moses read The Ten Commandments to the congregation. After the Divine Liturgy, the parents prepared for the *saints* and the parishioners. ☐



**MARONITES CONSECRATED
TO THE HEARTS OF MARY & JESUS**

**54TH ANNUAL CONVENTION
ST. RAFKA ♦ GREENVILLE SC
JUNE 29 - JULY 2 ♦ 2017**



Sponsored by National Apostolate of Maronites

Greenville, S.C., Home of the 54th National NAM Convention



by Bridget K. Nevin, Publications Chairperson

The 2017 NAM Convention is being held in Greenville, S.C. Do you wonder where Greenville is? Well, the city is in the northwest corner of the state, one hundred miles south of Charlotte, N.C., and 145 miles north of Atlanta, Ga. There is always something going on in Greenville. Its thriving downtown area is a hub of activity as it showcases various stores while preserving the natural trees, waterfalls and walking paths right downtown. There are walking tours you can take explaining the city's history, or participate in the Mouse on Main search for those who like to investigate while walking. There are Segway tour for those that want a new adventure. There are over 170 local shops/businesses in the downtown area. Today, there are over 250 international companies from twenty-six countries in Greenville. Not only is the sunshine warm and inviting, so is the Reedy River with its picturesque landscape. In this link, there is a great tour of the downtown area of rooftop restaurants, hotels, and the suspended bridge which is in Reedy River Park. Greenville also offers a variety of culinary tours which include BBQ trail, The Chef's table Culinary tour and more. Greenville's brightest spot is "Downtown" because it has the park, arts and theater, restaurants and walking paths all close to the Hyatt where the convention is being held.

Greenville was voted by Forbes as being in the top twenty cities with the best bang for the buck. Located at the foothills

of the Blue Ridge mountains, this gives visitors more options to hike, camp or cycle. The beaches are only three hours away if you want to do sightseeing and enjoy the sun. Greenville is the cultural and entertainment center of the upstate area hosting events and concerts throughout the year.

Among the many activities are festivals like Fall for Greenville in October which has music, food and lots of fun to offer visitors. In May the Artisphere brings out the restaurants and artists to the public to view, taste and purchase, and a Greek Festival with food, cultural vendors and dancing.

The Peace Center for the Performing Arts contains a theater and concert hall as well as an outside stage for musical concerts and movie nights. This is just a taste of what Greenville has to offer its visitors.



Reedy River suspended bridge.

During the 2017 NAM Convention there will be workshops, Lebanese authentic dishes, entertainment and an opportunity to meet as the Maronite community from around the world. The convention is planned for June 29 to July 2, 2017. St. Rafka Mission will be hosting this convention and is looking forward to sharing time with both clergy and laity while fostering growth and awareness of the Maronite Church. The Hyatt Regency is the hotel which exudes Southern Hospitality by making you feel right at home. Room reservations will be available within the next few weeks by logging into www.namnews.org.

The 54th Maronite Convention is sponsored by the National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) and is hosted by Saint Rafka Mission in Greer [Greenville], S.C. For more information about the Convention, NAM, and its activities, please log on to www.namnews.org. □



Nearly One Billion People Passed Through Holy Doors During Year of Mercy

Events organized in Rome for the Jubilee Year drew 21.3 million pilgrims, Archbishop Rino Fisichella informed reporters at a November 21, 2016, briefing. Archbishop Fisichella - who as President of the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization had primary responsibility for organizing the Vatican's observance - estimated that nearly one billion people passed through a Holy Door somewhere in the world during the Year of Mercy. On a worldwide basis, he said, "the average participation among the Catholic population as a whole was between 56% and 62%." He said that these statistics were based on reports from "some important dioceses around the world."

The archbishop also called attention to the large number of pilgrims who traveled to Catholic shrines: Twenty-two millions to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico; three millions in Krakow, and an all-time record at Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

In Rome, the archbishop said, the greatest number of pilgrims registered for Jubilee events were, not surprisingly, Italian. They were followed by German-speaking pilgrims, Americans, Poles, and Spanish. But the list also included visitors from China, Chad, Rwanda, Nepal, and the Cook Islands. "In short," Archbishop Fisichella said, "we can say that the whole world has come to Rome. □

(CWNNews, November 22, 2016)

Bishop Gregory Mansour Named Chairman of CRS

Bishop Gregory John Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, was today [November 22, 2016], named chairman of the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) board of directors by Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, the newly elected president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).



Bishop Mansour, a CRS board member since 2012 who serves on its Overseas Operations and Audit committees as well as the Advisory Committee on Catholic Identity, succeeds Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, who has been chairman since 2013. Archbishop Coakley will continue to serve on the CRS board.

