



# The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

Volume X

Issue No. VI

June 2014

## Vocations God is Calling: Are We Listening?

*"Ask the Lord of the Harvest to Send Out Laborers Into His Harvest" (Mt. 9:38)*

On Sunday, May 11, 2014, Mother's Day, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations was observed. The purpose of such a day is to publicly fulfill the Lord's instruction to "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Mt. 9:38). A day set aside to pray for vocations to the priesthood and diaconate. Actually we should all continually pray for vocations, but such a day reminds us that it is really by the grace of God that vocations are realized.

A "vocation" is God's calling us to a life of holiness: holiness in the vocation of marriage, holiness in the vocation of a single life, holiness in religious life, holiness in ordained ministry. However, on this day the Church asked that we focus our prayer on the vocation to ordained ministry: the priesthood and diaconate. It is not coincidental that Jesus associates this command to pray for vocations to ordained ministry in agricultural terms, "the Lord of the harvest." In his message for this Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Francis used this imagery: "Let us dispose our hearts, therefore, to being 'good soil,' by listening, receiving and living out the Word, and thus bearing fruit." Truly, let us be good soil.

Vocations, while being a call to men by God, must have good, fertile soil to develop properly. First and foremost this "good soil" is the life of prayer, service and love found in the family. It is not happenstance that vocations are first fostered in the home. Secondly, vocations to the priesthood and diaconate are nurtured in the parish, in particular, in the proper and reverent celebration of the Divine Liturgy and through the example of the parish priest.

In the history of our Maronite Church there was a very clear bond between the future priest and the community he was to serve. Our recent Maronite Patriarchal Synod explained how closely the communities were engaged in helping to provide for the priests to serve them. In many cases the people chose and presented the individual to the bishop. The vocation to priesthood came from the families, and they saw it as their responsibility to ensure that they had sufficient priests to care for their needs. While time and circumstances have changed, it still remains the responsibility of the people to foster priestly vocations from within their own families. This always begins with prayer for an increase in vocations which should be on the lips of every Christian, but it also involves the loving encouragement of a mother and a father, a sister and a brother, to men who seek to serve God through the priesthood. We must pray daily that God grant young men the courage to respond to the call to ordained ministry. Our Eparchy has a great need for priests – priests to staff our current parishes and priests to open new ones. If our Maronite Church is to grow, our Maronite families must provide the vocations.

*(Continues on page 20)*

**“Given  
for  
you.”**



## Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

### June 4 - 24, 2014

Synod of Maronite Bishops, Bkerke, Lebanon.

### June 29, 2014

Pastoral visit to Saints Peter and Paul Mission, Simi Valley, Calif.

### June 30 - July 6, 2014

Clergy Conference and NAM Convention, Pittsburgh, Penn.

### 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. ☐

*The Maronite Voice*  
4611 Sadler Road  
Glen Allen, VA 23060  
Phone: 804/270-7234  
Fax: 804/273-9914

E-Mail: [gmsebaali@aol.com](mailto:gmsebaali@aol.com)  
<http://www.stmaron.org>  
<http://www.usamaronite.org>

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

**Editor** Msgr. George M. Sebaali

#### **Editing and proofreading**

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### Maronite Convention 2014

Our Lady of Victory Maronite Church

**Pittsburgh, Penn.**

**July 2 - 6, 2014**

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

## Eparchial Assignments

His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, has made the following eparchial assignments effective on June 1, 2014:

**Rev. Naji Kiwan** from Administrator of St. John Paul II Maronite Mission, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., to Pastor of St. Anthony Maronite Church, Danbury, Conn., for six years

**Rev. Dany Abi-Akar** from Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Waterbury, Conn., to Administrator, St. John Paul II Maronite Mission, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., while retaining his responsibilities as Administrator of the Maronite Community of Manhattan, N.Y.

**Rev. Raymond Khallouf** from Parochial Vicar at St. Anthony Maronite Church, Danbury, Conn., to Parochial Vicar at St. Sharbel Church, Newtown Square, Penn.

**Rev. Alexander Joseph** from Parochial Vicar at St. Anthony Church, Lawrence, Mass., to Administrator of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Waterbury, Conn. ☐

## Patriarch Rai's Pastoral Letter on Liturgy

You may read His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai's Pastoral Letter on Liturgy\_2014 at: [http://www.stmaron.org/patriarch\\_rai\\_pastoral\\_letter\\_Liturgy\\_2014.pdf](http://www.stmaron.org/patriarch_rai_pastoral_letter_Liturgy_2014.pdf). ☐

## First Communion Pictures

*The Maronite Voice* will publish First Communion pictures only in its July issue. Please send a photo, the names of the children, and the date before June 25, 2014. No exception. ☐

## Food For Thought

“You cannot please both God and the world at the same time. They are utterly opposed to each other in their thoughts, their desires, and their actions.”

*Saint John Vianney*

# Saint Louis, Missouri

## *Bishop Emeritus Robert J. Shaheen's Golden Jubilee*

by Shelly Vitale

On Thursday, May 1, 2014, at St. Raymond Maronite Cathedral in Saint Louis, Mo., hundreds of parishioners, family, friends, clergy and laity joined Bishop *Emeritus* Robert J. Shaheen in celebration of his anniversary of fifty years since his ordination. Members of the Order of Saint Sharbel and the Knights of St. Gregory the Great stood honor guards. The procession included Bishop Elias Zaidan, Eparchy of Our Lady Of Lebanon; Bishop Gregory Mansour, Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn; Bishop *Emeritus* Robert Shaheen, St. Raymond Cathedral; Chorbishop Richard Saad, Vicar General of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and Pastor of St. Elias Church, Birmingham, Ala.; Chorbishop Moussa Joseph, Rector of St. Raymond Cathedral; Chorbishop Joseph Kaddo, Pastor of St. Anthony of the Desert Church, Fall River, Mass.; Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor of St. Sharbel Church, Warren, Mich.; Father Peter Karam, Pastor of St. Maron Church, Cleveland, Ohio; Father Wissam Akiki, St. Raymond Cathedral; Deacon Louis Peters, St. Raymond Cathedral; Deacon Samuel Wehby, St. Elias Church, Birmingham, Ala.; and Subdeacon George Simon, St. Raymond Cathedral. Also in attendance were local clergy from St. Louis.

Many of the Bishop's family and friends were present, including his two brothers, William and John Shaheen and their families, and his two cousins, Tom and Randal Michael from Danbury, Conn.

Bishop Robert thanked everyone and spoke joyfully about his calling to the priesthood. Even as a young boy living in Danbury, Connecticut, Jesus was in his heart. He passed by a local church on the way to school and began attending Mass there each day before going to classes. He was very interested in the Mass and would carefully watch the priest celebrate on the altar. Through his journey of the priesthood, he has been fulfilled serving the Lord. He is thankful to Almighty God and would not change one thing in his life.

Francis G. Slay, Mayor of the City of St. Louis and a longstanding member of St. Raymond, spoke about the Bishop's dedication and service as well as the treasured friendship he shared with the Mayor's family and the Mayor's father, the late Francis R. Slay.

Chorbishop Moussa Joseph offered the Bishop heartfelt prayers and congratulations for his fifty years of devoted service, the majority of that time served at St. Raymond. He expressed the appreciation of the parish. He remembered the Bishop's parents, Albert and Aileen Shaheen, and the great pride they had for their son. He expressed that Maronites throughout the country were richer in their faith because of the Bishop.

Bishop Elias Zaidan read a congratulatory letter on behalf of His Holiness Pope Francis. He also read a letter from Patriarch Bechara Rai, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all



From left: Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop Shaheen and Bishop A. Elias Zaidan.

the East, conveying his congratulations to Bishop Robert for his great faith and service. He acknowledged that Bishop Robert was the first American-born Maronite priest to be ordained in the United States. The Patriarch expressed his gratitude for all that the Bishop had accomplished during his fifty years of service.

Bishop Shaheen had a vision when he came to St. Raymond over forty-seven years ago. He was instrumental in developing St. Raymond Church from a four-family flat into the beautiful St. Raymond Cathedral. With his strength, fortitude and guidance, St. Raymond is now the home of a Cathedral, rectory, Cedars Hall, the Maronite Pastoral Center and the Maronite Heritage Institute, all of which serve faithful Maronites throughout the country. Since the Bishop's ordination he has baptized countless children, celebrated First Holy Communion, delivered the Sacrament of Reconciliation, presided over marriages, and buried the dead, always doing so with the faith of a shepherd.

Bishop Zaidan thanked everyone present for sharing this special occasion with Bishop Shaheen. He congratulated him on fifty years of great service, devotion, dedication, commitment, selflessness and love for God. He mentioned that the Bishop had endeared himself to the parish of St. Raymond. Bishop Zaidan presented an engraved plaque to Bishop Shaheen and expressed that he is a faithful servant to the Lord.

