



# The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

Volume XIV

Issue No. III

March 2017

## The Year of Witness and Martyrs

*"The Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church" Tertullian of Carthage  
(Apologeticus, Chapter 50)*

On the occasion of the 1,500th anniversary of the martyrdom of the 350 monks, followers of St. Maron, in 517, our beloved Patriarch His Beatitude and Eminence Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai, has declared the year from February 9, 2017, to March 2, 2018, as the "Year of Witness and Martyrs." This proclamation is intended to bring to our attention the close relationship between witness and martyrdom. In fact, every Christian Martyr bore witness to God in his or her life and earned the "crown of martyrdom."

During the early centuries of the Church, Christians began to use the term "witness" or "martyr" (the Greek word) to refer to those believers who were called to profess or witness to their religious belief in Christ, and on account of this witness, endured suffering and even death.

These early Christians who first began to use the term martyr saw Jesus as the first and greatest of all martyrs because of his crucifixion. So it did not seem unreasonable to them that they could be called on as well to witness to their faith even if that meant death. The Bible and our tradition tells us that the first martyr after Jesus was St. Stephen the Deacon. St. Stephen was stoned to death for not just what was in his heart but what he professed publicly with his lips (Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 7). He was followed by countless others. In fact, all of the apostles except John were martyred.

Over the centuries many other Christians have been called upon to witness to the Christian faith, and for many of them, it cost them their lives. There were frequent and violent persecutions of Christians throughout history - both in the East and in the West. We know some by name, but many we do not know. It is not that they chose or even wanted to die; but they chose to profess their faith regardless of the consequences.



(Continues on page 9)

## Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

### March 4 - 5, 2017

Pastoral Visit to St. Sharbel Mission, Baton Rouge, La.

### March 6, 2017

Pastoral Visit to St. Jude Church, Salt Lake City, Utah

### March 7, 2017

Enthronement of Bishop Oscar Solis, Salt Lake City, Utah.

### March 12, 2017

St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

### March 18 - 19, 2017

Pastoral Visit to Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Millbrae (San Francisco), Calif.

### March 24 - 25, 2017

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

### March 27, 2017

Caritas-Lebanon Meetings, St. Louis, Mo.

### March 28 - 30, 2017

Eastern Catholic Bishops' Meetings, St. Louis, Mo.

### March 31 - April 9, 2017

Pastoral Visit to the Maronite Churches in the Greater Detroit Area: St. Maron Church, Detroit; St. Sharbel Church, Clinton Township; and St. Rafka Church, Livonia, Mich.

### April 10, 2017

Blessings of Holy Oil, St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

### April 11 - 15, 2017

Holy Week Mission Retreat, Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Houston, Tex.

### April 16, 2017

Easter Sunday, St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

### April 20 - 23, 2017

NAM Regional Convention, St. Rafka Church, Denver, Colo. ☐

*The Maronite Voice*

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*The Maronite Voice*, (ISSN 1080-9880) the official newsletter of the Maronite Eparchies in the U.S.A. (Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles and Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn), is published monthly.

Send all changes of address, news, pictures and personal correspondence to *The Maronite Voice* at the above captioned address. Subscription rates are \$25.00 per year. Advertising rates are available upon request.

### **Publishers**

- Most Reverend Bishop Gregory John Mansour
- Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan, M.L.M.

**Editor** Msgr. George M. Sebaali

### **Editing and proofreading**

Mary Shaia

Printed in Richmond, Virginia.

### **Maronite Convention 2017**

Saint Rafka Maronite Mission

### **Greenville, South Carolina**

**June 29 - July 2, 2017**

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

## Eparchial Condolences



Rev. Mr. Joseph Kouri Crowley, Deacon at Our Lady's Maronite Catholic Church in Austin, Tex., passed away on January 15, 2017, after nearly twenty-one years of service in the parish. He was born in Austin on December 19, 1943, and was a lifelong resident of the central Texas area. He was ordained the first Deacon of Our Lady's on February 2, 1996, but a rare ice storm closed the airport that day and Deacon Joe braved the roads to meet Maronite Bishop John Chedid in San Antonio for the ceremony. He was involved in the ministry in every facet of Our Lady's Parish, and he will be missed by all of the parishioners.

His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Deacon Crowley's family and loved ones.

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

## Tequesta, Florida Three Vocations Come Together



From left: Subdeacon Dennis Somerville, Fr. Vincent Farhat and Subdeacon Elias Azzi. Photo is courtesy of Valerie Faris.

by Mary Somerville

**M**ary, Mother of the Light Mission (MMOL) in Tequesta (West Palm Beach), Fla., has been blessed to have three vocations arising from our small community. January 29, 2017, was a very happy occasion as those three vocations – Fr. Vincent Farhat, current Pastor of St. Maron Church in Philadelphia, Penn., Subdeacon Dennis

Somerville, and Subdeacon Elias Azzi, both currently serving at MMOL – came together to celebrate the Divine Liturgy.

Throughout this period while Fr. Jack Morrison, Pastor, recovers from his surgery, MMOL has been blessed to receive the hospitality of many priests from the Eparchy of Saint Maron as well as the Diocese of Palm Beach to celebrate the Divine Liturgy each Sunday. This particular Sunday we were given a treat, as our very own former parishioner and organist from our mission in Greenacres, whom we called "Vince" was with us as Father Vincent! It was so nice to have him "home" with us for the day, and we thank him for coming to help us during this trying situation. As a former south-Floridian, the odd rainy-chilly weather didn't fluster him!

The day was also special as we celebrated Dennis' 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the Subdiaconate. We pray that the Lord bring more vocations to our Eparchy for His Glory and the up-building of the Holy Church and all her children. ☐



**Deadline** for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is March 22, 2017.

*The Maronite Voice* is the official newsletter of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and of the Eparchy of Saint Maron.

Send all news, pictures and personal correspondence to:

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Digital pictures must be in "JPG" format and in high resolution (300dpi). The Maronite Voice is also available online, in PDF format, at [www.stmaron.org](http://www.stmaron.org). ☐



## ANNUAL LENTEN APPEAL 2017

The Maronite Bishops' Annual Appeal takes place during Lent each year.

Please be generous and help with the greatest needs of your Eparchy.



### HOW DO YOU MAKE A GIFT?

#### YOU MAY MAKE A DONATION IN YOUR PARISH:

Please bring your gift to your Maronite Parish on any Sunday during Lent in a special enveloped marked "Annual Appeal."

#### MAIL A GIFT OR MAKE A DONATION ON-LINE:

Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn  
109 Remsen Street  
Brooklyn NY, 11201  
[www.stmaron.org](http://www.stmaron.org)

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles  
1021 S. 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Saint Louis, MO 63104  
[www.eparchy.org](http://www.eparchy.org)

## Detroit, Michigan St. Maron's Feast Day



From left to right: Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Dr. Daher Rahi, Amira Kassis, Joseph Boumansour, Marie Karam, Samir Karam and Chorbishop Louis Baz.

by Chris Rahi Kassis

More than four hundred people attended the celebration of St. Maron's Feast Day, Saturday, February 4, 2017, at St. Maron Church in Detroit, Mich.

