



The Maronite Voice

A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA



Volume IX

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January 2013

Christmas Stars

Bishop Robert Shaheen, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, and Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, received the following poignant testimonials from His Excellency Archbishop Samir Nassar, Maronite Bishop of Damascus, Syria. They want to share it with the readers of *The Maronite Voice*.

In the Footsteps of the Holy Family

It is not uncommon these days to see Palestinian families wandering the streets of Damascus [Syria] ... Parents carrying their children, followed by older children holding hands, some bags and parcels.

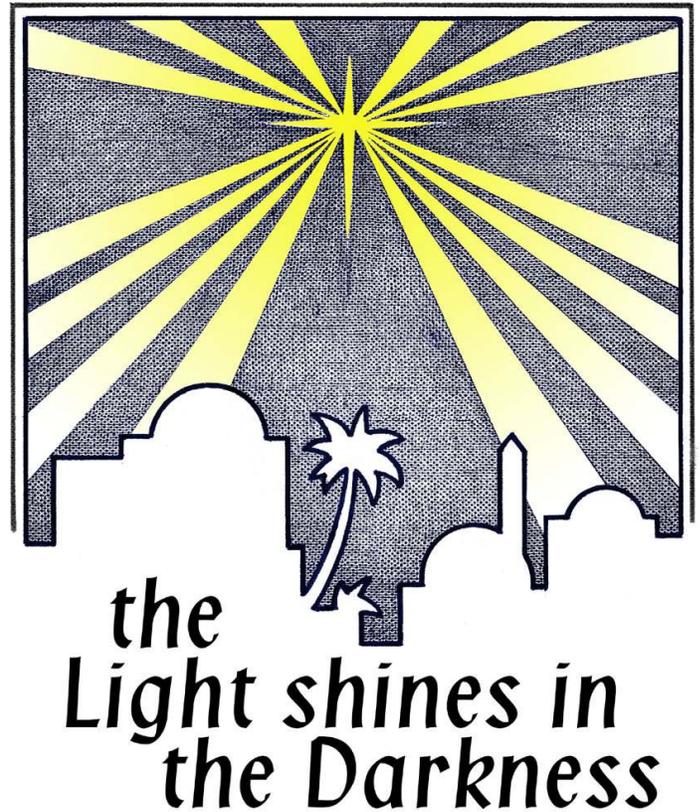
Tears in the eyes of women, anger in the eyes of men, the sadness of children's eyes ... These Palestinian refugees have not been spared by the fire of the Syrian crisis ... Thousands have fled their camps where they have been living since 1948. A second exodus emerges. Some have managed to reach the Palestinian camps in Lebanon; others are turning in circles, looking to be hosted by any Syrian family as an act of charity despite their poor and fragile situation.

A family of seven children came to the neighbor, who is a concierge of a home, looking for a quiet corner for the mother to breast-feed her baby of ten days. Everyone leaves the tiny room to allow her and her baby some privacy. For a while the little room of the concierge resembled the Manger of Bethlehem ... Always in the footsteps of the Holy Family

A Magi King

At a time when everyone is leaving the city, the new Greek Orthodox Patriarch, His Beatitude Youhanna X, arrives in Damascus on December 20, 2012, the Feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch. He is having a simple and modest reception, due to the actual events. The sounds of bells meet with the explosion of shells. Two contradictory languages. The first is a call to prayer and love, the second sows death and hatred.

His Beatitude, elected on Monday, December 17, 2012, in Lebanon, hurries to be in the middle of his people living in turmoil for the last twenty-two months confirming their faith, their mission, their identity and their testimony, and calling on Christmas Eve for forgiveness, reconciliation and dialogue



as the only instruments of peace in a country torn by violence. [He is a] wise man with a gift of his master: Forgiveness.

The Smile of Wissam

Wissam, three years old, is living with a blood cancer (leukemia). He comes to the church every evening at 6 p.m. when he is not under the effect of chemotherapy. He distributes and collects the songs sheets, giving with his small and innocent hands and his seductive smile the gesture of peace to the faithful scattered throughout the vast cathedral. He throws his hat that hides a bald head, carries a candle for the reading of the Gospel and for Communion, distributes holy cards at the end of the Mass.

(Continues on page 15)

Schedule of Bishop Robert Shaheen

January 12 - 13, 2013

Parish visit and Confirmation, Norman, Oklahoma.

January 17 - 18, 2013

Family Visit

January 20, 2013

Memorial Liturgy, St. Anthony Maronite Church, Danbury, Conn.

February 1 - 6, 2013

Rome, Italy

February 9, 2013

Jefferson City, Miss.

February 10, 2013

Saint Maron Celebration, St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

February 15 - 18, 2013

Saint Maron Celebration, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif. □



Eparchial Condolences

Badwi Doueih, the brother of Bishop Stephen Hector Doueih, Bishop Emeritus of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, died recently in Lebanon. He was preceded in death by his wife, his mother, father, and sister, and leaves his son, Joseph, along with three brothers, Pierre, George and Bishop Stephen Hector, and many nephews and nieces.

Bishop Doueih is still in the hospital but thank God he is doing better, thus any messages of condolences should be sent only to his address at 113 Remsen Street, 4th Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

Bishop Gregory Mansour along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and Bishop Robert Shaheen along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Bishop Doueih and his family.

May the Lord God grant Bishop Doueih a speedy recovery and grant Badwi eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to his family and loved ones.

Francis (Yogy) Michael, the father of Father David Michael, passed away on November 29, 2012. He is survived by his wife, Marie, and along with Father David, the following daughters: Christine, Janna, Ellen, and Rene, as well as his brothers, Tony and John and his sister, Lena.

Condolences may be sent to Father David Michael, Saint Peter's Church, 602 Market Street, Cheraw, SC 29520.

Bishop Gregory Mansour along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Fr. David and his family.

May the Lord God grant Francis eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to his family and loved ones.

Badiha Mouanes, the mother of Fr. Tony Mouanes, Administrator of St. Theresa Church, Brockton, Mass., passed away on December 26, 2012, at her home in *Chebanieh*, Lebanon. She was preceded in death by her husband, Daoud. In addition to Fr. Tony, she is survived by her children, Claire, Georgette, and Sister Afifi and many cousins, nieces and nephews.

Condolences may be sent to Fr. Tony Mouanes, Saint Theresa Church, PO Box 2567, Brockton, MA 02305-2567.

Bishop Gregory Mansour along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Fr. Tony and his family. May Almighty God grant Badiha eternal rest in His kingdom and consolation to her family and loved ones. □

The Maronite Voice

4611 Sadler Road

Glen Allen, VA 23060

Phone: 804/270-7234

Fax: 804/273-9914

E-Mail: gmsebaali@aol.com

<http://www.stmaron.org>

<http://www.usamaronite.org>

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- Most Reverend Bishop Robert Joseph Shaheen
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Editor Msgr. George M. Sebaali

Consultor Fr. Abdallah Zaidan, M.L.M.

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Mary Shaia

Anne-Marie Condlin

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Sts. Peter and Paul Maronite Church

Tampa, Florida

July 3 - 7, 2013

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

Fall River, Massachusetts *First Vows*



From left: Fr. Jack Morrison, Sister Therese Maria with her mother, Jackie, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Mother Marla Marie and Chorbishop Joseph F. Kaddo.

On Saturday, December 8, 2012, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Sister Therese Maria Touma professed her First Vows as a Maronite Servant of Christ the Light at Saint Anthony of the Desert Parish in Fall River, Mass. His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, several concelebrating clergy and over two hundred people attended the celebration. Mother Marla Marie received Sister Therese Maria's vows after the homily. It was a beautiful and blessed day in the journey of the foundation of the Maronite Servants. Sister Therese Maria addressed the congregation at the close of the Liturgy:

“My soul rejoices in the Lord my Savior ... The Mighty one has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1: 47, 49). Yes, truly He has filled me with the fullness of His awesome love. Thank you to all for your encouraging presence and prayers, and for sharing with me such a joyous occasion. In gratitude to our Good God, I thank Him for the gift of my calling as a Maronite Servant of Christ the Light, and for the grace to respond to this life-giving invitation to be all for Jesus, and to love and serve our Church.

“I thank my parents, Youssef and Jackie, for all their sacrifices and love in raising me and my siblings, Alison and Roumanos. I am honored to have my mother here with me all the way from Australia, representing my loved ones, family and friends back home in Sydney.

“There are many who have touched my life and made a positive difference. They know who they are and I thank God for each of them. In particular, I thank His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour for his inspiring words, caring presence and faithful witness of fatherly and brotherly love. I am deeply grateful to the generous priests who have supported me in my journey of discernment and formation, and especially for those here today.