After the Liturgy, Chorbishop Joseph invited everyone to a reception at the Cedars Hall, giving everyone the opportunity to visit with the Bishop and thank him for being a great inspiration. □

## Livonia, Michigan Church Dedication



Assisted by Fr. Milad Yaghi, Bishop Zaidan anoints the walls of St. Rafka Church with the Holy Oil.

by Fr. Tony Massad

On April 6, 2014, His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, joined the Community of St. Rafka and presided over the celebration of the Divine Liturgy wherein St. Rafka Mission was dedicated as St. Rafka Maronite Catholic Church. St. Rafka Church is located in Livonia, a western suburb of metropolitan Detroit, thus creating the third Maronite community to be established in the area with sister parishes St. Maron, Detroit, and St. Sharbel, Warren.

Thirteen years ago, the dream of St. Rafka Church began with a handful of families celebrating the Divine Liturgy in a student chapel at Madonna University. Today, the community has grown to more than one hundred families strong, celebrating in a newly acquired church. The community's faith, dedication, and never-ending perseverance was joyfully rewarded with this historical celebration. Our Lord said in Matthew 17:20, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, say unto this mountain move and it will be moved." Truly, this accomplishment is a testament to the St. Rafka parishioners' faithful commitment and dedication to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Bishop Zaidan began the Divine Liturgy with the traditional ceremony where all in attendance gathered outside the doors of the church. While the community waited behind the Bishop, he knocked on the doors of the church three times, seeking permission to enter. Fr. Tony Massad, Pastor of St. Rafka, Fr. John Paul Kimes, and Fr. Peter Karam were inside the church responding. The doors opened and all were

permitted to enter. The ceremony included sprinkling the church with holy water, anointing the walls and altar with oil, redressing the altar with fresh linens, bringing forth of icons and pinning the walls with red ribbons to symbolize the consecration of the church to the Lord. Members of the parish community participated in these traditions.

The community of St. Rafka was happy to share this celebration with many dignitaries and guests including His Excellency Bishop Ibrahim Ibrahim from the Chaldean community, the Mariamite monks from Ann Arbor, the Consul General of Lebanon, Bilal Kaban, Maronite clergy from Cleveland and Chicago, Sisters from the Religious Sisters of Mercy, and many members from the Maronite parishes in Michigan and in Cleveland, Ohio, and parishioners and friends from the surrounding Melkite, Chaldean, and Orthodox communities. □

## North Jackson, Ohio Save the Date

The National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in North Jackson, Ohio, will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Jubilee the weekend of October 10-12, 2014. This will be a weekend filled with many activities.

The Grand Banquet will be on Saturday, October 11 at the Cedars Hall of the National Shrine. Tickets for the banquet will be available as of June 1, and will cost \$75 per person. Tables of eight can be reserved. Please purchase your tickets as soon as possible as only 400 tickets will be available.

This will also be the weekend of the Inter-Eparchial Deacon/Subdeacon Retreat which will be held at the Shrine and Saint Maron Church in Youngstown, Ohio

The Antonine Sisters' new Antonine Village will be close to completion, and you will have an opportunity to see their new and expanded elderly care facility next to the Shrine.

The NAM Board will meet in Cleveland that weekend, and the board members will be with us for the Jubilee celebration.

Mark your calendar and we hope to see you at our National Shrine in October. Information is available from the Shrine office by calling 330-538-3351 or online at [www.ourladyoflebanonshrine.com](http://www.ourladyoflebanonshrine.com). □

*the Deadline is...* **Deadline for the next issue of *The Maronite Voice* is June 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*  
4611 Sadler Road

Glen Allen, Virginia 23060

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

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). □

## North Jackson, Ohio *Antonine Village*



by *Elias Saade, MD*

The Antonine Sisters held their annual Guild of St. Anthony the Great dinner on April 26, 2014, at Our Lady of Lebanon Shrine Cedar Hall, North Jackson, Ohio. This year was a special occasion because the new Assisted Living and Memory Care facility, called Antonine Village, is under construction.

This \$8.5 million facility will be adjacent to the existing Adult Day Care Center and will include ten suites, 24 assisted living units and 21 memory care units, all designed in a friendly home-like environment that promotes safety and encourages independence.

The Antonine Village is a newly designed project that encompasses three levels of care:

- Suites offer independent seniors a safe and comfortable environment they could call "home."
- Assisted Living Units provide continuity of care to people who need extended hours of supervision or assistance with their daily chores.
- Memory Care Units are specifically designed to accommodate adults with memory impairment. They provide them with enough space to enjoy while eliminating possible dangers.

The Guild of St. Anthony the Great is a group that serves in an advisory capacity to the Sisters and represents a spectrum of people dedicated to the success of the projects of the Antonine Sisters. This year the dinner was successful and well attended. The architect K. Anthony Hayek gave a power point presentation on the progress of construction. Sister Marie Madeleine Iskandar, Local Superior, says that the facility, already under roof, will be finished later this year. □



## Lakewood, Colorado *Pastoral Visit*

On Mother's Day, May 11, 2014, the Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon; Bishop Emeritus Robert J. Shaheen; and Roman Catholic Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila of the Denver Archdiocese visited St. Rafka Maronite Church in Lakewood, Colo.

The three bishops celebrated Mother's Day Liturgy at the small church on the hill on the northwest side of Denver. During the homily, Bishop Zaidan took a cue from the Gospel reading (John 21:1-14) by encouraging parishioners to be like Simon Peter and become fishers of men by inviting neighbors, friends and relatives to church. Bishop Zaidan also asked parishioners to be excited about Jesus, to jump out of the boat and run to greet our Savior.

After the Divine Liturgy, Archbishop Aquila and Bishop Zaidan exchanged gifts, and they were treated to a Mother's Day Brunch with parishioners and guests.

The weekend began with a banquet and awards dinner at a neighboring Catholic Church, the Shrine of St. Anne Catholic Church, to honor Bishop Zaidan and several St. Rafka parishioners. Dr. Louis and Georgette Ashkar received the Family Award of Faith and Heritage; Gilbert Clark received the Faithful Servant and Hospitality Award; Dr. Susan Childress received the Stewardship and Ministry Award; and Fr. George Shawareb, Pastor of St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church, received the Outreach and Leadership Award.

A concert of Sacred Music to honor Bishop Shaheen's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the priesthood was held on Saturday at Holy Ghost Catholic Church in downtown Denver. The Concert for Peace and Conviviality, directed by Fr. Andre Mahanna, Pastor of St. Rafka, featured the choir from St. Rafka, St. Elias music director Sonia Nasr, and the choir from Holy Ghost, directed by Richard Robertson.

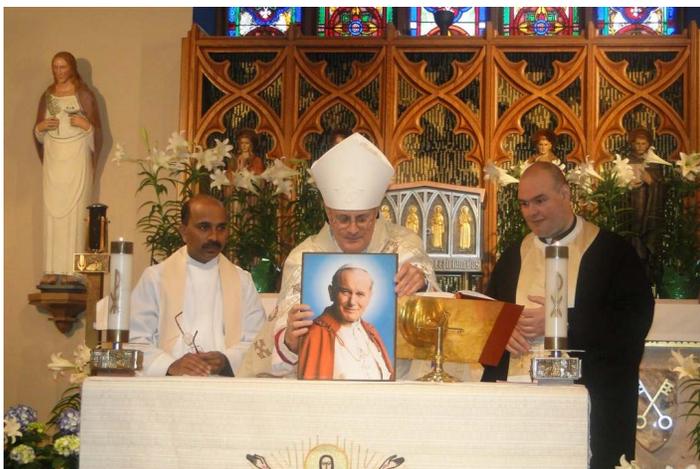
With Fr. Andre accompanying her, Ms. Nasr chanted and sang hymns for Great Lent and Pascha from the Byzantine tradition. The Holy Ghost choir sang hymns from the Latin tradition, St. Rafka's choir, featuring Gisele Cherabie, Nathalie Feghali, Marsha Moussallem, Paul Conkling and Fr. Andre, entertained the guests with hymns in the Syriac-Aramaic tradition.

The honor of three bishops' coming together in the St. Rafka community will be remembered as a time to sow peace among our neighbors, family and friends. □



Bishop A. Elias Zaidan

## Westchester, New York Canonization Weekend



Bishop Gregory Mansour (center) displays a picture of Saint John Paul II.

by Janine Wakim

As many faithful across the United States attended Masses on Sunday, April 27, 2014, to celebrate the canonization of two popes, the day held particular significance for the now Saint John Paul II Maronite Mission in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y. The parishioners were joined by His Excellency Bishop Gregory J. Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, for the Divine Liturgy, which culminated a weekend of activities to commemorate the Canonization of St. John Paul II, Patron of this Mission, started in October 2002.

