



The Maronite Voice

A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA



Volume IX

Issue No. X

November 2013

Thy Will Be Done

Homily of Bishop Elias Abdallah Zaidan At His Enthronement Ceremony



Your Excellency Archbishop Vigano, Apostolic Nuncio,
Your Excellencies Bishop Abi Younes and Bishop Alwan, representing our beloved Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai,
Your Excellency Archbishop Carlson,
Your Excellency Sayedna Shaheen,
Your Excellencies, my brother bishops,
Very Reverend Superior General Malek Abou Tanos,
Reverend Monsignors and Fathers,
Deacons and Subdeacons,
Monks and Nuns,
The Honorable Francis Slay, Mayor of St. Louis,
Your Excellency Antoine Chedid, Lebanese Ambassador to the U.S.,
Honorable Consul General Bilal Kabalan,
Distinguished guests, brothers and sisters in Christ,
Thanks for being here today.

Over three months ago, I received a phone call from the Apostolic Nunciature informing me that the Holy Father Pope Francis had appointed me to be the next Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. Since then, my life has not been the same and Sayedna Robert is absolutely right when he told me from experience, "One phone call can change your whole life."

Various feelings and thoughts overtook me: feelings of joy, of being selected but more so the feeling of fear of carrying the responsibility; feelings of pride along with feelings of humility, knowing that I am not the best and the most qualified person; feelings of excitement along with feelings of the weight of the office of the bishop. In the midst of these feelings, I decided to surrender to God as the Blessed Mother did when the Archangel Gabriel announced to her that she was chosen to become the Mother of God and as Jesus taught us in the Our Father: "Thy will be done." This is my motto and I hope to live my Episcopal ministry fulfilling God's will in my personal life, and I invite you as well to do likewise, so that all of us, people of God, in this beloved Eparchy are doing God's will.

Doing so, we will become the good soil of the parable of the sower in today's gospel. The good soil that hears the Word of God receives it with joy and conviction and produces fruit pleasing to God. Yes, this was the intention of Pope Benedict when he announced the Year of Faith last year. He invited us to go deeper in our relationship with God, to have stronger attachment to our beliefs and to share them with others in the new evangelization. Then, we are not just the good soil; we are the sowers whose mission will be to spread God's love, joy and peace in our homes, workplaces, parishes and society at large.

(Continues on page 6)

Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

November 2 - 3, 2013

Liturgy of Thanksgiving and Banquet, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

November 8 - 9, 2013

Stewardship Council Meeting in St. Louis, Mo.

November 10, 2013

St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

November 11 - 14, 2013

USCCB Meetings, Baltimore, Md.

November 14 - 15, 2013

Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary, Washington, D.C.

November 16 - 17, 2013

St. Ignatius Church, Dayton, Ohio, and Our Lady of Lebanon Mission in Columbus, Ohio

November 22 - 24, 2013

Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Houston, Tex.

November 29 - December 1, 2013

Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Lewisville [Dallas], Tex.

December 7 - 8, 2013

Our Lady's Church, Austin, Tex. □

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

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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

Orange, California Mission Outreach

The Maronite Servants of Christ the Light were invited by Father Tony Bakh, Pastor of St. John Maron Parish in Orange, Calif., to give a family and MYO retreat on October 18 -19, 2013.

On Friday evening, Mother Marla Marie gave an interactive and visual presentation to the adults and youth on Mary, Fatima and the Rosary. The following day she continued with the adults on the theme of "Coming Home to God the Father" using the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Sister Therese Maria facilitated the MYO program for the weekend and began Friday evening with fun icebreakers and a pro-life movie: *October Baby*. After the movie the teens had a fruitful discussion on key themes such as the sanctity and dignity of every human life beginning in the womb, the gift of good friendships vs. bad friendships, jealousy, living purity and deepening one's prayer life with Mary as our model. On Saturday, the MYO continued their retreat at a local park engaging ice breakers and the topics of scripture, chastity, preparing for Adoration and Confession. Saturday evening concluded with Divine Liturgy, Adoration and Confession. Also during the week the Sisters visited the homebound and had an event with the MYA.

If you would like to schedule a similar spiritual event for your parish, contact the Maronite Servants at sister@maroniteservants.org or call 508/996-1753. □



The Coat of Arms of His Excellency Elias Abdallah Zaidan Third Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles



Crosier

The crosier is a staff topped by a globe surmounted by the Cross. The cross is an Antiochian cross used in the Maronite Liturgical books. The cross is surmounting the world. The crosier holds the shield as the bishop is the shepherd who leads his flock in fulfilling God's will on earth.

Shield

The shield is divided into two sides. The Eparchial side on the left depicts many different symbols of the Maronite faith and the name of the Eparchy. The M with the blue background stands for the Blessed Mother, Queen of Heaven and Queen of the Apostles. The Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles is named in honor of her. The twelve stars symbolize the twelve apostles as the bishop is the successor to the apostles. The cedar, in the Maronite faith, is a representation of the Blessed Mother, and it is also the symbol for Lebanon that is dedicated to the Blessed Mother. Hence, the name of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon is given. The mountains reflect the solid faith of the Maronite people. Lebanon is the birthplace of Bishop Zaidan and where the cedars grow. The angels reflect the city of Los Angeles where the proto-cathedral is and where Bishop Zaidan spent nineteen years of his priestly ministry. The white background is a symbol of Lebanon and the snow on its mountains.

The personal side on the right side of the shield holds many different images that reflect Bishop Zaidan's ministry and the Maronite people's journey. The ocean is a sign of immigration, the early founders, the pioneers who left Lebanon and the Middle East looking for better

opportunities. They came by ship settling in the new land of the U.S.A. They brought with them their faith and traditions which moved them to establish Churches in different cities. The ship sail has the motto "Thy will be done" written in Syriac as the Maronite people have trusted in God's providence on their journey. The ship also represents the Church bringing the faithful to the safe harbor, the harbor of peace in the Lord. The arch is a biblical image of the covenant between God and Noah. It also reflects the city of St. Louis where the eparchial offices are located and where the Bishop will reside to exercise his ministry.

In the upper right side, there is a depiction of three essential symbols of the ministry of the Bishop. The image of the Church reflects the office of "governing" the Church well and vigilance to make Her prosper. The Bible is a reflection of the obligation to "teach" the Word of God at all times. The Chalice and the host are a reminder of the responsibility to "minister" the sacraments, a sure way for the holiness of the faithful. The yellow background is a reflection of God as the light of all nations. It is also the duty of the missionary to spread the love and life of God to all the people around.

Finally, the Coat of Arms is bordered in red and gold. The red is the readiness of the bishop to witness and to even sacrifice his life to do God's will, and the gold is the color of honor and fullness of the priesthood in the order of Bishop. The white background color on the left and the yellow color on the right are the colors of the flag of the Vatican, to emphasize the union of the Maronite Church to the See of Rome and the adherence and obedience of Bishop Zaidan to His Holiness, the Pope.

Motto

"Thy will be done" comes from the Lord's Prayer and is written in the coat of arms in the three languages of the Maronite Liturgy: Syriac, English and Arabic. On a personal basis, Bishop Zaidan's given name is Abdallah which means "servant of God." Thus, even though this motto is prayed daily by the faithful, Bishop Zaidan wishes to implement it in his own life of Episcopal ministry as well as in the life of his people. The motto, in particular, embodies the vow of obedience to God, to the Church, and to the ecclesiastical superiors, and reflects the membership of Bishop Zaidan to the Congregation of Maronite Lebanese Missionaries which formed him and where he exercised his priestly ministry. The motto also mirrors a personal spiritual surrender to God that was ingrained in him along his spiritual formation. □



Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai Sends His Blessings to the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and Asks Bishop Abi Younes to Represent Him at the Enthronement Ceremony

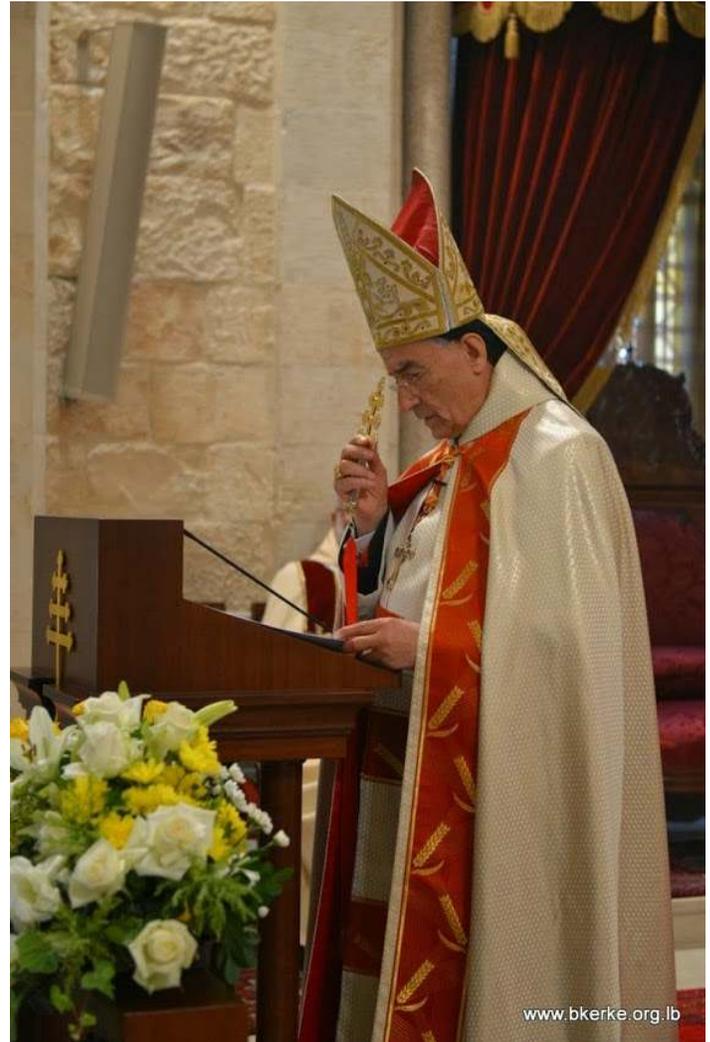
The Apostolic Blessing upon our brother His Excellency Robert Shaheen, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, Los Angeles - St. Louis, and upon the priests of the Eparchy, monks and nuns, and all the beloved faithful.