His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, celebrated the Feast Day Divine Liturgy. Chorbishop Louis Baz, Pastor; Fr. Milad Yaghi, Secretary to the Bishop; Fr. Tony Massad from St. Rafka Church in Livonia; Fr. Pierre Bassil from Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Flint; and Fr. Paul Tarabay and Fr. Francois Akl from the Order of the Blessed Mary in Ann Arbor, Mich., concelebrated.

During the Liturgy, His Excellency Bishop Zaidan inducted parishioner Paul Saigh into the Order of Saint Sharbel. Following the Liturgy, guests gathered at St. Maron's Hall for a reception. The highlight of the event was the awarding of the first annual Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai Scholarships by Dr. Daher Rahi. Dr. Rahi donated \$50,000 to create the scholarship last summer when his cousin Patriarch Rai paid a special visit to his home.

Four scholarships were presented to: Amira Kassis, Joseph Boumansour, Marie Karam and Samir Karam. Dr. Rahi congratulated the students and praised them for their academic accomplishments and dedication to the church. "I am very impressed by these young men and women. They are extremely bright and their dedication to the church is commendable," said Dr. Rahi. "I'd also like to thank their families. If it wasn't for their love, support and respect these students would not have been able to accomplish this."

Following the scholarship awards, Chorbishop Baz recognized Dr. Rahi. "Thank you to our devoted parishioner Dr. Daher Rahi and his family for providing scholarships for our young adults in honor of our beloved Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai," he said. "May God reward you and your family."

Chorbishop Baz gave special thanks to Theresa Ghafari, who served as the chairperson of the event and did a beautiful job organizing the event, decorating the hall and ultimately



St. Maron's Dabke Troupe.

making St. Maron's Feast Day a success. He presented her with a beautiful bouquet of flowers, and the people in attendance responded with a thunderous round of applause. He also thanked Rudy Jabbour for his assistance, and he made a point of recognizing St. Maron's dabke troupe, who performed that evening for the first time and did a tremendous job. □

His Excellency Bishop Zaidan expressed his heartfelt appreciation for the way the parishioners support the church. "As members of the same family we rejoice in the success of others. We stand together in times of challenge. And we support each other in times of need," he said. "Let us always remember the spirit of family each and every day." □

## Charlotte, North Carolina St. Maron Feast Day



by Amanda Nassar

On February 9, 2017, the Maronite Mission of Charlotte, N.C., celebrated the annual Feast Day of St. Maron. This feast day is a reminder for all of us to turn and look at our Maronite origins. Father Elias Khalil, Administrator, presided at the Divine Liturgy. The youth

group researched St. Maron and why we, as Maronites, are named after him. Each of the youth took the challenge to research the life about Saint Maron and the effects of his work. During the Liturgy, the choir sang elegant hymns relating to the Saint. When it was time for the presentation, each person got the opportunity to say a few lines about St. Maron. Following the Liturgy, a reception took place where everyone was excited to see new and familiar faces and enjoyed each other's company for the afternoon. St. Maron holds a deep place in our hearts and we are so glad that we got the opportunity to know and share about him on his feast day. □

## St. Louis, Missouri *Feast of Saint Maron*



by Shelly Vitale

On Sunday, February 12, 2017, hundreds of parishioners from the Saint Raymond Maronite Cathedral in Saint Louis, Mo., celebrated the Feast of Saint Maron. The Choir, directed by John LeCuyer, began the ceremony with resounding song. The procession was led by the Knights of Saint Gregory the Great, followed by the members of the Order of Saint Sharbel and officers and representatives from all the organizations and committees at Saint Raymond. The Divine Liturgy was concelebrated by Bishop Emeritus Robert J. Shaheen and Reverend John Nahal, Rector of Saint Raymond Cathedral. Subdeacons Tony Simon and David Wahby assisted. Committee members participated in the readings, petitions and the carrying of the gifts. Father Nahal gave an inspirational homily regarding the history of our Patron, Saint Maron, and the influence and impact he had on our Maronite faith. Father Nahal asked officers and committee representatives to come to the altar to receive a special blessing and to be officially installed to their positions. He also bestowed blessings on all couples of the parish on behalf of Saint Valentine.

After the Liturgy, a luncheon was held at the Cedars Banquet Hall. Bishop Shaheen said a prayer before lunch. The menu included delectable Lebanese dishes prepared by the dedicated kitchen workers, led by Denise Seifert, Gina Fanetti and Kathy Wahby. After the lunch, Dr. Maged Haikal, President of the Parish Pastoral Council, thanked everyone and introduced Father Nahal. The Reverend greeted everyone and then happily presented awards to some very deserving parishioners. The Silver Massabki Award was presented to Karen Denise Seifert, The Faith of the Mountain

Award was presented to Catherine Dubois and The Most Reverend Bishop Robert Shaheen received an award thanking him for fifty years of Priestly Ministry Service and sixteen Years of Episcopacy at Saint Raymond Maronite Cathedral. He received a standing ovation from all those present. All former recipients of the Silver Massabki Award and the Faith of the Mountain Award were announced and acknowledged for their work and dedication as well. Father Nahal thanked everyone involved in preparing for the wonderful day, especially Diana Deeba and Janet Fanetti who chaired the event. □

## San Antonio, Texas *Hafli and Award Presentations*



by Regina Aune

The weekend of February 11- 12, 2017, was a festive time at St. George Church in San Antonio, Tex., as the Parish celebrated St. Maron's Feast Day with the annual *Hafli* on Saturday evening, February 11, and the presentation of the annual awards at morning Divine Liturgy on Sunday, February 12.

Traditional Lebanese music for the *Hafli* was provided by Danny Achkar and his Band. The Parish youth provided traditional Lebanese folk dancing, and all enjoyed a meal of traditional Lebanese food. There was a silent auction to benefit the Maronite Young Adult organization.

At Sunday's liturgy, Father Charles Khachan presented the Silver Massabki Award to Susan and Frank Rizzo, the Faith of the Mountain Award to Hannah Mery, the Bishop's Award to Cathy Van Delden, the St. George Appreciation Award to Devin Haase, and the Altar Server Award to Andre Kuri honoring these individuals for their selfless service to the parish and the continuous giving of their time and talents to support St. George Maronite Parish. □



## Houston, Texas *Couples Encounter*



by *Liliane Maakaroun*

The "Couples Encounter" is a ministry of Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Houston, Tex. Their mission is to help married and engaged couples grow closer to Christ and to each other.

We hold three social events per year to help couples to better understand the Catholic Church's teachings on marriage and relationships through seminars and workshops.

The first event for 2017 was held on Friday February 10, and was attended by more than sixty couples. A cheese and wine reception was followed by a presentation on how "Love puts Eternity into Life," based on 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13.

In his presentation, Father Edward Hanna showed the married couples these words in a new light. His presentation was animated by the use of a powerful movie, a workshop where couples discussed real-life stories of different marriage challenges, as well as Fr. Hanna's commentaries and remarks.

The spiritual segment of the event gave a fresh look on these old familiar words that made up the theme of the encounter.

The evening ended with live entertainment by local singer Jabbour, who kept the couples on their feet till late in the night.