Weekend events were launched on Thursday, April 24, with a Holy Hour of Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament and a guest lecture on the life of Saint John Paul II by Bishop Mansour, followed by a wine and cheese reception. Friday evening started with an evening prayer service (*Ramsho*) and a wonderful youth rally and concert by the Catholic Band, Full Armor. And for the little ones, children's activities were held on Saturday afternoon. Members of the community and local parishes were invited to all these events, an opportunity to share our special heritage and common bonds with our neighbors.

The anticipated highlight of the weekend was the Annual Spring Gala on Saturday evening, at Knollwood Country Club in Elmsford, N.Y. It included a silent auction, raffle, seated dinner and dancing. The evening was made all the more special with the presence of His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, His Excellency Mr. Majdi Ramadan, Consul General of Lebanon in New York, Mr. Atef Eid, Secretary General of the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU), and the pastors of the local Catholic parishes.

The canonization of Saint John Paul II was profoundly universal, but was particularly personal to the faithful of the Westchester Mission. The Saint John Paul II Mission had been on a twelve-year journey to find a home in Westchester, N.Y., where weekly liturgies could be celebrated and the community could join together in prayer

and friendship. The Canonization weekend marked both the joyful occasion of our parish patron as saint, and the Mission's first full year in this permanent home with weekly liturgies.

The parishioners of St. John Paul II Maronite Mission look forward to many years, and God-willing, many generations to grow together in faith and love in this beautiful home. □

## Jacksonville-Florida Shrine Dedication



by Fr. Elie Abi-Chedid

On Sunday, May 4, 2014, the Feast of Our Lady of Lebanon, Saint Maron's Church community in Jacksonville, Florida, celebrated the dedication ceremony of the newly erected shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon that was built on the Church's grounds between the new church and the hall.

Following the Divine Liturgy, parishioners held a procession to the shrine, where Father Elie Abi Chedid consecrated the shrine with special prayers of dedication and the sprinkling of holy water. Afterward, the *Ziah "Ya Om Allah"* and the blessing with the icon of Our Lady of Lebanon took place. □

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

## Scranton, Pennsylvania *Lenten Project*



Delivering the gift bags to an employee of the Advocacy Center are from left: Anna Ligorio, Lena Ligorio and Rebecca Abdo.

The Daughters of Saint Ann of St. Ann Maronite Catholic Church in Scranton, Penn., completed their Lenten Project by assembling and donating forty Easter gift bags for the boys and girls who use the services of the Children's Advocacy Center of NEPA. The gift bags contained toiletries and other items needed by the children who come to the Advocacy Center from abuse situations. □

## Glen Allen, Virginia *MYO Charitable Drive*

by Kathryn Meadows

The Youth Club at St. Anthony Maronite Church in Glen Allen, Va., decided to take a different approach on giving back to the community. They considered numerous ideas, but ultimately, they decided to sponsor a couple of fundraising events and donate the money to a charity.

After researching various charitable organizations, they collectively decided to fundraise for Hospice of Virginia, for two reasons. First, its mission to help patients and their families in their last few months of life is an excellent example of Christianity. Hospice of Virginia works with patients and their families wherever they feel most comfortable - whether it is their home, an inpatient facility or an outpatient setting. They have doctors, nurses, consolers, and volunteers to help the patients feel comfortable, and offer consolation as they move through the many steps of losing a loved one. Second, we chose Hospice of Virginia because a little over a year ago, we lost a 26-year-old parishioner to brain cancer. Nicholas McDaniel was a close cousin to many of us, he grew up in the church, and his family has been in the parish for generations. The Youth Club felt like giving to Hospice honored Nicholas in many ways.

The Youth Club sponsored two fundraisers over the course of a few weeks. They held a breakfast on March 23, 2014, and a spaghetti dinner on April 4. Members of the Youth Club, along with some of the parents, prepared the meals, and the St. Anthony's community came out to support their efforts. Their generosity made it possible for the youth to raise over \$1500 to benefit Hospice of Virginia. St. Anthony's youth felt honored to give back to Hospice after all they do for others and for the community. □

## Fort Lauderdale, Florida *Mothers' Day*



From left to right are: Charlie Marzouka, Joseph Lahoud, Tony Chamoun, Pierre Deeb, Robert Kiderchah, Samir ElHage, John Dahdouh, William Beamer and Joseph Bousemaan.

On a festive Mothers' Day at Heart of Jesus Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., the men of the parish came together to prepare, grill, and serve a delicious luncheon for all the women of the parish. The women were able to relax and enjoy each other's company. It was a gracious gesture on the part of the men and a way to thank the mothers for all they do each and every day. Now the men are waiting in anticipation for Fathers' Day to see what the women will serve! □



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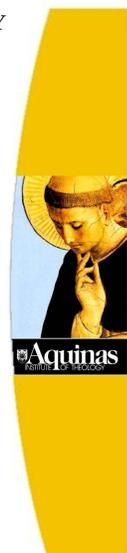
*Bishop Emeritus Robert J. Shaheen*

*with its*



**Save the Date!**  
**October 23, 2014**

The Cedars Banquet Hall  
939 Lebanon Dr.  
St. Louis, MO 63104



To make a donation, please send to Aquinas Institute, 23 S. Spring Ave., St Louis, MO 63108 or [www.ai.edu](http://www.ai.edu).

## North Jackson, Ohio *May Crowning*



The annual May Crowning took place at the National Shrine on Sunday, May 11, 2014. The celebration this year was simple and beautiful. The statue of Our Lady was crowned by Madison and Reanna Reardon, the granddaughters of Janice Reardon, the Shrine Sacristan.

After prayers and hymns the two young girls, who recently made their First Holy Communion, jointly crowned Our Lady as the congregation sang hymns.

We were blessed with beautiful weather and many visitors as Our Lady's statue was crowned on Mother's Day.

## *Annual Feast of St. Joseph*



The National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in North Jackson, Ohio, once again, celebrated the annual Feast of Saint Joseph. The feast was preceded by a nine-day Novena which was well attended and culminated with the closing Liturgy, procession and blessing of the Saint Joseph Table.

Traditionally the Saint Joseph Table was prepared by

wealthy townfolk who opened the doors of their homes on the feast day and invited all the poor to come and partake of a grand meal prepared for all. The tradition continues to this day with many churches and private homes opening their doors for all to come and celebrate the feast day.

The Novena to Saint Joseph has been a long tradition at the Shrine and continues through the year with many people coming to the statue of Saint Joseph to pray for their temporal needs and also to place their families under his protection. Saint Joseph, guardian of our families, pray for us! ☐

## Scranton, Pennsylvania *May Crowning*



From left: May Queen Rebecca Abdo, Angelina Wheeler, Anna Ligorio and Lena Ligorio.

by Fr. Francis Marini

On Mothers' Day, May 11, 2014, the Daughters of Saint Ann, the young women's group at St. Ann Maronite Catholic Church in Scranton, Penn., celebrated the May Crowning. Rebecca Abdo, Prefect and May Queen, placed a crown of white flowers on the statue of the Virgin Mother to the singing of Marian hymns. Also participating in the celebration were Anna Ligorio, Lena Ligorio and Angelina Wheeler. ☐

## **Food For Thought**

"We say that knowledge is not mere talk, but a certain divine knowledge, that light which is kindled in the soul as a result of obedience to the commandments, and which reveals all that is in a state of becoming, enables man to know himself and teaches him to become possessed of God."

St. Clement of Alexandria

## Warren, Michigan May Crowning



On Sunday, May 4, 2014, Feast of Our Lady of Lebanon, St. Sharbel Church in Warren, Mich., held a crowning ceremony for the Blessed Virgin Mary. This year's students of the First Holy Communion class processed to the altar with carnations, which were placed at Mary's feet.

### *Bishop's Pastoral Visit*

St. Sharbel Maronite Church welcomed Bishop Zaidan as he made his first Pastoral Visit, along with Fr. Milad Yaghi, to the parishioners in Warren, Mich., on April 3-13, 2014.

On Thursday, April 3, a dinner in the Bishop's honor was hosted by the Pastor, Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, and was attended by all board members and their spouses. Prior to this, a business meeting was held to discuss the past, present and the future of the Maronite community in Michigan.

On Friday, April 4, a visit was made to the Archdiocese of Detroit to meet with the Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron, the Archbishop of Detroit, and local Maronite clergy. Discussions were had regarding the healthy relationship between the Latin Rite and the Maronite Rite Catholics in the greater Metropolitan Detroit area. A luncheon at the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club followed and included Auxiliary Bishops Donald Hanchon and Francis Reiss; clergy from the Maronite and Orthodox Churches; the Consul General of Lebanon, His Excellency Mr. Belal Kabalan; and many active community representatives. Bishop Zaidan spent the remainder of the afternoon visiting with the sick and homebound.

On Sunday evening a dinner was held in honor of the Bishop by the Detroit Chapter of the Lebanese Forces.

On Monday, April 7, an evening dinner was hosted in honor of Bishop Zaidan by the *Tayyar* Michigan, chapter of The Free Patriotic Movement.

On Friday, April 11, Bishop Zaidan made a visit to the priests of the Maronite Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ann Arbor, Mich.

That evening, Bishop Zaidan prayed the Stations and



Benediction of the Cross with the parishioners of St. Sharbel Maronite Church. A Lenten Dinner was enjoyed by all following prayers.

On Saturday, April 12, the organizations and committees of St. Sharbel were privileged to meet individually with the Bishop to discuss accomplishments and goals for the future. Following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy a "Meet and Greet" and Talent Show by the youth of the parish were enjoyed by all.

Palm Sunday Liturgy was celebrated on Sunday, April 13. A going away dinner was hosted later that evening at *La Saj* Lebanese Bistro.

We are very thankful to His Excellency for his support, guidance and leadership! ☐

### **Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour**

**June 5 - 24, 2014**

Maronite Bishops Synod, *Bkerke*, Lebanon.

**June 27, 2014**

Arrival of Bishop Elias Sleiman of Syria

**June 29, 2014**

Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

**June 30, 2014**

MYO Retreat in Pittsburgh, Penn.

**June 30 - July 6, 2014**

Annual Clergy Conference and NAM Convention, Pittsburgh, Penn.

**July 12 - 13, 2014**

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

**July 20, 2014**

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

# “Why Goodness Depends on God”

by

*Very Reverend Robert Barron*

One of the commonest observations made by opponents of religion is that we don't need God in order to have a coherent and integral morality. Atheists and agnostics are extremely sensitive to the charge that the rejection of God will conduce automatically to moral chaos. Consequently, they argue that a robust sense of ethics can be grounded in the consensus of the human community over time or in the intuitions and sensibilities of decent people, etc.

What I would like to do is lay out, in very brief compass, the Catholic understanding of the relationship between morality and the existence of God and to show, thereby, why it is indispensably important for a society that wishes to maintain its moral integrity to maintain, at the same time, a vibrant belief in God.

Why do we do the things that we do? What motivates us ethically? Right now, I am typing words on my keyboard. Why am I doing that? Well, I want to finish my weekly column. Why do I want to do that? I want to communicate the truth as I see it to an audience who might benefit from it. Why would I want that? Well, I'm convinced that the truth is good in itself. Do you see what we've uncovered by this simple exercise? By searching out the motivation for the act of typing words, we have come to a basic or fundamental good, a value that is worthwhile for its own sake. My acts of typing, writing, and communicating are subordinate, finally, to the intrinsic value of the truth. Take another example. Just before composing that last sentence, I took a swig of water from a plastic bottle on my desk. Why did I do that? Well, I was thirsty and wanted to slake my thirst. But why did I want to do that? Hydrating my system is healthy. Why is health important? Because it sustains my life. Why is life worth pursuing? Well, because life is good in itself. Once more, this analysis of desire has revealed a basic or irreducible good. Catholic moral philosophy recognizes, besides truth and life, other basic values, including friendship, justice,

and beauty, and it sees them as the structuring elements of the moral life.

When Pope Benedict XVI complained about a “dictatorship of relativism” and when Catholic philosophers worry over the triumph of the subjective in our culture, they are expressing their concerns that these irreducible values have been forgotten or occluded. In her great meditations on the sovereignty of the good, the Irish philosopher Iris Murdoch strenuously insists that the authentic good legitimately imposes itself on the human will and is not a creation of that will. At the limit, contemporary subjectivism apotheosizes the will so that it becomes the source of value, but this puffing up of our freedom is actually ruinous, for it prevents the appropriation of the objective values that will truly benefit us.

This “basic goods” theory also grounds the keen Catholic sense that there are certain acts which are intrinsically evil, that is, wrong no matter the circumstances of the act or the motivations of the agent. Slavery, the sexual abuse of children, adultery, racism, murder, etc. are intrinsically evil precisely because they involve direct attacks on basic goods. The moment we unmoor a moral system from these objective values, no act can be designated as intrinsically evil and from that state of affairs moral chaos follows.

So far we have determined the objectivity of the ethical enterprise, but how does God figure into the system? Couldn't an honest secularist hold to objective moral goods but not hold to God's existence? Let's return to our analysis of the will in action. As we saw, the will is motivated, even in its simplest moves, by some sense, perhaps inchoate, of a moral value: truth, life, beauty, justice, etc. But having achieved some worldly good—say of writing this column, or slaking a thirst, or educating a child—the will is only incompletely satisfied. In point of fact, the achievement of some finite good tends to spur the will to want more of that good. Every scientist or philosopher knows that the answering

of one question tends to open a hundred new ones; every social activist knows that righting one wrong awakens a desire to right a hundred more. Indeed, no achievement of truth, justice, life, or beauty in this world can satisfy the will, for the will is ordered to each of those goods in its properly unconditioned form. As Bernard Lonergan said, “the mind wants to know everything about everything.” And as St. Augustine said, “Lord, you have made us for yourself; therefore our heart is restless until it rests in thee.” You've noticed that I've slipped God somewhat slyly into the discussion! But I haven't done so illegitimately, for in the Catholic philosophical tradition, “God” is the name that we give to absolute or unconditioned goodness, justice, truth, and life.

Now we can see the relationship between God and the basic goods that ground the moral life: the latter are reflections of and participations in the former. As C.S. Lewis points out in *Mere Christianity*, the moral absolutes are, therefore, signposts of God. And this is precisely why the negation of God leads by a short route to the negation of moral absolutes and finally to a crass subjectivism. Removing God is tantamount to removing the ground for the basic goods, and once the basic goods have been eliminated, all that is left is the self-legislating and self-creating will. Thus, we should be wary indeed when atheists and agnostics blithely suggest that morality can endure apart from God. Much truer is Dostoyevsky's observation that once God is removed, anything is permissible. □

## About the Author

*Father Robert Barron* is the founder of the global ministry, Word on Fire, and the Rector/President of Mundelein Seminary. He is the creator of the award-winning documentary series, “Catholicism” and “Catholicism: The New Evangelization.” Learn more at [www.WordonFire.org](http://www.WordonFire.org)

## **“Come and See” Discernment Weekend 2014**

by Aaron Sandbothe, Seminarian

**O**n April 4 -6, 2014, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary in Washington, D.C., hosted its annual Vocations Discernment Retreat. Six young men from two Eparchies arrived from Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The Vocations Retreat is one of the high points of the seminary year, allowing the seminarians to open their home to men who may, one day, join them in formation. The process of discernment is different for each person but one of the most common points that men reach is asking the question: "What exactly am I getting myself into?" In the past it was common to have a priestly



***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

vocation in the family, and the ins-and-outs of the priesthood were common knowledge in Catholic families. In the current context this familiarity may not be so common and the life of a seminarian or priest can become mysterious or misunderstood. The Vocation Directors and seminarians designed the retreat to demystify the seminary experience and show that the daily life of diocesan seminarians isn't all that different from their peers. The discernment retreat allows men who are thinking and praying about a priestly vocation a chance to see seminary life as it really is - a unique but truly human experience with all the same challenges and joys that life offers in other contexts.

On Friday evening the men arrived in Washington and were able to begin the retreat by joining the seminarians for *Ramsho* (Evening Prayer). The Divine Office is the lifeblood of the seminary schedule, with the community beginning and ending each day with psalms and hymns from our rich Syriac tradition. After *Ramsho* the men met Fr. Geoffrey Abdallah, the Rector of the Seminary, Frs. Gary George and Dominique Hanna, the Vocation Directors, and the seminarians over dinner prepared by the seminary cook.

After a day fraught with airline delays and the rigors of travel, the community and the discerners enjoyed some social time by watching a movie and getting to know one another.

Saturday began early with *Safro* (Morning Prayer), breakfast, and the *Qurbono* (Mass). After the Liturgy, Fr. Dominique gave a small talk on his own priestly vocation and the spirituality of discernment. The afternoon plan to see the famous Cherry Blossoms of Washington was thwarted by an unseasonably long winter, but the men were able to visit the Catholic University of America where the seminarians study, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Capitol Hill, and many of the monuments. The evening concluded with *Ramsho*, dinner at a nearby restaurant, and a Q&A with the priests and seminarians. The men spoke of their own discernment process, asked questions, and were able to place the seminary experience in context.

Sunday morning began with *Safro*, breakfast, and an hour of reflection led by Fr. Gary. The men were able to reflect on the previous days, speak with one of the priests in private, or spend time in preparation for the Sunday Liturgy.

*(Continues on page 20)*

## Vocation Promotion

### Do You Have a Maronite Servant's Heart?



From left: Natalie Salameh, Mother Marla Marie and Sister Therese Maria Touma.

The Maronite Servants of Christ the Light invite young women to consider a vocation to the consecrated life. Here are some qualities that may show signs of a call to the Maronite Servants' way of life:

- Personal relationship with God in prayer
- Thirst for a deeper knowledge of the Maronite Catholic faith
- Devotion to the Holy Eucharist
- Generosity and concern for others
- Desire to live a good and holy life
- Love for the Church and her teachings
- Capacity and desire for spiritual motherhood
- Capacity for friendship and communal living
- Love for the poor and defenseless
- Healthy self-image and normal social skills

If you are considering a call to religious life, it is beneficial for you to begin living these steps:

- Stay close to the Mysteries (sacraments)
- Participate in Divine Liturgy every Sunday, and daily when possible
- Confess your sins to a priest regularly - once a month or even more
- Get a spiritual director
- Ask a priest or sister to meet with you once a month to discuss your spiritual life
- Pray everyday
- Develop a prayer routine with the help of your spiritual director
- Do some spiritual reading daily
- Stay close to Our Lady. The Mother of God will not let you down!
- Serve your parish and seek opportunities to get involved in parish life
- Contact Sister Marla Marie at Sister@maroniteservants.org.

## Vocation Prayer

We therefore implore you, O Christ, guard your Church as one flock, under one pastor. Call to your service the young men and women chosen by you. Deepen the love of those you have called for the religious life and help them to become more perfect in following your precepts. May those whom you have chosen hear your call to the works of evangelization. May your Church be an instrument of sanctification and salvation; let her increase according to your plan, and grow to full stature. Through her may we reach your kingdom and glorify and praise you, forever. Amen. ☐

(Prayer taken from the Maronite Divine Office)

## From the Book Shelf

### Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

#### Order Form For English Lectionary of the Maronite Church Book of Readings and Book of Gospels

The English translation of the Book of Readings and the Book of Gospels is now available from the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and is ready for shipment. The cost per set is \$225 including shipping and handling. To order your copy (ies) make check payable to the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and send directly to:

The Pastoral Center  
1021 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
St. Louis, MO 63104

Or email orders to: [mdenny@usamaronite.org](mailto:mdenny@usamaronite.org)

Fax orders to: 314 - 231-1418

(Please print or type)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Church Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of sets: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chicago, Illinois *Bishop's Visit*



Bishop A. Elias Zaidan blessed the people as he exits Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Chicago.

by Samantha Lebbos

The weekend of May 2 - 6, 2014, was more than a lovely weekend. It was a blessing. His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, visited our parish, and it was a weekend that Our Lady of Lebanon (OLL) Church in Lombard [Chicago], Ill., will never forget. Father Pierre AlBalaa, the Pastoral Council and the visit's committee had long been planning and awaiting a weekend that would light up OLL Chicago.

On Friday, May 2, His Excellency Bishop Zaidan arrived at O'Hare Airport. Father Pierre, Mr. Edmond Lebbos (Parish Pastoral Council President) and Mr. William Harb (Council Vice President) were waiting to greet him. That evening, the Bishop, Father Pierre and the Pastoral Council met for dinner. Needless to say, Bishop Zaidan enjoyed hearing about the plans and activities the parish is involved in. The rest of the weekend was filled with meetings, lunches and dinners. The Catechism Teachers, the MYO, the Board of Trustees and the OLL Choir met with Bishop Zaidan separately to talk about ways they can improve the parish.

It was time to celebrate Bishop Elias Zaidan's visit on Saturday evening. The banquet hall was filled with over 200 parishioners and guests. It was a graceful evening spent at the Hilton Indian Lakes Resort in Bloomingdale, Ill. Cocktails, dinner and dessert were served. To top off the joyous night, the guests had a thrilling night singing and dancing to our guest entertainer, Danny Achkar.

The parish arrived ready for the solemn Liturgy on Sunday morning. It was wonderful to see Father Pierre and Bishop Zaidan come together and speak God's words to all of us. Soon after the Liturgy and reception held at OLL, His Excellency Bishop Zaidan, Father Pierre and the Pastoral Council took off to Wisconsin, where they attended a Liturgy at the New Mission.

From advice to exchanging ideas, the visit of Bishop Elias Zaidan was very important to OLL because his visit showed him how we strive to succeed with each other as a whole. Bishop Elias Zaidan shared his wisdom and

appreciation to his people. We hope to have him visit again soon. We also hope he will take with him on his travels something from us – more love than he came to Chicago with. □

## Tulsa, Oklahoma *Parish Festival*



Saint Therese Maronite Parish, Tulsa, Oklahoma, celebrated its annual Lebanon Fest on Saturday May 3, 2014, at the Jorishie Hall at the parish. The festival featured Lebanese food, international conversation, and music by Cesar's band. Also a favorite with the children are the exotic animals displayed by Safari Joe's Exotic Animal Rescue of Adair, Okla. The Pastor, Father Elias Abi-Sarkis, said that the festival was successful as a parish unifier, an invitation to non-parishioners, and a fundraiser. He also stated it was just plain fun. □

## Saint Louis, Missouri *Maronite Bishops Organize Assistance for Caritas Lebanon*

Bishop Gregory Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon convened a meeting in St. Louis on March 10, 2014, to form Caritas Lebanon USA, which will support the work of Caritas-Lebanon, raise awareness of its needs, and reach out to people of good will who share this mission.

Under the direction of the Maronite Patriarch His Beatitude Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai, Caritas-Lebanon serves the poorest without any discrimination throughout Lebanon. It does this in divergent activities including medical, social, socio-pastoral, refugee and migrant assistance, emergency intervention, reconstruction, rehabilitation and economic development.

Caritas Lebanon USA will endeavor to enlist the whole Catholic Church in the United States, western rite and eastern rites, as well as other persons of good will to support Caritas-Lebanon. Bishop Mansour and Bishop Zaidan said one focus



From left to right: Dr. Jacob Jorishie, Msgr. George Sebaali, Dr. Rustom Khouri, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Father Elias Abi Sarkis, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Fahym Gemayel, Dr. George Ayoub, Henry Harder, Therese Abi Habib and Louis Ragy.

could be on children and medicine. The bishops appointed Father Elias Abi Sarkis as Director of Caritas Lebanon USA.

The Board of Directors hopes to raise awareness of needs at the NAM Convention in Pittsburgh July 2 - 6, 2014. □

## St. Paul, Minnesota *Burning Of Mortgage*



Bishop Shaheen (left), Bishop Zaidan and Fr. Constantin with the First Communion children and an honor guard.

by Jackie Gubash-Mueller and Christine Solberg

**D**uring the weekend of April 25 - 27, 2014, Holy Family Church in Mendota Heights [St. Paul], Minn., was honored to host Bishop Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and Bishop *Emeritus* Robert Shaheen. This was Bishop Zaidan's first pastoral visit to Holy Family Church, and the parish marked the occasion by burning its mortgage. Seven years ago, Holy Family, a parish of two hundred active families (350 registered), took on a \$1.3

million mortgage to relocate from St. Paul to Mendota Heights, where most parishioners resided. Continuous fundraisers and generous donations from dozens of hard-working parishioners have, with God's grace and the leadership of our pastor, Fr. Rodrigue Constantin, paid off a big mortgage in a very short time, and in very difficult economic conditions. We were honored to host Bishop Shaheen, who had faith in the parish and signed on the mortgage, and were proud to welcome Bishop Elias into a mortgage-free church.

On Friday evening, both bishops, Fr. Constantin, the Parish Council and the Stewardship Committee shared dinner together. The Holy Family Society and Merry-Nites women's organizations were delighted to become acquainted with our new Bishop Zaidan at a Saturday morning breakfast. They pleasantly discovered the witty sense of humor of the new bishop! Of course, Bishop Shaheen evoked chuckles from the group as he often does. Celebrating Divine Liturgy later that day, the Bishops and Fr. Constantin were joined on the altar by the sons of the parish, Fr. Raymond Monsour (a Latin rite priest) and Fr. Anthony Salim, Pastor of St. Joseph Maronite Church in Olean, N.Y. The choir and congregation joined as the church resounded with beautiful Maronite hymns. The busy day concluded at Mendakota Country Club with a dinner, as we celebrated the "burning" of our mortgage, and were entertained by our Pastor's game of "How Well Do You Know Bishop Elias?" – which was a fun way to learn more about the Bishop.

Sunday morning, Bishop Zaidan celebrated the First Communion of five children who will cherish this special memory forever. This joyous occasion was followed by a brunch in the honor of our guest bishops and our First Communicants. We thank Bishop Shaheen for his support during his episcopacy, and look forward to the next visit from our new Bishop A. Elias Zaidan.

## Glen Allen, Virginia *Letter to the Governor*

Dear Governor McAuliffe,

**I** am a twelve-year-old girl named Ava Gibrall. I live here in Richmond, Virginia. I go to St. Mary's Catholic school. I have some interest in politics. I am a Republican (by choice, not because of my family) and I do not want you to stop reading this after you see that. There is a topic that I would like you to acknowledge that has been bothering me, and many others: abortion. When I hear that word I think: death, murder, horrible, babies. I think that if anybody was told those words, they would not like it. They would not want whatever it was describing. Now, I completely understand that you are trying to give women rights and all, but do you realize how many rights you are taking away from the babies. Babies are people too! I would really like you to think about (even if you aren't Catholic or religious) what God would want you to do. Would He want you allowing women to kill innocent little babies because they were stupid and didn't expect to become pregnant after having sex? You are rewarding women after they did something irresponsible (even if they were married) If they don't want children, then don't have sex. But, if they want to have sex, then have them

and let the child be adopted. It's better than having no life at all! Now, you might read this and completely ignore everything I say, but would I be doing this if it doesn't matter to me? I have rights to tell you what I think. I have a friend, and her sister has a clinic for women who want to abort babies. After hearing the babies' heartbeat the women rarely ever still want to kill the baby. Those are some smart women. God didn't put us in our mother's stomach only to die after a few weeks or months. Now, there are plenty more topics I will in future time tell you about, but for now, really think about this. I am very angry knowing you allow this to happen. Please respond once you know what you will do about this. I really appreciate it.

Thanks, Ava Gibrall. ☐

[Ava Gibrall is a member of St. Anthony Maronite Church in Glen Allen, Va., and is enrolled in the sixth grade of the Maronite Formation Program. She received a form letter from Virginia's Secretary of Health and Human Resources in response to her letter.]

## **Damascus, Syria** **A Tomb Which Illuminates The** **Journey**

### **A Tomb of Light**

**F**ather Franz VAN DER LUGT (1938 - 2014) was a Dutch Jesuit priest living in Syria since 1972. Fluent in Arabic, he held a doctorate degree in psychology. Father Franz advanced dialogue between Muslims and Christians, especially through youth ministry, retreats, and gatherings. He gave good care, especially for the mentally handicapped. He began an agricultural cooperative for the disabled, advocated for needed childcare, and assisted in the restoration of churches and parish centers in the small rural area.

To demonstrate his confidence in his fellow Muslims, Father Franz refused to leave the old city of *Homs*, where he was also the only priest to serve dozens of Christians abandoned by their pastors. He was martyred in *Homs* on April 7, 2014. There was no priest to celebrate his funeral. Father Franz was buried in the courtyard of the convent by a small number of Muslim and Christian refugees who form a community of "cloistered" life, living with scarcity and in fear.

His tomb now attracts a large number of Muslim and Christian visitors. By his life and death, Father Franz shows the way to the future in Syria through a message of brotherhood among men and women. Both in life and in death *Abouna* Franz is an apostle of love and peace embodying the life of his Master, witnessing the values of justice, truth, and total self-giving.

### **A Sign In Our Midst – A New Priest** **Without Parish Ministry**

Syria, plunged into violence and suffering, continues to be a fertile ground for vocations, a sign of hope. Numerous youth

are responding to the call of the Lord, despite dispersion, exodus, great suffering, and difficult prospects.

Maroun, a deacon from *Homs*, has been preparing for the priesthood for twelve years. He will be ordained a priest, for a diocese torn by war and violence, on August 15, 2014, at the Maronite Cathedral in Damascus. Maroun will not have a parish or a specific duty, other than the social care of refugees, families and the moral and spiritual support of the youth. His ordination is the future of the Syrian Church and hope in the restoration of peace. This spiritual vitality is encouraging. Maroun's is a vocation that risks in a Christianity that refuses to die. This new priest is a sign in the midst of a people proud of its martyrs.

I confide in the prayers of Father Franz and in your prayers, ☐

+Samir Nassar  
Maronite Archbishop of Damascus

## **Tune In To Our Saints**

by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M.

**T**oday more than ever we need saints and heroes to admire and emulate. The cult of the saints and its history has fallen out of focus in recent times with shifts in society, family life, and religious formation. But the veneration and invocation of saints still hold a place of considerable importance and value in the life of Christians and in the liturgy of the Church. A brief historical review will shed some light on the situation.

In the beginning of Christianity the martyrs, bishops, and other saintly persons were held in veneration in the local church where they had lived. As time progressed some gained universal renown and found a place in the calendars of all churches. And for some mysterious reasons a small number of saints like St. Anthony of Padua and St. Rita of Cascia, and St. Pio of Pietrelcina in our day, became the objects of extraordinary popular devotion around the world, even though they never wandered far from home and their place in the Church's liturgy is rather moderate or nonexistent. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, is another topic altogether.

To understand the cult of the saints it is important to trace its history from the beginnings of Christianity to our own time. Up to the sixth century there was one tradition for both East and West. Later a divergence developed. Twentieth century reforms improved on previous practice and highlighted the significance of the liturgical cult of saints in the contemporary Church.

### **The History of the Cult of Saints**

In the East and in the West we find a double source for the liturgy of the saints: the cult of martyrs, whose anniversary was celebrated by the community gathered around their tombs; and the cult of bishops, whose memory was kept with devotion by the churches they headed. Each particular

church developed its own calendar, which was gradually enlarged to include martyrs from other churches and also noteworthy figures like the apostles and others who played a basic role in the universal Church. Thus the "memory" of martyrs and bishops developed into the "feasts" of saints. Tracing the evolution of the development is more than a historical exercise. Because we celebrate the saints in a uniform manner in our day, this will help us recapture the distinctive characteristics of each category of saints, and to understand what kinds of sanctity throughout the centuries the Church deems worthy of a cult.

## *The First Six Centuries*

### *Martyrs*

From earliest Christianity the cult of the martyrs was one of the forms of honoring the dead. It was a cult of memory, a way of insuring that the deceased person lived on in the memory of the living. For the living it was a way of being nourished by the example and courage of those who gave their lives to attest to their faith. Recall that martyr comes from the Greek word for "witness."

From the beginning the cult of the martyrs was distinguished from the cult of the ordinary deceased because the anniversary gatherings did not concern only the family but the entire local community. Those memorial gatherings lasted not only a few years but indefinitely. The Christian memory of the martyr is lasting.

Records regarding the cult of the martyrs in the early centuries are sparse. The East preceded the West in documenting this practice. The earliest testimony concerns St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who was martyred about 155 or 156. In a letter written some months after his death, the Christians of *Smyrna* indicated "We took up his bones . . . and laid them away in a suitable place. There the Lord will permit us, so far as possible, to gather together in joy and gladness to celebrate the day of his martyrdom as a birthday, in memory of those athletes who have gone before us, and to train and make ready those who are to come hereafter." Most likely this meeting included the celebration of the Eucharist.

In the West the earliest documentation was found in Carthage, at the time of St. Cyprian and the persecution of Decius (250). In a letter to his clergy Cyprian gives this recommendation concerning the confessors of the faith: "You should keep note of the days on which they depart this life. We will then be able to include the celebration of their memories in our commemorations of the martyrs." In another letter about three martyrs of Carthage, Cyprian adds, "We never fail to offer sacrifices on their behalf every time we celebrate in commemoration the anniversary dates of the sufferings of these martyrs." These two texts demonstrate that the celebration of the martyrs was already customary at Carthage at the time of Cyprian and that it included the Eucharistic sacrifice.

In contrast Rome rendered no special cult to martyrs before the middle of the third century. The bloody persecution of Valerian in the summer of 258 caused a change. On August

6 Pope Sixtus II and six of his deacons were put to death, and on August 10 the deacon Lawrence. In June of that year the remains of St. Peter and of St. Paul were placed in safety. The Church of Rome wanted to preserve the memory of a summer that experienced such grief and trial.

The veneration of martyrs included a Eucharistic celebration at the grave on the anniversary of death. This veneration also expressed itself in written inscriptions near the martyrs' tombs to seek their intercession. Following Constantine's Edict of Toleration in 313, the Christians began to erect over the martyrs' graves small edifices marking their presence and sheltering the hallowed spot. Such a structure was known as a *memoria* or a *martyrium*.

