



# The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

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July - August 2014

## ***The Massabki Brothers, Patrons of the Family and of Society, and All Those Who Struggle For Justice and Peace During The "Arab Spring"***



Every community in the Middle East has stories about their heroes, and we, Maronites, have plenty of our own. On July 10, we celebrate the feast of the Massabki Brothers, who, in fact, can be seen as patrons of Maronite families and of society and especially of all people of good will who struggle throughout the Middle East for truth, peace, and justice, especially today. The three Massabki Brothers, Francis, Raphael, and Abdel Mo'ti, were family-men, businessmen, devoted fathers, brothers, and faithful parish members who were martyred for their faith in the violence of Damascus in 1860.

At that time, Muslim and Christian families alike had been victims of radical ideologies. In fact, the 1860s can be compared to the Syria of today with oppression and violence from every side. These Maronite brothers, well respected in their day and over the years, long held with esteem by laity and clergy alike, are worthy patrons for what is called the "Arab Spring" sweeping the Middle East. They are also the great example of the witness of Christian families who pray together, fast, worship and sincerely love. These families make a great difference in society, even if not noticed by the political leaders of the day.

Christians today are praying for their very survival in countries with Muslim majorities. It is sad to say this, but it is true. Radical Islamic warriors cannot tolerate anyone different from themselves – neither Christian, Muslim nor Jewish. This is not true of the majority of Muslims, but it is true of those who are radical. Ironically, Christians were part of the Middle East and the Arabic speaking world almost 700 years before the dawn of Islam. But to radical fundamentalists, Christians and all others are looked upon with suspicion.

Today the Massabki Brothers can help both the family and society. In their day, Christians were defended by their fellow Muslim citizens of Damascus, and in particular by a former radical jihadist by the name of Emir Abdel Kader who lived in Damascus at that time. He and others fought for the innocent and defended the persecuted (see

Commander of the Faithful by John W. Kiser). The Massabki Brothers were not fortunate enough to benefit from his protection, but other Christians were. Eventually, the Massabki Brothers were killed before the altar, along with several Franciscan friars, all of whom refused to deny their faith. Although their murder was thought to be their end, these martyrs continue to live on in the hearts and minds of devout believers as patrons of all those who believe in what is true, noble and good, and for that faith which pays the ultimate price. *(Continues on page 20)*

## Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

### July 11 - 13, 2014

Pastoral visit to St. Jude Church, Murray, Utah

### July 18 - 20, 2014

Pastoral Visit to St. Sharbel Church, Portland, Ore., and Ordination of Monk Mark Anthony as a Deacon.

### August 2 - 3, 2014,

Children's Summer Camp, Our Lady of Mount Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

### August 8 - 10, 2014

Pastoral Visit, Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Akron, Ohio

### August 13 - 15, 2014

Our Lady of Lebanon Shrine, North Jackson, Ohio

### August 16 - 18, 2014

Pastoral Visit, Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Wheeling, W. Va.

### August 23 - 24, 2014

Pastoral Visit, Our Lady of the Rosary Mission, Carmichael, Calif.

### August 31, 2014

Annual Festival, Our Lady of Mount Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

### August 6 - 7, 2014

Hall Dedication, Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Houston, Tex.

### September 9 - 19, 2014

Bishops' Conference, Rome, Italy. □

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## Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

### July 10, 2014

Iftar with the Muslim community, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### July 12 - 13, 2014

Parish Visitation, Our Lady of Mercy Maronite Church, Worcester, Mass.

### July 19 - 20, 2014

Pastoral Visit, St. Sharbel Maronite Church, Newtown Square, Penn.

### July 21 - 24, 2014

Hosting Bishop Elias Sleiman on visits to brief area bishops on the Syrian crisis

### July 27, 2014

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

### August 2, 2014

Pastoral Visit, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church, Easton, Penn.

### August 3, 2014

Parish Visitation, St. John Paul II Mission, Westchester, N.Y.

### August 10, 2014

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

### August 13 - 15, 2014

National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon, North Jackson, Ohio

### August 16 - 21, 2014

Family Visit in Michigan

### August 24, 2014

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

### August 26 - September 2, 2014

Silent Retreat, Gloucester, Mass.

### September 3, 2014

Mass for the Maronite Community, Gloucester, Mass.

### September 5 - 7, 2014

Extraordinary Visit of the Relics of St. Anthony of Padua, Springfield, Mass. □

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

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Saint Maron Maronite Church

**Cleveland, Ohio**

**July 1 - 5, 2015**

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## *Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai Makes A Pastoral Visit to the Holy Land*



Patriarch Rai celebrates the Divine Liturgy at St. Sharbel Church in Amman, Jordan.

Following the Holy Father's surprise visit to Saint Saviour Monastery [Holy Land], it was His Beatitude Beshara Peter Cardinal Rai, the first Lebanese religious dignitary to visit the Holy Land since the creation of the State of Israel, who visited on Tuesday, May 27, 2014, accompanied by his Vicar General, Archbishop Paul Sayah, and his press spokesperson, Walid Ghayad.

The historic visit was not without controversy, with several political factions accusing the Patriarch of visiting "enemy" territory. Diplomatic relations between Israel and Lebanon are all but dead, despite the armistice signed in 1949. However, the Maronite Church has two administrative entities in the territory of the Holy Land: the Eparchy of Haifa and the Holy Land together with the Patriarchal Exarchate of Jerusalem, Jordan and the Palestinian Territories together count some 10,000 faithful. His Beatitude, therefore, took it upon himself to be among those welcoming the Holy Father and profited from the occasion to continue his stay and make a broader pastoral visit in the Holy Land.

The first stop on his visit was in Jordan on May 23 - 24, 2014. Micheline Baz, Lebanon's Ambassador to Jordan; the

Jordanian Director of Protocol, Nabil Massarouh; Bishop Paul Hajj, Maronite Bishop of the Holy Land; Bishop Youssef Soueif, Maronite Bishop of Cyprus; Bishop George Chihane, Maronite Bishop of Egypt; Msgr. Jihad Nassif, Pastor of St. Sharbel Church, Amman, Jordan; Fr. Abdo Bou Kasam, Director of the Catholic Center for Information in Lebanon; and a number of Lebanese dignitaries in Jordan welcomed the Patriarch at the airport.