You receive with great joy your new Bishop Most Reverend Elias Abdallah Zaidan, the descendant of the Congregation of the Maronite Lebanese Missionaries. The Holy Spirit and the ecclesiastical authority have placed him Shepherd, Servant of the leadership of Charity in your eparchy, after a priestly and pastoral ministry within it for the last twenty-five years. What increases your joy and your assurance is that you know him to be a zealous and unselfish missionary, a priest faithful to his vocation, known for his commitment to his duties, to the spiritual, ethical and human virtues which made him close and loved by all. He enters the Eparchy having full knowledge of it, clergy and laity, parishes and missions, especially from his learned experience serving in the various councils and committees, and the offices that he held.

At this occasion, we would like to express to our brother Most Reverend Bishop Robert Shaheen our deep gratitude for all the efforts that he made with great love and devotion, for your sake, clergy and laity, and for the progress of the eparchy in its parishes and missions, its organizational and pastoral structure which he established, its buildings in St. Louis, near St. Raymond, the second Cathedral, in addition to Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral, the first one in Los Angeles, Calif., We express our appreciation for your assistance to him for the last twelve years, when he took over shepherding the flock from the late Bishop John Chedid. We mention with gratitude, in a particular way, the help of his two Vicar Generals, His Excellency Gregory Mansour in the first three years before his election as Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn on January 10, 2004, then Chorbishop Faouzi Elia. They remain for him, without doubt, great advisors.

It gives us great pleasure to send our brother His Excellency George Saad Abi Younes, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of the Martyrs of Lebanon in Mexico to represent us at the Ceremony of Enthronement, and to work with our brother His Excellency Bishop Hanna Alwan, our Patriarchal Vicar on the transfer procedures according to the Canon Law. Then, they will submit to us the written report as required by Canon Law.

As we join you in prayer for the intentions of the new bishop and the eparchy, clergy and laity, we greet with respect the religious and civic authorities that are participating at this celebration, either at the Cathedral in St. Louis, or at the Cathedral in Los Angeles. We express to all of them our appreciation for the ecclesiastical communion and the pastoral, national and civic collaboration with the bishops and priests of our Church, especially with the new bishop.



We implore God, through the intercession of our Mother the Virgin Mary and St. Maron, to bless you all with the flow of His graces, and spiritual and earthly goods, assuring you of our love and prayers.

From our See in Bkerke, on October 3, 2013,
+Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai. ☐

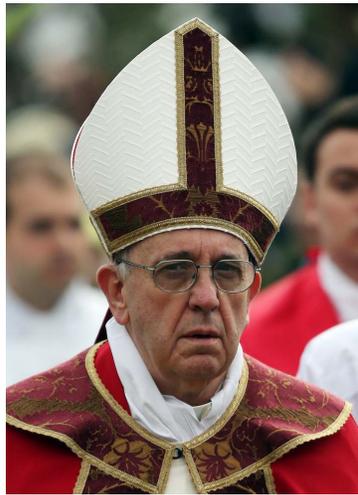
Food For Thought

Everything is a gift from God: it is only by recognizing this crucial dependence on the Creator that we will find freedom and peace.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Official Papal Decree Appointing Reverend Abdallah Elias Zaidan as Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

FRANCIS, BISHOP, SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD, sends his greeting and imparts the Apostolic Blessing to his beloved son, Abdallah Ellia Zaidan, member of the Congregation of the Lebanese Maronite Missionaries, hitherto Rector of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Lebanon and of St. Peter in Los Angeles, now designated Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles of the Maronites.



In view of the necessity of appointing a Shepherd to lead the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles of the Maronites, vacant since the resignation of its Bishop, our Venerable brother Robert Joseph Shaheen, in accord with canon 210 §1 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, we, after hearing the counsel of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, consider it best to entrust the role of governance to you, beloved Son, who are endowed with clear gifts and expert in the local ecclesial affairs.

We, therefore, having been elected to the Cathedra of blessed Peter and being solicitous for the good of the entire flock of the Lord, in virtue of the supreme Apostolic authority, nominate you as Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles of the Maronites, with all the rights and duties annexed to that pastoral mission, according to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. With regard to your Episcopal ordination, the profession of faith and the promise of obedience to Us and Our Successors, you will observe the norms of said Code. Furthermore, we direct that this Letter be made known to the clergy and people of the same eparchial See; and we exhort them to welcome you with joy and follow you most willingly. Finally, beloved Son, may you act in such manner as to fulfill this vital ministry of Shepherd by word, deed and, above all, the example of your life, for no other means is more suited to the teaching and governing of men. May "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:13), through the intercession of the Virgin Mother, be always with you and with this Maronite ecclesial community that is so dear to Us.

Given at Rome, from St. Peter's Basilica, on the 11th day of July in the 2013th Year of Our Lord, the First of Our Pontificate. □

Saint Louis, Missouri Installation of New Bishop



On October 23, 2013, His Excellency Bishop Elias Zaidan was installed as the third bishop of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon at St. Raymond Cathedral in Saint Louis, Mo.

Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, joined Their Excellencies George Abi Younes of Mexico and Hanna Alwan of the Patriarchal Curia, representing Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai; Archbishop Carlson of Saint Louis, Mo., Paul Marwan Tabet of Canada; Edgar Madi of Brazil; Robert Shaheen, Bishop Emeritus; Very Reverend Superior General Malek Abou Tanos, M.L.M., a large number of priests, religious, deacons and subdeacons and a crowd of approximately 500 people for the Enthronement ceremony.

In his homily, Bishop Zaidan told the faithful "I pledge my love to you, I commit to put my life at your service. Today, I take my first step in this journey ... may God's will in our lives be done."

Addressing Bishop Shaheen, Bishop Zaidan said, "You have prepared me well, and you have my unity and trust. I am eternally grateful for your support."

Bishop Zaidan was ordained as a Bishop on September 28, 2013, at the Basilica of Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa by His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai.

Born in Lebanon, Bishop Zaidan joined the Congregation of Maronite Lebanese Missionaries and was ordained a priest in 1986. After completing his theological training in Lebanon, he came to the United States in 1988 where he served as Assistant Rector at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N. Y.

From 1990 to 1994, he was Pastor at St. George Maronite Catholic Church in San Antonio, Texas, and helped establish Maronite missions in Dallas and Houston. From 1994 to 2013 he served as Rector of Our Lady of Mt Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral in Los Angeles, Calif. □

Bishop Zaidan's Homily at His Enthronement Ceremony

Continued from page 1

This is our mission as Christians, as Maronite Catholics. All of us, bishops, clergy, religious and laity are called to live heroic lives, to open our hearts to the Word of God, to open our hearts as well to our brothers and sisters, especially those in need as His Holiness Pope Francis has been a great example in his humble way to reach out to all.

From this perspective, as your bishop, I pledge myself to lead you in that mission of openness, of sharing and surrendering myself to God in every way.

As we gather in St. Raymond Cathedral today, we witness a ceremony of the passing of the pastoral staff from Bishop Shaheen to me, your new shepherd. Four insignia stand out today:

- The Crosier is a symbol of the shepherd who uses his staff to lead, to protect and to keep the flock together.
- The Pectoral Cross is a reminder that the bishop, as a good disciple, must carry his cross daily and help others carry the cross.
- The Ring is a constant reminder that I am now married to my diocese, to the eparchy entrusted to me by our Holy Mother Church.
- The Miter represents my consecration to the Lord and the honor of the Order of Bishop that I should dedicate my life to preserve it.

In the diocese, the Bishop is not the only worker; he is supported by the dedication, support and prayers of the clergy, religious and laity alike. Therefore, I would like to express my feelings and thoughts to you.

To my priests: I would like to tell you that you are the apple of the bishop's eye. You are my close collaborators; I am here for you, to listen to you, to support you and to lay down my life for you.

To our seminarians: You are precious to the bishop. I pray for you to persevere in your vocation and may



Bishop Zaidan blesses the faithful at his enthronement Liturgy.

God inspire many others to join as well.

To the deacons and subdeacons: Your ministry is that of service to the Church as an edifice and as people of God. I value your sacrifices and your dedication.