“In a special way, I thank you, Mother Marla Marie, for your self-giving dedication and uplifting presence in my life

as a guide, formator, and dear friend. In the last three years of formation, I have seen myself grow in the acceptance of my humanity, and in compassion for my neighbor. Thank you for your goodness, for all the joys, challenges, and the sharing of your life experiences with me, in community. This all has helped me to grow in my understanding and living of true communion and love.” □

Utica, New York *Subdeacon Ordination*



by Jacqueline Sweeney

Peter M. Hobaica, Esq., a prominent attorney in Utica, New York, for nearly three decades, was ordained to the Order of Subdeacon at Saint Louis Gonzaga Maronite Catholic Church on December 8, 2012, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Chorbishop John D. Faris, Pastor, conferred the ordination.

Fr. Bassam Saade, former pastor of St. Louis Gonzaga Church and currently the Pastor of Saint Jude Church in Orlando, Fla.; Fr. Georges Bouchaaya, Pastor of Saint Ann Church, Watervliet, N.Y.; Fr. Miled Jreig, Parochial Vicar of Saint Louis Gonzaga Church; Fr. Louis F. Aiello, Director of the Permanent Diaconate Formation Program of the Diocese of Syracuse; Msgr. Francis J. Willenburg; Fr. Paul Drobin, Chaplain of Utica College; and Fr. Ralph Fraats of St. John the Evangelist, concelebrated. Deacon Paul A. Salamy proclaimed the Gospel and presented Peter to the Chorbishop for ordination. Mrs. Judy Hobaica, the wife of Subdeacon Peter and a registered nurse, read the Epistle and presented the vestments for her husband.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a reception offered by the Parish in the Church Hall. The next morning, Subdeacon Peter exercised his new order during the Divine Liturgy. Subdeacon Peter is enrolled in the formation program for permanent deacons in the Diocese of Syracuse. Candidates from the program participated in the ordination liturgy. □



Brooklyn, New York Lebanese Heritage Day



Left to right: Bishop Gregory Mansour; Jerry Allred, presenter on behalf of Brooklyn Borough President; Majdi Ramadan, Consul General of Lebanon in New York; Joseph Elhilow, Esq.; and John Abi-Habib, Committee Chair. (Photo by Tony C. Malouf).

by Salma T. Vahdat

November 28, 2012 saw a capacity crowd fill the Brooklyn Borough Hall Rotunda to celebrate and honor four prominent Lebanese Americans who have contributed to the mosaic that is America. The invitation was at the behest of the Lebanese Heritage Committee, John Abi-Habib, Chairman, Marty Markowitz, Brooklyn Borough President, and the Honorable Consul General of Lebanon in New York, Majdi Ramadan.

The four honorees were George Altirs, a self-made entrepreneur and business man and CEO of the GMA group which is operated by seven hundred professionals and three thousand factory and distribution employees worldwide. The Altirs Foundation sponsors hundreds of children playing soccer and has established the "Cedars Star Academy," a pro soccer school. His many charitable endeavors are too numerous to list here.

Jeanette Harouni, widely known as "Hanan, the Arabian Nightingale" was a world famous classical Arabic singer and film star recognized for her cultural and charitable contributions to the Arab-American community. Among the many groups she supported were the St. Nicholas Home in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, N.Y., and Danny Thomas' St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. In October, 2011 she passed away and her family accepted her honor posthumously.

Dr. Ghassan Elcheikhali is an academician whose career has spanned a wide range of activity. Currently he is the principal of the Razi School in Queens, N.Y., one of the largest Islamic schools in N.Y. He was recently selected by *The New York Times* to be one in Eight Million New Yorkers for his outstanding community work and outreach effort to bridge relations between the Muslim community and people of other faiths.

His Excellency Bishop Gregory J. Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, was the final

honoree. He is the Shepherd of the Maronite community which consists of sixteen states on the East Coast. Included in the Eparchy are forty priests, twenty five deacons and subdeacons, a community of contemplative monks, a community of religious women, a seminary and forty parishes and missions.

In his acceptance remarks Bishop Mansour echoed his thanks to God for the existence of Lebanon, "where eighteen different religious communities have found a formula, a pact, that allows them to live together in freedom and mutual respect; and they actually learn from another!" He also thanked God for the U.S.A., "for it is here that a man can be honored by civic leaders simply for loving his faith and sincerely attempting to live by it each day. This is true of me as a Christian, as well for the Muslim and the Jew."

He thanked the Lebanese community in the greater New York area who began as simple peddlers and shop owners in lower Manhattan, where they brought their families from the "old country" in search of a better life. From there they came to Brooklyn and eventually to all five boroughs and subsequently to the whole United States. He cited the presence of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn Heights and her Rector, Msgr. James Root, as a sign of our enduring presence here and our continuing contribution to the life of all New Yorkers.

It was an exciting evening filled with the pride of Lebanese-Americans who appreciate their heritage and are grateful to these United States of America for giving their forebears the opportunity to achieve the "American Dream."

A reception followed in the Grand Rotunda where all were treated to a variety of Lebanese cuisine donated by seventeen Brooklyn restaurants and caterers serving our community. □

the Deadline is... **Deadline for next month's issue** of *The Maronite Voice* is January 25, 2013.

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

Send all changes of address, news, pictures and personal correspondence to: *The Maronite Voice*

4611 Sadler Road

Glen Allen, Virginia 23060,

Phone: (804) 270-7234; Fax: (804) 273-9914

Email: Gmsebaali@aol.com

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. □

Food For Thought

The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary's side as she is busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth. This enables her to train us and to mold us with the same care, until Christ is "fully formed" in us... Why should we not once more have recourse to the Rosary, with the same faith as those who have gone before us? □

Pope John Paul II

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania *All Saints Vigil*



by Amal Kouyoumdji

For several weeks, the MYA at St. Maron Church in Philadelphia, Penn., had been preparing for two important events with the help and guidance of Father Vincent Farhat, Administrator, and newly ordained Deacon George Hajj. The All Saints Vigil, followed the next day by a trip to Washington, D.C., to attend the Young Adults Retreat/Workshop was scheduled for November 2 - 4, 2012.

The much anticipated evening was finally here. When you entered the Church filled with the whispers of the many parishioners who came to celebrate, you forgot how chilly that November evening was, as the warmth of the ambience inside slowly enveloped your body and mind. When Liturgy started, and the whispers subsided, all eyes were drawn to the front pews where the young adults stood side by side, eager, excited, and possibly a tad nervous, with one eye on the road ahead tomorrow, and all the tomorrows after that, and one eye on their families that stood behind them and lovingly looked upon them. Whether your child was among them or not, your heart had to beat a little faster, for tonight they were not only their parents' children, they were the children of a broader spiritual family that strongly believed that they are the future, or, as His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour puts it, "a special gift to our churches."

Listening to Deacon George's homily, I found myself smiling. I then realized that I was not the only one. Deacon George's face and the faces of those listening to him reflected the joy adhering to his words. No wonder! After he cited example upon example of the "miraculous moments" in the lives of saints when they completely and unconditionally "surrendered to the love of Christ," came the big announcement "It is a love story," he said, and we are all invited at all times to partake in it. And the good news kept coming. Not only "the story had begun" for all of us otherwise we would not have been there on what he called a "historic night," but the story has a happy ending, for God is Truth, and He is with us, and with Him and all the saints, we get to "live happily ever after... for all eternity." All we

have to do is open our hearts and minds to His tremendous Love, and allow ourselves to be led by Him, for He is walking with us always.

With that in mind the procession began that lasted several blocks through the narrow streets of South Philadelphia. In *The Story of a Vocation* published in *The Maronite Voice* last November, Deacon George compared his life in the seminary to the story of the two disciples on their way to the village of *Emmaus*. One could only pray that our collective walk that night compared, even in a small way, to that of the disciples' heading for *Emmaus*.

For many years now, our Church and our ever-growing community have been capturing the hearts of Philadelphians. And that night was no different! Touched, fascinated, and maybe intrigued, pedestrians stopped on both sides of the street and watched us walk, all together. "We are all in this together," says Deacon George in *The Story of a Vocation*, and hopefully, on that night, we were, all together, one step closer to living as children of God, and to earning the privilege of proclaiming His Word to the world.

Before he gave the Final Blessing, Father Vincent had some touching words of praise and congratulation for Deacon George on his homily, and on his work with the MYA, to which the congregation responded with spontaneous applause. Liturgy was followed by light fare prepared and served by the young adults. The evening ended with a group of them huddled at the door of the Church hall, taking final instructions from Father Vincent. "Be good," he said over and over, as they nodded and smiled. And on their way they went, accompanied by their advisor, Mrs. Anne Tayoun Dellagro, and Deacon George. We prayed that God walked with all of them, and that they too were led by His Grace one step closer to *Emmaus*. □

Pleasantville, New Jersey *Star of the East Online Radio Station*

A new Maronite online Radio presence is established in the U.S. to serve the Christian Community. It webcasts in Arabic (eighteen hours) and English (six hours) daily, with a variety of programs to help us learn more about our faith, heritage, and spirituality, in addition, to the rosary and the daily Liturgy in the Maronite Rite. You can listen to Star of the East Radio online at www.StaroftheEast.org or by downloading the free application for Iphone and Ipad "Star of the East App." We will be happy to communicate with your parish concerning your activities and your news, or your suggestions. You can contact us at info@StaroftheEast.org or 609-363-2000. □

Food For Thought

Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections but instantly set about remedying them - every day begin the task anew. □

St. Francis de Sales

Catholic Extension Renews Challenge Grants to Maronite Church

by John Kurey

In March 2012, Catholic Extension Society offered fourteen dioceses a unique opportunity to earn a matching grant for raising money for the dioceses' endowments to pay the [education] costs of seminarians. The dioceses were selected after a competitive application process. Only half of the dioceses that applied were selected.