### *Catechists Retreat*

by *Eliana Abou-Jaoude*

When the Our Lady of the Cedars (OLC) Catechists responded to God's call with our "yes," we responded to the Spirit within us and to the call of the Church. We have received sufficient training and understand the faith well enough to be able to use the textbook, to develop and follow a lesson plan, to be familiar with references to Scripture, and to give concrete examples,

but we always seek to grow spiritually and to further our knowledge by attending workshops and spiritual retreats. On February 10, 2017, we attended our first retreat of the year at the OLC Pastoral Center. A most powerful and nurturing experience, the retreat was gently and wisely led by Fr. Edward Hanna, who created a safe circle of prayer where sharing and supportive instruction were equally valued.

Fr. Hanna guided the group through a workshop on "Jesus and Team Work." A scriptural text selected by him was analyzed and presented by us in a group setting. The workshop was beneficial in giving us a much more concrete realization of the leadership nature of Jesus Christ. It has been especially helpful to have current applications to the ongoing challenges we face in catechizing today. Fr. Hanna and our administrator, Nabil Joubran, made time to meet with each catechist to help us address weaknesses identified during classroom observation. They encouraged and supported us in many ways, including words of affirmation and appreciation for outstanding work. The catechists of Our Lady of the Cedars Church would like to thank Fr. Edward Hanna for enriching our spiritual life tremendously. □

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### **Food For Thought**

Do not underestimate the value of example, for it is more powerful than a thousand words, a thousands "likes," retweets or YouTube videos.

*Pope Francis, February 23, 2017*

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## Orange, California MYO Retreat



by Joanne Marsh

**F**aith, fun, and friendship. These are the three words that can best describe the MYO retreat that took place at St. John Maron Church in Orange, Calif., January 27 - 29, 2017. The theme of the retreat was "Our Father," coming to understand the unconditional love of the heart of the Father. Youth from the host parish joined other youth from our sister parishes of West Covina, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Las Vegas. Father Gary George, and Rosa, as they always do, were able to bring out the true beauty within the youth.

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, presided over the Divine Liturgy on Saturday, January 28. Monsignor Antoine Bakh, Father Gary George, and Father Constantine concelebrated. Subdeacons George Haddad and Charles Doche assisted. A group of young seminarians helped to make the experience extra

special.

The volunteers at St. John Maron Church made sure that the youth were well fed so that their hunger could be devoted to the faith-filled experience. Various activities were planned for them for their free time including a visit to Downtown Disney in Anaheim.

The adult chaperones were tireless in ensuring that everything went smoothly. One of the highlights of the retreat was the Saturday night dance party. The DJ played both Arabic and English music that everyone, including the adults, enjoyed.

The smiles, laughter, and even tears that were seen during the weekend will definitely have a positive impact on the faith journey of these young men and women. We will be relying on them more and more in the coming years as the growth of the Maronite Church depends on them. □

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### *Appeal from Caritas Lebanon*

**C**hristians in Lebanon are suffering! If you are able to relieve some of the suffering, please contact

**Fr. Elias Abi Sarkis, Director**  
8315 South 107<sup>th</sup> East Ave.  
Tulsa, OK 74133  
Ph: 918-872-7400

or visit *Caritas Lebanon* at <http://www.caritas.org.lb>.  
Checks may be made payable to Caritas Lebanon.

Thank you for your consideration. □

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Please save this date  
**Thursday, October 5, 2017**  
And join us for the

***Eighth Annual Benefit Dinner for  
The Eparchy of Saint Maron***

*New York Athletic Club, New York City*

***Special honorees  
Dr. Josyann Abisaab and Habib Kairouz***

*Details to follow*

# Parishes Improving Together

by Fr. Alex Harb

Jesus said, "Be as shrewd as serpents, and as simple as doves" (Mt. 10:16). This means that we should be prudent in our personal and business actions without being attached to the trappings of this world. Many businesses apply a technique known as *best practices* in which they seek out what works best in their various branches for the benefit of other branches. Over the last three months, a survey has been sent out to Maronite parishes and others throughout the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon to find and promote the good ideas and successes for the benefit of all. Below find some of the *best practices* which you can incorporate into your own parish.

## Fundraising

- ◆ Some parishes have found certain events to be successful such as: Festival of baskets, pancake breakfast or Middle Eastern breakfast on Sunday, a fashion show, bazaar, and Trivia nights.
- ◆ Other parishes have found that education has been beneficial: preaching a homily series on giving as a part of a lifestyle of stewardship as well as campaigning for tangible repairs and goals.
- ◆ Some parishes have found success in directing their parish outward toward a cause, citing that because they are so actively involved in ministry, people support not only the ministry, but also the Church. Some cited a food kitchen or pro-life charities.
- ◆ Finally, some parishes have gone digital, noting that online giving and online bake sales have greatly improved their collections and fundraising.

## Administration

- ◆ Many parishes spoke of software including: Ministry Scheduler, Flocknote, Vistaprint, and specialized church accounting software.
- ◆ Some parishes spoke of staffing practices including: hiring directly vs. contracting, hiring a hall manager, and appointing someone to make reminder phone calls.

## Participation

- ◆ Popular groups include: A retirees group which goes on trips, a widows and widowers group, neighborhood prayer or Bible study group following preexisting programs, marriage mentors to mentor engaged and newlywed couples, a choir that rehearses regularly, prayer line, caregivers to visit the sick, Knights of Columbus, Men's and women's prayer groups, children, youth, and young adult groups.
- ◆ Many people were excited about the education, service,

and ministry opportunities in their parish and found that they strengthened the bond to their parish.

## Evangelization and Outreach

- ◆ Programs to parishioners include "Happy Anniversary" and "Happy Baptism Anniversary" cards sent out each year, an active group of greeters, family day, and evangelization training. Many spoke highly of Theology on Tap or other relaxed events where parishioners feel more comfortable inviting friends. Many parishes mentioned or implied they needed work in this area.

## Education

- ◆ Many parishes mentioned free books and CDs available in the back of the Church and at Easter/Christmas.
- ◆ Other parishes mentioned FORMED.org and Symbolon.org. Some mentioned the Lifeteen program or Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. One parish mentioned Bible studies hosted at the homes of parishioners.
- ◆ One parish mentioned a concept called Wednesday Night Out that combines dinner, multiple venues of adult education and youth education and has become so popular it is regularly attended by one third of the parish.
- ◆ Teaching Masses and parish missions/talks were also mentioned.

## Parish Communication

- ◆ Some parishes mentioned Facebook, emails, a regularly updated website, and YouTube.
- ◆ Some mentioned special software including Fflocknote, Constant Contact, myParish app, Wunderlist app, GroupMe app, Slack app, Remind app, and Wix.com for web design.
- ◆ Some parishes have automated call systems, quarterly mailers, and newspaper/ TV/ radio ads. □

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God know better than we do about what we need. We must have faith, because His ways are different than ours.

*Pope Francis, February 21, 2017*

If evil is contagious, so is goodness. Let us be infected by goodness and let us spread goodness.