To the religious, monks and nuns: I come from a religious congregation as well. Your ministry is so valuable and I applaud your zeal and self-giving.

To the lay people and to our families: You are the domestic Church. You keep our Churches going and growing. Let us always heed God's call to us to be holy as He is holy. To the National Apostolate of Maronites, the Order of St. Sharbel and the various organizations, we will work together to build up God's Church on earth.

In a special way, I greet the youth and young adults who are the vibrant energy in our Churches. Remain close to your priests and actively involved in your parishes. Your participation is a great assurance of our future.

I would also like to send a message of love to the children who are the promise of the future and the joy of the present. I am here for you. Count on my help.

All of us together form the Church but our Church is not an independent one; it is united in faith and loyalty to the Pope and to our Patriarch; it is rooted in a beautiful tradition that dates to the time of the apostles. We are the family of Maron, this great saint whose main mission was to guide others to Christ. May we do the same.

In that spirit, I would like to express my gratitude today. I give thanks to the Almighty God for calling me to this ministry of priesthood and for providing me with the proper care along the years.

I am deeply grateful to His Excellency Archbishop Carlo Vigano, the Apostolic Nuncio to the U.S., for being the presence of the Holy Father for us today. Please relay to His Holiness our loyalty and love for his person and for his office as Supreme Pontiff. Please also convey our appreciation to His Eminence Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches and to all his collaborators.

I am also thankful to His Eminence Cardinal Bechara Peter Rai, our beloved Patriarch, who ordained me and who leads our Church at this

critical time. I am so touched by the presence of my brothers, their Excellencies the Maronite Bishops: George Abi Younes [Mexico], Edgard Madi [Brazil], Hanna Alwan [Patriarchal Curia, Lebanon], Elias Sleman [Syria], and Marwan Tabet [Canada], who traveled a great distance to join me today. Thanks for your friendship, trust and support.

In a special way, I would like to thank you, Bishop Gregory Mansour. (Welcome home.) You served St. Raymond, and together we will join our efforts for the good of our people in the U.S.

I deeply appreciate the presence of His Excellency Robert Carlson, Archbishop of St. Louis, and his Auxiliary Bishop Rice. St. Louis is the city of the winning Cardinals, at the expense of Los Angeles. Thank you for your gracious welcome. I am now here in your Archdiocese.

I am also touched by the presence of His Excellency Edward Clark representing the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. I am also grateful for all the Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic bishops. You honor me and the Eparchy with your presence.

Allow me to give special thanks to my Congregation of the Maronite Lebanese Missionaries. I appreciate the formation, the care and the support the Congregation gave me for many years. I am so happy to welcome the new Superior General, the Very Reverend Malek Abou Tanos, and my brothers, the *Kreimist* missionaries. You will always be in my heart and prayers.

I am blessed by the presence of my brother priests of the Eparchy. We will form a great orchestra playing great hymns of praise to Our Lord. I would like to thank the priests of the Eparchy of Saint Maron and other friendly faces. Together, we lay down our lives for the Lord.

Thank you Deacons, Subdeacons, Monks and Nuns: we will be working closely together to serve our Church.

I want to say thank you to Chorbishop Michael Kail, to Chorbishop Moussa Joseph, Rector of St. Raymond, to the choir and to this beautiful community

and all the people who have worked hard to ensure the success of our celebration. I am your pastor now; we will get to know each other more in the upcoming months. You are my family.

Thanks to all the people, parishioners and friends who came from near and far, for taking the time from work to come and participate at this ceremony to pray for me.

I am remiss if I did not mention the Cathedral parish in Los Angeles whom I served for the last nineteen years. You have been a great support to me and I am forever grateful. I have learned also a lot from my previous pastoral experiences in Brooklyn, N.Y., San Antonio, Houston and Dallas.

I appreciate the presence of the Honorable Francis Slay, Mayor of the city of St. Louis and all the local civic representatives. We are grateful for your service.

In a special way, I am touched by the presence of His Excellency Antoine Chedid, Lebanese Ambassador to the U.S.A., representing His Excellency General Michel Sleiman, President of Lebanon. We are grateful for this kind gesture and we assure you of our love and our prayers for peace and stability in the beloved country of the Cedars. Thank you Honorable Bilal Kabalan, Consul General of Lebanon in Detroit, for joining us as well.

I would like to send special greetings to my blood family, my mother and my siblings, who join me from Lebanon in thought and prayer. I rejoice in the presence of my two cousins today.

In my life, there are many people who have preceded us to the next life but who have impacted my life in a very special way: Archbishop Francis Zayek, who received me back in 1988, and Bishop John Chedid, who appointed me as first rector of the Cathedral in Los Angeles in 1994.

You thought, for a moment, that I have forgotten a very special person to me and to you, our beloved Bishop Robert Shaheen. *Sayedna*, you have been leading our diocese selflessly for the last 12-13 years and you have mentoring me to this chair for so long by assigning me to different councils

and committees. You have prepared me well. I am eternally grateful for your fatherly love and support. I will always rely on your guidance.

Dear Friends,

What we embark on today is similar to a marriage where the bride and the groom exchange vows of love and fidelity. I pledge my love to you, each of you, clergy, religious and laity, children, youth, adult, and young at heart, men and women, present physically or spiritually. I love all of you and I commit to put my life at your service. Let us come together as one community to renew our faith in God, our love to God and His Church. Today I take my first step in this journey but I am sure that with your collaboration, with the intercession of the Blessed Mother, our Patroness, St. Maron, St. Sharbel, the Massabki Brothers, and with God's grace, miracles do happen. May God's will be done in our lives and may our days be a continuous honeymoon.

Thanks for your presence, love, support and prayers. Alleluia. God Bless! ☐

Eparchial Assignments

His Excellency Bishop Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, has made the following Eparchial appointments effective October 23, 2013:

Chorbishop Moussa Joseph as Rector of St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

Father Elias Sleiman as Rector of Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

Deacon Lou Peters as Chancellor of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon. ☐



Washington, D.C. *Chorbishop Seely Beggiani Retires*

On Friday, October 4, 2013, at Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Washington, D.C., Chorbishop Seely Beggiani celebrated the Sacred Divine Liturgy with His Eminence Cardinal Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, D.C.; His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron; His Excellency Bishop Joseph Mouawad of the Patriarchal Curia; Chorbishop Dominic F. Ashkar, Pastor; and Fr. Geoffrey Abdallah, Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary, along with dozens of Maronite Priests, Deacons, and Subdeacons representing parishes from the Eparchy of Saint Maron and the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon.

A Graduate of the Catholic University of America (CUA), Chorbishop Beggiani was ordained to the Priesthood in 1961. He obtained his Doctorate Degree in Sacred Theology from CUA in 1963; was named Chaplain to His Holiness Pope Paul VI in 1975; was elevated to Chorbishop in 1986; and served as Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary from 1968 -2013. During Msgr. Beggiani's tenure as Rector, over sixty priests have graduated from the Seminary.

Previous Assignments:

- Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary: 1968 - 2013
- Member of the Eparchial Finance Committee: 1994 - present
- Adjunct Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies, Catholic University of America: 1986 - present
- Chairman, Commission For Lebanon, Eparchy of Saint Maron: 1985 - present
- Peritus, Maronite Patriarchal Synod: 2003 - 2006
- Lecturer, Department of Religious and Religious Education, Catholic University: 1967 -1986
- Founding Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Washington, D.C.: 1967 - 1979
- Treasurer and Spiritual Director, Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary: 1967 - 1986
- Assistant Professor of Theology, St. John College, Cleveland, Ohio: 1967 -1968



From left: Chorbishop Ashkar, Bishop Joseph Mouawd, Cardinal Wuerl, Chorbishop Beggiani, Bishop Mansour and Fr. Geoffrey Abdallah.

A prolific writer, Chorbishop Seely Beggiani enriched the Maronite Church with his books and numerous research articles, lectures and presentations. Some of his books are:

- Aspects of Maronite History. New York: Saint Maron Publications, 2003.
- The Divine Liturgy of the Maronite Church: History and Commentary. Revised Edition. New York: Saint Maron Publications, 1998.
- Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality: The Syriac Tradition. London and Toronto: University of Scranton Press, Associated University Presses, 1991.
- Early Syriac Theology. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983.
- Translation of History of the Maronite Church, by Pierre Dib, Beirut, Lebanon: Imprimerie Catholique, 1971.

The Liturgy Celebration was followed by a Banquet in honor of Chorbishop Beggiani's retirement as the Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary. Chorbishop Beggiani is the founding Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Washington, D.C., and as such the parish community, Chorbishop Ashkar, and Bishop

Gregory Mansour worked together to organize a wonderful event for their beloved pastor.