Both the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon were selected. Both Maronite Eparchies met their challenges in 2012 and received a \$25,000 grant from Catholic Extension to add to their endowment to pay seminarian education costs.

In late 2012, Catholic Extension again welcomed applications from dioceses to participate in the matching grant program. Despite requests from numerous dioceses, there were just two dioceses that participated in the matching grant program in 2012 that were approved to participate in 2013: the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon. This is a tremendous honor for the Maronite Eparchies and a tribute to the new stewardship effort undertaken by Bishop Gregory Mansour and Bishop Robert Shaheen since 2010.

As with the 2012 matching grant program, each Eparchy will have the opportunity in 2013 to get a "one-for-two" matching grant from Catholic Extension, up to \$25,000. Catholic Extension will give \$1 for every \$2 donated for the

Seminarian Education Endowment. This means that every donation to the Endowment will be increased in value by 50%. Membership dues and donations have to be received by December 31, 2013 to qualify.

Each Eparchy will work with the Order of Saint Sharbel to meet the terms of the matching grant. It requires enrolling ten new Perpetual Members in the Order of Saint Sharbel (Perpetual Membership costs \$5,000) or receiving a comparable amount in donations.

If you have ever considered Perpetual Membership for yourself or a loved one, now is the time to act. Your Membership fee or donation must be received by December 31, 2013, to count towards the challenge.

Additional information can be found on the Order of St. Sharbel's website, www.orderstsharbel.org, or obtained by contacting any of the following people:

- Rosanne Solomon, President of the Order of Saint Sharbel (rosannesolomon@gmail.com)
- Wanda Elkourie, Vice President of the Order, Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon (welkourie@charter.net)
- Bernadette Shalhoub, Vice President of the Order, Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn (bbshalhoub@aol.com)
- John Kurey, Stewardship Director, Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon (718-237-9913 / 314-231-1021 or saintmaron@yahoo.com / maroniteswest@yahoo.com).

Thank you again!

Effective Ways You Can Help Your Eparchy!

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

Planned Giving: Consider Your Legacy

This is a creative way to support the Church. Planned giving can involve contributing through your will, insurance policy, or retirement assets. Also, it can be a way to make a donation and to provide yourself with a steady source of income; a charitable remainder trust is one example of this.

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

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

Suggested wording for a bequest to the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

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

Tax-Smart Giving of Appreciated Stock or other Assets

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

For more information on any or all of these options, please contact Stewardship Director John F. Kurey, Esq., MBA, at 718-237-9913 or 314-231-1021; or by e-mail at johnkurey@yahoo.com or at maroniteswest@yahoo.com. □

THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

Perpetual Members

- ★ Natalie Homsy, Broomfield, Colo.
- ★ Emosa K. Herrera, San Antonio, Tex.
- ★ Edward P. Richard, Jr., Concord Twp, Ohio
- ★ Susan Boackle Childress, Denver, Col.
- ★ Thomas J. Joseph, Phoenix, Ariz.
- ★ Richard M. Kassouf, Birmingham, Ala.
- ★ Fr. Ghassan Mattar, San Antonio, Tex.
 - ★ Karl A. Karim, Houston, Tex.
 - ★ Scott Wepfer, Hoover, Ala.
 - ★ Valerie Wepfer, Hoover, Ala.
- ★ Tawnee Nasseff, Woodbury, Minn.
- ★ Gabriel Habib, Pearland, Tex.

Annual Members

- ★ Georgina E. Constantine, Northridge, Calif.
- ★ Albert Constantine, Northridge, Calif.
- ★ Matthew Dennig, Pleasanton, Calif.
- ★ Merry Kweiter, Ballwin, Mo.
- ★ Marie Eid Medawar, Phoenix, Ariz.

Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn

Annual Members

- ★ Peter Moawad, Harrisburg, Penn.
- ★ Peter Nasiff, Fall River, Mass.

The Order of Saint Sharbel is an organization of lay people and clergy who have pledged their spiritual strength and financial support for Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary and the retired Maronite clergy of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA.

For more information about the Order, ask your pastor or write to:

Eparchy of Saint Maron
Order of Saint Sharbel
109 Remsen Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Or

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

Warren, Michigan *Lebanon Independence Day*



Children of St. Sharbel Maronite Church in Warren, Mich., sing the Lebanese National Anthem in remembrance of Lebanon's Independence Day.

by *Jessica Mourani*

St. Sharbel Lebanese Literature Students celebrate Lebanon's Independence Day on Sunday, November 18, 2012. November 22, 1943, is a remarkable day in the history of the Lebanese heritage. Lebanon gained her freedom and liberty on this day and it is a day worthy of celebration and joy! For this reason, St. Sharbel Lebanese Literature Students in Warren [Detroit], Mich., took great pride in their home country as they hoisted the Lebanese flag in the air and sang the Lebanese National Anthem with pride. After the Divine Liturgy, the children paraded into the Church's banquet center. Dressed in black and white with the Lebanese sash across their chests, they evoked feelings of joy and pride in all those watching.

Following the ceremony, the Director of the Arabic Language Program, Mrs. Mirna Mourani, addressed the audience with beautiful words about Lebanon. The Honorable Mr. Belal Kablan, Consul General of Lebanon, addressed the audience with a message of unity and love quoting Patriarch Rai's motto, "Communion and Love." Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor, spoke words of unity, hope and peace and wished all the Lebanese a happy Independence Day. The St. Sharbel *Dabke* Troops, led by Mrs. Antoinette Habbouche, gave a memorable performance on the occasion! The Consul General presented each child with a Lebanese pin in remembrance of this special day. □



Austin, Texas Celebration of Saint Sharbel's Life and Miracles



From left: Patricia Angelides, Msgr. Don Sawyer, Araceli Nieto, and Yolla Bsaibes.

On two Sundays - October 13, 2012, presented in English, and October 21, presented entirely in Spanish, Our Lady's Maronite Catholic Church in Austin, Texas, hosted *The Celebration of Saint Sharbel* on the big screen at a local cinema. With promotional assistance from Relevant Radio and the Diocese of Austin, both events were presented to sold-out audiences.

The thirty minute pre-show consisted of a number of videos of the Monastery of Saint Maron in *Annaya*, Lebanon, actors depicting Saint Sharbel as a child, young man and then in his elderly years, views of the hermitage and scenes of his canonization in Rome, Italy, while the music, all in Arabic, reflected devotion for this great saint.

Attendees were welcomed by Our Lady's Pastor, Monsignor Donald Sawyer, who explained that *The Living Miracles* and the movie, based on the book by Father Hanna Skandar, and generously provided by producer Roland Eid, were in Arabic and subtitled in English or Spanish for each presentation.

The Living Miracles presentation showed scenes of

devotion to Saint Sharbel around the world: Mexico, Jordan, Nigeria and other African nations. This was followed by testimonials: Raymond Nader, who bears the Saint's hand print and has received over twenty messages from Saint Sharbel; the story of the healing of the toddler, Elias, from a severe form of cancer, as told by his mother and father; and finally a video of Nohad El-Shamy, on whom Saint Sharbel, assisted by Saint Maron, performed surgery in 1993, curing the paralysis she suffered as a result of a stroke. The reaction of the audience to this part of the celebration was very moving with a lot of tears shed. Our Lady's acknowledges the assistance provided by Rona Ayache of Chandler, Arizona, in providing *The Living Miracles* CD and promotional assistance for the celebration.

After testimonials, the movie, which is approximately one hour and forty minutes, was presented. The celebration was concluded with distribution of blessed pictures of Saint Sharbel and holy oil with tiny relics provided by the Monastery of Saint Maron - *Annaya*.

Any parish interested in doing a celebration can contact Monsignor Sawyer at email@ourladysmaronite.org. He will gladly put them in touch with committee members who can provide CDs, information and assistance.