In the afternoon, after a welcoming reception held at the Lebanese Embassy, His Beatitude celebrated the Divine Liturgy at St. Sharbel Maronite Church to a standing-room-only church.

Following his visit to Jordan, His Beatitude scheduled over a week to visit his faithful in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa and Nazareth, where he met with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority. The Maronites were not alone in rejoicing at the Patriarch's arrival; many Christian Arabs joined them, including the Custody of the Holy Land. The warm welcome that His Beatitude received at Saint Saviour as well as at the Maronite Eparchy in Jerusalem bore witness to this.

The enthusiasm was real, explains Fr. Feras, parish priest of Jerusalem. "Christians know him well because for years he has preached on live broadcasts on the Noursat TV network in the Middle East." Fr. Najib, the Lebanese superior of the Flagellation Monastery, emphasizes that the Lebanese Patriarch is "a national figure and a true Christian spiritual authority" in the Middle East.

The Custos [Franciscans] did not hesitate to stress this role in his welcoming address. "The relationship



Patriarch Rai prays in the Nativity Chapel in the Holy Land

## Austin, Texas Canonization Pilgrimage

by Msgr. Don Sawyer

between the Maronites and the Franciscans are of long date and go deep; your presence perpetuates it. But even beyond continuity, your visit enriches the message of the Holy Land. With your presence today we draw closer to our mission and dream of Christian unity.”

His Beatitude appreciated these words when he took the floor, speaking in Italian: “Our visit to the Custody of the Holy Land today is a *Te Deum*. We come to thank you for your presence for the esteem that you have in the eyes of the Christians you support here.” With conviction, he added, “We resist. We have so many churches, so many Christians. We must never stop telling the world that this land bears the mark of Christians. Blessed are you to be in this Land where we cannot easily set foot.”

His Beatitude did not stop with the official remarks. He went to the infirmary to meet the oldest Franciscans. With great tenderness, he blessed each friar, recited the Our Father with them, and took time for a chat, also greeting infirmary personnel and posing for photos.

This patriarchal visit was a sign of encouragement for the Maronites of the Holy Land, as well as for the many Lebanese who aspire to peace in the Middle East. As the Lebanese journalist Bissane Al-Sheikh wrote in the pan-Arabic daily *Al Hayat* on May 23rd, “This visit opens a chink in our spirits as well as in the wall against normalization with Israel that we have been building for decades and strengthened with reinforced concrete. This wall has distanced us from Palestine and its people even more than the wall of separation that Israel built. May His Beatitude claim for us who love Jerusalem the same privilege of being able to visit that city that millions of us would love to see.”

After stops in Bethlehem, *Beit Sahour* and Jerusalem, the Patriarch continued his stay until May 31st, visiting the major Maronite centers in Israel: Akko, Jish, Nazareth, Issifya and Haifa.

On May 28, he celebrated the liturgy at *Capernaum* as a guest of the Franciscans who protect the site. The celebration was broadcast live on Noursat TV, thanks to technical assistance from the Franciscan Media Center.

Earlier in the day he went to *Kfar Biriim*, whose population was displaced in 1948 and has not yet been able to return to the land of their ancestors.

He completed his pastoral visit in *Haifa*, where the large Maronite community joined him in a grand procession in the late afternoon of May 30 before he returned to Lebanon. □

*The majority of this article was written by Emilie R. of Obethlehem.com and published in the June 2014 issue of ObBethlehem.com.*

Receiving word that I won the raffle from the John Paul II Life Center in Austin, Texas, was such an exhilarating surprise! I received a call from my Executive Assistant just as I had arrived in the Hill country for a youth and adult retreat in February. I could not think too much of the trip since I had Lent and Holy Week still ahead of me.

The pilgrimage was with Steve Ray, a known author and speaker. Sixty-eight of us, who came from all over the States, arrived in Rome on Friday, April 25th, and were taken immediately on tour of the city beginning with Santa Mary Major. Every day we had Mass at one of the major churches in Rome, including St. Peter's, St. John Lateran, St. Paul Outside the Walls, the Church of the Martyrs, and St. Lawrence. The entire group was able to attend a Papal audience and attempt to touch the Holy Father. We were particularly blessed to have Mass at St. John Paul II's tomb in St. Peter's. Our group was the envy of a crowd of over three hundred who had to be content to watch.

We also visited the Forum, the Coliseum, the Vatican Museum, and many restaurants. On Tuesday we rode the three hours to Assisi and toured the old city and the many churches. The feeling in Assisi is very special and peaceful. Not only are the surroundings peaceful and beautiful, but there is a special feeling of holiness. It was all so wonderful.

The group that went, from all over the United States, was comprised of many different professions. We had doctors, nurses, professors, a retired Texas Supreme Court Judge, several priests, lawyers, CEOs and others. However, everyone that I spoke to is involved in their parishes and in some sort of ministry. They all are very committed Catholics who love God and the Church.

I was so pleasantly surprised to see so many priests and nuns in Rome. Many came from Poland (1500 buses), which has a great number of nuns and priests. I was surprised by the number of young priests and nuns. The entire city of Rome feels very comfortable at a slower pace and full of churches and beautiful architecture. The entire trip was a blessing from the Lord for me since I was celebrating my fortieth anniversary of priestly service on April 27, the day that Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II were canonized as saints! It will not be an anniversary that I will soon forget. □



## Boston, Massachusetts *Church Renovated*



by Michael Bethoney

At Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon Church, Jamaica Plain, Mass., parishioners have been climbing the same steps since the day the Church opened over forty years ago. Like any other building, leaky roofs and crumbling architecture were just a few of the problems the parishioners faced every weekend. But, thanks to the tireless work and guidance of our Pastor, Fr. Georges El-Khalli, our beloved Church has received the renovations it so desperately needed.