*Pope Francis, February 20, 2017*

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# *The Year of Witness and Martyrs*

*Continued from page 1*

Maronite tradition tells us that our people sought refuge in Mount Lebanon just so they could continue to profess their faith freely. Over the centuries, the persecution of Christians occurred from time to time. Many were martyred, some of these martyrs were patriarchs, such as Gabriel Hjoula (1367) and Daniel Hadchiti (1283), priests and deacons and monks. Many were lay faithful who would not abandon their faith such as the three Massabki Brothers: Francis, Raphael, and Abdel Mohti, Patrons of our laity in the United States of America.

Today "the Church has once again become a Church of martyrs" wrote Pope Saint John Paul II in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (#37). The Holy Father went on to say: "Persecutions today are often similar to those described in the Martyrology of the Church of past centuries. They include various types of discrimination against believers and against the whole community of the Church. Such forms of discrimination are often practiced at the same time as it is recognized the right to religious liberty and to freedom of conscience, and this in the law of individual countries as well as in declarations of an international nature."

In our day, the systematic genocide of Christians happening in some places, especially in the Middle East, is a great tragedy. Many Christian communities are being exterminated and driven from their homelands. They are natives to these lands, but their patrimony is being eradicated. In this they are witnesses to all of us; they are, indeed, martyrs. Their martyrdom must not be forgotten by us or by future generations. Many of us have first-hand experiences of such persecutions, and martyrs are with us in a very familiar way.

Patriarch Rai, in his Apostolic letter, described the historical reasons as well as the biblical, theological, liturgical and spiritual traditions of the Universal Church, in particular our Maronite Catholic Church. He connected the close relationship between "witness" (*Shahed*), who is in love with the Lord, and "martyr" (*Shaheed*), who faces persecution and threats with steadfast faith and inner peace looking forward to be with the Lord. Patriarch Rai goes on to highlight the spirituality of the Maronites in correlation with the Cross. Vertically, we witness the relationship with the Lord with asceticism, prayer, and silence. Horizontally, we witness the love of God in our daily relationships with our brothers and sisters through our missionary efforts, educational institutions and pastoral care for the less fortunate and needy.

In conclusion, His Beatitude Patriarch Rai exhorts us to renew our commitment to Christian witness so that love may conquer hatred, peace over war, justice over oppression. Let us heed his call and live our Christian vocation fully.

+ A. Elias Zaidan  
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

## **Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour**

### **March 7- 9, 2017**

Catholic - Muslim Dialogue, Chicago, Ill.

### **March 11 - 12, 2017**

MYO/MYA Retreat and Parish Visit, St. John Paul II Church, Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

### **March 13 - 14, 2017**

Catholic University Board of Trustees Meeting and Seminary Visit, Washington, D.C.

### **March 18 - 19, 2017**

Visit to St. Joseph Church, Atlanta, Ga.

### **March 20 - 22, 2017**

USCCB Administrative Committee Meeting, Washington, D.C.

### **March 23 - 24, 2017**

Catholic Relief Services Meeting, Baltimore, Md.

### **March 25, 2017**

Syro-Malankara Rededication of Church, Rockville Center, N.Y.

### **March 26, 2017**

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

### **March 27, 2017**

Caritas-Lebanon Meetings, Saint Louis, Mo.

### **March 28 - 30, 2017**

Meeting of Eastern Catholic Bishops, Saint Louis, Mo.

### **March 31, 2017**

Inauguration of John Nader as President of Farmingdale State University, Farmingdale, N.Y.

### **April 1, 2017**

Visit to St. Sharbel Church for the Children and Youth Program, Somerset, N.J.

### **April 2, 2017**

Visit to Our Lady Star of the East Parish, Pleasantville, N.J.

### **April 5, 2017**

Presbyteral Council Meetings and Chrism Mass, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### **April 6, 2017**

Eparchial Financial Council Meetings, The Chancery, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### **April 9, 2017**

Hosanna Sunday Service, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y., and Evening Service at Manhattan Mission, Manhattan, N.Y.

### **April 11, 2017**

Diocese of Brooklyn Chrism Mass, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### **April 12, 2017**

Rite of the Lamp, St. Theresa Church, Brockton, Mass.

### **April 13, 2017**

Washing of the Feet, St. Maron Church, Torrington, Conn.

### **April 14 - 16, 2017**

Great Friday of the Crucifixion, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday Services, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y. □

# ***Paul's Revolutionary Epistle: The Letter to Philemon***

by  
***Rev. David A. Fisher***

*"Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother. To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" - Philemon 1:1-3.*

Paul's Letter to Philemon is one of the shortest writings in the New Testament and in the entire collection of Sacred Scripture. Yet, its impact upon the history of Christianity and the world as a whole has been large and long in its reach. This is because in a few short lines, which were to be read as a public letter to the Christian community that met as a "house-church" on Philemon's property; Paul, in subtle and nuanced terms, begins the eventual dismantling of the institution of slavery.

While there have been Pauline detractors, who from their 21st century historical and ethical perch, feel that Paul should have denounced slavery clearly and forced Philemon to promise the manumission (freeing) of his slave Onesimus; we must remember that there was no precedent for him to do so, in the Judaism from which he came, or the Greco-Roman world he lived in. "Paul's own Jewish Scriptures, while limiting the harshness of slavery because the Israelites were believed to have had their origins in an exodus from slavery in Egypt, by no means abolish slavery. In the so-called Covenant Code, for example, a male Hebrew slave is freed after six years of enslavement, though he may not take, even then, a wife and children whom the master has given him" (John R. Levison, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*).

In the Greco-Roman or Hellenistic world into which the Church was born, slaves often outnumbered those who were free. It was such an accepted form of behaviour that even scholars such as Aristotle argued for "natural slavery," in his great work known as *Politics*. The famous slave revolt of Spartacus against the Roman rulers in 70 B.C. was not intended to eradicate slavery but merely to address the harshness of its application.

Philemon ("loving" in Greek) to whom the letter is addressed was a young,

seemingly wealthy, respected Christian of a town in the Locust Valley of Asia Minor, probably *Colossae*. Paul greets him along with Apphia (probably Philemon's wife) and Archippus (possibly a son), and the Christian community, Philemon it is thought was converted by Paul possibly in Ephesus. Paul refers to himself as a prisoner, as often elsewhere (cf. Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians especially), the second word in Greek enunciates the theme and sets the tone of the letter. Here it is the prisoner of Christ Jesus (for he writes this while in prison for preaching the gospel) appealing, rather than the apostle commanding, Philemon to consider his feelings for freeing Onesimus the slave.

The slave Onesimus ("useful" in Greek) had run away, having caused his master considerable damage. In his flight he came to where Paul was imprisoned, perhaps knowing of the esteem his master held for Paul. Somehow Paul managed to give him refuge and ultimately converted him to Christianity. Eventually, Paul learned that Onesimus was Philemon's slave, and though he wanted to keep him with himself for help in evangelization, he recognized Philemon's right and decided to send Onesimus back. Paul writes in 1:7-14:

"For I have experienced much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the holy ones have been refreshed by you, brother. Therefore, although I have the full right in Christ to order you to do what is proper, I rather urge you out of love, being as I am, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus. I urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment, who was once useless to you but is now useful to [both] you and me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I should have liked to retain him for myself, so that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel, but I did

not want to do anything without your consent, so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary."

Paul asked Philemon not to inflict on Onesimus the severe penalties permitted by law. Paul also promised to restore the damage that Onesimus had caused - how he would do this from prison is not said. Paul further suggested that he would like to have Onesimus come back to work with him. Did Paul mean by this that Philemon should emancipate the slave? This may be implied. He writes in 1:14-20:

"Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord. So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me. And if he has done you any injustice or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, write this in my own hand: I will pay. May I not tell you that you owe me your very self. Yes, brother, may I profit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ."

Paul's words in verse 16, "no longer a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother," puts Philemon in a dilemma. As a slave owner, he is entitled by law to punish the returning Onesimus to the fullest extent, which could even mean death. As a Christian he must acknowledge that he and Onesimus are now on equal footing, since Onesimus has converted to being a Christian also. For Paul there is only one option for Philemon, to embrace Onesimus as a brother in the faith, forgive him the wrongdoing of having fled his duties, and free him from slavery. Without directly attacking the institution of slavery with logical and rhetorical arguments, Paul smashes this most unjust and horrid state of life, by shining upon it the light of Christ.

*(Continues on page 19)*

# Evangelizing Through the Good

by  
*Bishop Robert Barron*

Anyone even vaguely acquainted with my work knows that I advocate vigorous argument on behalf of religious truth. I have long called for a revival in what is classically known as apologetics, the defense of the claims of faith against skeptical opponents. And I have repeatedly weighed in against a dumbed-down Catholicism. Also, I have, for many years, emphasized the importance of beauty in service of evangelization. The Sistine Chapel Ceiling, the Sainte Chapelle, Dante's Divine Comedy, Bach's St. Matthew's Passion, T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, and the Cathedral of Chartres all have an extraordinary convincing power, in many ways surpassing that of formal arguments. So I affirm the path of truth and the path of beauty. But I also recommend, as a means of propagating the faith, the third of the transcendentals, namely, the good. Moral rectitude, the concrete living out of the Christian way, especially when it is done in an heroic manner, can move even the most hardened unbeliever to faith, and the truth of this principle has been proven again and again over the centuries.

In the earliest days of the Christian movement, when both Jews and Greeks looked upon the nascent faith as either scandalous or irrational, it was the moral goodness of the followers of Jesus that brought many to belief. The Church father Tertullian conveyed the wondering pagan reaction to the early Church in his famous adage: "How these Christians love one another!" At a time when the exposure of malformed infants was commonplace, when the poor and the sick were often left to their own devices, and when murderous revenge was a matter of course, the early Christians cared for unwanted babies, gave succor to the sick and the dying, and endeavored to forgive the persecutors of the faith. And this goodness extended, not simply to their own brothers and sisters, but, astonishingly, to outsiders and to enemies. This peculiarly excessive form of moral decency convinced many people that something strange was afoot among these disciples of Jesus, something splendid and rare. It

compelled them to take a deeper look.

During the cultural and political chaos following the collapse of the Roman Empire, certain spiritual athletes took to the caves, deserts, and hills in order to live a radical form of the Christian life. From these early ascetics, monasticism emerged, a spiritual movement that led, in time, to the re-civilization of Europe. What so many found fascinating was the sheer intensity of the monks' commitment, their embrace of poverty, and their blithe trust in divine providence. Once again, it was the living out of the Gospel ideal that proved convincing. Something similar unfolded in the thirteenth century, a time of significant corruption in the Church, especially among the clergy. Francis, Dominic, and their confreres inaugurated the mendicant orders, which is just a fancy way of saying the begging orders. The trust, simplicity, service to the poor, and moral innocence of the Dominicans and Franciscans produced a revolution in the Church and effectively re-evangelized armies of Christians who had grown slack and indifferent in their faith.

And we find the same dynamic in our time. John Paul II was the second most powerful evangelist of the twentieth century, but unquestionably the first was a woman who never wrote a major work of theology or apologetics, who never engaged skeptics in public debate, and who never produced a beautiful work of religious art. I'm speaking, of course, of St. Teresa of Kolkata. No one in the last one hundred years propagated the Christian faith more effectively than a simple nun who lived in utter poverty and who dedicated herself to the service of the most neglected people in our society.

There is a wonderful story told of a young man named Gregory, who came to the great Origen of Alexandria in order to learn the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. Origen said to him, "First come and share the life of our community and then you will understand our dogma." The youthful Gregory took that advice, came in time

to embrace the Christian faith in its fullness, and is now known to history as St. Gregory the Wonderworker. Something of the same impulse lay behind Gerard Manley Hopkins's word to a confrere who was struggling to accept the truths of Christianity. The Jesuit poet did not instruct his colleague to read a book or consult an argument but rather, "Give alms." The living of the Christian thing has persuasive power.

We have been passing through one of the darkest chapters in recent Church history. The clerical sex abuse scandals have chased countless people away from Catholicism, and a secularist tide continues to rise, especially among the young. My mentor, the late, great Cardinal George, surveying this scene, used to say, "I'm looking for the orders; I'm looking for the movements." He meant, I think, that in times of crisis, the Holy Spirit tends to raise up men and women outstanding in holiness who endeavor to live out the Gospel in a radical and public way. Once again, I'm convinced that, at this moment, we need good arguments, but I'm even more convinced that we need saints. □



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

## My Journey to the Priesthood

by  
*Father Joseph Abi Saad*

**B**orn and raised in Beirut Lebanon, my parents, Antoine and Renée, were faithful Maronites who attended weekly Mass with myself and three younger siblings. During the month of May, my parents would open their doors inviting all the neighbors to come, gather and pray with us the May Office and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

I was the oldest of four siblings. My younger brother and one of my little twin sisters became handicapped at age seven when the eastern shore of Mediterranean was hit by an epidemic that generated an ataxia and deficiency of Vitamin E with kids between the age

of five and fifteen

Despite the economic hardship that struck our family following the illness of my two siblings, my parents insisted to provide me with the best and finest Catholic education available back then. I was sent to the *Collège Notre Dame de Jamhour*, a Jesuit school and one of the most prestigious ones in the country, where elites are formed.

My Jesuit formation played a big role in my vocation. I was fascinated by the humbleness, the gentleness and most of all by the rich intellectual and spiritual background of each of the priests serving the school. In my inner self, I felt that inclination to become one of them and the Dean of the school, at that time, Father Jean Dalmais was my idol of a priest.

In High School, even though I loved Mathematics, I was more inclined to philosophy. I opted for the "Philosophy" section of the Baccalaureate. We had to study Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Marx, Albert Camus, Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Darwin who were countered with Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, Daniel-Rops, Charles Péguy and Teilhard de Chardin. It was a lot to think of and a lot to read about... That was the other spark which introduced me to the theological world.

At age eighteen, I started both my college studies and a banking career. At age twenty-three, I was counted among the youngest Bank Managers in the country, not to say that I was the youngest. I started as a Forex dealer then became a manager.