"I am at once humbled and honored to be able to lead an organization so committed to assisting our brothers and sisters in need wherever they live," said Mansour, who is bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. "Over the

years, I've seen the great work done on behalf of Catholics in the United States to ease the suffering and improve the quality of life of millions of people living in extreme poverty or fleeing conflict around the world. It is truly an honor to be part of this great organization carrying out the Gospel."

"We are grateful for Bishop Mansour in accepting the appointment of chairman of the board of CRS and in overseeing the important work they do throughout the globe to bring aid and hope to so many," said Cardinal DiNardo. "Bishop Mansour's long-standing service in every area of the work of CRS is completed by his pastoral concern for the humanitarian efforts of CRS in the Middle East and on behalf of persecuted Christians."

"I also wish to express my gratitude for the tremendous contributions made by Archbishop Coakley for his tireless work as chairman of the CRS board over the past three years. His leadership, most particularly in those areas of assistance to those in regions of conflict and poverty, is deeply appreciated," DiNardo said.

As a board member, Mansour has traveled to Lebanon and Jordan to witness firsthand the Syrian refugee crisis, and also to Egypt and El Salvador where CRS works on programs like peacebuilding and with at-risk youth, respectively.

"We have worked with Bishop Mansour for the last four years and know and appreciate his commitment to the poor," said Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo, President and CEO of CRS. "I know everyone at CRS looks forward to his leadership as we work together to address a wide variety of challenges that affect so many members of God's family. And I'm profoundly grateful for Archbishop Coakley's leadership, guidance and support. He unfailingly responded to all our inquiries promptly with valuable spiritual and practical wisdom. He demonstrated enthusiasm for our work and affirmation for all our colleagues, particularly those at the front line."

Bishop Mansour was named as Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn in January 2004 by Pope John Paul II and was ordained in Lebanon by Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir in March 2004. After receiving a bachelor's degree in Health Education from Western Michigan University, he entered Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary in Washington, D.C., and was ordained a priest in 1982. In 1981 and 1983 he received an STB degree from The Catholic University of America and the STL degree in Spiritual Theology from the Gregorian University in Rome. He is a member of the Maronite Synod of Bishops. □

(CRS, November 22, 2016)

Catholic Relief Services is the official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States. The agency alleviates suffering and provides assistance to people in need in more than 100 countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality. CRS' relief and development work is accomplished through programs of emergency response, HIV, health, agriculture, education, microfinance and peacebuilding. For more information, please visit crs.org or crsespanol.org and follow CRS on social media: Facebook, @CatholicRelief, @CRSnews, YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest.

U.S. Bishops Discuss Ways the Church in American Can Assist Persecuted Christians in the Middle East

Bishop Gregory J. Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn introduced a discussion today, during the U.S. Bishops' Fall General Assembly, on ways the Church in the United States can assist persecuted Christians in the Middle East.

"Although the vast majority of today's refugees are non-Christian; the vast majority of those who serve them are Christians, who continue to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth," Bishop Mansour said. "Today Christians are more united than ever, through a common suffering, a common martyrdom, and a common assistance given to those in need."

The efforts to improve assistance and support Christians in the Middle East cover three main focus areas: advocacy, humanitarian aid, and ecumenical support.

In the area of advocacy, the bishops urge the U.S. government to increase U.S. humanitarian aid and development assistance for refugees as well as internally displaced persons and those countries in the region hosting large refugee populations. The bishops also urge the U.S. Government to promote peace in the region and encourage the building of inclusive governments while working with other nations to stand against ISIS and hold them accountable for their genocidal acts.

Regarding humanitarian assistance, efforts include: developing a plan to assist Iraqi and Syrian Christians in the future in rebuilding churches, hospitals, schools, homes and livelihoods; the promotion of a linking (twinning) of parishes and dioceses between the U.S. and Churches in the Middle East; and continued funding efforts for various Catholic charities including Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) and Knights of Columbus (K of C).

Efforts in the area of ecumenical and interreligious support include: working ecumenically with interfaith partners to draw attention to the need for basic human rights, full citizenship rights and religious freedom for people in the Middle East; collaborating with human rights and refugee organizations to highlight the crisis and advocate for measures to alleviate suffering; and strengthening ecumenical and interreligious outreach to deepen witness and foster respect and support for Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East.

The USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace coordinates and leads the U.S. Bishops' advocacy for persecuted Christians and other minorities in cooperation with the Knights of Columbus, In Defense of Christians, and CRS. □

(USCCB, Office of Public Affairs, November 15, 2016)

Pope Closes Extraordinary Jubilee Year, Calls Faithful to Follow Christ's Kingship of Mercy

Closing the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis concluded the extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy with Mass in St. Peter's Square. The Jubilee Year—the first since the great jubilee of the year 2000—began on December 8, 2015, the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, and concluded on November 20, 2016, Solemnity of Christ the King.

Christ's "kingship is paradoxical: his throne is the cross; his crown is made of thorns; he has no scepter, but a reed is put into his hand; he does not have luxurious clothing, but is stripped of his tunic; he wears no shiny rings on his fingers, but his hands are pierced with nails; he has no treasure, but is sold for thirty pieces of silver," Pope Francis preached.

"It would mean very little, however, if we believed Jesus was King of the universe, but did not make him Lord of our lives: all this is empty if we do not personally accept Jesus and if we do not also accept his way of being King," the Pope continued, as he reflected on the bystanders at the crucifixion as well as the good thief.

The Pope concluded:

But even if the Holy Door closes, the true door of mercy which is the heart of Christ always remains open wide for us. From the lacerated side of the Risen One until the very end of time flow mercy, consolation and hope.

So many pilgrims have crossed the threshold of the Holy Doors, and far away from the clamor of the daily news they have tasted the great goodness of the Lord. We give thanks for this, as we recall how we have received mercy in order to be merciful, in order that we too may become instruments of mercy.

Let us go forward on this road together. May our Blessed Lady accompany us, she who was also close to the Cross, she who gave birth to us there as the tender Mother of the Church, who desires to gather all under her mantle. Beneath the Cross, she saw the good thief receive pardon, and she took Jesus' disciple as her son. She is Mother of Mercy, to whom we entrust ourselves: every situation we are in, every prayer we make, when lifted up to his merciful eyes, will find an answer. □

(CWNNews, November 21, 2016)

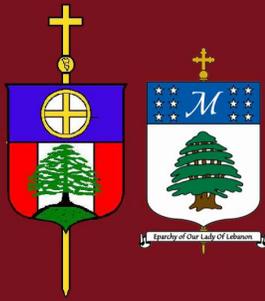
How much I desire that the years to come will be full of mercy, so that every person can experience the goodness and tenderness of God!

Pope Francis, November 22, 2016

May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!

Pope Francis, November 20, 2016





Effective Ways You Can Help Your Eparchy!

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

Legacy Giving

This is a creative way to support the Church. Legacy Giving can involve contributing through your *will, insurance policy, or retirement assets.*

You can get a tax deduction today and provide yourself with a steady source of income in future years through a *charitable trust.*

How to Remember Your Church in Your Will

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 _____% 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 _____% 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* that have increased in value can be 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
718-237-9913 or 314-231-1021
saintmaron@yahoo.com or
maroniteswest@yahoo.com

Portland, Oregon Order of St. Gregory



Bishop A. Elias Zaidan with Mr. and Mrs. Elie Kassab.

by Fr. Chris Fabre

Celebration was already in the air on October 30, 2016, at St. Sharbel Parish in Portland, Ore., following the first historic ordination of a parishioner to the Order of Cantor. Prior to the annual parish fall dinner, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, conferred a special honor on behalf of Pope Francis on Elie Kassab. The Holy Father conferred the prestigious title of Knight in the Pontifical Equestrian Order of St. Gregory to

Elie Kassab – an award which recognizes outstanding contribution and service to one's community.

At the end of the liturgy celebrated by Bishop Zaidan, the official letter from the Holy Father and the insignia – an eight-pointed cross on a ribbon – was presented to honor Mr. Kassab for his exceeding generosity in supporting both St. Sharbel Parish and the newly established Monastery of the Maronite Monks of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in Washington State. Mr. Kassab graciously accepted the honor saying, "I never knew about the Order itself and, more than that, I never expected rewards for my charitable deeds – I am humbled by the honor bestowed upon me by the Holy See and Pope Francis."

Mr. Kassab is a successful businessman in property development who has not withheld his support from the Church, to say the least. He has and continues to magnanimously follow the precepts of the faith and temporally support the service of the Church. Not only has Mr. Kassab exhibited a financial generosity but one of heart.

The Pontifical Equestrian Order of St. Gregory the Great, one of the five great Orders of Knighthood given by the Holy See, is conferred to men and women of outstanding communal example who support the Church. It was established in 1831 by Pope Gregory XVI as a namesake in honor of St. Gregory the Great. Some of the individuals with whom Mr. Kassab shares the prominent distinction are members of government, such as a Parliament member of Britain and the first Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Olympic athletes, artists, scientists, judges and philanthropists of all suits. □