Mr. Richard A. Hibey, Master of Ceremonies, introduced the head table and enumerated Chorbishop Beggiani's accomplishments and influence on the Maronite Church. His Excellency Ambassador Antoine Chedid, on behalf of Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, presented Chorbishop Beggiani with the Republic of Lebanon Presidential Shield. Bishop Gregory Mansour, Chorbishop Ashkar, Mr. Charles Feghali, Event Chairman, Very Reverend Geoffrey Abdallah, newly appointed Rector, and many others spoke of Chorbishop Beggiani's many contributions to the Maronite Church, Lebanon, the Lebanese community and priests in the United States. Chorbishop Beggiani closed the celebration with a heartfelt thanks to all present and especially to his longtime friend Chorbishop Ashkar. Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Vicar General, gave the final benediction. □



Brooklyn, New York Cathedral Bids Farewell



From left: Paul Massoud, Alex Harb, Fr. Geoffrey Abdallah, Rector, Aaron Sandbothe and Chris Fabre.

by Salma T. Vahdat

Four years seem like just yesterday that the Eparchy of Saint Maron and the community of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y., welcomed the Rev. Geoffrey Abdallah of Sydney, Australia, in 2009 to take up residence as Director of Music for the Eparchy. Little did we know at the time the gift we had been given, Father Geoffrey, as he is affectionately known, came to the Eparchy highly-qualified as a musician, composer, translator and, above all, a gentle priest. He completed his music studies at the University of Sydney, graduating with a bachelor of music degree in composition. He also studied composition under the Australian composers Peter Sculthorpe, Ross Edwards and Eric Gross. His instrument of choice being the concert piano, Father Geoffrey studied with world renowned Australian concert pianist Roger Woodward, both in Sydney and London. He also studied privately in Paris with Yvonne Loriod, the wife of French composer, Olivier Messiaen.

In 1989, Father Geoffrey experienced a change of direction, and attended St. Patrick's College, Manly, in Sydney to study for the priesthood. A portion of these studies was completed at the University of the Holy Spirit in Kaslik, Lebanon. During his time in Lebanon he also studied Syriac Chant with the Church musicologist, the late Rev. Professor Louis Hage, former president of the International Association of Sacred Music (Paris). Father Geoffrey was finally ordained to the priesthood in January, 1994.

He had positions in Sydney as Diocesan Secretary and Bishop's Private Secretary, Youth Chaplain, Rector of St. Maroun's Cathedral, Director of the Australian Maronite Liturgical and Musical Commission, Maronite Prison Chaplain, Episcopal Vicar for Youth and Episcopal Vicar for Community Services. In Lebanon he is a member of the Patriarchal Liturgical Commission in Bkerke.

Father Geoffrey has composed many hymns and chants for the Catholic Church, both in the Maronite and Latin rites. He has also worked extensively since 1982 in the adaptation

of Syriac and Arabic chant into English for use in the Maronite Diocese of Australia. "Gathered As Your Church", which contains over one hundred chants was released in 1997. Volume Two, released in 2001, contains music for the Latin Church. In 2013, The Book of Offering Music Book was published under his direction and contains three hundred hymns and chants to accompany the new English translation of the "Book of Offering" (Maronite Liturgy Book). An accomplished linguist, he has translated into English, "Precis of Maronite Chant" by Louis Hage and "Iconography of the Syro-Maronite Church Liturgical Year" by Abdo Badwi.

Father Geoffrey has been assigned to be the Rector of the Maronite Seminary in Washington, D.C. It is true that he will not be distant from us here in Brooklyn and he is always more than welcome to return and visit when he can find time. The Cathedral Choir, which he melded into the best there is, will especially miss his wonderful direction. As a token of their affection for him they gifted him with a vestment. When he dons the vestment he will be encircled by their respect and love. Father Geoffrey celebrated his last "official" Liturgy at the Cathedral on June 9, 2013. In his homily to the parish he thanked everyone for their love and well wishes. He said they all made his stay here very personal and loving. Following Liturgy a reception in the Social Hall was a scene of many embraces as we wished him success in his new position. □

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

November 9, 2013

Catholic Relief Services Board of Directors Meeting, Baltimore, Md.

November 10, 2013

Our Lady of Lebanon Parish, Washington, D.C.

November 11 - 13, 2013

USCCB meetings, Baltimore, Md.

November 14 - 15, 2013

Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary, Washington, D.C.

November 16, 2013

Fairfield, Conn., to help Bishop Caggiano with Confirmations

November 17, 2013

Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y., and 5:00 pm Liturgy at the Manhattan Mission

November 21, 2013

Eparchial Benefit Dinner, Manhattan, N.Y.

November 22, 2013

Lebanon Independence Day, Consulate of Lebanon, N.Y.

November 23, 2013

Mass and Dinner for the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, St. Patrick Cathedral, Manhattan, N.Y.

November 24, 2013

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

November 27 - December 3, 2013

Thanksgiving Vacation with family in Michigan

December 5, 2013

Catholic Relief Services Board of Directors Meeting, Baltimore, Md.

December 7 - 8, 2013

Parish Visit, St. Sharbel Church, New Brunswick, N.J. □

We Are Called To Be Angels

by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M.

Recent years have directed a great deal of attention to angels. Have angels become a fad, a trend, or are they real? Angels seem to appear in so many aspects of our lives today - magazine covers and articles, news reports, jewelry, postage stamps, stories, television shows, literature, historical anecdotes, art, religious practice, biblical studies. Attention to angels seems ubiquitous. So absorbed in angels is the general population that the current interest borders on angel mania.

Like the commercialization of Christmas and Easter, angel mania can serve to draw our attention to the reality and importance of angels in God's creation. Angels are no myth. They are a very evident and significant part of history and spirituality.

Examining our Christian prayer life indicates that we encounter the angels of God not only in popular and vocal prayers in general, but we find them prominent especially in the Church's official, liturgical prayer - the Liturgy of the Hours and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Angels are an obvious reality of religious history and biblical study. This popular outburst of interest in angels leads us to learn the role of angels in the Bible and their meaning for us today.

Mention of angels abounds in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Christians need not look to popular news sources to learn more about the angels.

The word angel comes from the ancient Greek *angelos*, which means messenger. The word is applied to both human and divine messengers. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *mal'ak* is rendered *angelos*, and refers to human and divine messengers alike. In several instances in the New Testament angels refer to humans, but the word usually means heavenly beings. Though our focus is on angels as heavenly beings, the Bible itself employs a wider use of the term.

The angels serve as messengers of the Lord and servants of the Lord. They help to bridge the gap between humans and God.

Note that the names often given to angels point away from the angel and back to God. Michael means "Who is like God?" Gabriel means "God is strong." Raphael means "God heals." These angels are representatives of God's active presence in our world.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#331) teaches: "Christ is the center of the angelic world. They are his angels." There is a clear impression that some early Christians gave too much attention to angels, and that some New Testament writers addressed this point. Is this a message for us today?

A few years ago pollster George Gallup, a devout Episcopalian, reporting the results of his national survey, highlighted concerns among the clergy that angel mania "may be detracting people from proven paths to spiritual development" and that "pop culture visions of angels impede a deeper development of spiritual values to nourish the soul" (*Emerging Trends*).

What does this mean for us today? Here are some conclusions we can glean from the Bible's teaching on angels.

First, we should focus more on God than on angels. The Lord sends the messenger who delivers the message or performs the action. Angels come from God and should direct us back to God.

Second, we need to place great trust in God's active presence in our lives. God's angels remind us that we are not alone. God is always with us. God wants to protect us from harm.

Finally, we can see Jesus as God's messenger and servant. Though not called an angel, Jesus is the one sent by God into our world. He is the presence of God in our daily lives, and expresses God's concern for the lowly and the needy. In Jesus, God "has visited and redeemed his people" (Lk 1:68).

We can celebrate angels and the important truth they communicate to us. God wants to be intimately involved in our everyday lives. Our guardian angels are the clearest indication of this.

Throughout the Old Testament God's messengers/angels guard and protect individuals as well as the people of God. This providence of God is exemplified by instances found in Genesis 21: 17-18; Genesis 22: 11-18; Exodus 14: 19- 20, 23; and Daniel 12: 1.

In the New Testament Jesus advises his disciples not to ignore or despise any of the "little ones" because "their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven" (Mt 18: 10).

And the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#336, 352) affirms that "From infancy to death human life is surrounded by the watchful care and intercession" of the angels.

While being open to the good news conveyed by the angels, we too are invited to become messengers/angels to the world. We are called to participate in the new evangelization. While the Bible does focus more on heavenly figures, it also recognizes that we can be angels, too. □



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Order of Saint Sharbel
1021 South 10th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104

The Story of A Vocation

My name is Alex Harb. I am a twenty three year old seminarian (someone studying to be a priest) from Louisiana. I have been a seminarian for five years and am currently in the final year of my theology studies.



Since entering the seminary (the place where men go to become priests), I have found human fulfillment, and have met many priests who live fulfilling lives. I have found true friends with whom I can share my thoughts, fears, hopes, and desires. I have been accepted and appreciated. (Thank you to all those who support me and accept me through kind words and prayers) God has given me love for the life I am living and a longing for the priestly life.

Yet, I used to fear that I would not find happiness and fulfillment in this life.

When people ask me about my vocation they are often interested in the supernatural side of vocation. They want to hear about the angels and trumpets. I, likewise, wanted signs, and I loved hearing about signs in others, but looking back it is not the supernatural, but the natural/ human aspects that I so often see as the determining factor in saying “yes” to a vocation (the particular life to which God calls each person).

Our Lord Jesus was fully God but also fully man. A vocation, likewise, is not only divine but also human. My discerning (thinking and praying about what God wants me to do) is also a very human experience.