I enrolled in the "Business Administration" program at the *Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth*, another prestigious Jesuit establishment from which I graduated in 1981 with a major in Finance and Banking. This program was the only one which offered evening classes, which enabled me to work and carry on my studies

concurrently.

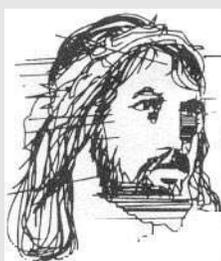
As soon as I finished school, my mother became unable to care for my handicapped siblings on her own, my father had to retire earlier to help carry out that burden. I became then the only breadwinner of the family. Both my parents, myself and my other little sister religiously dedicated our lives to this sacred task. We all understood that by serving them we were serving Christ who chose to dwell in the heart of our family. The burden became our joy and our home, a center of radiating love.

In 1985, I established with the help of two friends a new import and distribution business which in 1989 led me to the U.S.A. I came to a show in Chicago to look for new products when a raging war broke out in Lebanon between the Christian factions, which destroyed our warehouses and decimated all our inventory. All ports of entries to the country were closed. I was left with the only choice to remain in the U.S. and look for a work opportunity. I stayed in Lawrence, Mass., where I had some acquaintances.

I became a faithful parishioner of Saint Anthony Church in Lawrence, and a member of its Traditional Choir. It is in Lawrence, that I discovered the richness of the Maronite Divine Liturgy and the idea of becoming a priest which had been haunting me all of my life. This dormant idea of the priesthood was always at work in the back of my mind.

The late Pastor at St. Anthony, Msgr. James Khoury, called me into his office one day and asked "Joseph, would you like to become a priest?" He awakened in me that dormant call and that was another spark that was thrown on my path. Msgr. Khoury gave me the application, presented it to Bishop Stephen Hector Doueihy at the Eparchy of Saint Maron in Brooklyn, N.Y.

*(Continues on page 18)*



***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 10<sup>th</sup> 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



## Taking Up Spiritual Reading

by

*Sr. Natalie Sayde Salameh and Sr. Marla Marie Lucas*

*“Spiritual reading is as necessary as the air you breathe.” - St. Padre Pio.*

*“Don’t neglect your spiritual reading. Reading has made many saints.” - St. Josemaria Escriva.*

If these two saints and many more recommend and insist on spiritual reading, then we should find out more about this powerful practice of prayer. Spiritual reading can be explained simply as reflective reading of spiritual writings to help deepen our understanding of faith, and more so, our relationship with Our Lord. St. Athanasius said: “You will not see anyone who is truly striving after his spiritual advancement who is not given to spiritual reading.”

The best sources of spiritual reading are the Scriptures (especially the Gospels), then the biographies of the saints, and spiritual writers from the early Church to our present day. Many of these books can be found at Ignatius Press or Sophia Press, among several Catholic sources online. The lives of the saints offer a wealth of inspiration. It is refreshing to find out that the saints are human, too, just like us, with their own struggles and inner battles, giving us hope in our own.

We recently read the Life of St. Anthony of the Desert written by St. Athanasius. This Father of Monks was a formidable warrior in the struggle against demons and his approach to evil spirits was actually healthy and quite modern (considering he lived in the third century). He would often consider them of no importance at all, like flies at a picnic. These days there is so much fear surrounding demonic powers, but St. Anthony encourages us not to be afraid for they are powerless in the face of a baptized soul.

The benefits of spiritual reading are numerous. Our time in holy reading provides candid advice and counsel, and corrects and encourages us in our faith. Spiritual reading also enlightens our souls about the dangers and temptations that we may encounter, while giving us insight on how to handle these challenges. Most importantly, spiritual reading provides an opening for Our Lord Jesus to speak to our hearts to help us in our continued conversion. In the words of St. Jerome, “When we pray we speak to God; but when we read, God speaks to us.”

The important point to remember is to go about this holy reading prayerfully, taking one’s time when reading, even if

we can only devote ten to fifteen minutes a day. Spiritual reading is like meeting up with a dear friend for a chat. If there are points in your reading that have touched you, talk about them with the Lord. He is waiting to hear what you have to say, because it is he who touches hearts.

Here is a site of suggestions for reading: [www.listchallenges.com/50-books-every-catholic-should-read](http://www.listchallenges.com/50-books-every-catholic-should-read). If you have any questions or would like suggestions of good spiritual reading, please contact the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light Sisters at 508-996-7753 or email [sister@maroniteservants.org](mailto:sister@maroniteservants.org). □

### **Prayer For Peace In Our Communities**

O Lord our God, in your mercy and kindness, no thought of ours is left unnoticed, no desire or concern ignored.

You have proven that blessings abound when we fall on our knees in prayer, and so we turn to you in our hour of need.

Surrounded by violence and cries for justice, we hear your voice telling us what is required . . . “Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Fill us with your mercy so that we, in turn, may be merciful to others. Strip away pride, suspicion, and racism so that we may seek peace and justice in our communities.

Strengthen our hearts so that they beat only to the rhythm of your holy will. Flood our path with your light as we walk humbly toward a future filled with encounter and unity.

Be with us, O Lord, in our efforts, for only by the prompting of your grace can we progress toward virtue. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)*



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The National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) in cooperation with Jouzour Loubnan, is sponsoring a memorial grove of 10,000 Cedar Trees in the mountains of Lebanon.

Trees may be sponsored by individuals, families, NAM Chapters, clubs, or organizations. Profits generated within this project is going to help build Missions in the USA

**For More Information:**

NAM Office  
P.O. Box 717 • Yonkers NY 10702  
(914) 964-3070

Email: [nam@namnews.org](mailto:nam@namnews.org)  
[www.namnews.org](http://www.namnews.org);  
and click on Cedars Project

*Preserve & Prosper*



# MARONITES CONSECRATED TO THE HEARTS OF MARY & JESUS

## 54TH ANNUAL CONVENTION ST. RAFFKA ♦ GREENVILLE SC JUNE 29 - JULY 2 ♦ 2017



Sponsored by National Apostolate of Maronites

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## Denver, Colorado NAM Regional Convention



Parishioners of St. Rafka Church.

Fr. Andre Mouhana, Pastor, and the parishioners of St. Rafka Denver are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to welcome our Maronite brothers and sisters to Denver for the SW Regional NAM Convention April 21 – 23, 2017!

Denver is the capital of Colorado and, at an elevation of 5,280' has long been known as the Mile-High City. Therefore, we have selected the convention theme of Praying @ A Mile High!

Guests will stay at the Grand Hyatt Denver, and the meetings will take place at historic Holy Ghost Catholic Church, a mere block and a half away from the hotel. Saturday afternoon you will be able experience other aspects of Denver before the Grand Banquet, which will feature the music of Elie El-Moujjaber.

On Sunday, The Divine Liturgy will take place at St. Rafka Maronite Church followed by a farewell luncheon. Attendees are also invited to a bonus event on Sunday – an ecumenical symposium entitled: Save Christian Middle East – Save America.