### *Confessors and Bishops*

The risk and opportunity of martyrdom ceased with the end of the persecutions. Feeling impoverished, the Church sought new forms that would substitute for martyrdom.

Already in the third century it was customary to venerate persons, usually bishops, who had suffered either prison or exile for their faithfulness to Christ, but had not been put to death. These courageous witnesses were called confessors because they confessed their faith openly as did the martyrs.

### *Today*

Life today without the saints is unthinkable. The saints are for the ages, ours no less than others. Without saints life would be miserable. The saints are for everyone -- believing and unbelieving -- because they are the people who proclaim by their lives that life is valuable, life is worth living, that a provident God cares for us. Without them life would be a series of disasters. The saints personify Christian hope. We need their example and help. Are you in touch with your patron saint? ☐

## *Pope to Seminarians: Be Fathers, Not Simply Graduates*

In a Q&A session, Pope Francis discusses temptations and challenges of seminary life. Pope Francis has encouraged seminarians training for the priesthood in Rome to study hard, avoid gossip, and to return to their dioceses as fathers rather than simply graduates.

Spontaneously answering questions with an "open heart" from a large group of seminarians from all over the world attending Rome's pontifical colleges, the Pope addressed themes such as the priesthood, temptations, and challenges of consecrated life.

Before he began the meeting in the Paul VI Hall on Monday, he addressed a special message of closeness to the Christians of Ukraine and the Middle East, emphasizing that the Church still suffers greatly today, in many parts of the world, as a result of persecution.

The Holy Father spoke about the danger of "academicism," or rather the risk that seminarians return to their dioceses simply as graduates rather than fathers, as priests, in response to a question from an American seminarian. He mentioned the four pillars of the formation of

priests which must be cultivated so as not to fall into the trap of "academicism:" spiritual, academic, communitarian and apostolic formation. A seminarian from China asked about community life, to which Pope Francis responded that it is impossible to prepare oneself for the priesthood alone; it must take place within a community, taking great care to overcome the capital sins that may arise in relations with one's brethren.

"Never, ever speak about others behind their backs!" he said. "If I have something against someone, or I do not agree with them, I tell them directly. ... Gossip is the scourge of a community; one must always speak with someone face-to-face, and pray for those with whom there are problems."

Similarly, he advised them to be patient, to study hard and to make the most of all the opportunities offered them during their stay outside their countries of origin. He also urged them to seek calm through prayer and, in turbulent moments, to take refuge under the mantle of the Mother of God "because a good relationship with the Mother helps us to stay in good relations with the Church." The Pope added that there is only one path to leadership in priestly life: service. "Service means doing the will of others, over and over again. Reject the path of money or vanity and be a servant, armed with humility."

A seminarian from Cameroon asked how the various dimensions of the ministry can co-exist in a balanced way, to which Pope Francis responded that it was necessary to be vigilant, careful and organized. "The ideal is to end the day tired. ... But with a good tiredness, not a reckless tiredness that is harmful to your health over time." In response to another question on how one should be a priest in view of the new evangelization, the Pope commented that it is important to reach out of oneself, and to be close to the people. "A cordial closeness, a closeness of love, but also a physical closeness." He added that the closeness of a pastor to his people can be measured by the paying attention to his homilies. He admitted that "in general, our homilies are not good – they are conferences or lessons," and he emphasized that boring homilies on abstract subjects resemble school. "We are behind in this respect," he admitted; "it is one of the points of conversion that the Church needs today: to improve homilies so that people can understand better."

Finally, the Pope responded to a Polish seminarian who asked his advice on how to remain willing and happy in service to the people of God. Francis commented on the great importance of meeting with people, with the bishop and with other priests, but without fear. "Perhaps you have some inner reservations, but you must never be afraid," and he added that "one of the treasures that you must cultivate is priestly friendship." Before taking his leave, the Pope encouraged the seminarians to be "friends to all those whom the Lord places before you." "Priestly friendship is the strength of perseverance, apostolic joy, courage, and also humor." □

(Zenit.org, May 13, 2014)



## ***Be Not Afraid! St. John Paul II's Key to Building a Culture of Life***

### ***It Is Fear That Sustains the Culture of Death***

by Denise Hunnell, MD

The recent canonization of Saint John Paul II offers an impetus to reflect on both his life and his papacy. The Pope's leadership of the Catholic Church was exemplified by his signature phrase "Be not afraid!" Yet, what exactly was he exhorting the faithful to face without fear?

Pope John Paul II first uttered this often repeated phrase on October 22, 1978, in St. Peter's Square in his first address as Pontiff. In discussing this theme in the book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Pope John Paul II recalls these words as inspired by the Holy Spirit. He goes on

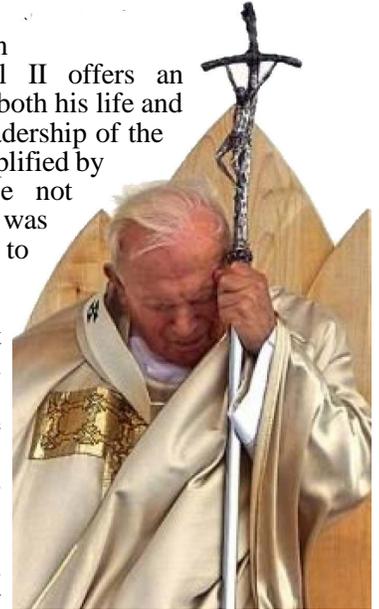
to say that they are addressed to all people in all parts of the world as an exhortation to conquer fear in whatever situation the temporal world presents. Such courage is possible where there is faith in God's love and mercy, as demonstrated in the Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord.

"Be not afraid!" does not suggest that faith will prevent challenges and suffering. Rather, faith will sustain hope in the face of suffering and guard against despair. When looking at contemporary assaults on a Culture of Life it is clear that they are rooted in fear.

Consider the scourges of contraception and abortion that have spread around the world, most recently in the "reproductive health" law approved this past April in the Philippines. Fear of an increased maternal mortality rate moved legislators to require government health centers to provide abortifacients and contraception to all women as well as mandate sex education and free condoms in public schools. Instead of seeking the root causes of maternal mortality and crafting solutions that uphold the sanctity of life and the virtue of chastity, the Philippines government despaired and opted for the less challenging but morally objectionable path.

Countries in North America and Europe have already trod this road and the results are predictable. Once pregnancy is depicted as dangerous and undesirable, the barriers to accepting abortion as a solution to unplanned pregnancies fall and legalized abortion-on-demand becomes a reality.

A similar dynamic is playing out in the United States with the



HHS mandate under the Affordable Care Act, which provides for universal insurance coverage of contraception, abortifacients, and sterilizations -- at the expense of religious liberty. Proponents of the HHS mandate fear the loss of worldly pleasure, and argue that motherhood is a detriment to a woman's success in life. Pregnancy is likened to a disease that must be prevented.

In contrast, the courageous woman embraces femininity and fertility, and sees pregnancy as a gift and part of the vocation to which God calls her. She does not fear her child, but freely gives herself to the nurturing and care of her child to the best of her ability. She does not despair over an unplanned pregnancy and turn to abortion. She seeks life-affirming solutions like adoption if she is unable to provide for her child.

Fear also drives the worldwide push for assisted suicide and euthanasia. Belgium became the first country to remove all age limits for euthanasia and will now kill children to "relieve" their suffering. Proponents claim this is an act of compassion. However, the word *compassion* literally means "to suffer with." True compassion offers comfort and solidarity instead of killing the sufferer because [his or her] suffering makes us uncomfortable. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are acts of despair motivated by the fear of potential personal suffering, or the fear of witnessing the suffering of others.

Again we can turn to St. John Paul II and see both his words and his life as witnessing to the redemptive power of suffering. When Cardinal Karol Józef Wojtyła was elected as a successor to St. Peter he was relatively young and vibrant. He had been a soccer goalie at one point in his life and continued to be physically active. In the early years of his papacy we were captivated by pictures of him hiking and skiing in the Italian Alps. But over the ensuing years a combination of age, an assassination attempt, and the progressive neurological deterioration due to Parkinson's Disease eventually sapped his strength and left him unable to speak or move without great difficulty. He was clearly suffering.

Yet Pope John Paul II did not fear his infirmities. He embraced them as his cross and united them to the suffering of Christ. He lived in solidarity with all who suffered. He was not afraid to entrust himself to the generosity of others and accept help to accomplish his papal duties. He was humble enough to delegate pastoral duties as necessary. He put his personal suffering in full view to give dignity to all who suffered. His very life proclaimed that suffering does not diminish one's humanity.