As a testimonial to this spiritual celebration, Saint Sharbel statue stands proudly outside of Our Lady's Parish bearing a rosary around his neck and a variety of colorful ribbons on his outstretched hands, the Mexican traditions of thanking him for interceding in prayers answered. □

Pleasantville, New Jersey Second Annual Christmas Recital



by Fr. Elie Saade

The Choir of Our Lady Star of the East Maronite Mission in Pleasantville, New Jersey, celebrated the Second Annual Christmas Recital on December 15, 2012. The Recital started with the youth choir, which presented a series of English traditional hymns, directed by Rana Rehani, and accompanied on the organ by Jason Rehani. The Choir of OLSE performed some of the Maronite traditional Christmas hymns, directed by Fr. Elie Saade, L.M.O., and then with Elvis Manuel and the Spanish choir, who shared the beauty of the Spanish music and language. □

Roanoke, Virginia Veterans' Day



High school students of St. Elias Parish narrate the story of the Star Spangled Banner.

Veterans' Day, November 11, 2012, was on a Sunday this year, providing a perfect opportunity for St. Elias Parish, Roanoke, Virginia, to honor its veterans with a program and lunch following the Sunday Liturgy.

A table, festooned in red, white and blue, housed a display of photos and memorabilia, not only of parishioner-veterans but also of active duty personnel and family-member veterans not of the Parish. Dining tables were likewise adorned with flags and centerpieces made by the children's group, *St. Sharbel's Kids*.

The program opened with a presentation of the colors and the Pledge of Allegiance by Boy Scout Troop 138, followed by a meal with three pasta dishes - red, white and blue - and a salad with red, white and blue fruit. Red white and blue persisted through desert with a tricolor cake and tricolor pizzelle cookies.

St. Sharbel's Kids marched and sang to Yankee Doodle and It's a Grand Old Flag. High school students narrated the story of the Star Spangled Banner. Taps were played and the names of deceased veterans were read by Wanda Donkers. Especially noted was the story of Lt. Col. Joseph Moses, the most decorated service member from Virginia during WW II. Veterans stood for recognition while the songs of their branch of service were played. The program ended with the singing of America the Beautiful, accompanied and led by the organist, Beverly Keeling.

MC Jim Donkers announced that any money placed in the donation jar at the entrance would be given to a fund to provide toiletries and gifts to the veterans residing at the Virginia Home for Veterans. Donations were generous.

The idea of honoring our veterans was well received. Plans are underway for another celebration next November in what will become an annual event. □



Stockton, California First Annual Hafli



St. Sharbel Mission in Stockton, California, celebrated its first Annual Hafli with its new administrator, Fr. Nabil Mouannes, in conjunction with its sister church in Sacramento, Our Lady of the Rosary. Youth from both communities performed a traditional skit and *dabke* dance to express their unity and to express the hope and the future of both communities. Fr. Mouannes thanked the people and the priests who served the mission for many years. He conveyed the support of Bishop Shaheen and the Eparchy. □

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

January 5 - 6, 2013

Dedication of Heart of Jesus Maronite Church, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

January 12 - 13, 2013

Pastoral Visit to Saints Peter and Paul, Tampa, Fla.

January 14 - 18, 2013

Annual Clergy Retreat, North Palm Beach, Fla.

January 18 - 19, 2013

Order of Saint Sharbel Retreat, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

January 20, 2013

Pastoral Visit to Mary Mother of the Light Maronite Mission, West Palm Beach, Fla.

January 24 - 25, 2013

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

January 27, 2013

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

February 3, 2013

Pastoral Visit to Our Lady of Mercy Maronite Church, Worcester, Mass.

February 9 - 10, 2013

Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, St. Maron Feast Day celebration "and honoring of" Bishop Stephen Hector Doueih. □

The Second Vatican Council's Decree On The Eastern Catholic Churches A Half - Century Later

by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M.

This presentation offers an introductory comment on a topic of utmost importance followed by a summary of the Church's official teaching.

In 2012 we marked the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962 - 1965) by Blessed John XXIII. The aging Pope John XXIII astounded the Church and the world by convoking a general council almost a century after Vatican I by opening the windows to allow the Holy Spirit to renew and enlarge the Church's understanding of itself and its mission to the world. By the conclusion of Vatican II in 1965 Pope Paul VI had promulgated sixteen documents hammered out by the Council Fathers which present fundamental teachings of the Church to our contemporary world.

How Much Do You Know About the Eastern Catholic Churches?

One of those conciliar documents is the *Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches (Orientalium Ecclesiarum)* signed into official approval on November 21, 1964. This instruction deals with a subject little known and poorly understood. It is a primary effort to shed light on a part of the universal Church generally shrouded with unfamiliarity.

Have you read this important instruction? Have you ever heard it mentioned and explained?

What is said of the Eastern Catholic Church, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to all Eastern Christian Churches. In fact this document is of a piece with the *Decree on Ecumenism (Redintegratio Unitatis)* promulgated on the same date.

Are Catholics, let alone Eastern Catholics, even aware of this document? The value of the *Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches* is unquestionable. However, it is unfortunate that this document on a topic which needs and deserves so much attention today has received the least consideration of all sixteen Vatican II statements. Evidence indicates that it has received the least attention of all in study and in print. Seldom does one find it cited or find commentaries about it. Not a few authorities think it is the document most weakly implemented. Asking others about this decree will soon reinforce these impressions.

Current circumstances in the life of the Church universal draw attention anew to the *Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches*.

A Beginning with a Helpful Tool

In this anniversary period let us take a fresh look, perhaps a first look at this important instruction. As faithful Maronites we should be in the forefront of bringing clarity of understanding to the existence and mission of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

I have assembled the following précis to help focus attention on the identity and mission of our Eastern Churches.

This précis is a concise summary of the key points of concern expressed in verbatim excerpts from the document. The intent of the summary is to promote clearer understanding of the Eastern Catholic Churches and to encourage deeper appreciation of our heritage. May it renew and refresh our grasp of the mind of the Church.

Decree On The Eastern Catholic Churches

Second Vatican Council, November 21, 1964

The Universal Church Values the Eastern Christian Churches

The Catholic Church values highly the institutions of the Eastern Churches, their liturgical rites, ecclesiastical traditions, and their ordering of Christian life. For in those Churches, which are distinguished by their venerable antiquity, there is clearly evident the tradition which has come from the Apostles through the Fathers and which is part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the Universal Church (#1).

The Particular Churches

The holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government. They combine into different groups, which are held together by their hierarchy, and so form particular Churches or rites. Between those Churches there is such a wonderful bond of union that this variety in the Universal Church, so far from diminishing its unity, rather serves to emphasize it. For the Catholic Church wishes the traditions of each particular church or rite to remain whole and entire, and it likewise wishes to adapt its own way of life to the needs of different times and places (#2).

Understand and Appreciate the Eastern Churches

Provision must be made, therefore, everywhere in the world to protect and advance all these individual churches. For this purpose, each should organize its own parishes and hierarchy, where the spiritual good of the faithful requires it. Prelates of the various individual Churches who have jurisdiction in the same territory should meet at regular intervals for consultation, and thus foster unity of action and strive together to meet their common tasks, so as better to further the good of religion and to safeguard more effectively the discipline of their clergy. All clerics and those who are to receive sacred orders should be well instructed concerning rites and particularly in practical rules for inter-ritual questions. Lay people should also receive instruction concerning rites and their rules in their catechetical formation.

Finally, each and every Catholic, as also the baptized members of any non-Catholic church or community who come to the fullness of Catholic communion, must retain each one's own rite wherever one is, and follow it to the best of one's ability (#4).

Preserve the Heritage of the Eastern Churches

History, tradition, and very many ecclesiastical institutions give clear evidence of the great debt owed to the Eastern Churches by the Church Universal. Therefore, the holy Council not merely praises and appreciates as is due this ecclesiastical and spiritual heritage, but also insists on viewing it as the heritage of the whole Church of Christ. For that reason this Council solemnly declares that the Churches of the East like those of the West have the right and duty to govern themselves according to their own special disciplines, for these are guaranteed by ancient tradition, and seem to be better suited to the customs of their faithful and better fitted for bringing about the good of their souls (#5).

All members of the Eastern Churches should be firmly convinced that they can and ought always preserve their own legitimate rites and ways of life, and that changes are to be introduced only to forward their own organic development. They, themselves, are to carry out all these prescriptions with the greatest fidelity. They are to aim always at a more perfect knowledge and practice of their rites, and if they have fallen away due to circumstances of time or persons, they are to strive to return to their ancestral traditions.

Those who by reason of their office or apostolic ministry have frequent dealings with the Eastern Churches or their faithful should be instructed as their office demands in theoretical and practical knowledge of the rites, discipline, doctrine, history, and character of the members of Eastern Churches. It is recommended strongly to religious orders and associations of the Latin rite, which are working in Eastern countries or among the Eastern faithful, that they should set up, so far as possible, houses or even provinces of the Eastern rite to make their apostolic work more effective (#6).

The Eastern Patriarchs

The patriarchate as an institution has existed in the Church from earliest times, and was already recognized by the first ecumenical councils.

By the term "Eastern Patriarch" is meant the bishop who has jurisdiction over all the bishops, Metropolitans not excepted, clergy and people of his own territory or rite, according to the rules of Canon Law and without prejudice to the primacy of the Roman Pontiff (#7).

