



The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

Volume XII

Issue No. II

February 2016

Can We Really Say We Love God, But Hate Our Brother or Sister?

In the First Letter of St. John, the Apostle tells us, "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20).

During this Holy Year Pope Francis has called on us to be channels of God's mercy and forgiveness. Sometimes we wonder what this may mean or how we can respond to this call from the Holy Father. The proverb "Charity begins at home" certainly rings true. Mercy starts by having peace and joy in our own heart first. Then, it extends to family members, to relatives, to the community and society at-large.

The Bible tells us this as well. "And whoever does not provide for relatives and especially family members has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). I believe that as children, it is in the family and in the home that we learn our faith and we learn how we are to interact and relate with other people. It is in the home that children experience mercy and forgiveness. Of course, while it may begin with family and home, it never stops there, but it must begin there.

To love God and not love others, especially those who are closest to us by nature, is opposite of what the Christian faith is all about. "One of the Pharisees, a lawyer, asked Jesus a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22: 35-39). We simply cannot separate our love of God from our love of others.

Love is not just a feeling, an emotion. To "love" someone is really an act of the will. That is, it is not just how we may feel at any given moment. We love by choosing to love. Our love is shown in our actions towards others. When we extend mercy to others by forgiving their offenses against us,



we are doing what God does. Forgiveness says to the other, "I forego my desire for revenge or retribution." Just as God has forgiven us of our sins - that deserve our just condemnation - we should do the same. Thus, mercy is the supreme love as we assure the people who hurt us that we still love them despite all the pain and suffering.

Pope Francis, in his Wednesday audience on November 4, 2015, highlighted the importance of forgiveness within the family: "One cannot live without seeking forgiveness, or at least, one cannot live at peace, especially in the family. We wrong one another every day. We must take into account these mistakes, due to our frailty and our selfishness. However, what we are asked to do is to promptly heal the wounds that we cause, to immediately re-weave the bonds that break within the family. If we wait too long, everything becomes more difficult. There is a simple secret to healing wounds and to avoiding recriminations.

(Continues on page 20)

Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

February 6 - 7, 2016

Pastoral Visit to Our Lady's Church, Austin, Tex.

February 8, 2016

Ash Monday, St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

February 9, 2016

Feast of St. Maron and Pastoral Visit to Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Norman, Okla.

February 11, 2016

Talk and Divine Liturgy at St. John Seminary, Camarillo, Calif.

February 13 - 14, 2016

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

February 20, 2016

Divine Liturgy at St. Jude Maronite Church, West Covina, Calif.

February 21, 2016

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

February 26 - 28, 2016

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Church, Cleveland, Ohio

March 4 - 6, 2016

Pastoral Visit to St. Joseph Church, Phoenix, Ariz.

March 7, 2016

Caritas Lebanon Board of Directors Meeting, Chancery Office, St. Louis, Mo.

March 9 - 11, 2016

Catholic Eastern Bishops' Meeting, Chancery Office, St. Louis, Mo. □

The Maronite Voice

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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

Clinton Township, Michigan Ladies Altar Society Annual Christmas Luncheon

The Annual Christmas Luncheon hosted by the Ladies Altar Society of St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church of Clinton Township, Mich., was held on Wednesday, December 9, 2015, at the Fern Hills Country Club in Clinton Township. As in years past, the event was well-attended and all enjoyed a meal, desserts and a raffle of gift items! Every guest was given a goody box of home-baked cookies by members of the Ladies Altar Society to take home. Everyone joined Chorbishop Alfred and members of St. Sharbel Choir in singing Christmas carols. A sincere thank you to Vicki Bojalad and Ann Marie Ferris for coordinating this event. □



Scottsdale, Arizona

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon Annual Clergy Retreat

by Deacon Lou Peters

On January 11 - 15, 2016, Bishop Elias Zaidan and Bishop Emeritus Robert Shaheen and the clergy of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles participated in their annual retreat at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona. For the past few years, St. Joseph Maronite Parish in Phoenix, Ariz., and Father Wissam Akiki, its pastor, hosted the gathering.

The retreat was led by Father Dave Heney, a priest of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. He is the author of *Motivating Your Parish to Change*, a book on spiritual leadership from Resource Publications, and the author of *Don't Tell Me What to Do!*, a concise Catholic view of modern moral issues which was published by Paulist Press in 2002. Fr. Heney is currently writing two practical *How-To* manuals for priests and pastors: one on developing large adult education programs in parishes and the other on parish leadership.

In his presentations, Fr. Heney stressed the importance of ministering to people in the same way that Jesus did, with Jesus as the role model. Among the strategies he shared is having a positive and optimistic view of life, taking the first step to reach out to people, understanding and being involved in the lives of those to whom we minister, doing good among the people, and ultimately proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The Retreat also allowed time for fraternal sharing and social activities. The four-day retreat was a positive experience for all those who participated. □



Denver, Colorado

Opening of the Holy Year Door

by Fr. Andre Mahanna

December was an exceptional month for St. Rakfa Maronite Church in Denver, Colorado. Having been designated by His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon as a Pilgrimage Church for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Parish team realized the Church needed a *Holy Door*. Thanks to the efforts of Paul Conkling, parishioner, and a parish friend, Tom Gruber, the door was designed, built and installed on December 8, 2015, just before the Parish welcomed Bishop A. Elais Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and the Relics of St. Sharbel. Bishop Zaidan opened the Holy Year of Mercy by celebrating the Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. At the end of the Divine Liturgy, His Excellency Samuel J. Aquila, Archbishop of Denver, arrived to venerate the Relics of St. Sharbel. The two bishops together opened St. Rafka's *Holy door*.

Many visitors came over the next two days to venerate the Relics, celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, walk through the *Holy Doors*, and to listen to one of Fr. Andre's talks on Saints or on Divine Mercy. □



Bishop Zaidan incenses the Relics of St. Sharbel while Fr. Andre Mahanna is at the altar.

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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 U.S.A. For more information about the Order ask your Pastor, visit www.orderstsharbel.org, or write to:

Eparchy of Saint Maron
109 Remsen Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201
or

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
1021 South 10th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104 ☐

North Palm Beach, Florida *Wounded Souls and the Salvation of the Cross*



The Eparchy of Saint Maron met once again for its annual clergy retreat held in North Palm Beach, Florida, on January 11 - 15, 2016. The message from the Retreat Master, Rev. James Hess, O. Carm., was warm and reassuring as he touched on many important aspects of the priest's ministry.

The retreat began with Eucharistic Adoration to prepare for a week of inspiration and renewal followed by a very moving talk by Bishop Mansour.

Fr. James focused on the Epistles of St. Paul and the symbol of the Cross, a symbol we are all too familiar with and a symbol we may, at times, take for granted. The Cross, once a symbol of shame and punishment became a symbol of victory and salvation for us poor sinners through Jesus Christ, a symbol that St. Paul boasts about---a symbol that explains a broken world but as Fr. James reminds us it also made a broken world right.

We are all wounded souls in this world, sharing in the redemptive suffering through the Cross. What is most important is that we do not stand in judgment of all the wounded souls that we are entrusted with but that we meet these wounded souls with mercy and compassion just as Jesus did throughout his ministry. Jesus embraced sinners; Jesus always had time for sinners; Jesus called sinners to Him with mercy, love, and understanding, and by doing so He drew them closer to God.

This is our mission as a Catholic community. This is our mission as priests and religious. When we meet people where they are we, as a community, bring healing to the wounded souls in need of God's love. They see that we are not sitting in judgment but rather we stand in God's mercy showing that healing can happen in the Christian community when we trust one another and help each other to come to Jesus so He can truly touch our lives.

Fr. James made a comment that will forever be in our minds and hearts. As priests we cannot sit in judgment of other people's sins, to make them feel judged or condemned. What we must do is show compassion and love and to show them the redemptive salvation of the Cross, the same message that Pope Francis brings to the world and the same message he brought to the U.S. By his actions he is an example of bringing people closer to Jesus through mercy and compassion.

On Wednesday, Chorbishop Michael Thomas and the parishioners of Heart of Jesus Mission in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., invited the priests for a Divine Liturgy followed by a luncheon prepared by the parishioners.

The retreat was a time to pray, rejuvenate, and renew our priesthood so that we can continue to save all of the wounded souls in this world including our own. I am confident that through the help of Fr. James Hess, we are on the right road once again. ☐

New Bedford, Massachusetts Christmas Pageant



2015 OLOP Christmas Pageant
December 12, 2015

On Saturday, December 12, 2015, the youth of Our Lady of Purgatory Church in New Bedford, Mass., presented the annual Christmas Pageant. The program included an original play entitled *With Open Hearts* which tells of the quest of three shepherds to bring the perfect gift to the newborn Christ Child in the manger and an original series of vignettes set to music entitled "The Heart of Christmas" which highlights the impact on people's lives by love at Christmas. The program also included a Christmas Meditation offered by Deacon Jean Mattar and caroling led by the children which included both English and Arabic Christmas Carols. Over twenty-five children, ranging in age from Pre-School to Seniors in high school, participated in the Pageant. Over seventy parishioners and friends of Our Lady of Purgatory Church attended the Pageant and the reception that followed. During the reception, each child in attendance received a small box of Christmas candy, and each family received a Christmas candle. The children would like to thank Fr. Fadi Rouhana, the newly appointed Administrator at Our Lady of Purgatory, all of the adults who helped prepare the Pageant and the reception afterwards and all who attended for making the Pageant such a success. □

Eparchy of Saint Maron Liturgy of the Oils

Bishop Gregory Mansour will celebrate the Liturgy of the Oils (Chrism Mass) on March 16, 2016, at one o'clock at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, New York. A luncheon will follow in the Cathedral's lower social hall.

To RSVP please call Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral at (718) 624-7228 or email cathrectory@verizon.net. □

Akron, Ohio Religious Art to Honor Sanctity of Life



From left to right are Bishop Elias Zaidan, Dr. Richard Maroon, and Msgr. Bill Bonczewski.

by Msgr. Bill Bonczewski

Dr. Richard Maroon, a gifted artist at our Lady of the Cedars of Mt. Lebanon Church in Fairlawn [Akron], Ohio, created an image of Mother and Child under the title of Mary Mother of Life and Mother of Perpetual Grace from a true story about his sister and her pregnancy of six years ago. The Sanctity of Life Office of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon made the request for this project with the intentions of making the moving life story and the painting available to anyone who asks for them. This story has much meaning and is a valuable lesson for the good of the Sanctity of Life, especially at this time.

Dr. Maroon's sister carried her second child in 2010. All the family was anxious and waiting to welcome the newest member of the family. Just weeks before the birth, the mother detected that there was no movement in the womb. She wanted to keep the baby until it was born. Finally the day came and the baby entered the world before arriving at the hospital and was born without life. Much pain and sadness overwhelmed the parents and all the family.

To honor this special project of a new gift of religious art, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, unveiled and blessed the new image at a Pontifical Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6, 2016. The timing was just right because the month of January is well-known for the Annual March for Life in Washington and throughout all our nation as we all join together to pray for the protection of the unborn and respect all life.

A reception in honor of Bishop Zaidan took place in the social hall following the Liturgy and the Parish presented him with a \$4,000 special contribution for the greater needs of Caritas Lebanon.

For a copy with more details about this story contact the Sanctity of Life Office at 330-666-3598 or email ourladyofthecedarschurch@gmail.com. □



You are Invited ... to Support



Each year during Lent, the two Maronite Eparchies in the United States invite all members of the faithful to support the Annual Appeal taking place in each Eparchy. The proceeds of the Annual Appeal are used by the Eparchies to support the following:

- **Education of Seminarians.** Both Eparchies have been blessed with an increasing number of seminarians in recent years, but this also presents a financial challenge, as the average cost of preparing a seminarian is about \$40,000 per year. Your support helps pay for the seminarians' tuition, lodging, food, books, health insurance and other costs.



- **Ministries to Serve the People.** The Eparchies have several offices dedicated to serving the faithful. These offices include Religious Education, Youth Ministry, Family and Sanctity of Life, Liturgy, Care Ministry and others. Their goal is to help each person grow closer in their relationship to Jesus Christ.



- **Opening New Parishes.** There are several states in which there is no Maronite parish, and in some places people must drive several hours to get to the nearest Maronite parish. The Eparchies are opening new parishes – called “missions” – to bring the Church closer to people and help them stay close to the Church of their forefathers. These new parishes often need financial assistance until they can support themselves and, one day, support other new parishes.
- **Care for Retired Priests.** There are several retired priests in each Eparchy, men who served our faithful parishioners for so many years. These good men deserve adequate financial assistance from the Eparchies to live their retirement in dignity.
- **Modern Communications to Serve the Faithful.** The Eparchies strive to use the latest technology to spread the Good News and minister to people. In addition to the *Maronite Voice*, the Eparchies feature blogs, apps for the iPhone and Android, websites and other communication vehicles.





the Annual Eparchial Appeal!



- **Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary and the National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon.** The Maronite Seminary in Washington, DC, and the Maronite National Shrine in North Jackson, Ohio, are part of the spiritual heritage of every Maronite in America and need financial help.



- **The Suffering Church in Lebanon and the Middle East.** Both Eparchies help the Church overseas in so many ways: by providing direct financial assistance, connecting their Church leaders to American benefactors, publicizing their needs in the media, helping them apply for grants, and in other ways. Part of the proceeds of the Annual Appeal are allocated for this effort.



MAKE YOUR DONATION IN YOUR PARISH:

Please bring your gift to your Maronite parish on any Sunday in Lent in a special envelope marked “Annual Appeal”.

OR, TO MAKE YOUR DONATION ONLINE, GO TO:

Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn
www.stmaron.org/donate.html

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
www.eparchy.org or by app

OR, TO MAKE YOUR DONATION BY MAIL, SEND YOUR DONATION TO:



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109 Remsen Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201



Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
1021 S. 10th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104

Your generosity empowers the Maronite Church to carry forth the Gospel message in today’s world. Gifts in any amount are appreciated, and all gifts will be used wisely. May God bless you for your sacrificial gift this Lent!

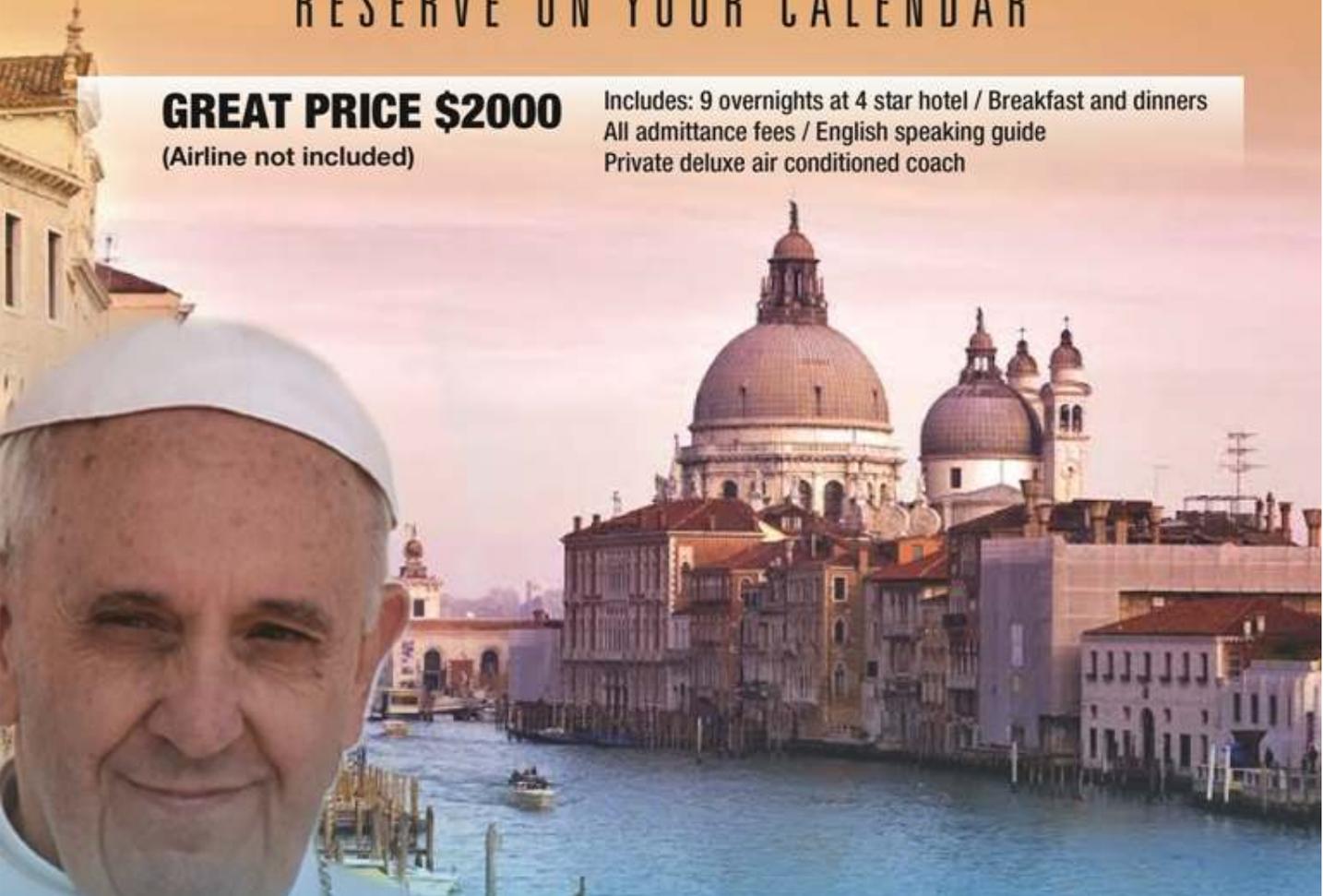
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MARONITE MERCY PILGRIMAGE

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MAY 25 – JUNE 4, 2016

Join Bishop Elias Zaidan on a special Maronite Pilgrimage
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Basilica of St. Paul / Basilica of St. John in Lateran / Sancta Sanctorum / Vatican Gardens / Basilica of St. Cross
in Jerusalem / Shrine of San Padre Pio / Monte Cassino (St. Benedict).

Papal Audience with Pope Francis / Liturgy at St. Peter's Basilica

For more information, please email us at MaroniteMercyPilgrimage@gmail.com
or call Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun at (612) 379-2758. Seats will be limited.

Glen Allen, Virginia Year of Mercy Pilgrimage



by Cathy George

The parishioners of Saint Anthony Maronite Church in Glen Allen [Richmond], Virginia, wanted to celebrate Saint Anthony's Feast Day and the Year of Mercy in a unique and memorable way. On Saturday, January 16, 2016, parishioners of all ages caravanned to the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., for a pilgrimage. Eddie Shibley said, "I thought the idea of going on a pilgrimage was a great idea!" Seventy-five others agreed with him and signed up for the trip. Their first stop was the beautiful Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Chapel in the Basilica where they celebrated liturgy. The Basilica staff were kind enough to provide chairs and a sound system for the large group outside of the chapel. Chorbishop Dominic Ashkar, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Washington, D.C., concelebrated the liturgy with Monsignor George Sebaali, Pastor of St. Anthony Church.

After touring the Basilica, St. Anthony parishioners visited Our Lady of Lebanon Church, which was designated as a pilgrimage church for the Year of Mercy. Chorbishop Ashkar and Deacon Michel Touma met everyone outside the doors of the church for the Rite of the Opening of the Door of Year of Mercy service. After the greeting and hymn, the participants processed into the church, crossing over the threshold of the Doors of Mercy. The people were sprinkled with water, a living reminder of the renewal of their baptismal promises. They proceeded to the altar for the Benediction with the icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Chorbishop Ashkar welcomed the congregation to the church, and spoke about its origin and the concept of

MYO National Retreat

The Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) Annual Retreat will take place July 16 - 21, 2016 at:

St. Vincent College
300 Fraser Purchase Rd.
Latrobe, PA 15650-2667

The cost will remain the same as last year at \$475.00 per child. More information will follow in the near future. ☐

pilgrimage that feeds our spiritual life.

The visit ended at the Lebanese Taverna Restaurant, where the group had lunch and then left on a pleasant bus ride home. ☐

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

February 6 - 7, 2016

Feast of Saint Maron, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

February 8, 2016

Ash Monday Service and Feast of St. Maron, St. John Paul II Church, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

February 12 - 13, 2016

Ordination of Joseph Abi Saad to Diaconate, St. Anthony Church, Lawrence, Mass.

February 14, 2016

Pastoral Visit to St. George Church, Dover, N.H.

February 15 - 28, 2016

Visit to Catholic Relief Services' Outreach to the Poor and Refugees, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt.

March 1, 2016

Talk on Christians in the Middle East, Greensburg, Penn.

March 4, 2016

Morning Talk on Christians in the Middle East, Manhattan, N.Y.

March 5 - 6, 2016

Ordination of Aaron Sandbothe to the Diaconate, Greenville, S.C.

March 8 - 9, 2016

USCCB Meetings of Administrative Committee, Washington, D.C.

March 9 - 10, 2016

Meeting with Catholic Relief Services Board of Trustees, Baltimore, Md.

March 13, 2016

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

March 14 - 15, 2016

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

March 16, 2016

Chrim Mass, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y. ☐

the Deadline is... **Deadline for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is February 25, 2016.**
The Maronite Voice is the official newsletter of the Eparchy of Our Lady of

Lebanon and of the Eparchy of Saint Maron.

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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. ☐

St. Abraham of Cyrrhus, Apostle of Lebanon

The Righteous will Flourish like a Palm Tree and Will Spring Up Like the Cedars of Lebanon. - Psalm 92:12

The Foundations of Eastern Monasticism

Christian Monasticism began in the East, in particular in the so-called Near East in Egypt, Greater Syria, and Greater Persia. St. Anthony of Egypt (251-356) began a spiritual movement that later became known collectively as that of the Desert Fathers, although women were also part of this vast movement. Anthony lived during the transition of Christianity's acceptance in the Roman Empire, beginning his monastic life (around 270) during the reign of the last great Imperial persecutor of Christians, the Emperor Diocletian, and the rise of Constantine I, who legalized and preferred the Christian faith. Athanasius of Alexandria, who wrote of the life of Anthony, tells us that so many men and women followed him into the monastic life that "the desert became a city."¹

St. Anthony began what could be called the first of the Three Pillars of Monasticism, that of being a hermit or solitary (eremitic). Eventually the three types of monastic life in the East would comprise that of the eremitic, the cenobitic², and the skete. If the eremitic life is that of the solitary hermit, the cenobitic life (begun by St. Pachomius in 346 in Egypt) is that of the community of monks, living under a rule of life, and guided by an Abbot (from the Syriac *Abba*, meaning Father). This will become the preferred form of monastic life in Western Christianity. St. Theodore of Egypt, disciple of Pachomius, later began the skete or idiorhythmic form of monasticism, where monks or nuns living in hermitages of close approximation to one another, would gather as a community for certain liturgical feast days, times of prayer, or common meals.

From Bet Maroun to Mount Lebanon

The Christian movement begun by St. Maron in the fourth century became greater than just a monastic community. Truly *Bet Maroun* came to embrace laity, clergy, and monastics as a way of living out the Christian faith in a Syriac speaking culture. Due to its defense of the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon, which led to the massacre of 350 monks and the subsequent continued persecutions at the hands of Monophysite Christians, the spiritual descendants of St. Maron formed a Patriarchate of Antioch with Papal and Imperial approval under St. John Maron. Moving to Mount Lebanon they found the terrain of Lebanon afforded them protection and a strong defensive position against the Monophysites and the Arab Muslims who would eventually

conquer the region, but not conquer the Christian faith of the people. However, was this the beginning of the "Maronite" presence in Lebanon? No, for that answer we must look back to the time of St. Maron himself³.

Abraham of Cyrrhus⁴

During the life of St. Maron and directly after his death, some of his monks went into the area of Lebanon to preach the Gospel. While there does not exist much information from that period to give us an exact picture, we do know that one of these monks, and possibly the one who had the greatest impact upon the people there, was Abraham of Cyrrhus, the first disciple of St. Maron, sometimes called the Apostle of Lebanon.

There is no certain date for his birth, which was in modern day *Harran*, in Syria. He died in 422, while consulting the Byzantine Emperor, Theodosius I, in Constantinople. Theresa Urbainczyk in her book, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man*, writes this of St. Abraham based on the reflections of Theodoret:

*He was also born and brought up in Cyrrhus, although he goes to Lebanon and saves some of its inhabitants from impiety by lending some villagers money for their taxes. The money was not his personally; he was helped by some of his friends. He is therefore not without influence, although Theodoret does not explain how he won it. Abraham is later made bishop of Carrié and continues to live ascetically while carrying out his duties such as judging lawsuits. Theodoret comments that even the emperor wanted to see him and sent for him. "A choir" of empresses clasped his hands and knees and made supplication to a man who did not even understand Greek.*⁵

St. Abraham of Cyrrhus, disciple of St. Maron, prefigures what will eventually become the presence of *Bet Maroun* on Mount Lebanon and the surrounding Lebanese region. He is an example of how monasticism has continually influenced and shaped Eastern Christianity in the Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Ancient Oriental Orthodox (non-Chalcedonian) Churches. (Continues on page 11)

¹ *In the Heart of the Desert: Revised Edition: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers (Treasures of the World's Religions):* Chryssavgis John, Ware Kallistos and Ward Benedicta. (Bloomington, Ind., World Wisdom, 2008) p. 18.

² Cenobitic Monasticism became the most popular form of Monasticism in the West. It was brought to Western Christianity by St. John Cassian (ca.360-ca.435) from Palestine. The great North African St. Augustine (354-430) and the Roman, St. Benedict of Nursia (ca.480-547) are also founders of Western Monasticism.

³ The mission of St. Abraham of Cyrrhus can be compared to that of St. Augustine of Canterbury in the 6th century. Just as St. Augustine, a Roman monk (not to be confused with St. Augustine of Hippo of the 4th and 5th centuries) was sent by Pope St. Gregory the Great to organize the Church in England and hopefully convert the pagan spouses of some Christians, St. Abraham left the side of St. Maron to address certain needs of the Christians of Lebanon, who were still a minority among the pagans there.

⁴ Abraham of Cyrrhus is also known as Abraham of Charres, and Abraham of Harran.

⁵ *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man*, Urbainczyk, Theresa: (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p.74.

Saint of Light, Saint of Darkness

by
Bishop Robert Barron

Like so many others around the world, I was overjoyed to hear of the recent decision of the Vatican to canonize Mother Teresa, a woman generally recognized, during her lifetime, to be a "living saint." Mother Teresa first came to my attention through Malcolm Muggeridge's film and attendant book *Something Beautiful for God*. Of course Muggeridge showed Mother's work with the dying and the poorest of the poor on the streets of Kolkata, but what moved me the most were the images of the saint's smile amidst so much squalor and suffering. She was a very bright light shining in exceptionally thick darkness.

Mother's life reveals so many aspects and profiles of holiness, but I would like to focus on three of them. First, she shows something remarkable about love, which is not a sentiment but rather willing the good of the other. I think it is fair to say that Mother Teresa went to extremes in demonstrating love in this proper sense. She renounced practically everything that, in the opinion of the world, makes life pleasant -- wealth, material goods, power, comforts, luxuries -- in order to be of service to those in need. Further, for decades, she personally reached out to the most vulnerable in one of the worst slums in the world and sent her sisters to some of the most disagreeable places on the planet. Most of us, I imagine, manage to love to a degree, but few ever express this theological virtue more dramatically and radically than she did. This is not simply admirable, it constitutes a crucial witness to the nature of love. Unlike the other virtues, both natural and theological, love has no limit. Justice, limitlessly expressed, excludes all mercy; too much temperance becomes a fussy puritanism; exaggerated courage is rashness; unlimited faith is credulity; infinite hope devolves into presumption. But there can never be too much love; there is never a time when love is inappropriate, for love is what God is, and love constitutes the very life of heaven. Mind you, in heaven there is no need for faith and hope fades away. But in that supremely holy place, love remains in all of its infinite intensity and radicality. Mother Teresa's way of life, accordingly, is an icon of the love that will obtain in heaven, when we are drawn utterly into the very life of God.

A second feature of Mother's holiness is her dedication to prayer. When I visited the Mother House of the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata some years ago, what impressed me most was a life-size statue of Mother Teresa in the very back of the chapel, in the attitude she customarily assumed when she prayed: legs folded under her, palms facing upward, head bowed. From the very beginning of her community, Mother insisted that her sisters should engage in substantial amounts of prayer every day; and in time, she established a branch of her order dedicated exclusively to contemplative prayer. She understood something that is essential to the Christian spiritual life, namely, that the kind of love she and her sisters endeavored to practice could come only through the grace of God, only as a sheer gift. To get that gift, it was necessary to ask, to ask again, to beg one's whole life long. Without this explicit connection to God and his purposes, their work, she knew, would turn into mere do-goodism, and the egos of her

sisters would inevitably assert themselves. Saints, those who embody the love that God is, are necessarily beggars.

I remarked above that Mother Teresa struck me as a light in the shadows. How mysterious, therefore, that she herself once said, "If I ever become a saint, I will surely be a saint of darkness." She was referring to something that only a handful of people knew in her lifetime, that for upwards of fifty years, Mother Teresa experienced the pain of the absence of God. The living saint often felt abandoned by God or even that God does not exist. Once a visiting bishop was kneeling in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament with Mother and her nuns. A note was passed to him from the saintly foundress, which read, to his infinite surprise, "Where is Jesus?" That she lived through this crucible for decades, even as people routinely saw her as the very paragon of holiness, shows forth a third dimension of her saintliness. To be a saint is to allow Christ to live his life in you. Indeed, St. Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me;" and this means the whole Christ. Jesus was a person of service to the poor and needy, and Mother certainly embodied this aspect of his life; Jesus was a person who prayed intently and for long periods of time, and Mother participated in this dimension of his existence. But Jesus was also the crucified Lord, who said, at the limit of his suffering, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" To allow Christ to live his life in you is, therefore, necessarily to experience, to one degree or another, the absence of God, to undergo the agony of the crucifixion in all of its dimensions. St. John of the Cross, the greatest mystical theologian in the Church's history said, quite simply, that there is no path to holiness that does not lead through the cross. Though it is a high paradox, the fifty-year darkness that Mother endured is, therefore, one of the surest indicators of her saintliness.

Saints exist for the Church, for in them we see the very *raison d'etre* of the Church, and this is why canonizations are always joyful affairs. So let us rejoice in this new saint whose love, prayer, and very darkness, are light for us. □

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

St. Abraham of Cyrrhus

Continued from page 10

Unlike in the Christian West, where the monastic cloister eventually creates literal and spiritual walls between monks and laity, the spirituality, theology, and prayers of monastics in the Christian East become like a river that continuously flows into the life of all the faithful. □

*Rev. David A. Fisher
Philadelphia, Penn*

My Vocation Story
by
Subdeacon Mallard George

My journey through life thus far has made me truly believe that God has a plan for all of us. For the majority of my adult life, I believed that His plan for me was to serve others in the field of dentistry. After graduating from Washington and Jefferson College in 1973 where I completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology, I continued on to Temple University's School of Dentistry, where I earned my Doctor of Dental Surgery degree. It was during my time in dental school that I met my wife, Donna, and upon graduation I intended to remain in Philadelphia, Penn., to practice dentistry, as well as continue my education in the Post Doctoral Fixed Prosthodontics program at Temple

University. However, God's plan blessed us with the opportunity to move back to my hometown of Uniontown, Penn., and found my own business, George Dental Associates, in 1978.

Starting my own business was a challenge, and I prayed to God to give me strength and guide me as I embarked upon this new chapter in my life. It was paramount for me to develop a successful business, provide quality care to my patients, and create a reputation for George Dental Associates that was unrivaled. I was passionate about my work and enjoyed the challenges and rewards that I encountered each day in my practice. After my daughter, Lauren, was born in 1983, it became even more important for me to be successful so that I could provide for my family.

I spent the next thirty-three years in practice, dedicating my life to my family and work and serving others. In addition to practicing dentistry, I also served my community in various capacities through charitable work and as a member of several prominent boards of directors. My life was clearly quite busy yet extremely fulfilling. I gave away my only daughter at her wedding and was thrilled to learn that she and her husband were expecting their first child shortly thereafter. However, although I was surrounded with so much joy, I became fearful that it might all be taken away. It was in January of 2010, that I experienced a major setback in my life by undergoing an emergency open heart surgery. I prayed constantly yet again to God to keep me safe so that I could continue to enjoy my work and my family.

After several months of recovery, I finally managed to get back to work and be healthy enough to enjoy the birth of my granddaughter, Mallory. I was grateful to God, my family, friends and patients for their care, concern, and support of me during one of the most fearful times in my life. It was short

lived, however, as in January of 2011, I experienced yet another health crisis, only this time it was clear that God's plan for me had changed.

The strokes that I suffered ultimately made it impossible for me to continue to serve others in the healthcare field. Though I received extensive rehabilitation, I knew that it simply was not possible for me to work at the level that I had for the previous thirty-three years. I experienced many ups and downs emotionally, because I loved my work and for the first time in my life I felt lost. It was devastating for me and for my family to come to terms with the effects that the strokes had on me, and our faith is what has enabled us all to survive. That is when I realized that it was because of my faith in God that I was able to enjoy a long and fulfilling professional career in dentistry and serve my community with the utmost care. It was my faith in God that kept me alive.

Approximately one year after I suffered the strokes, my church pastor at the time asked me if I ever thought about serving in the church as a deacon. I contemplated his suggestion for many weeks as I did not know if I would be able to do it. After I was accepted into the program, I spoke at length with Bishop Gregory Mansour before I began my studies. He expressed his faith in me and reassured me that I would be successful. After much prayer, I knew that this was God's new plan for me - and that I could still remain vital with a new sense of purpose by devoting myself to my church family. □



***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



What Is Discernment?



The Maronite Servants of Christ the Light visiting with the Maronite Monks of Adoration in Petersham, Mass.

by Maronite Servants of Christ the Light

When someone uses the word “discernment,” most people connect it with a person trying to decide about joining the priesthood or convent. Discernment is what should happen before we decide. It is a journey of seeking God’s will in one’s life. Here are a few suggestions for a young man or young woman to consider as part of a religious vocation discernment journey.

- It is walking with the Lord, accompanying him and recognizing his presence. It is listening to your desires, feelings, and distinguishing God’s voice from other voices.
- It is friendship with the Lord and becoming one with him through living the sacramental life (e.g. going to daily Eucharist and confession regularly).
- It is growing in self-knowledge. (What are my strengths, weaknesses, what do I need to surrender to God so that he can transform me into his image of Love?)
- It is a desire to serve and to “be” for others...It is being led by the love of Jesus to discover who he is, our merciful and loving Savior, friend, Lord and God...
- It is not being afraid of our weaknesses and entrusting all to his merciful love. Jesus will lead us because he is with us.

The gift of a vocation is to be received in a spirit of love because it is an encounter with grace, with Jesus who is mercy incarnate. The best love is readiness to give and lay

down one’s life for the other! The journey of discerning a religious vocation can be summed up as a daily falling in love with Jesus.

If you have questions about discerning a religious vocation, contact the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light at maroniteservants.org or the vocation director in your Eparchy. ☐

Lenten Observances 2016



The Most Reverend Bishops Gregory Mansour and A. Elias Zaidan have issued the following Lenten guidelines for the Maronites of the U.S.:

- ★ All Maronites who are physically capable are to abstain from meat on Ash Monday (February 8, 2016) and all Fridays of Lent.
- ★ Ash Monday and the Great Friday of the Crucifixion are also days of fasting. Fasting in the Maronite Church involves eating and drinking nothing at all (except water and medicine) from midnight until noon. The rest of the day normal meals can be taken, but without meat. All Maronites who are physically capable are to fast on these two days.

Devotion of Lenten Fridays

All parish priests are to celebrate the Benediction with the Cross every Friday of Lent except for the Great Friday of the Crucifixion. This service may be preceded by other popular devotions such as Evening Prayer (*Ramsho*), Stations of the Cross or even the Divine Liturgy. Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament should not take place on Fridays of Lent.

Personal Devotion

Clergy, religious and laity who wish to observe the more traditional Maronite practice of fasting and abstinence are encouraged to do so. That practice is summarized in the following, taken from the Synod of Mt. Lebanon (1736): *Every weekday of Lent (Monday through Friday) is a day of fasting and abstinence from meat and dairy products (eggs, butter, milk, etc.) Fasting involves eating and drinking nothing at all (except water and medicine) from midnight until noon. The rest of the day normal meals can be taken, but without meat or dairy products. Dairy products are excluded because they are animal byproducts. Saturdays and Sundays are exempt from fasting and abstaining, as are the following four feast days: St. Maron - February 9, The 40 Martyrs - March 9, St. Joseph - March 19 and the Annunciation - March 25. (Good Friday falls on March 25, this year. Therefore, it is a day of complete fast and abstinence. The Feast of the Annunciation has been moved to the following week.)* ☐

Food For Thought

In today’s society, in which forgiveness is so rare, mercy is ever more important. ☐

Pope Francis

ST. SHARBEL'S RELICS VISITING HIS PEOPLE IN THE U.S.A.



February 6 & 7, 2016
Our Lady of Lebanon Church
Miami, FL

February 8 & 9, 2016
Heart of Jesus Church
Ft Lauderdale, FL

February 9 & 10, 2016
Mary Mother
of the Light Mission
Tequesta, FL

February 11 & 12, 2016
St Jude Church Catholic Church
Orlando, FL

February 13 & 14, 2016
Saints Peter & Paul Mission
Tampa, FL

February 15 & 16, 2016
Saint Maron Mission
Jacksonville, FL

February 17 & 18, 2016
Saint Joseph Church.
Atlanta, GA

February 19 & 20, 2016
Saint Rafka Maronite
Catholic Mission
Greer, SC

February 21-24, 2016
Rest

February 25 & 26, 2016
Saint Michael
the Archangel Church
Fayetteville, NC

February 27 & 28, 2016
Saint Sharbel Mission
Raleigh, NC

**February 29,
March 1 & 2, 2016**
Saint Elias Church
Roanoke, VA

March 3 & 4, 2016
Saint Anthony Church
Glen Allen, VA

March 5 & 6, 2016
Our Lady of
Lebanon Church
NW Washington, DC

March 7 & 8, 2016
Our Lady of
the East Mission
Pleasantville, NJ

March 9 & 10, 2016
Our Lady of
Lebanon Church
Easton, PA

March 11 & 12, 2016
Saint Maron Church
Philadelphia, PA

March 13 & 14, 2016
Saint Sharbel Church
Newtown Square, PA

March 15 & 16, 2016
Saint Anthony And
Saint George Church
Wilkes-Barre, PA

March 17 & 18, 2016
Saint Ann Church
Scranton, PA

March 19 & 28, 2016
Rest

The Holy Week, and Easter

March 29 & 30, 2016
Blessed John Paul II Mission
Sleepy Hollow, NY

March 31 & April 1, 2016
Saint Anthony Church
Danbury, CT

April 2 & 3, 2016
St. Sharbel Maronite Church
Somerset, NJ

April 4-8
Rest

April 9 & 10, 2016
Our Lady of
Lebanon Cathedral
Brooklyn, NY

April 11 & 12, 2016
Our Lady of
Lebanon Church
Waterbury, CT

April 13 & 14, 2016
Saint Maron Church
Torrington, CT

April 15, 2016
Saint Therese Church
Brockton, MA

April 16 & 17, 2016
Our Lady of the Cedars
of Lebanon Church
Jamaica Plain, MA

April 18 & 19, 2016
Rest

April 20 & 21, 2016
Saint George Church
Cranston, RI

April 22 & 23, 2016
Saint Anthony of
the Desert Church
Fall River, MA

April 24 & 25, 2016
Our Lady of
Purgatory Church
New Bedford, MA

April 26 & 27, 2016
Saint George Church
Dover, NH

April 28 & 29, 2016
Saint Joseph Church
Waterville, ME

April 30 & May 1, 2016
Saint Anthony Church
Lawrence, MA

May 2 & 3, 2016
Our Lady of
Mercy Church
Worcester, MA

May 4 & 5, 2016
Saint Anthony Church
Springfield, MA

May 6 & 7, 2016
Saint Ann Church
Watervliet, NY

May 8 & 9, 2016
Saint Luis Gonzaga Church
Utica, NY

May 10 & 11, 2016
Saint John Maron Church
Williamsville, NY

May 12 & 13, 2016
Saint Joseph Church
Olean, NY

May 14 & 15, 2016
Saint John the
Baptist Church
New Castle, PA

May 16 & 17, 2016
Blessed Teresa of
Calcutta Mission
Darlington, PA

May 18 & 19, 2016
Our Lady of
Victory Church,
Carnegie, PA

May 20 & 21, 2016
Saint George Church
Uniontown, PA

June 4 & 5, 2016
Maronite Mission,
Charlotte, NC



For more information
please visit our website
www.stmaron.org



Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon *Visit of the Relics of St. Sharbel*

San Diego, California

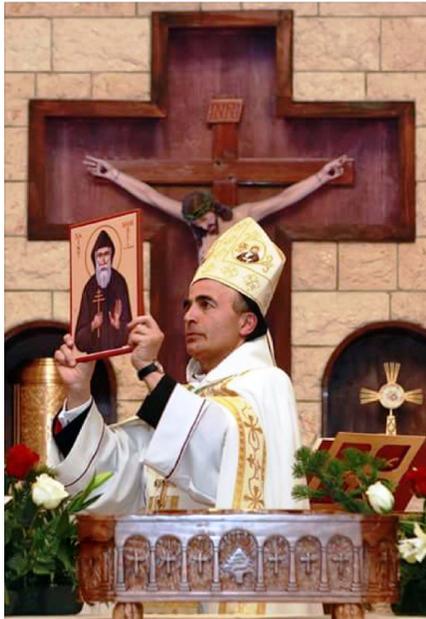
by Mrs. Ellen Saad

Not even El Niño, that hit the area, deterred the faithful from coming to St. Ephrem Church in San Diego, Calif., to venerate the Relics of St. Sharbel on January 4 - 5, 2016.

The community was blessed by the presence of Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, who celebrated four liturgies during which six new members were inducted into the Order of Saint Sharbel.

Many guests from different communities participated in the different liturgies, novenas, chaplets, Angelus, rosary, *Safro* and *Ramsho* prayers that took place throughout both days till late at night.

A big tent provided shelter, a seating area, food and refreshments and housed the popular St. Sharbel gift shop that was bustling with those looking for a memento of this historical visit. □



Associate Pastor, drove to Austin, Tex., to bring the Holy Relics of St. Sharbel after their visit to Our Lady's Maronite Parish there. That afternoon, the Holy Relics blessed the homebound, hospitalized and incapacitated of our community during home visits conducted by Father George and the Pastor, Father Milad Yaghi.

On Thanksgiving morning, volunteers from the parish received a special blessing with the Relics during morning liturgy and were sent off to help feed the homeless.

On Friday and Saturday, the Saint's Relics were exposed in the Church for Veneration starting at 9 a.m., and the faithful kept pouring in until 10 o'clock each night. Each day started with a morning Liturgy, followed by perpetual Adoration of the Holy Eucharist throughout the day, for people to come venerate the Relics and get the blessing from the Holy Eucharist. The Parish organizations led special prayers at different times, and public prayers were set up at different times during the day. Volunteers signed up to be present in the Church in front of the exposed Eucharist throughout both days. Each evening, all who were present were treated to a dinner prepared by the Daughters of Mary and the Knights of the Cedars. During both days, movies about the life of St. Sharbel were shown in the Cedar Hall adjacent to the Church. Throughout the day, volunteers from the Bible Study group handed out blessed oil and incense brought from St. Sharbel's tomb in *Annaya*, Lebanon, and staffed a shop where the faithful could buy memorabilia to take home.

The highlight of the day on Friday was the late afternoon Pontifical Divine Liturgy concelebrated by the Archbishop of the local Latin Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, His Eminence Cardinal DiNardo, alongside the parish priests and other local clergy. After the Liturgy a procession with candles and the Relics took place and Father George BouChaya conducted a presentation on the spirituality of St. Sharbel.

Saturday was highlighted with a Liturgy of Healing in the evening, which also ended with a procession of candles with the Relics.

On Sunday, after both morning liturgies, processions took place along with blessing of the faithful with the Relics, before a group from the Dallas Maronite parish came by to transport the Relics to Our Lady of Lebanon Parish in Lewisville, Tex., where they were hosted next. □

Houston, Texas



Daniel Cardinal DiNardo at the Altar with the con-celebrating priests during the Divine Liturgy.

Thanksgiving this year was a very special one at Our Lady of the Cedars Parish in Houston, Texas. It all started on Wednesday, November 25, 2015, Thanksgiving Eve, when Father George BouChaaya,

Episcopal Appointment

On January 21, 2016, His Holiness Pope Francis erected the Maronite Apostolic Exarchate of Bogota, Columbia, and appointed Fr. Fadi Abou Chebel, O.M.M., as the first Apostolic Exarch of the new exarchate of Bogota, Colombia. The bishop-elect was born in *Deir al Qamar*, Lebanon, in 1969, took his solemn vows in 1994 and was ordained a priest in 1995. He holds a licentiate in pastoral theology and has served in a number of pastoral and administrative roles, including deputy priest, spiritual assistant for young seminarians, general director of the Notre Dame college of *Louaize*, university chaplain and general director of university pastoral ministry in Lebanon. □

(VIS, January 21, 2016)

Cleveland, Ohio Hosts of Angels Christmas Concert



by Deacon George Khoury

On Saturday, December 19, 2015, the weather outside was anything but wintery. The weather in Cleveland, Ohio, was more spring-like with a temperature of 47 degrees Fahrenheit and a misty rain. However, after the evening Liturgy in the chapel, the lights went off except for in the sanctuary, and the talented pianist Christopher Jamhour and violinist Aleina Soueidi played "O Come All Ye Faithful" to prepare the people for the Christmas Concert presented by the Hosts of Angels Choir of the chapel.

At the conclusion of the musical introduction, the choir of twenty-five young adults processed into the chapel with candles in hand to the sanctuary. From the Annunciation to the Adoration of the Magi, there was a reading setting the scene for the verses of *Arsal Allah* [From Heaven God Sent]. Interspersed with the verses of *Arsal Allah* were traditional Christmas songs. At the third verse when the reading was "Jesus is Born," six children ranging from 7-11 years old processed up the aisle carrying Jesus and candles and placed him in the crèche.

After the fifth verse the choir sang "Joy to the World," concluding with a Great Amen and closing remarks by Christopher Nahra who choreographed and directed the entire program. □

Newtown Square, Pennsylvania Children's Christmas Pageant

by Lilian Shahade

On Sunday December 20, 2015, the children of St. Sharbel Church in Newtown Square, Penn., made room for Baby



Jesus in their hearts and in their minds. In their childlike innocence they knew that Baby Jesus' parents needed a place to stay so that Jesus could be born into the world as man. The play was performed after the Divine Liturgy and the children sang all the songs in the pageant to the delight of all the parents. Following the play, the children got a big surprise when Santa came to visit and took pictures with them.

The children are always amazed when they are shown what the gifts were that Jesus received from the Magi. In their childlike minds, it is hard to understand the significance of the incense, frankincense and myrrh. Their thoughts are on iPhones, bikes, snowboards and video games.

Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, may we too, with eyes full of amazement and wonder, gaze upon the Child Jesus, the Son of God. And in His presence may our hearts burst forth in prayer: "Show us, Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation" (Ps 85:7). □

Clinton Township, Michigan Hair Cutting Ceremony



On the weekend of January 16 - 17, 2016, Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor of Saint Sharbel Maronite Church, Warren, Michigan, celebrated the annual traditional Hair Cutting Ceremony at all weekend Liturgies. The parents of nine babies born in 2015 presented their babies for this special blessing and a clipping of a lock of their hair. This ritual on the part of the parents was an act of presentation of their newborns to the Lord. Every baby was

given a blessed Holy Rosary as a remembrance of this special event. May God continue to bless these children as they grow in age, wisdom and grace, and their parents as they pass on the traditions of our faith.

Congratulations to the following parents: Kenneth and Laura Bacha, parents of George Donald Bacha; Timothy and Christina Matway, parents of Santino Joseph Matway; Ted and Raquel Soyad, parents of Vincent Tady Soyad; George and Rita Srour-Fares, parents of Anthony Charbel Fares; Laba and Christine Soyad, parents of Jacob Soyad; Robert and Sahars Safadi, parents of Kaitlynn Anne Safadi; Joseph and Jessica Safadi, parents of Jenna Victoria Safadi; Antoine and Karenna Abboud, parents of Rebecca Abboud; Johnny and Nathalie Al Achkar, parents of Lucia Maria Al Achkar. □



Pro-Lifers Brave Blizzard at March for Life

Tens of thousands of pro-life activists defied freezing temperatures and the approach of a gigantic snowstorm to join in the 43rd March for Life in Washington, D.C., on January 22, 2016.

The annual March, held on the anniversary of the notorious *Roe v. Wade* decision that struck down laws against abortion, was held despite predictions that an approaching blizzard would bring two feet of snow to the area. The snow began to fall as the participants marched toward the Supreme Court building.

With airports shutting down and highways quickly becoming impassible, thousands of the pro-lifers who traveled to Washington for the March faced the likelihood that they would be stranded in the city for the weekend -- in many cases without a place to stay. Organizers of the March for Life had urged people to be cautious about traveling to the



Maronite faithful joined Bishop Mansour for the March for Life in Washington, D.C., on January 22, 2016.

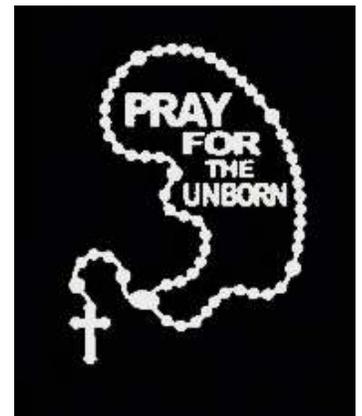
city in light of the dire forecasts, but had vowed that the March would be held regardless of weather conditions.

(Cwnews, January 22, 2016)

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Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles
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Saint Louis, MO 63104
maroniteswest@yahoo.com

Pope to Future Priests: You Can't Be 'Normal'; You Have to Be Holy

Pope Francis says future priests have to reject the temptation of "normality": the temptation to be a pastor "for whom a 'normal' life is enough."

"You are preparing to respond to that impulse from the Spirit, to be the 'future of the Church,' in accordance with God's heart; not with individual preferences or passing fashions, but as the announcement of the Gospel requires," said the Pope this morning as he received in audience the Pontifical Community of the Lombard Seminary in Rome, in the Clementine Hall. "To prepare oneself well requires not only extensive work, but also an inner conversion, basing daily ministry on the first call of Jesus, and reviving it in the personal relationship with Him, as did the apostle Paul, whose conversion we remember today."

A priest cannot be contented with attention or judge his ministry on his "successes," gradually becoming lukewarm and "without true interest in others," Francis warned. "The 'normality' for us is instead pastoral holiness, the giving of life. If a priest decides merely to become a normal person, he will be a mediocre priest, or worse."

The Pope said that the seminarians must be in constant dialogue with "the Word of God, or better, with God who speaks."

"In these years you have been entrusted with the mission of training in this dialogue of life: the knowledge of the various disciplines you study is not an end in itself, but must instead be made concrete in the conversation of prayer and in the real encounter with people. It is not beneficial to form oneself in a compartmentalized fashion, as prayer, cultural and pastoral ministry are the cornerstones of the same edifice: they must remain steadfast and united to support each other, well-cemented together, so that the priests of today and tomorrow will be spiritual men and merciful pastors, unified within by the love of the Lord and able to spread the joy of the Gospel in the simplicity of life."

The Pope also remarked that to be a good priest, it is essential to maintain contact and closeness with the bishop. "The characteristic of the diocesan priest is precisely his diocesan nature, and the cornerstone of this is frequent contact with the bishop, in dialogue and discernment with him. A priest who does not maintain a close relationship with his bishop is slowly isolated from the diocesan group and his fruitfulness diminishes, precisely because he does not participate in dialogue with the Father of the Diocese." He concluded by asking those present to "cultivate the beauty of friendship and the art of establishing relations, so as to create a priestly fraternity, made stronger by its particular diversities." □

(Zenit.org, January 25, 2016)

Meet Rula Ghani, Afghanistan's Christian First Lady

Afghanistan is almost 100 percent Muslim. According to the CIA World Factbook, the Middle Eastern nation has 32.5 million people, 99.7 percent of whom adhere to Islam.

Rula Ghani is part of the 0.3 percent listed as "other." She is the wife of Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, and she is Christian.

Born in 1948 in Lebanon of a Maronite Christian family, Rula Saade studied in Paris and received a master's degree in political studies from the American University in Beirut. There she met Ashraf Ghani, and the two married in 1975. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and later Taliban rule, kept the couple from settling in his native country. Rula earned a master's degree from the Columbia School of Journalism in New York, and Ashraf taught at Berkeley and Johns Hopkins and worked at the World Bank.

They moved to Kabul in 2002, when he became Finance Minister of Afghanistan, in the wake of the U.S.-led coalition's victory over the Taliban. Rula, shocked by the living conditions of many children, went to work for Aschiana, a local organization that helps feed and educate street children, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Ghani succeeded Hamid Karzai as head of state in September 2014.

During the presidential campaign, Ghani's opponents tried to make his wife's Christianity and foreign-born status a campaign issue. "After the election, I wanted to end all these fantasies," she said. "The only solution was to speak publicly. That's why I accepted the television interviews on national television. Afghans have seen that I spoke Dari [an Afghan language]; I was veiled and dressed decently. I could demonstrate that I knew Afghanistan."

For his part, Ghani took an unusual step during his inauguration, thanking her during his speech for her work both as a wife and mother and her work for Aschiana. The French newspaper *Le Monde* called the gesture a "very unusual recognition in a country where women are relegated to menial tasks."

In 2015, *Time* magazine included Rula Ghani in its list of the 100 most influential people, noting that she "has a long history of activism" and has "vowed to work to improve living standards for women in a country where they have historically struggled to be treated fairly."

"Afghan women have lost the status of people that we respect. Before it was not like that," she said in a December 2014 interview with *Paris Match*. But, she lamented, "I do not think I can change things deeply. I'm just a symbol, a reason for hope."

But her support for women's rights does not come as an attempt to undermine one of Afghanistan's most important values, she said in the *LA Times* interview.

"I have noticed that with some people I speak to progress is [seen as] 'becoming liberated from the family,' and that's not progress, that's actually creating a lot of dislocation of the social fabric."

When women take jobs, she said, "they're not doing that to 'liberate' themselves, they're doing that because they need to, to contribute to their family."

Her religious background, she added, also is irrelevant. "God created and decided for me to be born in a Christian family. It's not every day that a Lebanese marries an Afghan. I think God's hand is also in there." □

(Aleteia.org, January 13, 2016)

San Francisco, California Convention Update



by Elie Antoun, Parish Council President

The plans for an exciting and invigorating 2016 NAM Convention are coming together very nicely. As a quick reminder, the Convention will be held on July 6 - 10, 2016, in San Francisco, California.

We are excited that His Beatitude Patriarch Beshara Peter Cardinal Rai has decided to attend the Convention. We are looking forward to his presence, which will be a big draw for the broader Maronite community and will energize the Convention.

We are well on our way to finalizing the speakers for the Convention workshops. We have had a positively overwhelming response to our invitations from speakers who will cover a broad range of topics and contribute a wealth of spiritual and life experiences. Among the already-committed speakers will be Dr. Joseph Jabra, President of the Lebanese American University (LAU), and Father Gary George, MYO National Director. Also, two Lebanese founders of Silicon Valley technology start-ups will share their experiences – Ramy Abeed of Snip.it and Roger Hajjar of Prysm.

The MYA and MYO committee coordinators are preparing Convention programs and extra-curricular activities which we will share in upcoming newsletters.

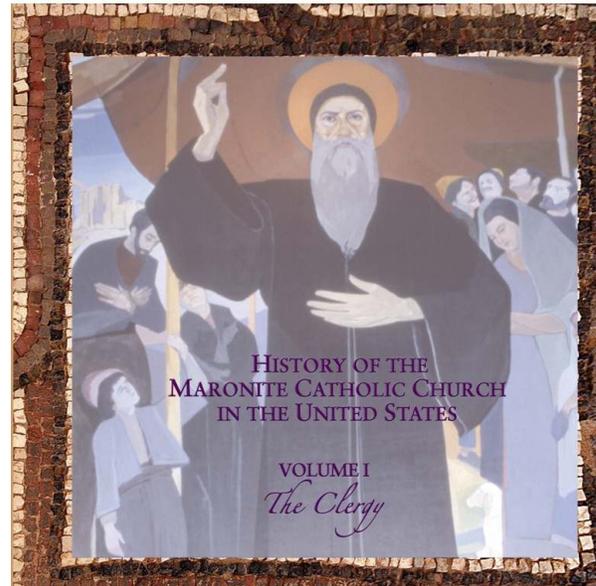
We continue to look forward to seeing you all at the 2016 NAM Convention. Please make sure to register early. San Francisco ranks in the top five visited cities in the United States every year, with more than eighteen million visitors in 2014. The earlier that we know the Convention's attendance the better we can prepare!! Regardless, our goal is to ensure that you have a phenomenal time! Mark your calendars!! ☐



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.

Can We Love God

Continued from page 1

It is this: do not let the day end without apologizing, without making peace between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters ... between daughters- and mothers-in-law! If we learn to apologize promptly and to give each other mutual forgiveness, the wounds heal, the marriage grows stronger, and the family becomes an increasingly stronger home, which withstands the shocks of our smaller or greater misdeeds."

Dear Friends, I urge all of you (me included) to be the first to reach out; be the first to take that step forward. If you base your life and your actions on the love of God and the love of people – most especially in your own family - you will fulfill God's command to love one another. If your love of God is only lip service and not through the act of love of others, you are wasting your time.

Let us make this Holy Year of Mercy a very special one. Let us journey spiritually by opening our heart to God and to each other. May this Lenten Season be an opportune time to seek mercy and to extend mercy. ☐

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

Cincinnati, Ohio Christmas Recital

by Linda Conour

On Sunday, December 20, 2015, St. Anthony of Padua Parish's "Choir of Angels" in Cincinnati, Ohio, performed their Christmas Concert immediately following the Divine Liturgy. The Choir, made up of several Maronite Youth Organization members, and led by Choir



Conductor Mrs. Mounira Francis, joyfully proclaimed many traditional and modern Christmas songs, both in English and in Arabic. It was truly a beautiful Christmas Recital, and the entire parish was filled with the spirit of the season! A Christmas Party for the children of the parish, including a visit from Santa, immediately followed in the Joseph A. Abood Maronite Center. ☐



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. ☐