I discerned the priesthood while in high school and the issues that weighed heaviest on my heart were human issues. Will I be happy as a priest? Can I find friendship in the celibate priesthood? Can I leave my family? Can I survive moving around the country? Will I be able to support my parents? Will others accept or appreciate my vocation? Will I be able to serve others effectively? Do I have to give up my hobbies, my academic interests, and my independence?

Human fears and doubts made my discernment difficult. I could have made an easier choice, or a more common choice, or a safer choice. Yet, for me it was not about what was easy, but about what God wanted me to do; what God wanted me to want to do. I have learned that I personally can be most happy, most joyful, as a priest, and it is in the joy (and the peace) that I find that I know that God is calling me to be a priest.

I understand God is calling me to be a priest because of the joy and the peace I have found. Yet, before I can know my vocation I must first know God. Before I can fully love the vocation God is calling me to, I must love God. My vocation is a gift from the one I love, God. Vocation is not to be just a job or lifestyle that I choose or take for myself.

Priesthood is not the only vocation, and is not the only gift from God. Marriage is also a vocation, and is also a gift from God. The religious life (becoming a nun or a sister, or a monk or a brother) is also a vocation, and is also a gift from God.

To my young friends thinking about priesthood or religious vocations, fall more deeply in love with God so that you are able to joyfully receive the gift He gives you. If you have any questions email us at maroniteseminary@comcast.net. ☐

Westchester, New York Visit of Bishop Elias Sleman of Syria



Maronite Bishop Elias Sleman of Latakia, Syria, celebrates the Divine Liturgy at Blessed John Paul II Mission in Westchester, N.Y. (Photo by Donna Maria Mourani).

by Mrs. Janine Wakim

Blesséd John Paul II Maronite Mission in Westchester, N.Y., welcomed His Excellency Bishop Elias Sleman of Latakia, Syria, on October 12, 2013 during his short visit in the United States. After celebrating the Divine Liturgy with them, he joined the congregation and the local community for a luncheon hosted by the ladies' committee of the Church. Bishop Sleman answered questions about the current plight of Christians in Syria caught in the midst of a terrible civil war, and the target of extremist violence.

Bishop Elias Sleman of Latakia has served many communities and parishes in Syria, Lebanon and France since his ordination in 1987. He earned a Master's degree and a Doctorate degree in Canon Law from the Catholic University of Paris, and a second Doctorate in Civil Law in 1997 from the Jean Monnet College University, Paris, France. He has taught Law and Theology at several universities in Lebanon. He has also served on numerous committees that deal with family life, as well as Civil and Canon Law.

Bishop Sleman had traveled far to bring news about the situation of our Christian brothers and sisters in Syria. The engaging and enlightening discourse that followed the luncheon deepened our understanding of the complex and challenging environment for the Christians in Syria. Bishop Sleman inspired the community with his undeterred focus on faith and walking the path of Christ, despite the difficult situation. Our prayers that day extended to all our brothers and sisters in Christ in Syria and throughout the region.

Blesséd John Paul II Mission thanks Bishop Elias Sleman for his visit and hopes he will join them again soon. □

In the Muslim World, The Genius of Christianity

Interview With Aid to the Church in Need

by Joop Koopman

Maronite Bishop Elias Sleman heads the Eparchy of Latakia in the north of Syria, a region that so far has been spared the violence of the country's civil war. This may come as a surprise to many in the West who imagine the entire country to be in the grip of violence. The territory is home to Alawite Muslims, who run the country, and who continue to live peacefully beside a Christian population of some 45,000.

Latakia and neighboring towns are a haven for Syrians fleeing the fighting, Muslims as well as Christians, the latter having fled Damascus, Aleppo and Homs (which is part of the Latakia Eparchy) in great numbers, the majority of them currently stranded in Lebanon.

Bishop Sleman is on a visit to the US to rally support for his local community, not only to help him cope with the needs of the internally displaced - whose status, unlike that of refugees, make them ineligible for UN aid - but to give local Christians a chance to sustain a livelihood through farming. He is aiming to buy livestock and machinery for agricultural production, such as cheese-making.

"If Christians cannot make a living here, they will leave, and most of those who leave - particularly for the West - do not return," the prelate said, adding that "their enduring presence here and throughout the Middle East is vital for the well-being of Muslim society," serving as an indispensable antidote to fanaticism and extremism.

Also high on the Bishop's wish list is the establishment of a residence for young women attending school and college in Latakia, a haven that will ensure parents of the safety of their daughters, whose education is critical to the future of Syria. The bishop spoke with Aid to the Church in Need, a Catholic charity, on Oct. 17, 2013, during a stop in New York.

Q. After two years of fighting and so much bloodshed, what is your vision of a formula to establish peace in Syria? What is your message for the American audience?

Bishop Sleman: Great effort must be made to establish a dialogue between the regime and moderate elements of the opposition. The world's big players must get involved in earnest and put real pressure on the various parties to come to the negotiating table: America and its allies—France, all the Europeans, Israel; and Russia, which must call on Iran and its allies. But there has been no real leadership up to this point. The big challenge is religious fanaticism. This is a very difficult issue, of course.

The problem of so many media is that they don't really grasp the real picture of the situation. The Arab Spring has been

depicted as this clear push for liberty and democracy—but the actual results in Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, for example, are proving otherwise. In many respects, the West is poorly informed, including its Churches, despite good intentions.

Right now, in Syria, the story needs to be told that moderate rebels and Islamists have begun fighting each other. The world's major powers must intervene—now—to stop Syria from tumbling into utter chaos. I am very worried about the situation. Nonetheless, I continue to have hope—call it a foolish hope, if you will. But with God all is possible.

One of the enormous stakes is the ability of Christians to remain in the lands of the birth of their faith.

We need the solidarity of people and governments in the West to ensure the ongoing presence of Christians in Syria and throughout the Middle East. We cannot allow the land to be without Christians, because the Christian presence helps Muslims to be moderate. That is what John Paul II said about Lebanon: "It is more than a country, it is a message [of the coexistence of Muslims and Christians]." The environment of Islam benefits from the engagement of the Christian faith, which ensures, of course, also our own openness with regard to the Muslim world.

That is what I want to tell American Christians and Catholics. To be able to really live out my faith I stress two principal pillars—God, who is absolute in heaven, and man, whose value is absolute on earth. In touching the one, you touch the other. Any kind of religious fanaticism is a breach of this fundamental respect for God and man. That is the message of the Christian witness, its presence in the Muslim world, which Christians in the West make possible through both prayer and material support.

However, I don't believe that we should rely on a constant supply of money—only while the fighting continues. Eventually, local Christians must find ways to become self-sufficient and thus be able to stay. We must find ways to prevent them from becoming refugees themselves! The local Church is seeking to play a crucial role in this regard.

In Syria, and elsewhere in the region, Christians and Muslims have lived side-by-side for centuries.

I cannot and will not speak separately of Christians and Muslims. We have lived together in Syria for 1400 years. Why can we not manage to live together any more? That is the big question. We Christians want to stay and moderate Muslims want the same thing. Why do Jihadists and fundamentalist Muslims come to Syria, and elsewhere, to insist that this coexistence is no longer possible? We should not split up countries and regions along religious lines. This is a great risk: a country with a single religion becomes extremist, provoking war. Religion must not be used as a pretext for violence.

Q. So there is nothing in Islam that is fundamentally incompatible with regard to tolerance of Christians?

Bishop Sleman: Indeed. Again, we have lived together for 1400 years. Now, Saudi Arabia is a different matter.

Countries that are 100 percent Islamic are a different story; there, Muslims have not been forced to find ways to live together with Christians, have not been pushed to arrive at an openness. But in Syria, Lebanon, in Jordan, and so forth, we have lived together for the longest time. In those countries it is hard to imagine Muslims living without Christians or vice versa.

There are occasional reports of Muslims coming to the aid of their Christian neighbors.

It happens the other way around as well. For example, Sunni families fled Aleppo and came to my diocese. Religious sisters came to their aid, and were told by their guests; "We are busy killing you, but you are giving us food to eat. We will not forget you." That was the first time these Muslims had met Christians, and they discovered that these believers were not what they expected. We cannot let such experiences not bear fruit. This is extraordinary. We can live together. When Christians and Muslims live together in a particular region, it is not Christians who close up but Muslims who open up. It is ignorance that makes us afraid of the "other."

Our religion is one of mission—it is not a religion that closes in on itself. We cannot accept the logic of uniformity; we stand for openness; that is the genius of Christianity.

Aid to the Church in Need is an international Catholic charity under the guidance of the Holy See, providing assistance to the suffering and persecuted Church in more than 140 countries (reprinted with permission). □

Summit of The Heads of The Oriental Churches

Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, announced in his address at the opening of the new academic year of the Pontifical Oriental Institute that a summit meeting of the patriarchs and major archbishops of the oriental Churches of Syria, Iraq and the Middle East will be held in the Vatican, in the presence of the Holy Father, on November 21, 2013.

The meeting, which will take place from November 19 - 22, 2013, will take as its general theme the debate "The Eastern Catholic Churches fifty years after Vatican Council II."

The Cardinal declared that "Pope Francis has agreed to repeat the meeting which took place for the first time in 2009," when the heads of the Eastern Churches met with Benedict XVI in "a fruitful morning of reflection," and will now have the opportunity "to speak before the Pope on the situation of eastern Christians."