Fr. El-Khalli first went to work on the Church's roof and support beams, replacing the heating and cooling systems, and sealing off all leaky areas. With this complete, he insisted on continuing to renovate the church further in order to make it more safe and amenable for the Maronite liturgical use. Ceramic tiles made to imitate the look of rocks and the natural textures of the parish campus were used for the vestibule floor. Four handsome wood-and-glass insulated doors were positioned at the entrances, and a new cement pad was poured at the outside main entrance to cover an existing three inch gap, making for much easier accessibility to the church. The cold concrete support pillars located inside the church are now hiding behind beautiful wooden coverings, providing a much warmer feeling for the Church.

For parishioners accompanied by little ones, the Cry Room received a complete makeover, including its own heating and cooling systems. All walls, lights, ceiling and doors have been replaced, and new speakers were installed.

The church's ancient sound system is finally upgraded to current 2014 technology including wireless microphones. Additionally, two new side altars have replaced the existing stone niches. A new skylight was installed, along with an elaborate tabernacle in the shape of a host placed upon a chalice-like supporting table. The icon of the Holy Mother at the rear of the church altar has been adorned to include two fine-looking pillars and an arch-like cross member presenting a strikingly attractive appearance. Old carpeting was ripped up to make way for new carpet.

All electric wiring was updated, tripling the number of

light fixtures. To be more energy-efficient, all lighting has been replaced with LED technology. The entire ceiling has been insulated, sheet rocked, and plastered giving the entire church a new radiant look. A cedar tree replica is adhered to the ceiling above the center aisle to accentuate our heritage and spirituality. The entire sanctuary floor, including the stair treads and risers leading to the altar, are now covered with a bright white stone stronger than both marble and granite. The same stone was used to cover the warped wood and stained concrete under the stained glass windows on both the north and south walls leading up to the altar. The uneven and bulky pulpits were replaced with new wooden lecterns to allow for more space.

Since Fr. Georges came to Our Lady of the Cedars Church, he has aspired to bring new and old generations back to the church with a renewed fervor. Fr. Georges has been quite successful in that he has a unique spirit of team-building and rallying support for the church. He has even written a new book, *Whispering Treasures* (A Custom Publishing House), a fascinating analysis of our elaborate stained glass windows which are now covered with insulated glass to protect them from the inclement weather. He selflessly donated all of the profits of his book to repair these windows.

Many thanks from the bottom of our hearts go out to our Pastor, Fr. Georges El-Khalli, for his dedication, steadfastness and devotion in undertaking this monumental task. Hopefully, with the renovations completed, many, if not all of us, will share in a renewed faith. A big "Thank you" to Fr. Georges from the parishioners of Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon Church. □



## *Western New York Lebanese Festival at St. John Maron Church in Williamsville, N.Y.*

Are you looking for an opportunity to experience a "treasure chest" of traditional Lebanese culture, customs, cuisine, and music? We are happy to announce that the ever-popular 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Lebanese Festival of Western New York will be held on the grounds of St. John Maron Maronite Church in Williamsville, N.Y., on:

Friday, July 25, 2014:	5:00 to 11:00 p.m.
Saturday, July 26, 2014:	2:00 to 11:00 p.m.
Sunday, July 27, 2014:	noon to 8:00 p.m.

The Lebanese Festival continues to share its heritage with the Western New York community in an enjoyable and unique way, by offering authentic food, music and entertainment, an exclusive gift shop, games for children, raffles, and bounce houses. For more information regarding the Festival, please call (716) 634-0669, contact by email at [stjmaron@gmail.com](mailto:stjmaron@gmail.com), or visit our website at [www.stjohnmaron.com](http://www.stjohnmaron.com). Admission is \$1.00 - children under 12 free. □

## Fall River, Massachusetts *Faith of the Mountain Award*



From left: Chorbishop Joseph F. Kaddo, Evan Michael Massoud and Rochelle Kieron.

On Sunday, May 25, 2014, Chorbishop Joseph F. Kaddo, Pastor of St. Anthony of the Desert Church, Fall River, Mass., and NAM delegate Rochelle Kieron announced that the parish's recipient of the "Faith of the Mountain Award" was Evan Michael Massoud.

Evan joined the parish choir when only nine years old. He continued to be a committed choir member and musician, coming home every weekend from college to be part of the Mass. Ten years later, Evan became the choir director and actively supports the activities of his church. A coffee hour in honor of Evan followed the Divine Liturgy. □

## Youngstown, Ohio *Graduating Seniors*



(First row): Deacon William George, Nicholas Luchansky, Abigayle George, Maria Joseph and Chorbishop Michael Kail. (Second row): Gregory Thomas, Karlina Estephan and Fabio Ghossain. Missing from the picture are Jonathan Ghossain and Gianna Venerosa.

by *Amelia M. Yazbek*

On Sunday, June 1, 2014, the Maronite Christian Formation (MCF) Program of St. Maron Church, Youngstown, Ohio, honored its graduating seniors. The eight graduates are: Fabio Ghossain, Karlina Estephan, Abigayle George, Jonathan Ghossain, Maria Z. Joseph, Nicholas Luchansky, Gregory Thomas, and Gianna Venerosa. Congratulations and God's blessings to our the MCF graduates and all the other young people from the parish who graduated this year.

### *Snow in June*

Many of us throughout the country have suffered a long hard winter, and many do not have faith in the weatherman. We had many record-breaking temperatures and windy, cold, snowy days in Youngstown, Ohio. Chorbishop Michael Kail, our pastor, was one such person who had no faith that winter was going to leave us or that we would have any good weather to speak about. He kept warning us that we were going to build a snowman on Sunday, June 1. It was going to be the parish snowman. This sounded like more than celebrating Christmas in July. On Sunday, June 1, we had a gorgeous, warm, sunny day, but we did not want Chorbishop to feel he was deprived, so we had two large blowup snowmen: one outside the church doors and another floor-to-ceiling one in the vestibule. On the steps leading to the altar were small (10") Mr. & Mrs. Snowmen. They were set up without Chorbishop Kail's knowledge. After Liturgy, when Chorbishop Kail was doing the announcements, he was given a floppy snowman from one of our students. While he was speaking, a beautifully decorated snowman cake, which was discreetly held over his head by our Deacon, was then presented to him. We all sang Frosty the Snowman and all had a fun time, especially Chorbishop Kail. □

PLEASE SAVE THIS DATE  
**THURSDAY OCTOBER 23, 2014**

FIFTH ANNUAL  
 BENEFIT DINNER FOR  
**THE EPARCHY OF  
 SAINT MARON**

ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK CATHOLIC CENTER  
 1011 1ST AVENUE · NEW YORK CITY  
 Details to follow

## Houston, Texas *Silver Massabki Award*



From left: Fr. Milad Yaghi, Elias Georges, Myrna Georges, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, and Fr. Pierre El Khoury.

Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Houston, Texas, is blessed to have members who unselfishly give of their time, talent, and treasure for the good of the parish. These members have given their time to help with parish functions, have used their talents to aid the parish in everything from singing in the choir to designing the parish buildings and have used their treasure to financially support the parish. Though it is nearly impossible to recognize each of them individually, the National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) allows parishes to recognize individuals or married couples who have unselfishly served their parish with the Silver Massabki Award. This year, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan presented the Award to Elias and Myrna Georges on Sunday, May 25, 2014.

### *Subdeacon Ordination*

On Sunday, May 25, 2014, His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, ordained Dr. George Carram and Dr. Michel Mawad to the order of Subdeacon at Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Houston, Texas. A reception was held in the Social Hall following the ordination ceremony. □

## Cincinnati, Ohio *Annual Mahrajan*

by Linda Conour

On Sunday, June 1, 2014, the Parish of St. Anthony of Padua in Cincinnati, Ohio, held its annual summer *Mahrajan* from noon - 8:00 pm. The Parish was blessed with beautiful weather as large crowds turned out to sample the homemade Lebanese cuisine and pastries, watch the MYO perform traditional Middle Eastern dances, see the Fashion Show, play games, and listen to music.

Co-Chairmen Kam Misleh and John George worked tirelessly for months to orchestrate the successful event and



From Left: Andrew Samaan, Tina Khamis, Anthony Chemaly, Michelle Mezher, Mark Ghastine and Hannah Chemaly.

encourage the entire Parish to work together as a team in order to make the festival possible.

Many thanks go out to all the parishioners who worked all day at the various booths and for those who came to support the annual *mahrajan*. It was quite a success! □

## Warren, Michigan *May Procession*



May procession at St. Sharbel Maronite Church.

The Blessed Mother Mary was honored during the Month of May by the parishioners and friends of St. Sharbel Maronite Church in Warren, Mich. Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor, prayed the Rosary in a different home each night. The month of May was concluded with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on May 30, 2014. A statue of Our Lady of Fatima was carried by the men of the parish as all processed outdoors while praying the rosary and singing Marian hymns. Following the Benediction, a potluck dinner with Lebanese *saj* was enjoyed in the Social Hall. □

# Priest Grateful for Ways New Saints Supported Eastern Rites as Popes

by Chris Donahue, Associate Editor  
*The Catholic Spirit*

Several days before Pope Francis canonized two of his predecessors, John XXIII and John Paul II, April 27, 2014, Msgr. Maroun P. Asmar said he would be just as happy celebrating the historic occasion at home as if he were among the faithful in St. Peter's Square.

Msgr. Asmar, *pastor emeritus* of St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church, Somerset, N.J., said during their respective papacies, both helped invigorate and foster the faith of those who practice Catholicism and its various rites. They include the Syro-Antiochene rite, which Msgr. Asmar began practicing while growing up in Lebanon.

A cabinet maker who served three years in the Lebanese Army, Msgr. Asmar moved from Lebanon to the Park Slope section of Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1956, after marrying Genevieve, an American woman of Lebanese descent. The couple raised two sons, Peter and Paul, who has Down Syndrome, and a daughter, Mary. During his nearly 30-year career with the New York Transit Authority, he served a six-year term as president of its Subway-Surface Supervisors Association.

Regarding St. John XXIII, who convened the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), Msgr. Asmar said it resulted in documents such as the "Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite," which supported the pope's goal to "open the windows and let the fresh air" into the Church.

The decree included the Sacred Council's declaration that "the Churches of the East, as much as those of the West, have a full right and are in duty bound to rule themselves, each in accordance with its own established disciplines, since all these are praiseworthy by reason of their venerable antiquity, more harmonious with the character of their faithful and more suited to the promotion of the good of souls."

The document also stated, "All members of the Eastern Rite should know and be convinced that they can and should always preserve their legitimate liturgical rite and their



Then-Father, now Monsignor, Maroun Asmar watches then-Pope, now Saint John Paul II bless Msgr. Asmar's son, Paul.

established way of life, and that these may not be altered except to obtain for themselves an organic improvement..."

Msgr. Asmar, who now serves as a hospital chaplain, said for those who minister and worship in the Eastern rite, "That means a lot."

"In Vatican II, he [Pope John XXIII] said to all the Eastern churches, "Don't copy from any other rite. Go back to your roots, You have beautiful roots."

Msgr. Asmar also appreciated changes brought by Vatican II, such as the priest facing the worshipers, because it allowed them to "participate in the liturgy, let them see the actions of the priest."

He noted, too, that the Mass could be celebrated in the native language of the worshipers. The liturgical language of the Maronite Church is Syriac (Christian Aramaic). Msgr. Asmar added, "When we repeat Jesus' words at the Last Supper, it is mandatory to use the Aramaic language. John XXIII encouraged that with Vatican II."

## Gracious Gifts

Msgr. Asmar's fondness and respect for St. John Paul II was strengthened by an encounter with the Pope and his pastoral concern for Lebanon.

On March 22, 1981, then-Deacon

Asmar was invested in the papal order of the Knights of St. Sylvester for sending "a shipload of medicine and clothes in my name to war refugees in Lebanon." For his efforts, he received a certificate and a medal from [Pope] John Paul II.