For more information, please visit [StRafkaDenver.org](http://StRafkaDenver.org), or [NamNews.org](http://NamNews.org). Two websites are also of interest: [SaveChristianMiddleEast.org](http://SaveChristianMiddleEast.org) and [MercyandAmerica.com](http://MercyandAmerica.com). □

## Cincinnati, Ohio NAM Awards

Sunday, February 12, 2017, was a very special day at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, with the celebration of St. Maron's Feast Day. After the Divine Liturgy and before the All Parish Meeting, Fr. George Hajj, assisted by Ms. Rose AbiRadi, local NAM Chapter President, presented the NAM Silver Massabki Award to Mr. Donald Jones, who for many years has been an altar server in addition to volunteering for many different church activities.

The NAM Faith of the Mountain Award was presented to Mr. Anthony Chemaly, Ms. Christina Khamis, Ms. Lauren



Mezher, and Mr. Andrew Samaan. These young adults have been active since the age of five, participating in the *dabke* troupe, participating in the church choir, as well as other church activities, and are still active today. □

## NAM Annual Spring Raffle

The National Apostolate of Maronites [NAM] presents its 25th Annual Spring Raffle - 2017. Only four hundred tickets are printed. Donation is \$100 per ticket. The Raffle consists of the following cash prizes:

- \$10,000 for First Prize
- \$ 3,000 for Second Prize
- \$ 2,000 for Third Prize
- \$ 1,500 for Fourth Prize
- \$ 1,000 for the Fifth Prize.

This year's drawing will be held at the conclusion of the Spring Board meeting on April 30, 2017, at Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Lombard [Chicago], Illinois

The Spring Raffle is an important part of the NAM annual budget. To purchase a personal ticket(s) or to help NAM in selling tickets please contact:

Mike J. Naber, Executive Director  
NAM, P.O. Box 717, Yonkers, NY 10702  
914-964-3070 (phone), 914-964-3071 (fax)  
[nam@namnews.org](mailto:nam@namnews.org), [www.namnews.org](http://www.namnews.org)

All requests and payments must be received by April 23, 2017. You can purchase your tickets online using a credit card, or request that it to be mailed to you.

## Convention Hotel Reservation

The 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Maronite Convention, sponsored by the National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) and hosted by St. Rafka Church will take place in Greenville, South Carolina, June 29 - July 2, 2017, at the Hyatt Regency Greenville Hotel, 220 N. Main St., Greenville, SC 29601. The room rate is \$129 per night. To make your room reservation, please call the hotel at (402) 592-6434 and use the code NAM to get the discounted rate. □

## Brooklyn, New York *Feast of Saint Maron*



From left: Bishop Gregory Mansour, Lydia Gordon and Msgr. James Root.

by Salma Vahdat

The faith community of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y., gathered on the eve of the Feast of St. Maron, our Patron, February 8, 2017, to assist and celebrate at the Divine Liturgy in his honor. It is always our last joyful celebration before the solemnity of Great Lent descends upon our congregation. Bishop Gregory Mansour celebrated the Divine Liturgy. Monsignor Jim Root, Rector and Rev. Antoine Risk, Pastor of the Virgin Mary Melkite Church, concelebrated. Subdeacons, Norbert Vogl and Peter Frangie assisted.

In his homily, Bishop Gregory, as usual, gave the community much food for thought. Referring to Sacred Scripture in the Gospel of St. John which quotes Jesus: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies it remains but a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit." "We know Jesus is referring to Himself and his sacrifice on the Cross for our redemption. It is His example and love for us which we must follow. Perhaps not to die but to achieve a life of longing for Him, of greater sacrifice, greater asceticism, and greater fidelity. St. Maron had that hunger for those qualities and lived his life accordingly, inspiring so many others to follow his example and draw themselves closer to Christ. It is that same example of selflessness which the saints have followed in the persons of St. Sharbel, St. Rafka and St. Nematallah in our Maronite tradition as well as all the saints of the church," the Bishop said.

Bishop Gregory reminded us that "The Maronite Church is today a gift to the Universal Church and to the World, a bridge between East and West, between Christianity and Islam, between the ancient and ever new." To continue, "Maronites share a unique way of prayer, a sincere love of Lebanon, a glorious history, devotion to Our Lady. All Christians share the universal "call to holiness," yet from the fourth century to today Maronite men and women continue to give generously, to give and not count the cost, to make real in their own person the invitation of Jesus, to die to themselves."

There is much to ponder and hopefully to act on in absorbing the Bishop's admonition to sacrifice and holiness...in the Maronite way.

Our Cathedral then set about on Saturday, February 11, to celebrate the ninety-first Annual Banquet for the Feast of St. Maron. We gathered this year on Staten Island, N.Y., at the Vanderbilt at South Beach. It was an evening of camaraderie, good food, dancing and great raffles. The evening was graced by Bishop Gregory, Monsignor Root, Subdeacons Norbert and Peter and their spouses, Consul General in New York, Mehdi Ramadan and his wife, Vanessa.

The evening started with greetings from Monsignor Root and a brief greeting from the Bishop with an admonition to seek happiness in our lives by emulating the joy the saints demonstrated in their lives of sacrifice, suffering and humility which brought them closer to God. St. Maron led the way for us from "then" until today and we pray, into the future!

Our annual celebration gives us the opportunity to recognize those parishioners and also members of NAM who have given of their "time and treasure" to our community. The NAM sponsored Faith of the Mountain Award was given to Mireille Malouf. The Cathedral Lifetime Award was presented to Lydia Gordon and also to Chawki ElAdem. The Silver Massabki Award (NAM) is to be presented to a parishioner in the near future when that person can be present. It is still a secret! With all of the formalities concluded, the Continental Orchestra broke out into a wonderful evening of popular and arabic music which had the crowd on their feet, enjoying every moment. Fourteen fabulous raffles were offered and swept up by everyone. Thanks to Denise Abou-Chrouh and her committee for collecting and assembling the gifts.

A Big Thank You to the Banquet Committee of William AbouChrouh, Denise AbouChrouh, Vivian Akel, Eva Boumoussa, Adonis El-Asmar, George Elhaj and Lauren Shaia. We are looking forward to next year's celebration already. □

## Petersham, Massachusetts *Bishop's Visit*

On February 15, 2017, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, visited Most Holy Trinity Monastery in Petersham, Mass., for three days. He came to express his condolences at the recent death of Br. Augustine Martin and to visit with the monks. During those days, the Bishop entered into the monastic schedule, praying the hours of the Divine Praises and celebrating the Divine Liturgy with the monks, as well as meeting with the community both individually and as a whole.

# Birmingham, Alabama Annual Festival

by Wanda Elkourie

The St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church in Birmingham, Alabama, is having its Eighteenth Annual Lebanese Food and Cultural Festival on April 21 - 22, 2017. There is no admission charge.

Some of the Lebanese delicacies that will be offered during the Festival will include: *Baked Kibbee, Rolled Grape Leaves, Spinach Pies, Baked Kibbee and Falafel sandwiches, Tabouleh, Grilled Lebanese Lemon Chicken, Loobia, Rice, Homus* and Pita Bread. For dessert the public can sample Lebanese sweets including a variety of *baklawa, kiak*, and Lebanese ice cream.