Following the most ancient tradition of the Church, special honor is to be given to the patriarchs of the Eastern Churches, since each is set over his patriarchate as father and head. Therefore, this holy Council enacts that their rights and privileges be restored in accordance with the ancient traditions of each Church and the decrees of the ecumenical councils.

These rights and privileges are those which existed in the time of union between East and West, although they must be adapted to present-day conditions.

The patriarchs with their synods are the highest authority for all business of the patriarchate, not excepting the right of setting up new eparchies (dioceses) and appointing bishops of their own rite within the patriarchal territory, without

prejudice to the inalienable right of the Roman Pontiff to intervene in any particular case (#9).

Eastern Worship Rites

The faithful are obliged to take part in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and feast days or, according to the regulations or custom of their own Rite, in the celebration of the Divine Office. To enable the faithful to fulfill more easily this obligation, it is laid down that the time for fulfilling this precept extends from Vespers of the vigil to the end of the Sunday or feast day. The faithful are strongly recommended to receive the Sacred Eucharist on these days, and to do so even more frequently, even every day (#15).

Relations with Separated Churches

The Eastern Churches in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome have the special duty of fostering the unity of all Christians, in particular of Eastern Christians, according to the principles laid down in the decree of this holy Council, "On Ecumenism," by prayer above all, by their example, by their scrupulous fidelity to the ancient traditions of the East, by better knowledge of each other, by working together, and by a brotherly attitude toward persons and things (#24).

Nothing more should be demanded of separated Eastern Christians who come to Catholic unity under the influence of the Holy Spirit than what the simple profession of the Catholic faith requires. And since a valid priesthood has been preserved among them, Eastern clerics who come to Catholic unity may exercise their own Orders, in accordance with the regulations laid down by the competent authority (#25).

Sharing Sacraments

In view of the principles just noted, Eastern Christians who are separated in good faith from the Catholic Church, if they are rightly disposed and make such request of their own accord, may be given the Sacraments of Penance, the Eucharist, and the Anointing of the Sick. Moreover, Catholics may also ask those same sacraments from non-Catholic ministers in whose church there are valid sacraments, as often as necessity or true spiritual benefit recommends such action, and access to a Catholic priest is physically or morally impossible (#27).

Further, given the same principles, a common sharing in sacred functions, things, and places, is permitted for a just cause between Catholics and their separated Eastern brethren (#28).

Pray for Reunion and Christian Unity

In the meantime, however, all Christians, Eastern and Western, are strongly urged to pray to God daily with fervor and constancy in order that, by the help of God's most holy Mother, all may be one. They should pray also, that the fullness of the strength and consolation of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, may be given those many Christians, whatever church they belong to, who for their courageous profession of the name of Christ endure suffering and privation. "Let us all love one another with brotherly affection, outdoing one another in showing honor" (Rom 12:10) (#30). □

Healthy Families, Parish Communities Foster Vocations

by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput,
O.F.M. Cap.

If God called men to the priesthood by reaching down and tapping them on the shoulders, we would not be lacking for vocations.

But the "call" is much more subtle than that, and responding to it requires a good measure of human encouragement. Vocations are seldom the result of visions, dramatic miracles or near-death experiences. Instead, nurtured by others, they grow quietly and gradually, like seedlings which receive the necessary sunlight and water to mature into beautiful trees.

Consider the case of Kent Drotar¹. Kent did not fully understand what God wanted of him until he was a 30-something commander in the U.S. Air Force. The factors that helped him discern his vocation were neither lightning bolts nor visions. They were prayers and people.

I want to draw your attention to the telling results of a recent study on vocations, which you may have read about. Simply put, the study, conducted by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, demonstrated that parishes offering many opportunities to participate in the life and tradition of the Church are more likely to produce priests than parishes which do not.

Parishes producing multiple vocations in the past twenty years are fifteen to twenty-two percent more likely to have Marian or Eucharistic devotions than parishes producing no vocations. They are thirty-six percent more likely to have Catholic elementary schools, eighteen to twenty percent more likely to have more than one priest assigned to the parish.

This all makes sense. But I think the study implies something less obvious. Any parish's spiritual climate is largely dependent on the practices and attitudes of the parish's many families. Involved faith-filled families make for active, faith-filled parishes – parishes likely to produce priests. Therefore, *our homes are the primary places for the renewal of vocations.*

This cannot be understated. I don't think it is a coincidence that the decline in religious vocations in the United States mirrors the decline in the traditional family structure. Pope John Paul II wrote in *Familiaris Consorts* that "the future of



humanity passes by way of the family." So if we wish to transform our culture and create a culture conducive to priestly vocations, we must first transform our families. Our homes must be the true domestic Church, where the faith assumes the kind of centrality long ago abdicated to television sets and other temporal distractions.

One of the great blessings of the Second Vatican Council is a renewed interest among lay people in their own vocation, not only in the world but in the Church. Encouraging vocations to the priesthood and religious life is an important part of every Catholic's vocation. This does not in any way contradict active lay involvement in the church. In fact, the Church is richer by all these complementary vocations working together for the glory of God and the proclamation of the Gospel.

There is reason for optimism here in our own archdiocese. We currently have eighteen new applicants wishing to study for the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Denver. I do not know how many of these applications will come to fruition, but the Lord is giving us a good number of men who are considering serving the Church in this generous way.

The Holy Spirit has not stopped calling young men to priesthood, but the Church only gets the vocations it deserves. Sometimes, we have failed to create conditions – in our culture, in our parishes, in our families, in ourselves – that draw young men to the priesthood. Those seedling vocations too often fall on barren soil.

Our challenge is to become the water and sunlight that help vocations grow. We need to support and encourage those sensing a call to the priesthood, through prayers, words, and by being true to our own vocations.

If we help prepare the way, there will be many, many men willing to give themselves body and soul to the ministry of the priesthood within the Church. □

Reprinted with permission

About the Author

The Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., D.D., was ordained to the priesthood on August 29, 1970. He was ordained Bishop of Rapid City, South Dakota, on July 26, 1988. Pope John Paul II appointed him Archbishop of Denver on February 18, 1997. Pope Benedict XVI appointed him Archbishop of Philadelphia on July 19, 2011.

¹ Kent was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Chaput.

Vocations, "Sign Of Hope Founded In Faith"

The Holy Father's Message for the 50th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, to be celebrated on April, 21, 2013, was published on December 15. Pope Benedict XVI reflects on the theme of "Vocations as a sign of hope founded in faith." Given below are extensive extracts from the message.

"Dear Brothers and Sisters, what exactly is God's faithfulness, to which we adhere with unwavering hope? It is His love! He, the Father, pours His love into our innermost self through the Holy Spirit. And this love, fully manifested in Jesus Christ, engages with our existence and demands a response in terms of what each individual wants to do with his or her life, and what he or she is prepared to offer in order to live it to the full.



"The love of God sometimes follows paths one could never have imagined, but it always reaches those who are willing to be found. Hope is nourished, then, by this certainty: 'We ourselves have known and believed in the love that God has for us'. This deep, demanding love, which penetrates well below the surface, gives us courage; it gives us hope in our life's journey and in our future; it makes us trust in ourselves, in history and in other people.

"I want to speak particularly to the young and I say to you once again: 'What would your life be without this love? God takes care of men and women from creation to the end of time, when He will bring His plan of salvation to completion. In the Risen Lord we have the certainty of our hope!' (Address to Young People of the Diocese of San Marino-Montefeltro, 19 June 2011).

"Just as He did during His earthly existence, so today the Risen Jesus walks along the streets of our life and sees us immersed in our activities, with all our desires and our needs. In the midst of our everyday circumstances He continues to speak to us; He calls us to live our life with Him, for only He is capable of satisfying our thirst for hope. He lives now among the community of disciples that is the Church, and still today calls people to follow Him. The call can come at any moment.

"Today too, Jesus continues to say, 'Come, follow me.' Accepting His invitation means no longer choosing our own path. Following Him means immersing our own will in the will of Jesus, truly giving Him priority, giving Him pride of

place in every area of our lives: in the family, at work, in our personal interests, in ourselves. It means handing over our very lives to Him, living in profound intimacy with Him, entering through Him into communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit, and consequently with our brothers and sisters. This communion of life with Jesus is the privileged 'setting' in which we can experience hope and in which life will be full and free.

"Vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life are born out of the experience of a personal encounter with Christ, out of sincere and confident dialogue with Him, so as to enter into His will. It is necessary, therefore, to grow in the experience of faith, understood as a profound relationship with Jesus, as inner attentiveness to His voice which is heard deep within us. This process, which enables us to respond positively to God's call, is possible in Christian communities where the faith is lived intensely, where generous witness is given of adherence to the Gospel, where there is a strong sense of mission which leads people to make the total gift of self for the Kingdom of God, nourished by recourse to the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and by a fervent life of prayer. This latter 'must on the one hand be something very personal, an encounter between my intimate self and God, the living God. On the other hand it must be constantly guided and enlightened by the great prayers of the Church and of the saints, by liturgical prayer, in which the Lord teaches us again and again how to pray properly.'

"Deep and constant prayer brings about growth in the faith of the Christian community, in the unceasingly renewed certainty that God never abandons His people and that He sustains them by raising up particular vocations – to the priesthood and the consecrated life – so that they can be signs of hope for the world. Indeed, priests and religious are called to give themselves unconditionally to the People of God, in a service of love for the Gospel and the Church.

"By means of the witness of their faith and apostolic zeal, therefore, they can transmit, especially to the younger generations, a strong desire to respond generously and promptly to Christ, Who calls them to follow Him more closely. Whenever a disciple of Jesus accepts the divine call to dedicate himself to the priestly ministry or to the consecrated life, we witness one of the most mature fruits of the Christian community, which helps us to look with particular trust and hope to the future of the Church and to her commitment to evangelization. This constantly requires new workers to preach the Gospel, to celebrate the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

"So let there be committed priests, who know how to accompany young people as 'companions on the journey,' helping them, on life's often tortuous and difficult path, to recognize Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, telling them, with Gospel courage, how beautiful it is to serve God, the Christian community, one's brothers and sisters. Let there be priests who manifest the fruitfulness of an enthusiastic commitment, which gives a sense of completeness to their lives, because it is founded on faith in Him, who loved us first.

(Continues on page 20)

Troy, New York Historic Move



On Sunday, December 2, 2012, after serving the community at large for 107 years, St. Ann Maronite Church celebrated its final Liturgy and closed the doors at its Troy, N.Y., location. Following the Divine Liturgy, parishioners, embracing cherished articles (ciboria, chalices, patens, icons, vestments, registry books of Baptism, Marriage and Death), piled into their cars and lined up for a motorcade. Leading the procession was a statue of St. Ann, prominently displayed, on a flatbed truck. Immediately behind their patroness was an open-roofed car with Fr. Georges Bouchaaya, Pastor, holding a monstrance containing the Holy Eucharist. Joining him in the car was Chorbishop Joseph Kaddo from Fall River, Mass., one of St. Ann's native sons, who heeded his vocation call from this parish. Like Moses leading the Israelites across the Red Sea, Fr. Georges led his congregation across the Hudson River to their new parish home in Watervliet, N.Y. The journey was eight years in the planning.

Upon arrival in Watervliet, Fr. Georges remained standing in the car, directly in front of the new Parish home. With arms elevated, holding the monstrance aloft, Fr. Georges maintained his patient vigil as each parishioner carried their precious treasure inside the church. The congregation then spilled out the front doors of the Church and down the steps as the statue of St. Ann was reverently carried into her new home. As the statue made its slow procession up the steps, parish children showered her with flower petals while all gathered, sang a hymn of welcome. Once inside, Chorbishop Kaddo recited a prayer then sprinkled her with holy water. Fr. Georges, still holding the monstrance, then processed up the interior stairs and into the Church Sanctuary, leading a procession around the interior of the church. He then blessed the congregation and placed the Eucharist in the new Tabernacle.

On Sunday, December 9, the community gathered for the first time in their new Parish home of Watervliet. Prior to the celebration of the First Divine Liturgy, Fr. Bouchaaya led the congregation in a prayer service of dedication and

consecration. Twelve intercessions were recited, amongst which was: "For providing an empowering place to hear Your Word, grow in faith, and be challenged in mission, we give you thanks, O Lord." Organist Rick Thornton directed the choir in singing "O Come and Dwell with Us." Fr. Georges, with the approval of Bishop Gregory Mansour, recited the Prayer for the Consecration of the Church. "Eternal Father, watchful and caring, our source and our end: All that we are and all that we have is yours. Accept us now as we dedicate this place to which we come to praise your Name, to ask Your forgiveness, to know Your healing power, to hear Your Word and to be nourished by the Body and Blood of Your Son."

After the Rite of Sprinkling, Fr. Bouchaaya revered the altar as the community chanted the "Hymn of Light." Following the concluding prayer, all recited the Act of Consecration to Saint Ann. The Divine Liturgy was followed by a community celebration in the Parish Hall. A Pontifical Dedication with the Most Reverend Gregory J. Mansour is scheduled for Saturday, May 18, 2013. For more pictures about this historical move, please check the Parish's website: www.stann1905.com.

Daughters of Saint Ann



From left: Evelyn Hakim, Edith Farina, Eva Abdallah (President), Lena Joseph, and Wadad Frangie. Mrs. Mary Golden, unable to attend the event, was also recognized.

Eva Abdallah, President of the Daughters of St. Ann in Saint Ann Church of Watervliet, N.Y., recognized Evelyn Hakim, Edith Farina, Lena Joseph, Wadad Frangie and Mrs. Mary Golden with a Lifetime Membership Award. After years of faithful commitment and service, these women, have exemplified the Maronite spirit of loving dedication to the community at large.

The Daughters of St. Ann is a lay organization in the Parish Family of St. Ann Maronite Church comprised of women, "conscious of their privilege and responsibility to take an active role in the spiritual, educational, and social structures" of the faith of the church community. This organization assists the parish through fundraisers and community events. The Daughters form the backbone of support for the Parish. □

Springfield, Massachusetts Christmas Party



Children of Saint Anthony Maronite Church gathered around the Christmas tree in The Cedars Hall.

by Kathy LaBella

On December 16, 2012, the children of St. Anthony Maronite Church in Springfield, Massachusetts, participated in the Liturgy singing Christmas Carols in Arabic. The Christmas party was held immediately after Liturgy for both the children and the parishioners. Lebanese and American food were provided and served by the Women's Guild. Activities like ornament painting and gingerbread house decorating were provided for the children's entertainment. The party ended with a visit from Santa. □

Houston, Texas Christmas Concert



by Tanya Joubran

On Saturday, December 15, 2012, the adult and the children choirs of Our Lady of the Cedars Church in Houston, Texas, teamed up to perform a Christmas concert. They sang a variety of Christmas songs that were

sure to brighten everyone's evening and put everyone in the holiday spirit. After the children performed alone several songs, the adult choir sang traditional songs in Arabic, French, English, and Latin. For the Grand Finale, the children joined the adults in singing a couple of more songs as the concert's "cherry topper."

The choirs got a well-deserved standing ovation for their performances. Mr. Joseph Rouhana and Mrs. Linda Koussa trained and directed both choirs during the concert. Both choirs appreciate the musicians who accompanied them, as well as Mr. Joseph Zehri for setting up the sound and music system. □

Project Roots

The Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon join together to help people reconnect with their Christian spiritual roots in Lebanon and the Middle East. An office in Los Angeles, Calif., under the responsibility of Fr. Abdallah Zaidan, M.L.M., will assist those interested to:

- ★ Obtain their sacramental records from their country of origin
- ★ Connect with family members living in their place of origins and throughout the world where they emigrated
- ★ Obtain Lebanese citizenship, if desired
- ★ Obtain immigration records, if desired
- ★ Remain connected with the Maronite Church here and throughout the world.

No eparchial funds will be used, but the office will accept financial help from those willing to help. For more information contact:

Father Abdallah Zaidan, M.L.M.
333 South San Vicente Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90048
310-275-6634 □

Christmas Stars

Continued from page 1

Wissam must be on a long-term chemo treatment. The hospital fears its closure due to the fighting around it, and the shortage of medical personnel who are leaving Syria, and the shortages of heating oil and medications. All the faithful are living a nightmare with the family of this little angel. Wissam looks to the Crib where the Divine Child lays smiling at him. On this long Syrian night, the Stars shine and praise the Lord.

+ Samir NASSAR
Maronite Archbishop of Damascus



Mendota Heights, Minnesota *First Christmas Concert*



by John Kempe and Patricia Anderson

The morning commute was noticeably colder, and the falling snow brought traffic to a crawl. Cars backed up bumper to bumper along the freeway and the mind set of most drivers was far from cheery on this frigid December morning in Minnesota. Another arduous work day loomed as precious time lost in traffic triggered a bit more hustle and bustle needed to fulfill all the little and large obligations of the day. Few realized that the evening would bring a sweeter than expected surprise from within the quiet and subdued little parish of The Holy Family.

Father Rodrigue Constantin, Pastor, and the choir decided to dedicate their time and talent in presenting the first ever Holy Family Christmas concert in nearly ninety-five years on Thursday, December 20, 2012.

It was an evening filled with music and peaceful feelings and a perfect prelude to Christmas. The program was in three languages: English, Aramaic and Arabic. After a brief welcome from Parish Council President Patricia Anderson, the event began with an instrumental rendition of "Ave Maria" played on the organ by Carolyn Marker, one of the two organists. Soon thereafter, Fr. Rodrigue directed the choir in a rendition of "Away in the Manger" and "The First Noel."