On July 18, 1993, then-Father Asmar concelebrated Mass with Pope John Paul II at Castel Gandolfo, the Pope's summer residence. The event occurred twenty-two days after Msgr. Asmar was ordained to the priesthood at the age of 62.

After concelebrating Mass, in an audience of about thirty people, including Msgr. Asmar's son, Paul, the Pope gave a blessing and presented rosary beads to each person.

"At the time there was a war going on in Lebanon," Msgr. Asmar said. "I asked him [the Pope], 'Could you help us? Could you pray for peace?' " "You will have peace in Lebanon," he said. "He shook my hand and I kissed his ring."

Four years later, Msgr. Asmar was inspired by Pope John Paul II's visit to Lebanon, where he led a prayer meeting with youth and signed a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, "A New Hope for Lebanon," in the Basilica of Our Lady of Lebanon in *Harissa*.

*Continues on page 20*

# *When Jesus Knocks, Be Not Afraid! Let Him In!*

by Natalie Salameh

I thought it would be nice for me to share my personal conversion and vocation story with you. Since joining the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light in January 2014, I have been asked by many people, “So what is a girl from Sydney, Australia, doing in Dartmouth, Massachusetts? You’re a long way from home.”

This is true. I am a long way from home (and my Aussie accent gives me away every time), but Jesus’ Sacred Heart is the real home, and my following testimony will tell you why.

I originally discerned religious life when I was in high school and was just fourteen years old. I used to dream of the day that I would enter the convent. My discernment continued and at sixteen, I asked a community of nuns in Sydney to accept me as a postulant. My request was turned down because I was too young, but at the time it was a huge blow that was hard for me to accept. However, God had other plans because he tends to write straight with crooked lines!

To be honest, I lost interest in pursuing a vocation to consecrated religious life. I immersed myself in my studies, and I found to my surprise that I loved academia, and gradually came to be consumed by it. I went on to University where I studied Economics and Political Science, with hopes of one day having a political career. Thoughts of a religious vocation were long gone, or so I thought.

After my studies, I got an excellent job with our third tier of Government in Australia, Local Government in the Industrial Relations Unit. I spent six years working my way up the ranks. I found that the more and more I progressed at work, the less happy I became. Indeed, if I could sum up my feelings back then, I would say that I felt empty and very much alone.

I had a gaping void in my heart, which I was filling with all kinds of worldly distractions, such as nice clothes and dining out. I even bought my very own home, hoping that this might solve the problem! I often wonder what God was thinking when he was allowing me to pursue these earthly objects. I often picture Him



From left: Sr. Therese Maria, Mother Marla Marie and Natalie Salameh at the Maronite Seminary in Washington, D.C.

shaking His head at me in disapproval. But no, he was waiting for the right time to tap me, his daughter, on the shoulder with the utmost mercy and compassion, and remind me that only He can fill the void in my life. And this is precisely what Our Lord did.

I recall vividly back in January 2013, kneeling down in prayer and imploring the intercession of St. Rita of Cassia, the patroness of impossible cases, petitioning her to take away my feelings of emptiness and loneliness. I remember telling her that I felt guilty asking for something more, when I had so much already, but I said to her that something was missing, and I didn’t quite know what. I asked God through her intercession to send me what was missing. So what was missing? It was Jesus.

Shortly after that, I had some very powerful stirring of the heart towards Our Lord Jesus. I had always gone to Mass every Sunday, but I found myself constantly preoccupied by Him. All of the sudden He was there in every thought, in every word, in every prayer; He was there in everything and everyone I encountered. These feelings of longing for God, of longing to be

near Him, close to Him, beside Him, surrounded by Him cannot be fabricated, no matter how hard you try. This was God’s call. He was beckoning me to come, to leave all for His sake. At the time these feelings stirred, I was left utterly confused, not really knowing what was happening to me.

When Mother Marla Marie and Sr. Therese Maria were on mission in Sydney back in February 2013, I remember hearing them speak at one of our youth group meetings at my parish of St. Charbel’s about how they discerned their call to religious life. After they had finished speaking, something penetrated deep within me and struck a chord, perhaps because I was experiencing something similar.

I knew that Mother Marla Marie and Sr. Therese Maria were speaking again on the Voice of Charity Radio Station. So I tuned in to hear and my old feelings of wanting to enter consecrated religious life stirred again with renewed fervor. I came to realize that the Holy Spirit was gently leading me towards the Maronite Servants, by planting a seed of yearning in my heart.

*(continues on page 19)*

## “Called to Holiness”

### *What Does It Mean to Be Called to Holiness by God, as a Priest?*

by Fr. Gary George C.Ss.R.

**M**any times during my travels I am asked this question, often followed by another — What made you want to be a priest? Typically it is with an incredulous curiosity of *how do you do it, and why would you choose to?* For them, and often echoed by popular sentiment, the "unreasonable and unachievable" expectations holiness demands are not realistic in today's contemporary way of life. The idea many cling to is that holiness and priesthood are about having to give up; a notion that keeps most men and their families from

listening to the voice of the Lord and responding to the call of holiness.

I must confess, I am always slightly confused by questions attempting to discern my motives for priesthood — as if it were something I chose or wanted. It is not so much the question, but the manner in which it is presented, that to me shows an incomplete understanding of holiness and priesthood.

In the gospels we read about ordinary men going about the business of their daily lives when they encounter a stranger who makes a request in the form of an invitation:

"Come after me and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17).

I believe this invitation was made to everyone, yet it was only for those who responded by stopping what they were doing, putting down their nets and following, that their lives were forever changed. They went from being ordinary, often, sinful men, to becoming disciples; and in Luke's Gospel 6:13 the stranger chose twelve, whom he named apostles. "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men" was an unusual invitation from a stranger, who had the power to transform ordinary men into extraordinary apostles.

It's not as though they chose to be, or wanted to be, apostles but that He called them and they were willing to listen and follow; "It is not you who chose me but I who chose you." It's not that man chooses or wants to be a priest, but man's responding to a call.