Pope Francis is expected to attend the summit meeting on November 21. □

Vatican Information Service (VIS) October 29, 2013

Fayetteville, North Carolina World Youth Day 2013



by Ashley Jenkins

We left our small church bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at 6 a.m. (okay, maybe not so bright-eyed) on July 22, 2013. The Saint Michael's MYO [Fayetteville, N.C.], and our fearless leader were ready for anything. Because most of us attended World Youth Day in Madrid in 2011, we imagined ourselves to be well-seasoned world travelers that could handle every obstacle, big and small.

We arrived in Rio de Janeiro over twenty-four hours later with four extra group members from New York. After an entire day of travel, we were ready to see what exciting things Brazil had in store for us. We came with high hopes. In Madrid, we were treated like royalty, housed in beautiful homes, guaranteed safety, provided with luxuries, and fed extremely well (much more of a vacation than a pilgrimage). However, these expectations were crushed almost immediately after leaving the airport, when the bus driver swindled us out of a few Brazilian Reals. As we rode the bus into Rio, our hopes were further destroyed as we saw the sheer poverty that surrounded the city in the form of mountaintop shanty towns and walls coated in spray paint. When we approached our new homes, we were literally terrified, as the neighborhood we stayed in was full of stray

animals, garbage in the streets, and people who didn't speak English. We ate at McDonald's for dinner that evening, and before I was even asleep that night, I was ready to go home (especially after I realized that I was subject to freezing showers for the next ten days). We were also quick to realize that it would be cold, and extremely rainy the entire time we were there.

Now, I know what you may be thinking-"Wow Ashley, how could you ever survive such harsh conditions? You might actually be Wonder Woman." Truly, the only response I can give to such a realistic inquiry is that it happened by the grace of God. I speak for all twelve members of our group when I say that World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was literally one of the best and most memorable experiences we will ever have, and the rewards completely outweighed the petty struggles. Each of our days began with a small breakfast prepared by our host parish (basically, some of the nicest and most welcoming people I've ever met). We had three days of catechesis given by distinguished church leaders, including Cardinal Dolan of New York, Cardinal Napier of South Africa, and many Australian bishops. We had the opportunity to hear great vocations testimonies given by members of the Church from all walks of life. We also made a ton of new friends from all over the world, to include Paraguay, Japan, and, of course, Brazil.

One of the most amazing parts of the World Youth Day is getting to see the Pope. We had the opportunity to see Pope Francis in person four times over the course of our trip, which is something that made me so proud to be a member of this Church. Pope Francis is so humble, and took every opportunity to shake people's hands, kiss babies, bless the ill, and meet his fellow Catholics. He also inspires such energy and excitement among the youth, made evident by the chants of praise, which could be heard in any large group setting. After yelling out "VIVA EL PAPA!" and "ESTA ES EL JUVENTUDE DEL PAPA!" ("This is the youth of the Pope!") with complete strangers for ten days straight, you begin to realize that even if you don't speak the same language or come from the same country, you are united under a severe love for our new Pope, our fellow Catholics, and most importantly our faith.

God certainly put our faith to the test on that trip, made most evident by our experiences on Copacabana Beach. Each World Youth Day, the Pope celebrates a final Mass to close out the event, and we thought it would be a great idea to camp out the night before everyone was supposed to get there in order to get as close as possible. While we did get really close (for a little while), we did not know that it would pour freezing, cold rain all night long. As I shed a few tears while I spent a sleepless night in a puddle on the beach, I certainly questioned whether I would stay alive long enough to be able to write this article. Luckily I did (praise be to God), the sky cleared around ten the next morning, and the temperature warmed up for the first time during the trip. Soon, the beach was full of millions of other people and we were packed in like sardines. There wasn't enough food to feed the millions of people there, so we really didn't eat much for the next twenty-four hours. Additionally, the event location changed last minute, so there were no bathrooms available within walking distance, which really didn't matter much because it

took hours to navigate in and out of the campsite. Camping on the Copacabana may have been the biggest blessing our group received on this trip. While it was a struggle, we powered through together. Nothing bonds people quite like sharing body heat to prevent hypothermia and battling starvation together. We built lasting friendships and unforgettable memories on that beach, for which I know we will be forever grateful.

When we returned to our homes after our beach adventure, we took showers and attended a big dinner prepared for many of the World Youth Day attendees by our host parish. The food was great, and the company was even better. The next day was our last day in Brazil, and was the only one without a schedule to follow. We spent it relaxing on the beach (I know - who would possibly want to spend time on the beach ever again?) and swimming in the ocean. We also hiked to the top of a mountain through the jungle, where we got to feed wild monkeys and see a gorgeous view of Rio from above. We shared our last meal together in Brazil that night, and spent our last few hours of freedom exploring the last few bits of the city.

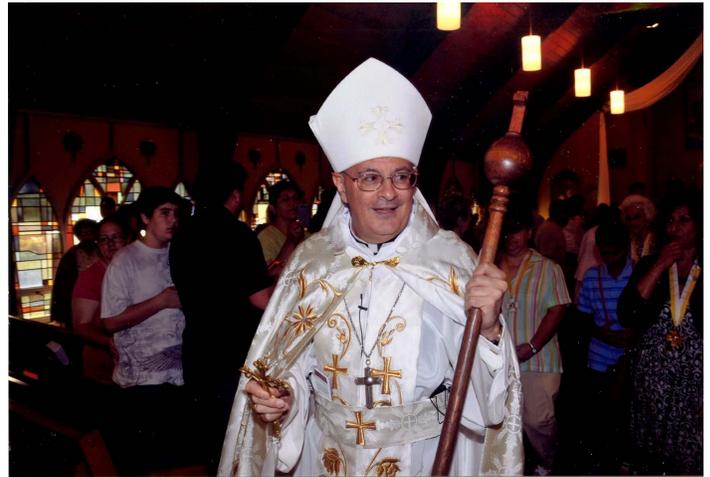
The next day it was time to go, but no one was ready to leave Rio behind. We were skeptical at first, but over our time there it truly became like home. Sure, we were ready for hot showers, but we were going to miss our new friends and favorite foods. We would miss our homes and each other. That was our last trip as a complete group before we would part ways for college or work.

Everyone has their own World Youth Day experience, but mine was perfect. I learned so much about people that I had known my entire life, and built new friendships that I will keep for a lifetime. I was pushed to my limits (emotionally, physically, and faithfully), but have overcome more than I could have imagined. It was one of the greatest, most enlightening blessings that I have ever received, and I highly recommend World Youth Day 2016 to anyone in need of a renewal of faith. □

Uniontown, Pennsylvania *Bishop's Pastoral Visit*

by Dr. Mabel George Howard

The weekend of August 17 - 19, 2013, marked the 19th annual summer festival at St. George Church in Uniontown, Pennsylvania. We were honored with a pastoral visit from the most Reverend Bishop Gregory Mansour. Bishop Gregory was the former pastor of St. George Church from 1983 to 1994. To begin his weekend stay, Bishop Gregory met with various church organizations throughout the day to discuss their achievements and goals. Accompanied by Fr. Nadim Helou, Pastor of St. George, Bishop Gregory celebrated the Saturday evening liturgy. Following the liturgy, a dinner reception was held in the Social Hall welcoming Bishop Gregory back to his "hometown Parish." Also, Bishop Gregory, Fr. Nadim and the congregation recognized Tom R. "Duke" George for his dedication to St. George Church. Duke, a lifelong parishioner of St. George, was honored for twenty years of service as the Subdeacon at St. George. During his tenure as



Bishop Gregory Mansour blesses the people as he enters St. George Church.

subdeacon, Duke has faithfully served the clergy and congregation for numerous religious events and special church observances. Spanning two decades, he has had the privilege of assisting several pastors and many visiting religious leaders. As a tribute to Duke's service, he was presented with memorable gifts of appreciation by several church organizations. When asked how he feels about his role as subdeacon, Duke responded, "serving our Maronite community has been a gratifying and rewarding experience."

On Sunday, parishioners and community members gathered at the festival to celebrate Uniontown's Middle Eastern heritage and enjoy a variety of ethnic foods, games, amusements, and entertainment. The St. George Ladies Guild prepared delicious traditional delicacies including grape leaves, *kibbee*, *laban*, *tabouli*, *lubia*, *hummus*, lamb shish kabob, Lebanese bread, *baklava*, and American foods. The festival featured a bake sale, cash prizes, basket raffles, religious gift purchases, church tours, and archives display, and a kid's carnival. The Ladies Guild, Maronite Men's Group, Parish Council, Altar Rosary Society, and the MYO worked cooperatively to make this event a huge success. Father Nadim commented, "This collaborative effort reaffirms our commitment to God and to the continual growth of our parish community. I am so pleased with the congregational activities and efforts; however, the main attraction at the festival was definitely the presence of Bishop Gregory. The parishioners love him, and they were extremely excited to have Bishop Gregory "home" again at St. George. "I am very happy to see so many familiar faces and to share wonderful memories of my time in Uniontown," said Bishop Gregory. His warm eye contact, calm and soothing voice, attentiveness, and caring disposition demonstrated his love for St. George. Finally, our flourishing St. George congregation continues to sponsor projects that interest, attract, and involve all groups. Our purpose is to develop and strengthen spiritual and social bonds among family, friends, and parishioners for the common good of our church and Lebanese ancestry. □

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania *Annual Picnic*

by Amal Kouyoumdji

On August 25, 2013, the Community of St. Maron in Philadelphia, Penn., came together for its second annual Church picnic that was held at Washington Park, in Sewell, N.J. As my family and I entered the park, organizers who had been there since the early morning hours swiftly unburdened our arms of the things we carried and greeted us warmly. I took a minute to observe a very smooth preparation process where everyone tended to a job, calmly, with a smile, as if someone had spent hours distributing the tasks at hand, and planning the whole operation. "The Ladies of the Guild outdid themselves once again," I thought to myself, as I watched the tables quickly fill up with an abundance of dishes and treats to be shared by all. The parishioners of St. Maron along with their Pastor, Father Vincent Farhat, were still mourning the loss of their beloved fellow parishioner Isabel Iocco, at the age of 95, when they learned of the untimely passing of Father Peter Boulos, Pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Maronite Mission in Tampa, Fla. These difficult events were clearly on Father Vincent's mind when he prepared his homily. The Gospel Reading (Luke 7:36-50) highlighted the surprise of Simon the Pharisee when Jesus embraced the "woman who was a sinner," and who came to greet Him with tears, kisses, and ointment, as she laid her sins at His feet. Father Vincent spoke of our obligation to constantly make the most of the gifts that God has blessed us with in order to be ready to meet our Creator when we are called to Him, just as the woman was. Life is precious, he explained, and we should strive to make every day count in our spiritual journey. In that regard, Father Peter and Isabel were shining examples in living each day to the fullest, and accomplishing God's work with much love and kindness, through their words and deeds.

With that in mind, the parishioners of St. Maron broke bread and enjoyed each other's company. Lunch was followed by a spirited game of volleyball, and a challenging backgammon competition. Then it was time for several rounds of Turkish coffee along with conversation that went on for a long time in an attempt to ignore the sun's hints of retiring after being a welcome guest at the picnic for the entire day.

A new tradition was now set for our parish. By this time next year, our children will be older, our friendships stronger, and we pray that we would all be a step closer to fully living as Children of God. □

Providence, Rhode Island *Fashion Show*

by Joseph P. Checrallah, Jr.

The 2013 St. George Maronite Church Fall Family Fashion Show was held at the West Valley Inn, in Warwick, Rhode Island, on September 29, 2013. The show was presented by the Holy Rosary Sodality of St.



George Maronite Catholic Church, of Cranston, Rhode Island. Beautiful fall fashions were provided by local clothing vendors and presented by parishioners young and young at heart.

St. George's Farid Zaarour, standing in for Fr. Edward T. Nedder, who had previously committed to a Baptism and a Wedding, began with the Invocation. (Fr. Ed made a surprise visit between his two events.) He thanked the organizers of the event, the attendees, and everyone who had generously donated the time, effort, resources, and gifts to bring this annual family evening together.

A family style chicken dinner was served, followed by the festivities of the evening. Parishioners, young and just a little bit older, had their makeup and hair done by Becky Brosco Hair Salon of Warwick, R.I., who generously donated their time, effort, and children's clothing. The women looked beautiful, the men handsome, and all of the children radiated as they paraded down the runway showing off dozens of beautiful Fall and Halloween outfits.

The evening concluded with two sweepstakes Raffle Drawings. An adult raffle for money prizes, gift baskets, a John Mederios jewelry and gift set, and many certificates from local restaurants, food and movie chains, followed by a children's raffle for toys and educational gifts.

Over 220 people attended this annual family event. It was a wonderful success made possible by the many parishioners and friends who always work together to support Fr. Edward Nedder and St. George in this close Lebanese community. □

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania *Lebanon Independence Day*

In honor of Lebanon Independence Day, St. Maron Church in Philadelphia, Penn., presents the Lebanese singer Tony Kiwan on November 23, 2013. For further information, please call the Church office at 215 - 389 - 2000. To make reservations, please call 215 - 334 - 1884. □

Washington, D.C. *Father Geoffrey's Remarks at Chorbishop Beggiani's Tribute*

O Lord, You search me and You know me. You know my resting and my rising; You discern my thoughts from afar. You know all my ways through and through (Psalm 139).

In 1994, when I was ordained a priest at Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Sydney Australia, I would never had imagined that I would some twenty years later become the third Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary in Washington D.C. How mysterious are the ways of God!



Yet when I reflected over these years, I realized that God had been planning me for this stage in my life, even without me realizing it. In 1994, Fr. Sam Najjar and Msgr. Don Sawyer were at my priestly ordination in Sydney. I met with Fr. Anthony Salim and the late Msgr. Ronald Bechara in 1995 in Lebanon. I was invited by Mr. Ed Shiner, on behalf of the USA Music Commission, to give a music workshop at the 1997 NAM convention in Detroit. On my way to the convention, I met Msgr. Gregory Mansour in Los Angeles. He was at that time the Vicar General for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. At this convention, I also met Chorbishop Michael Thomas for the first time and would never have imagined that we would work together on the new English translation of the Maronite Mass.

Although I had read his books, I finally met Chorbishop Seely Beggiani in Lebanon in 2003 - 2004 during the Maronite Synod. In 2004, I attended the Episcopal ordination of Bishop Gregory Mansour in *Harissa*, Lebanon, and concelebrated his first Mass as Bishop with the other American Maronite priests present. When Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Sfeir came to Washington, D.C., in 2005, I was sitting at the formal reception next to Fr. Mark Morozowich, who is currently the Dean for Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America. In 2008, I was appointed Director of the Inter-Eparchial Music Commission and Director of Music for the Eparchy of Saint Maron, and I lived with Msgr. James Root at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral Parish in Brooklyn, N.Y. In 2011, I attended the opening of the Maronite altar at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception with my parents, as if they gave me their blessing to be in D.C. one day. In 2013, Bishop Gregory asked me to be the Rector of the Seminary, and here I am. How mysterious are the ways of God!

To Chorbishop Seely Beggiani, it must be difficult, after being the Rector of this wonderful seminary for almost fifty years, to retire and see someone else take over, and someone from Australia! However, tonight is not a farewell because we will still see you at the seminary as you continue to teach Maronite studies to the seminarians. I take this opportunity to thank you, Msgr. Seely, for your graciousness, advice, and integrity. You are truly a priestly example for all of us. Tonight is a tribute to you, because very few priests can call bishops, chorbishops, monsignors, priests and deacons - "seminarians." □

Sacramento, California *Annual Festival*



by Carolyn Aboubechara

Our Lady of the Rosary Mission in Sacramento, Calif., held its Second Annual American Lebanese and Middle Eastern Food and Music Festival on September 28 - 29, 2013. For being a relatively new mission and having a small Maronite community in Sacramento, it was a huge success. Over 1,600 people attended, and around a hundred volunteers dedicated their time to make it a memorable event. This two-day event is the Mission's biggest fundraiser of the year and has helped tremendously in familiarizing the local community with the Church, food, and traditions.

Fr. Nabil Mouannes, Pastor, held a Festival Opening Liturgy at Our Lady of the Rosary Church the morning of Saturday, Sept 28, 2013. Monsignor James Murphy (Vicar General of the Roman Catholic Church), Fr. Fady El Chidiac (a Jesuit Maronite Priest), and Fr. Francis Murin (Pastor of St. Philip the Apostle Byzantine Catholic Church) concelebrated.

The San Diego "Zafet Lebne Dabke Group" and the Mission's "El Wadi Dabke Group" provided the entertainment. The festival also included three Arabic singers, an international DJ, Lebanese folklore songs, and an Egyptian wedding skit. The children's game section was popular as well.

Attendees came from San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Stockton, Modesto and San Jose, Calif., and from out of the state as well.

The Third Annual American Lebanese and Middle Eastern Food and Music Festival is scheduled for September 13 - 14, 2014, and we look forward to continue bringing all communities and religions together to enjoy our food, culture, and traditions! Come join us!

We also bid farewell to Fr. Nabil Mouannes and wish him good luck in his new assignment in Bordeaux, France. He has been a gift from God to us and has been instrumental in the formation of our Mission in Sacramento. His dedication, love, and guidance helped us to become more deeply rooted in spirituality and to grow as a community. □

Flint, Michigan Parish and Community Activities



A group of forty one parishioners of Our Lady of Lebanon in Flint, Mich., head to Michigan Adventure Amusement and Water Park.

by Cindy Shaheen

2013 has been a fruitful and busy year for the parishioners of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church in Flint, Michigan. In March the Ladies Altar Society held its annual Lenten Bake Sale fundraiser. Ladies from the parish donated homemade Arabic and American baked goods for a sale open to the public during the week and then held exclusively for the Parish on Palm Sunday weekend.

The month of May began with a Crowning ceremony of the Blessed Mother statue in the church courtyard followed by a joyous day of celebration as Carson Haddad, Alex Jabeto, Elias McLeod, Ella Whitson and Dina Younes received their First Holy Communion.