Even before Pope John Paul II personally experienced great physical suffering, he was cognizant of the need to recognize the redemptive power of suffering. He wrote his Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, in 1984 while he himself was still physically fit. In this seminal work on human suffering he writes:

"In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the

Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ." (19)

This is not to suggest that Christians should be masochists and seek out unnecessary suffering. But every human being will face some sort of physical, psychological, or spiritual suffering throughout his life. It is an inescapable part of the human condition in this temporal world. Pope John Paul II assures us that this suffering has meaning. Patience, generosity, and humility can all be among the fruits of suffering. Again from *Salvifici Doloris*:

"Suffering must serve for conversion, that is, for the rebuilding of goodness in the subject, who can recognize the divine mercy in this call to repentance. The purpose of penance is to overcome evil, which under different forms lies dormant in man. Its purpose is also to strengthen goodness both in man himself and in his relationships with others and especially with God." (12)

It is fear that pushes evil solutions to suffering and denies its potential to generate goodness and virtue. It is fear that sustains the Culture of Death. In order to push back and build a Culture of Life we must be not afraid to embrace our crosses. With steadfast faith and hope we trust in the mercy of God to bring goodness from our troubles. In the face of suffering we must not despair.

St. John Paul II, pray for us! ☐

(May 14, 2014, Zenit.org)

## ***Pope to Lay People: Parishes Need You***

**P**ope Francis has stressed the role of lay people in evangelization in an address to Catholic Action Italy, the country's largest association of lay faithful.

"In the first place, parishes, especially those marked by fatigue and closures - and there are many of them - need your apostolic enthusiasm, your availability and your full creative service," the Holy Father told the 7,000 members in the Paul VI Hall on Saturday. The lay group is holding its 15th National Assembly.

Stressing its significance during the Easter season, Francis focused on the theme: 'New people in Christ Jesus - co-responsible for the joy of living', adding this joy is that "of the disciples in their encounter with the risen Christ." It must be internalized, he said, "in a style of evangelizing capable of really changing lives."

Inviting those present to be open to where the Holy Spirit will lead, he said: "In the current social and ecclesial context, you lay people of Catholic Action are called to renew your missionary [commitment]." He said this requires being a living example and a renewed lay apostolate, open to accepting unexplored territories. ☐

(May 5, 2014, Zenit.org)

## **Typical New U.S. Priest: 32-Year-Old Who Prays Rosary, Takes Part in Eucharistic Adoration**

The typical member of the priestly ordination class of 2014 is a 32-year-old cradle Catholic who has three or more siblings, according to a survey of 365 of the 477 men slated to be ordained to the priesthood in the United States this year. The survey was conducted for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

The typical ordinand also regularly prayed the Rosary and took part in Eucharistic Adoration before entering seminary, according to the survey.

31% of the ordinands are foreign born, with the most typical foreign countries of birth being Mexico (6%), Vietnam (4%), Colombia (2%), Poland (2%), and the Philippines (2%). On average, these foreign-born seminarians have lived in the United States for thirteen years and arrived in the U.S. at age twenty-three.

A disproportionately high percentage of ordinands attended a Catholic elementary school (50%), Catholic high school (41%), or Catholic college (45%).

In addition, a disproportionately high percentage were home schooled: 5% were home schooled, typically for seven years, at a time when less than 2% of U.S. children were educated at home. If one assumes that all of the homeschooled seminarians came from the United States, then 7% of U.S.-born ordinands were home schooled.

### **Among the Survey's Findings**

- ◆ The median age of ordinands is 32; the mean age is 34
- ◆ The typical diocesan ordinand lived in his diocese for fifteen years before entering seminary, though 11% had lived in their diocese for less than a year before entering seminary
- ◆ 67% of ordinands are white, 15% are Latino, 11% are Asian, and 3% are black
- ◆ 9% are converts, with the average age of reception into the Church being nineteen
- ◆ 36% have a relative who was a priest or religious
- ◆ In 81% of cases, both parents were Catholic
- ◆ 4% have served in the U.S. Armed Forces; 15% had a parent who spent his career in the military
- ◆ 68% regularly prayed the Rosary, and 70% regularly participated in Eucharistic Adoration, before entering the seminary
- ◆ Ordinands typically first began to consider the priesthood at seventeen
- ◆ 71% were encouraged by their parish priest to consider a vocation; 45% were encouraged by a friend, 43% by a parishioner, 38% by their mother, and 28% by their father
- ◆ 5% were discouraged by a priest from considering a vocation; 12% were discouraged by their fathers, 11% by their mothers, and 22% by other family members
- ◆ 20% have five or more siblings, 11% have four siblings, 21% have three siblings, 25% have two siblings, 20% have one sibling, and 3% have no siblings
- ◆ 37% are the oldest children in their families; 31% are the youngest
- ◆ 54% had earned their undergraduate degree before entering seminary, and 16% had earned a graduate degree
- ◆ 60% worked full time before entering seminary

- ◆ 49% took part in a parish youth group, 30% took part in Boy Scouts, and 26% took part in the Knights of Columbus

- ◆ 26% took part in a World Youth Day, and 14% took part in a Franciscan University of Steubenville summer conference

- ◆ 80% had served as altar servers, 52% as readers, and 42% as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion before entering seminary. □

(CWNews, May 2, 2014)



## Make the Difference of a Lifetime

### Give a Gift This Spring

Are you looking for a special Graduation Day Gift? A First Communion gift? Any kind of gift?

Do you wish your child, grandchild, godchild, family member or anyone special to you would remain close to their faith and the Maronite Church?

Consider one of the following options:

 <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 5px 0;">Annual Membership in the Order of Saint Sharbel \$500</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 5px 0;">Order of Saint Sharbel EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON 1021 S. 10th Street St. Louis, MO 63104 (314) 231-1021 www.orderstsharbel.org</p>	 <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 5px 0;">Perpetual Membership in the Order of Saint Sharbel \$5,000</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 5px 0;">Order of Saint Sharbel EPARCHY OF SAINT MARON 109 Remsen Street Brooklyn, NY 11201 (718) 237-9913 www.orderstsharbel.org</p>	 <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 5px 0;">Lifetime Membership in the National Apostolate of Maronites \$1,000</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 5px 0;">National Apostolate of Maronites 20 S. Broadway, #405 Yonkers, NY 10701 (914) 964-3070 www.namnews.org</p>
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## Vocations

Continues from page 1

At the same time, within the parish, the role of the parish priest cannot be underestimated. The example of a priest in service to his people with joy and with a sense of fulfillment can be a powerful testament to young men seeking to respond to God's call in their lives. The joy that is the Gospel. After all, the word Gospel means "Good News." The joy found in the Gospel can send a formidable message to young men. Along with serving at the altar and staying close to the liturgical life of the Church, young men come to see that a life of service through ordained ministry is a viable option for them.

Once again, Pope Francis noted, "The more we unite ourselves to Jesus through prayer, Sacred Scriptures, the Eucharist, the Sacraments celebrated and lived in the Church and in fraternity, the more there will grow in us the joy of cooperating with God in the service of the Kingdom of mercy and truth, of justice and peace. And the harvest will be plentiful, proportionate to the grace we have meekly welcomed into our lives."

Please pray that young men hear and respond generously to the Lord's call to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated religious life. God is calling: Are we listening?

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

## Discernment Weekend

Continued from page 11

The retreat group joined the seminary community in the Sunday *Qurbano* in the Seminary Chapel.

The Liturgy was followed by brunch, and quickly after by trips to the airport and train stations to return home, hopefully with a better idea of how a seminarian lives day to day. The future of the Maronite Church in the United States depends on having priests to minister in our growing parishes and encouraging men to visit the seminary and the seminarians.

To see the joy with which they live is integral for fostering vocations for our Church. ☐

## San Antonio, Texas Honorary Members Celebrated



Fr. Charles Khachan, Pastor, with honorary members of St. George's Ladies Altar Society.

On May 18, 2014, the community of St. George in San Antonio, Tex., gathered together to pay tribute to the matriarchs of our parish on this Mother's Day. Fr. Charles Khachan, MLM, the pastor, gave each of these hard working ladies a special gift of appreciation and a blessing. On behalf of the parish, he thanked Amira Andera, Amira Dean, Margaret Abdo Karam, Margaret Andry Karam, Sophie Abdo Karam, Elvira Mery, Malake Mery, Maria Mery, Gloria Saliba, and Gene Viola for their many years of hard work and dedication assisting in the running of the church. As all parishioners know, it is the ladies of the parish who run the bake sales, the luncheons, the dinners, and many of the special events. So here is wishing that all the mothers in both eparchies have a blessed Mother's Day. ☐