In their willingness to put aside and drop their nets, they were willing to not only let go of the tangible material but also their doubts and fears, in order to embrace what seemed illogical so they could encounter Divine Truth, the Living God, their Creator, their Lord and Master. This stranger was their Messiah, Jesus the Christ. They went

from darkness to light; from ordinary sinners to extraordinary saints. They were elevated from the old way of being simple peasants to a new and everlasting way of royal nobleness.

What did these men lose or give up as logic would have you believe? Was it not paradoxical that by giving up they truly received more? God's call to holiness is not about having to change or give up, but rather making our thoughts His thoughts.

In the Acts of the Apostles we read of St. Paul's conversion. Paul believed he was right in persecuting and putting to death those who did not follow conventional thinking and beliefs. Jesus appears to him saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" - an invitation for Saul to leave his way of thinking. "Come after me and I will make you," was an invitation to transform his destructive thoughts into the way of God. Paul's response allowed Jesus to transform the murdering Saul into the Great Saint Paul whose "way of thinking" became that of God's to bring Life, not death, into the world.

There is another question being asked in different forms: "Do we really still need priests? Is God still calling men to holiness in the priesthood? Is it really relevant in today's culture and society?"

I'd like to end this article with a beautiful story which had a tremendous impact on me and which will sum up in a simple way the answer to these questions.

One day I received a call from a brilliant young college student who was going to have open heart surgery and who asked if I would come to be with him. My answer, of course, was yes, but what came next was one of the most unusual and challenging requests ever made in all my years as a priest. You see, I've known this young man and his family for many years. He was the



***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

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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 USA.

\*\*\*\*\*

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youngest of seven siblings and blessed with great intelligence. His parents had abundant wealth, and he was able to travel the world with nonchalance. He was surrounded with nothing but love, protection and was totally doted on by family and friends. So his request that no one else was to know and only I would be there for him came as a great surprise and, as a priest, under the seal, a heavy burden to honor.

This young man's father would have had the best hospital, the best room and the best doctors in the world. His mother was a woman of faith and would have literally had the entire world praying for him. He would've had a room overflowing with friends and family. Yet he chose otherwise and only later did I find out the reason, not from him but from his mother.

The day before he was to go into surgery all I could do was to call everyone and ask them to unite with me in prayer for a special intention asking them to not ask questions but trust me. I knew how devastated the family would have been if anything happened to him, and the hurt and anger at me for not saying anything would have been overwhelming. They would never have been able to understand why he chose that decision and why I stayed silent.

The day he was to go into surgery the doctor informed him that they found a solution and he would not need the surgery. Relieved and overjoyed, he called his mother to inform her of what happened. Her response to the news was one of great sorrow, not joy. She asked him why he told no one as he would have been all alone in his time of need. He answered that he told one person — a priest, to which she asked why? She later called me with very mixed emotions but relayed the reason:

"Father, he would have had everything the world had to offer, but that was not what he wanted. He said to me, "I called Father because that is why God made him; that is his job... to be Jesus to people when they need him the most." You see, Father, as hard as it was for me, I realized that in the hour of my son's greatest need it was not to the world he turned for help but to a priest who is the true Persona Christi (person of Christ)."

On May 11, 2014, we celebrated World Day for Vocations and we were asked to say a special prayer for men to respond to the voice of the Lord so that through them the world may continue to find Jesus.

I pray that each person will answer the call to holiness by listening, trusting and acting on a Word that brings life to those you meet. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide and direct our thoughts so that we may willingly "come and see" what the Lord has in store for each one of us. □

## About the Author



Fr. Gary George C.Ss.R.  
National Youth Director  
Vocation Director for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

*the Deadline is...* **Deadline for the next issue of *The Maronite Voice* is August 25, 2014.**

*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*  
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Email: [Gmsebaali@aol.com](mailto: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](http://www.stmaron.org). □

# *First Holy Communion in the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A.*

## **Miami, Florida**



**N**atalia Daher, Christopher Kilzi, Jonathan Gustine, Jack Digasbarro, Lucas Finocchiaro, Lea Haddad, Mia Tabet, Joseph Jude Sabga, Sanad Fanous, Vivian Garcia, Angelina Vargas, Sarah Karam, Jose Alejandro Nocua, John Paul Younes, Tatiana Kathryn Aoun, Marc Francis, Joseph Charlie Wehbe, Nathaly Marie Dominguez, Paulina Almada, Alejandra Almada, Michael Hage, George Hage and Lucas Chahine received their First Holy Communion on May 18, 2014, at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church in Miami, Fla. □

## **Springfield, Massachusetts**



**J**oseph Harfouche, Derek Semanie, Zakary Thomas and Julia Preston received their First Holy Communion on June 1, 2014 at St. Anthony Maronite Church in Springfield, Mass. □

## **New Bedford, Massachusetts**



**E**den, Jed, and Amalia Dupre, Matthew Rego and Keira McLaughlin received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at Our Lady of Purgatory Maronite Church in New Bedford, Mass. □

## **Brooklyn, New York**



**J**oya Achkar, Thomas Aflak, Elias Chawki, Lara Courgi, Christelle Diab, Rami Hailoo, Ronnie Hailoo, Luca Pfitzer, Mikayla Sahadi, Antonio Saliba, Selena Saliba and Antonis Vrahimis received their First Holy Communion on May 11, 2014, at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy Daisy Diamontopolus, the eldest member of the Cathedral community, crowned the Blessed Mother. □

# *First Holy Communion in the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A.*

## **Youngstown, Ohio**



**J**oselyn Bishara, Elena Chahine, Maria Chahine, Anissa Essad, Anthony Essad, Jade Ishac, Nicholas Judy, Vivian Nohra, Christopher Simon, Zaynah Tringhese and Elani Zidian received their First Holy Communion on May 18, 2014, at St. Maron Maronite Church, Youngstown, Ohio. □

## **Detroit, Michigan**



**M**ark Saigh and Nicholas Saigh received their First Holy Communion on June 1, 2014, at St. Maron Maronite Church, Detroit, Mich. □