Standing on the beautifully decorated altar, surrounded by dozens of candles, red poinsettias and evergreens, the choir sang with all their hearts. The weariness of the long work day melted away in the comforting embrace of the traditional Maronite Music. The traditional American Christmas hymns brought back pleasant childhood memories, and the Maronite hymns transported us to our spiritual homeland, Lebanon. Whether raised in Lebanon or not, we were soon whisked on that journey as the choir sang "Glory to the Word," "Father of Light," "Arsal Allah" and "Hallel, Hallel."

The rapt attention of the audience and the energy of the choir led to cheerful applause for the soloists: Phil Atkins ("O Holy Night"), Krista Abbott and Judy George ("Child of the Poor/What Child is This?"), and Souad Gubash (Silent Night). The quiet reverence turned into celebratory cheer as the choir concluded with a stirring rendition of "Kyrie

Eleison," with Fr. Rodrigue providing a robust solo.

A special bond was formed between the choir and their director, Fr. Rodrigue, as lovingly voiced by Judy George as she thanked him for the many hours he worked with the choir and inspired them into giving their very best. Finally, the crowd, both parishioners and guests, stood and applauded as Fr. Rodrigue and the choir exited singing "Joy to the World."

Children of the Faith Formation classes presented an audience interactive Nativity play. Joe Coury, Rebecca Kammeyer, Lisa Leach, and Nikki Abbott provided stage props and direction. Teachers Gary Schwery and Patty Rutz were in charge of backstage support. The Nativity play participants ranged in ages from grade-school to teenagers. Following the Concert refreshments and sweets were served in the social hall. □



Tampa, Florida *Convention Preparations*

by Sarah Maroun

Sun and fun are the goals of the NAM 2013 convention in Tampa, Florida, and what better place to accomplish those goals than at the Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina?

With over 700 luxury rooms and suites with balconies overlooking the city or bay, each of our guests can wake up looking at a beautiful ocean or sleep to the lights of the city. With room service around the clock, your comfort will be a top priority. High speed internet access is also available throughout the hotel.

Dinning, fitness, recreation and spa services are available, along with spiritual activities, children's activities, workshops, as well as hospitality services and entertainment, spread out to attend to your needs and comfort.

For all interested in soaking up the sun, a rooftop pool party will allow you to be twenty-seven floors closer to the sun! Whether you enjoy water sports or simply the warm sun and relaxation, it will give you a taste of Florida.

The convenient location of the hotel, in the heart of Tampa, is also of great advantage to NAM 2013 participants. A diverse selection of restaurants, museums, and amusement parks are within close proximity, cutting down on travel time and maximizing the fun times and experiences.

Creating unforgettable memories with the high quality of the Marriott Marina Hotel, the creativity of the Sts. Peter & Paul Maronite Catholic Mission, and the help of God, NAM 2013 will be a golden memory.

For more information about the NAM Convention 2013, and all of NAM's programs and events, please visit www.namnews.org or call (914) 964-3070 or by email at nam@namnews.org.

For more information from the host parish, call (813) 886-7413 or by email at peterpaultampa@gmail.com. □



Pope Benedict Asks Is There Still No Room in the Inn?



by Kathleen Naab

Pope Benedict XVI is asking if Mary, Joseph and the Infant Jesus can find room in the inn even today, or if we, too, are guilty of turning away God himself. The Pope asked this question during Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

The Holy Father suggested that our attitude toward the homeless, towards refugees and migrants "takes on a deeper dimension: do we really have room for God when he seeks to enter under our roof? Do we have time and space for him? Do we not actually turn away God himself?"

The Pontiff lamented that the "faster we can move" with all of modernity's "time-saving appliances," the less time we have. "And God? The question of God never seems urgent," he said. "Our time is already completely full."

The Bishop of Rome asked if God has any place even in our thinking. "If thinking is to be taken seriously, it must be structured in such a way that the 'God hypothesis' becomes superfluous," he said. "There is no room for Him. Not even in our feelings and desires is there any room for Him. We want ourselves. We want what we can seize hold of, we want happiness that is within our reach, we want our plans and purposes to succeed. We are so 'full' of ourselves that there is no room left for God. And that means there is no room for others either, for children, for the poor, for the stranger."

Sounds of Heaven

In contrast, the Pope noted the song of the angels, who begin their hymn with the words "Glory to God in the highest."

"God is glorious," Pope Benedict declared. "God is pure light, the radiance of truth and love. He is good. He is true goodness, goodness par excellence. The angels surrounding Him begin by simply proclaiming the joy of seeing God's

glory. Their song radiates the joy that fills them. In their words, it is as if we were hearing the sounds of heaven. There is no question of attempting to understand the meaning of it all, but simply the overflowing happiness of seeing the pure splendor of God's truth and love. We want to let this joy reach out and touch us: truth exists, pure goodness exists, pure light exists. God is good, and he is the supreme power above all powers. All this should simply make us joyful tonight, together with the angels and the shepherds."

The Holy Father went on to speak of the second part of the angels' message -- "peace on earth among men" -- considering the role of religion in history's wars, and in peace.

"It is true that religion can become corrupted and hence opposed to its deepest essence, when people think they have to take God's cause into their own hands, making God into their private property," he said. "... Yet it is not true that denial of God would lead to peace. If God's light is extinguished, man's divine dignity is also extinguished. Then, the human creature would cease to be God's image, to which we must pay honor in every person, in the weak, in the stranger, in the poor. Then we would no longer all be brothers and sisters, children of the one Father, who belong to one another on account of that one Father. The kind of arrogant violence that then arises, the way man then despises and tramples upon man: we saw this in all its cruelty in the last century. Only if God's light shines over man and within him, only if every single person is desired, known and loved by God is his dignity inviolable, however wretched his situation may be."

God's Peace

The Holy Father invited prayer for the places where Christ lived and for the town of Bethlehem. "Let us pray that Israelis and Palestinians may be able to live their lives in the peace of the one God and in freedom," he said. "Let us also pray for the countries of the region, for Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and their neighbors: that there may be peace there, that Christians in those lands where our faith was born may be able to continue living there, that Christians and Muslims may build up their countries side by side in God's peace."

The Pontiff concluded the homily by again encouraging the faithful to give space to God. "The shepherds made haste," he said. "Holy curiosity and holy joy impelled them. In our case, it is probably not very often that we make haste for the things of God. God does not feature among the things that require haste. The things of God can wait, we think and we say.

"And yet He is the most important thing, ultimately the one truly important thing. Why should we not also be moved by curiosity to see more closely and to know what God has said to us? At this hour, let us ask him to touch our hearts with the holy curiosity and the holy joy of the shepherds, and thus let us go over joyfully to Bethlehem, to the Lord who today once more comes to meet us." □

Zenit.org, December 24, 2012



Truth has Sprung Up, Bringing Kindness, Justice and Peace

Pope's Urbi et Orbi Address

Here is a Vatican translation of the address Pope Benedict XVI gave at the traditional blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city [of Rome] and the world).

Dear brothers and sisters in Rome and throughout the world, a happy Christmas to you and your families!

In this Year of Faith, I express my Christmas greetings and good wishes in these words taken from one of the Psalms: "Truth has sprung out of the earth." Actually, in the text of the Psalm, these words are in the future: "Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven. The Lord himself will give his benefits; our land shall yield its increase. Justice shall walk before him, and salvation, along the way of his steps" (Ps 85:11-14).

Today these prophetic words have been fulfilled! In Jesus, born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary, kindness and truth do indeed meet; justice and peace have kissed; truth has sprung out of the earth and justice has looked down from heaven.

Saint Augustine explains with admirable brevity: "What is truth? The Son of God. What is the earth? The flesh. Ask whence Christ has been born, and you will see that truth has sprung out of the earth ... truth has been born of the Virgin Mary" (En. in Ps. 84:13). And in a Christmas sermon he says that "in this yearly feast we celebrate that day when the prophecy was fulfilled: 'truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven.' The Truth, which is in the bosom of the Father, has sprung out of the earth, to be in the womb of a mother too. The Truth which rules the whole world has sprung out of the earth, to be held in the arms of a woman ... The Truth which heaven cannot contain has sprung out of the earth, to be laid in a manger. For whose benefit did so lofty a God become so lowly? Certainly not for his own, but for our great benefit, if we believe" (Sermons, 185, 1).

"If we believe." Here we see the power of faith! God has done everything; He has done the impossible: He was made flesh. His all-powerful love has accomplished something which surpasses all human understanding: the Infinite has become a child, has entered the human family. And yet, this same God cannot enter my heart unless I open the door to Him. *Porta fidei!* The door of faith! We could be frightened by this, our inverse omnipotence. This human ability to be closed to God can make us fearful. But see the reality which chases away this gloomy thought, the hope that conquers fear: truth has sprung up! God is born! "The earth has yielded its fruits" (Ps 67:6). Yes, there is a good earth, a healthy earth, an earth freed of all selfishness and all lack of openness. In this world there is a good soil which God has prepared, that He might come to dwell among us. A dwelling place for His presence in the world. This good earth exists, and today too, in 2012, from this earth truth has sprung up! Consequently, there is hope in the world, a hope in which we

can trust, even at the most difficult times and in the most difficult situations. Truth has sprung up, bringing kindness, justice and peace.