The Ladies Altar Society's biggest public fundraiser of the year was also held in the month of May. This year's Salad Supper Bingo event saw over 230 avid bingo players in our church hall for an evening of prizes and great salads prepared by the women of the parish. This event has been a time honored tradition for the Ladies Altar Society for over thirty years. In preparation for the 2014 event, Subdeacon Joe Pavlovich and Altar Society President Cindy Shaheen will be visiting local senior living facilities to invite them to join in the fun, providing the elderly of the Flint community with something to look forward to.

Activities in May came to a close with a huge multi-family rummage sale coordinated by Sawson Kalo to raise money for a Shrine of the Blessed Mother.

OLOL's Mid East Festival was "the place to be" in the month of July. Thousands of people from all over the state of Michigan, as well as from Ohio, came to the festival the weekend of July 12 -14. Over 250 parish members of all ages and a group of volunteers from the University of Michigan-Flint came together as a single community to work at the largest public event held at the parish each year. Ahlam Solomon coordinated the efforts.

Nicholas Zerka coordinated the Mid Eastern entertainment which included Arabic musicians, singers, and *Dabke* Troops. A fireworks display was held on Saturday night. Erik Lindhurst designed an educational area to share the beauty of the liturgy as well as the history of the Maronite faith and culture.

Gloria Lahoud coordinated the children activities. Blessed with perfect weather and the wonderful leadership of Jason Klansack and Danny Zerka, the 2013 event was a great success.

The month of August brought warmer temperatures so a group of forty one adults and children from the Parish packed up their swimsuits and sunscreen and headed to Michigan Adventure Amusement and Water Park for a day of fun!

The month of October holds a Mid East Luncheon, a Harvest Brunch for the Parish, as old cell phone donation drive for our military troops and local women's shelter, and a Halloween Hayride for children in the religious education program.

A Family *Sahra* is planned for November and the year will come to a close with a holiday food drive for the needy and Breakfast with Santa.

OLOL also wants to thank His Excellency Bishop Robert J. Shaheen for his dedication, spiritual guidance and leadership provided to the Parish. We were blessed with many visits from Bishop Shaheen over the years and pray that the Lord blesses him with peace and joy in his retirement. As Bishop Shaheen leaves us, we welcome His Excellency Bishop Elias Zaidan into our hearts and our Parish home. □

Easton, Pennsylvania Vacation Bible School

Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Easton, Penn., held its Annual Vacation Bible School (VBS) from July 8 - 12, 2013. The theme for VBS was "Everywhere Fun Fair: Where God's World Comes Together." The theme encouraged children to be friendly, bold, forgiving, and welcoming to their neighbors, both near and far, and it focused on five different countries: Japan, United Kingdom, Australia, Zimbabwe, and Mexico. The program ran from 9:00 am until noon and was open to children ages three to twelve. Each day consisted of opening prayer and song, lesson time, crafts, snacks, games, and a closing reflection and song. On the final day of VBS, students performed songs for their families and had a pot luck lunch with a carnival theme. Each student was given a certificate of completion, a goody bag, and a CD containing songs from this year's program.

VBS was a huge success. The number of volunteers was more than any other year! Adult and teen helpers did an exceptional job teaching, entertaining, and motivating the parish children. Our Lady of Lebanon is grateful for their commitment to serving the Lord and His community. □

Food For Thought

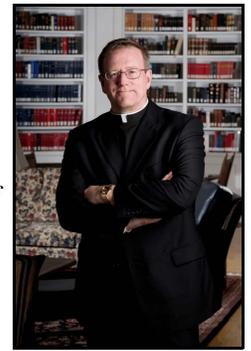
In Christ, man who made himself God encounters God who made himself man. Unrivaled self-importance and pride encounters unrivaled self-emptying and humility."

Christopher West

Who God Is And Who God Is Not

by Very Reverend Robert Barron

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 the recently released documentary, "Catholicism: The New Evangelization." Learn more at www.WordonFire.org.



The most signal contribution of David Bentley Hart's "The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, and Bliss" is to clarify that serious theists and atheists, though they debate frequently concerning the reality of God, are hardly ever using the word "God" in the same way. This fundamental equivocation contributes massively, in fact, to the pointlessness and meanness of most of these discussions. It is not so much that Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins disagree with Thomas Aquinas on the existence of God; it is that neither Hitchens nor Dawkins has any real grasp of what Aquinas even means when he speaks of God.

To a person, the new atheists hold that God is some being in the world, the maximum instance, if you want, of the category of "being." But this is precisely what Aquinas and serious thinkers in all of the great theistic traditions hold that God is not. Thomas explicitly states that God is not in any genus, including that most generic genus of all, namely being. He is not one thing or individual - however supreme - among many. Rather, God is, in Aquinas's pithy Latin phrase, *esse ipsum subsistens*, the sheer act of being itself. It might be helpful here to distinguish God from the gods. For the ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, the gods were exalted, immortal, and especially powerful versions of ordinary human beings. They were, if you will, quantitatively but not qualitatively different from regular people. They were impressive denizens of the natural world, but they were not, strictly speaking, supernatural. But God is not a supreme item within the universe or alongside of it; rather, God is the sheer ocean of being from whose fullness the universe in its entirety exists.

It is absolutely right to say that the advance of the modern physical sciences has eliminated the gods. Having explored the depths of the oceans and the tops of the mountains and even the skies that surround the planet, we have not encountered any of these supreme beings. Furthermore, the myriad natural causes, uncovered by physics, chemistry, biology, etc. are more than sufficient to explain any of the phenomena within the natural realm. But the physical sciences, no matter how advanced they might become, can never eliminate God, for God is not a being within the natural order. Instead, he is the reason why there is that nexus of conditioned causes that we call nature—at all. The Russian cosmonaut from the 1950's who, having pierced the heavens, confidently asserted, "I have found no God," was speaking so much nonsense, though he would have been right had he changed the "G" from large case to small. This is why the new atheists and their army of disciples are committing a category mistake when they confidently assert that scientific advances cause religion to retreat onto ever-shrinking intellectual turf or when they stridently challenge religious

people to produce "evidence" for God.

No amount of scientific progress can even in principle pose a threat to authentic religion, and no amount of experimental evidence can tell for or against the true God.

So how do we get at the true God? Hart clarifies that real religion begins with a particular type of wonder, namely, the puzzle that things should be at all. We are surrounded on all sides by things that exist but that don't have to exist. The computer on which I am typing these words indeed exists, but its existence is not self-explanatory, for it depends on a whole range of causes, both extrinsic and intrinsic. It exists only because an army of manufacturers, designers, technicians, etc. put it together and only because its molecular, atomic and sub-atomic structure sustains it. Furthermore, it is situated in an environment that conditions it in numberless ways. The technical philosophical term for this caused and conditioned existence is "contingency." Now a moment's meditation reveals that all of the conditioning elements that I mentioned are themselves, in similar ways, contingent. They don't explain their existence any more than the computer does. Therefore, unless we permanently postpone the explanation, we have to come, by logical deduction, to some reality which is not contingent and whose very nature is to exist. This power of Being itself, which explains and determines all the contingent things or our ordinary experience, is what serious theists of all of the great religious traditions mean by the word "God." I fully realize, of course, that the vast majority of religious believers wouldn't say that their faith in God is a function of this sort of philosophical demonstration. Nevertheless, they are intuiting what the argument makes explicit.

I often tease the critics of religion who take pride in the rigor of their rationalism. I tell them that, though they are willing to ask and answer all sorts of questions about reality, they become radically uncurious, irrational even, just when the most interesting question of all is posed: why is there something rather than nothing? Why should the universe exist at all? David Bentley Hart's book helps us to see that the question of God—the true God—remains the most beguiling of all. □



Fort Lauderdale, Florida *Benefit Dinner*



Bishop Mansour (left) and Chorbishop Michael Thomas celebrated the Divine Liturgy at Heart of Jesus Church.

The parishioners of Heart of Jesus Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, were honored and grateful when Bishop Gregory made a pastoral visit the weekend of October 12 - 13, 2013. On Saturday evening, Bishop Gregory was the honored guest speaker at the inaugural Heart of Jesus benefit dinner. This dinner served as a kick-off to start a fund for a Parish Rectory. Ms. Aleen Sirgany, the coordinator of the event, had arranged a delicious catered dinner and transformed the parish hall into a truly elegant setting. Bishop Gregory met and spoke to the large crowd about the warmth and deep spirituality of the community. Sunday morning, Bishop Gregory and Chorbishop Michael Thomas, the Pastor, celebrated Mass, and the Bishop in his homily encouraged the people to heed the words of Pope Francis when he speaks of the importance of being merciful.

Bishop Gregory greeted everyone after the Divine Liturgy in the parish hall where light refreshments were served. □

Miami, Florida, *Church Anniversary*



by Dr. Carlos C. Gomez

The Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, on September 8th and also not coincidentally the Feast of Our Lady of Charity, has come to have great significance in the Miami Maronite community. The faithful of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church, Miami, Fla., gathered to celebrate the Divine Liturgy, presided by Fr. Elie Saade, in thanksgiving for God's favor upon the community. Forty years earlier, to the day, Archbishop Francis Zayek personally established the parish in Miami and began a permanent presence of the Maronite Church in South Florida. Parishioners who forty years ago celebrated the first Liturgy brought up the offertory. The families of the first funeral were also present as the parish prayed for all those who have now left us to rest in God's Mercy. After Liturgy a meal was served at the Church Hall. □