## **West Covina, California**



**S**ophia Albasha, Charbel Antoun, James Antoun, Albert Chammas, Rita Chammas, Lyla Chikhani Natalia Ghanem, Tanios Ghaoui, Laya Ghosn, Roger Karam, Jr., Lea Kassir, John Khalaf, Tatiana Houry, Nicole Marina Madi, Adriana Mansour, Elie Christian Raad Jr., and Pascale Taby received their First Holy Communion on May 3, 2014, at St. Jude Maronite Mission in West Covina, Calif. □

## **Cincinnati, Ohio**



**J**oseph Driggers and Gianna Kanno received their First Holy Communion on May 11, 2014, at St. Anthony of Padua Maronite Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. □



# *First Holy Communion in the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A.*

## **Lawrence, Massachusetts**



**C**hristien Abimoussa, John Abimoussa, Luna Abimoussa, Rana Abi-Rached, Mitchel Alghoul, Patrick Archambault, Angelina Azzi, Chris Bousleiman, Carlene Driscoll, Paige Frias, Logan Gabriel, Tagan Kalil, Camryn Khoury, Mason Lanoue, Michael Merheb, Mario Rahi, Paul Sadek, David Sader, Kristine Sader, Trinity Sfeir, Maria Wazen and Elena Zaarour received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. Anthony Maronite Church in Lawrence, Mass. □

## **Orlando, Florida**



**P**ablo Reyes, James Boutros, Adrian Park Pagan, Juliano Bouzas, Jean Pierre Saad, David Rickert, Stefano Bouzas, Stephen Lizyness, Louis Farris, Ryan Saba, Joseph Daniel, Christian Rickert, Ava Jebailey, Petra Sweiss, Valerie Safie, Annie Coby, Layla Park Pagan, Stephanie Younis and Nadine Saba received their First Holy Communion on May 3, 2014, at St. Jude Maronite Church in Orlando, Fla. □

## **Glen Allen, Virginia**



**R**iley Cassidy, Joseph Chaoul, Julia Marie Fabiato, Sarah Flammia, Ann Margaret Gibrall, Jad Kakish, Laith Kakish, Ashley Maust, Ava Nadder, Raneem Basir, Hannah Roberts, Anna Grace Shaia, Nicholas Shaia, Leeanne Siefke, Natalie Yago and Anna Yesbeck received their First Holy Communion on May 11, 2014, at St. Anthony Maronite Church in Glen Allen, Va. □

## **Fort Lauderdale, Florida**



**P**eter Nehme, Patrick Nehme, Gabrielle Camarata and Marvin Kiderchah received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at Heart of Jesus Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. □

# First Holy Communion in the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A.

## San Diego, California



**S**kyler Abou-Jaoude, Hanadi AlSaigh, Rita AlSaigh, Zaid AlSaigh, Ammar Deno, Maya Deno, Michel Frangieh, Hindy Hindy, Christina Karam, Sahar Kasir, James Khoury, Jake Koussa, Rashad Koussa, Joseph Saker, Sarita Saker, Christina Saliba and Karam Yousif received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. Ephrem Maronite Church in San Diego, Calif. □

## Portland, Oregon



**C**ecilia Ann Allam, Lauren Anne Markwell, Peter Nasri Massaad, Rita Maria Zogbi and Taresa Maria Massaad received their First Holy Communion on April 27, 2014, at St. Sharbel Maronite Church in Portland, Ore. □



## Akron, Ohio



**F**reddie Nemr, Joseph Nemer, Michelle Jaoude and Joseph Abou-Elias received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at Our Lady of the Cedars of Mt. Lebanon Maronite Church, Fairlawn [Akron], Ohio. □

## Cleveland, Ohio



**N**aya Antoun, Alyssa Sweis, Juliana Afram, Hanna Hartman, Katelyn Moussa, Katie Diab, Maria Naim, Patrick Harb, Samuel Chalhoub, Kameran Hassrouni, Michael Afram, Rabih Abboud and Najji Habre received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. Maron Church in Cleveland, Ohio. □

# *First Holy Communion in the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A.*

## **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**



**J**oelle Najm, Samira Akkari, Savanah Church, Tasline Diab, Gracy Zeinoun, Patricia Mowad, Amal Kouyoumdji, Jeffrey Jabbour and Karm Mazahreh received their First Holy Communion on May 18, 2014, at St. Maron Maronite Church in Philadelphia, Penn. □

## **Williamsville, New York**



**C**harbel Al Mekhtifi, April Kabalan, Ethan Miller, Sienna Maalouf, Sophia Khangi, Perla Sakr, Chloe Armstrong, Maria Atallah, Julia Yax, Dominic Shady and Patrick Sakr received their First Holy Eucharist on May 4, 2014, at St. John Maron Church, Williamsville, N.Y. □

## **Tequesta, Florida**



**J**ezzi Rizk, Matthias Rizk, Roma Rizk, Ian Najem and Mark Azzi received their First Holy Communion on May 18, 2014 at Mary, Mother of the Light Maronite Mission in Tequesta, Fla. □

## **Scranton, Pennsylvania**



**A**lyssa Marie Bestrycki and Logan Edward Hetsko received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. Ann Maronite Church in Scranton, Penn. □

# *First Holy Communion in the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A.*

## **Roanoke, Virginia**



**M**ary Miller, Kim Doan and Christina Ellis received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. Elias Maronite Church in Roanoke, Va. □

## **Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania**



**B**enjamin Fenster, Naythan Wielgopolski, Howard Shiner, Julia Lewis and Theresa Khoudary received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. Anthony/St. George Maronite Church in Wilkes-Barre, Penn. □

## **Cranston, Rhode Island**



**A**lexander Faraj, Christian Faraj, George Habchi, Sadie Martiesian, Sharbel Mikhaail, Ronald Mourad, Rocco Savastano and Cassidy Youssef received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. George Maronite Church in Cranston, R.I. □

## **Denver, Colorado**



**J**aden Michael Aweida, Marc Anthony Mahanna, Gabrielle Marie Cohlmia, and Andrew Ibrahim Dagher received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. Rafka Maronite Church in Denver, Colo. □