Many cultural events explaining the rich history and tradition of the Maronite Catholic faith, which originated in Lebanon, will be held during the two-day event. Some of the cultural events will include a Heritage Room where demonstrations of the Birmingham Lebanese community and cultural displays from Lebanon will occur. Also, daytime tours of the newly renovated Church will be held each day. The tours will include a discussion of the famous stain glass windows surrounding the Church and the use during Church services of Aramaic, the native language spoken by Jesus.

Nightly entertainment will again feature the extremely popular world renowned Amin Sultan Band from New York outside in a tent with music and dancing from 6:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday. The public is also invited to attend the Divine Liturgy which will start at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. Inside the main Hall, Friday night and Saturday, on stage, our youth will perform traditional Lebanese dances. Beginning on Friday night and concluding Saturday at 8:00 p.m., a Silent Auction will be held. Donations to the Silent Auction include catered Lebanese dinners, vacation packages, collector items, and many gift certificates to restaurants and events in the Birmingham area.

Twenty-five percent of all proceeds for the Festival will go to local and national charities other than St. Elias. In the last eighteen years St. Elias has donated over \$425,000 to other charities from Festival proceeds. Check out our website at <http://www.stelias.org/festival.htm>. □

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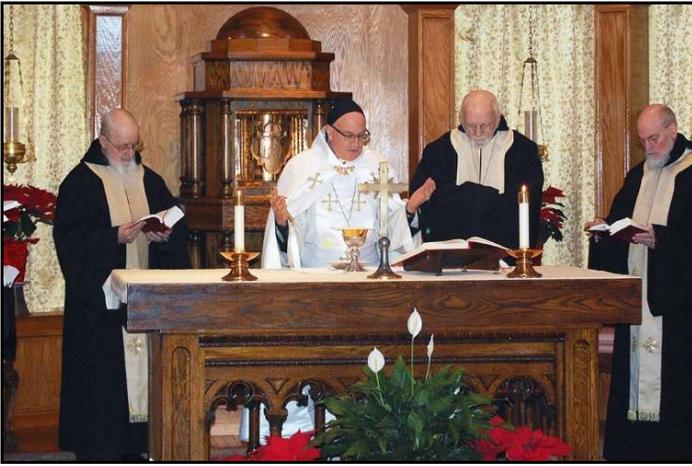
## ***Patriarch Calls for Lenten Prayer for Peace in Iraq***

The head of the Iraqi-based Chaldean Catholic Church, an Eastern Catholic church in full communion with the Holy See, has called upon the faithful to offer their Lenten prayer and fasting for peace.

Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako called for prayer "in order to have peace in our country and the region and for the safe return of the forcibly displaced people back to their homes and properties, after having such a bitter experience in camps."

(CWNews, February 20, 17)

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Bishop Gregory Mansour celebrated the Divine Liturgy with the Monks at Most Holy Trinity Monastery.

Every night the monks gathered around the bishop for an informal talk on certain spiritual topics. Among other things, Bishop Gregory encouraged us to be faithful to our calling as contemplatives whose lives centered on Christ in the Eucharist. Overall, it was an uplifting visit and one that will not be soon forgotten. □

## ***My Journey to the Priesthood***

*Continued from page 12*

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Bishop Doueihy interviewed me and said he did not think I have a priestly vocation but rather a vocation to take care of the family. I had mixed feelings. I still felt I had the call and God would take care of the situation.

Monsignor Khoury never gave up on me and insisted that I will definitely become a priest one day. He opened wide to me the door of ministering in the Church where I was able to discern my ability to serve and my vocation. I was actively involved in whatever a lay minister can do such as gathering people for Eucharistic Adoration, Rosary Cenacles for the elderly, lecturing the Sodality, etc. Then Father Elie Mikhael entered the scene and gave me the ultimate push.

Finally, my vocation which was the fruit of a lengthy life discernment blossomed with Bishop Gregory Mansour who formally accepted me in 2013 to start my "official" theological studies at Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary and the Catholic University of America. (and I tell you: it is quite of an adventure from his part)

And here I am now at 62, a priest that age cannot turn from sharing the sacred duty to labor for the souls of men and women. Please pray for me. □



## The Letter to Philemon

(Continued from page 10)

As he had written in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

It should be remembered that this letter to Philemon, while written in a very personal tone, stressing the relationship and friendship between Paul and Philemon, Paul and Onesimus, and the type of new relations Paul desires between Philemon and Onesimus; is also a public letter. He has seemingly already shared his views with his stated companions (Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke), and intends Philemon to share it with his household and the church that gathered in his house. Paul is a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and his proclamation of it is always public, for all to hear. It is a universal (catholic) proclamation of truth and of new life in Christ - it calls all men and women to conversion of heart. With the Letter to Philemon, Paul initiated one of the greatest reversals of institutional sin in human history. Paul fittingly ends the letter by saying, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." To this we must all say Amen!!! ☐

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## Learn Spoken Lebanese

(Derij)

By Mary L. Ghaleb, Ph.D.

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## Flint, Michigan Parishioners Honored



by Steve Faris

On Saturday, February 11, 2017, Father Pierre Bassil, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Flint, Mich., celebrated the Feast of St. Maron during a Saturday evening Divine Liturgy. Fr. Anthony Strouse, Pastor of St. Pius X Catholic Church, concelebrated, and the Parish's deacons assisted.

Immediately following the liturgy, more than 250 people attended the parish's *Hafli* in the Social Center. A highlight of the feast celebration was the recognition of three dedicated

parishioners of the church: Mrs. Michael (Tyl) Rizik, and Mr. Philip G. Faris and his wife, Mrs. Marie H. Faris.

Philip, Marie, Tyl and her deceased husband, Mike, were among the founders of Our Lady of Lebanon Catholic Church, which rose from humble beginnings in Flint Powers Catholic High School, and later, in a former grocery store, to the beautiful church and facility that it occupies today. It has been at 4133 Calkins Road in Flint Township since the 1970s.

Tyl is an active member of the church, having blessed us with her beautiful voice in the choir, and, together with Mike, made many contributions to the church in many capacities.

Philip and Marie have also served the parish in different capacities and Philip has been an usher for almost forty years.

Both the Rizik and Faris families have contributed to the parish life in many ways, and could also always be found volunteering whenever needed, such as at the annual parish festival.

The commemoration for Tyl, Philip and Marie began with a slideshow featuring highlights of their lives, including photos of their families and of them volunteering and working at the church.

Father Bassil then gave a speech honoring Tyl, Philip and Marie, recalling the many contributions they made to the growth and prosperity of OLOL for more than four decades. At the conclusion of his speech, Father presented them with commemorative plaques.

Also honored at the evening's celebrations was Mr. Anthony Chamas, for his numerous contributions to Our Lady of Lebanon, including serving as an Altar Boy for many years. He is a young man with a bright future in the Church.

At the conclusion of Father's speech, Father Anthony Strouse offered a prayer of thanksgiving for Tyl, Philip, Marie, and Anthony. To cap off the celebrations, a cake specially prepared for the event was cut and enjoyed by all.

The Rizik and Faris families would like to express their personal gratitude to Father Bassil, the Parish Council, and the entire church family of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church for the honors bestowed that evening. □