Yes, may peace spring up for the people of Syria, deeply wounded and divided by a conflict which does not spare even the defenseless and reaps innocent victims. Once again I appeal for an end to the bloodshed, easier access for the relief of refugees and the displaced, and dialogue in the pursuit of a political solution to the conflict.

May peace spring up in the Land where the Redeemer was born, and may he grant Israelis and Palestinians courage to end long years of conflict and division, and to embark resolutely on the path of negotiation.

In the countries of North Africa, which are experiencing a major transition in pursuit of a new future – and especially the beloved land of Egypt, blessed by the childhood of Jesus – may citizens work together to build societies founded on justice and respect for the freedom and dignity of every person.

May peace spring up on the vast continent of Asia. May the Child Jesus look graciously on the many peoples who dwell in those lands and, in a special way, upon all those who believe in Him. May the King of Peace turn His gaze to the new leaders of the People's Republic of China for the high task which awaits them. I express my hope that, in fulfilling this task, they will esteem the contribution of the religions, in respect for each, in such a way that they can help to build a fraternal society for the benefit of that noble People and of the whole world.

May the Birth of Christ favor the return of peace in Mali and that of concord in Nigeria, where savage acts of terrorism continue to reap victims, particularly among Christians. May the Redeemer bring help and comfort to the refugees from the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and grant peace to Kenya, where brutal attacks have struck the civilian population and places of worship.

May the Child Jesus bless the great numbers of the faithful who celebrate him in Latin America. May He increase their human and Christian virtues, sustain all those forced to leave behind their families and their land, and confirm government leaders in their commitment to development and fighting crime.

Dear brothers and sisters! Kindness and truth, justice and peace have met; they have become incarnate in the child born of Mary in Bethlehem. That child is the Son of God; He is God appearing in history. His birth is a flowering of new life for all humanity. May every land become a good earth which receives and brings forth kindness and truth, justice and peace. Happy Christmas to all of you! ☐

Zenit.org, December 26, 2012

"For a stalk to grow or a flower to open there must be time that cannot be forced; nine months must go by for the birth of a human child; to write a book or compose music often years must be dedicated to patient research ... To find the mystery there must be patience, interior purification, silence, waiting...."

Pope John Paul II



Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Papal Message for World Day of Peace Emphasizes Role of Peacemakers As Promoters of Life in Its Fullest Expression

On December 14, 2012, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, along with Bishop Mario Toso, Secretary of the same Council, presented Pope Benedict XVI's Message for the 46th World Day of Peace.

The message, which focuses on the theme of the annual event: "Blessed are the peacemakers," was discussed at a press conference held in the Holy See Press Office.

Regarding the nature of the Papal message, Cardinal Turkson stated that while at first it may seem that the message is theoretical in nature, it is very much grounded in reality.

"It states a fact - the existence, in the midst of conflicts, tension and violence, of numerous peacemakers; in the explanation of the Gospel beatitude it explains that this is a promise that is guaranteed, in that it is made by God and does not refer merely to the future but already finds fulfillment in this life," Cardinal Turkson said.

"It clearly indicates the duties of peacemakers: they must promote life in its fullest expression, in its entirety and therefore in all the dimensions of the human person, and draws attention to urgent problems, issues such as the correct vision of marriage, the right to conscientious objection, religious freedom, the issues of work and unemployment, the food crisis, the financial crisis, and the role of the family in education."

Cardinal Turkson also noted the message's "educational and pedagogical perspective" which he said was crucial in forming consciences.

"In this regard, the Pontiff calls for responsibility on the part of the various educational institutions who must form capable leaders and propose new economic and financial models," the Cardinal said.

"This is necessary to overcome the particularly grave situation the globalized world is currently facing, a phase of profound spiritual and moral crisis in which there are still bloody conflicts and numerous threats to peace."

Bishop Toso said that the Pope's Message for the World Day of Peace is "an invitation to become peacemakers" and that it aids in "protecting and implementing all the rights and duties of the individual and of communities."

The Italian prelate said that the message also calls on humanity to prevent the erosion of social rights, especially the right to work.

"This is in spite of the context of economic recession, provoked in part by the financial crisis which began in 2007, and ideologies of radical liberalism and technocracy according to which development can be achieved without social and democratic progress," he said.

Concluding his address, Bishop Toso said that Pope Benedict's message promoted the growth of the human family and peace among all.

"Peace is a common goal to be pursued as a community, to the full benefit of every human being and population," Bishop Toso said. (For the full text of the Holy Father's message for the World Day of Peace, go to: <http://www.zenit.org/article-36183?l=english>). □

Zenit.org, December 14, 2012

Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo Appeals for Peace in Syria

Bishop Antoine Audo Highlights Plight of War-Ravaged Nation

Chaldean Bishop Antoine Audo of Aleppo, Syria, made an appeal to all Christians to pray for an end to the nearly two year conflict that has ravaged his nation. In an interview with Vatican Radio, Bishop Audo stated that "we as Christians can live in peace and joy every time when we pray and suffer with the poor and serve them."

The Syrian prelate said that despite the difficult times, the Church is doing all that it can to serve the poor and needy of Aleppo. "We are helping [the poor families] with different programs, the children with different activities with centers in different parts of the city, with Caritas and other organizations."

Bishop Audo said that aside from peace, the greatest need of the people of Aleppo at this time is fuel. "It is very cold in Aleppo. We don't have any fuel [...] It's very expensive. Especially for the hospitals, the schools, of course in the houses - it's really a real problem, this problem of fuel. And we don't have electricity and we have to use generators (which require) fuel and it's very expensive." The Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo also stated that bread is very scarce and expensive as well. "It's a very dramatic situation," he said.

Between one and two thousand Christians, many from the wealthier families have fled the fighting in Aleppo, he added. Most have gone to Lebanon where they can rent an apartment and are able to send their children to school.

When asked what relationship the Christians of Aleppo have with government troops on the one side and rebels on the other, Bishop Audo says the question is a complicated one. "Christians want peace, reconciliation. They don't want [to be] on one side or the other side. This is our message of reconciliation. We have to respect each other and to develop the sense of citizenship and accept the differences of the others; not to oblige everybody to follow my way of thinking or [a particular] way of living."

Concluding his interview, Bishop Audo called on Christians to pray for Syria, saying that the conflict is not just an internal way, but affects the world. "There is an international level, a regional level, so everybody has to do what he can to ask (for) peace and reconciliation. War is not the solution."

Zenit.org, December 28, 2012

Glen Allen, Virginia Charitable Drive



after Thanksgiving. Parishioners chose stars from the tree in the vestibule of the church and brought in their gifts by December 16. Over 150 gifts and needed items were distributed to residents of Hilliard House, a center for battered women and children, The Good Samaritan Ministry, and other disadvantaged families in the Richmond area.

The final charitable drive of the year celebrated children also. On December 23, to celebrate Genealogy Sunday, the teens presented a nativity play prior to the Liturgy, and each Sunday School class sang Christmas carols. During the Liturgy, the high school youth read the readings and petitions, carried the gifts and ushered. The children of the parish sang during the liturgy. Afterwards, the parish hosted a Breakfast with Santa. Each child brought a canned food item to benefit the Commonwealth Catholic Charities. □

Vocations, "Sign Of Hope Founded In Faith"

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"Equally, I hope that young people, who are presented with so many superficial and ephemeral options, will be able to cultivate a desire for what is truly worthy, for lofty objectives, radical choices, service to others in imitation of Jesus. Dear young people, do not be afraid to follow Him and to walk the demanding and courageous paths of charity and generous commitment! In that way you will be happy to serve, you will be witnesses of a joy that the world cannot give, you will be living flames of an infinite and eternal love, you will learn to 'give an account of the hope that is within you!'"

(Vatican Information Services, December 15, 2012)

St. Anthony Maronite Catholic Church in Glen Allen (Richmond), Virginia, began and ended its 2012 charitable and religious activities with children in mind.

St. Anthony's annual Golf Tournament, held on Sunday, October 7, raised \$14,500 for orphaned children in Lebanon. The golfers and their supporters enjoyed the day which ended with a Lebanese meal. In a letter addressed to Bishop Mansour and a copy to Msgr. George Sebaali, Pastor, Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai thanked St. Anthony's parishioners for their donations and assured them that the funds were transferred to needy orphanages in Lebanon.

The annual Benefit Dinner held on December 2 also was widely supported. About 365 people attended the dinner, and \$18,500 was sent to Bishop Gregory Mansour who then sent it on, earmarked "orphaned children," to His Beatitude Patriarch Rai.

The annual Christmas Star program began the Sunday