# *First Holy Communion in the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A.*

## **Houston, Texas**



**K**ris Bayeh, Zayne Nemri, Christopher Salha, Elissa Mehri, Giancarlo Chelala, Mia Boujaoude, Samantha Maakaroun, Sabrina Nader, Marie-Reine Khouri, Joy Stephan, Serena Azzi, Ryan Moubarak, Joseph Jabbour, Ralph Fady, Emma Harb, Jonnie Francis, Ramsey Chalita, Fayez Droubi, Hannah Chalita, Michael Dally, Angelina Rassi, Theresa Estephan, Rita Elakkari, Jasmine Haoulia, Nicholas Nemri and Ryan El Hajj received their first Holy Communion on May 17, 2014, at Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Houston, Texas. □

## **Torrington, Connecticut**



**A**nthony Samele, Connor Fuller, Jake Nader, Madison Nader, Annabel Fuller, Nicole Encalada, Ivy Altman, India Altman, Emily Ullom, Joshua Ulloa, Matthew Lopez, Emily Tacuri, Kevin Chimbo, Macy Abou Arrage and Blake Leifert-Griffin received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. Maron Maronite Church in Torrington, Conn. □

## **Newtown Square, Pennsylvania**



**A**ndrew Obeid, Andrew Polus, Jessica Farhat, Alvin Polus, Lauren Ward, Lilly Obeid, Steven Sleiman, and Aoun Earafej received their First Holy Communion on May 11, 2014, at St. Sharbel Maronite Church in Newtown Square, Penn. □

## **Uniontown, Pennsylvania**



**D**arren Dunn, Aidan Barton, William Barton, Magdalen Williams, Owen Reed, Elizabeth A. Georgiana and Andrew Fike received their First Holy Communion on April 19, 2014, at St. George Maronite Church in Uniontown, Penn. □

# *First Holy Communion in the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A.*

## **Utica, New York**



**A**ryiana Swift, Audrianna Jones, Jason Angotti, Daniel O'Donnell, Olivia Sheehan, Eve Miller and Grace Barkett received their First Holy Communion on April 27, 2014, at St. Louis Gonzaga Maronite Church in Utica, N.Y. □

## **Boston, Massachusetts**



**A**ntonio Angelo, George Maroun, April Ibrahim, Andrea N. Naoum, Sam Berkachi, Emile Elie Abouzeid, Christo El-Hachem and Anthony El-Doueihy received their First Holy Communion on May 18, 2014, at Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Jamaica Plain [Boston], Mass. □

## **Saint Louis, Missouri**



**M**ary Catherine Slinkard, Munir Abu-Nader, Savannah Suleiman, Grant Gamma and Kristy Sholy received their First Holy Communion on May 4, 2014, at St. Raymond Maronite Cathedral in Saint Louis, Mo. □

## ***When Jesus Knocks***

*Continued from page 9*

The Holy Spirit gave me the courage to email Mother Marla Marie only two short days later and explain to her what I was experiencing. I met her and Sr. Therese Maria at my parish on the eve of their departure to the U.S. I recall speaking to Mother Marla Marie that evening and finding peace at last.

I visited the Maronite Servants in May, to get a glimpse of religious life and to see the Maronite Servants in action. Not only did I find my true calling and vocation, I found my home. The rest is history.

A vocation, whether it is to the married state or religious life, is fundamentally a gift from God. In the words of St. Gianna Beretta Molla, "Our concern then should be to know the will of God. We should enter onto the path that God wills for us, not by "forcing the door," but when God wills and as God wills..."

My message is to all the young women who are searching for goodness, happiness, truth and beauty. I was searching for it too, but I was looking in the wrong place. The world can't give you lasting joy, but that's the first place we all look for it. Stop looking for it there because you won't find it there! "Whom else have I in the heavens? None besides you delights me on earth" (Psalm 73: 25).

For those interested in discerning religious life with the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light, please contact Mother Marla Marie at [sister@maroniteservants.org](mailto:sister@maroniteservants.org). □

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## Newtown Square, Pennsylvania Priest First Anniversary



Fr. Raymond blesses a little girl at the Pentecost Liturgy at St. Sharbel Church.

by Lillian Shahade

On June 8, 2014, Fr. Raymond Khallouf not only celebrated the Feast of Pentecost, but also celebrated the First Anniversary of his priestly ordination. The parishioners had a cake welcoming him as their new administrator and recognizing his anniversary to the holy priesthood.

Fr. Raymond's first Liturgy at St. Sharbel Maronite Church in Newtown Square, Penn., was on June 1, and he immediately engaged with most of the parishioners at the picnic held in honor of him and that of Fr. Miled Jreig. Fr. Raymond was assigned to St. Sharbel as Parochial Vicar with full administrative duties. Fr. Raymond held meetings and quickly set about organizing various committees for the upcoming Annual Festival that will be held on August 23 and 24, 2014. □

## Priest Grateful

*Continued from page 8*

In a speech, the Pope described the document as an "invitation to all Lebanese to begin with confidence a new page in their history. It is the contribution of the universal Church to the greater unity of the Catholic Church in Lebanon, to the overcoming of divisions between the different Churches and to the development of the country, in which all Lebanese are called to take part."

The Pope's message was universal because it could apply to all countries, Msgr. Asmar said, adding St. John Paul II continued to be an inspiration in the final years of his life because of the challenges he faced from declining health.

"Every one of us has a mission - when God gave us the gift we should not put that to sleep. We use it as much as we can," Msgr. Asmar said. "He [John Paul II] felt he had a gift to give and he didn't want to give it up; maybe that is why he held on." □

## The Massabki Brothers

*Continued from page 1*

The so called "Arab Spring" does not have to be marked by oppression or sectarian violence. Many Christian and Muslim families have been hard at work in the streets, in their homes, and in quiet political efforts to bring about change for the good. They did this once before by working together during the Arab Renaissance of the late 1800s, and they do it again today. This is why the special help of people like Abdel Kader, the grace of the intercession and good example of the Massabki Brothers and the prayer and good deeds of the righteous and the just are very important. May the prayer of the Blessed Massabki Brothers and all the saints be with us. □

+Bishop Gregory J. Mansour  
Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn