



The Maronite Voice

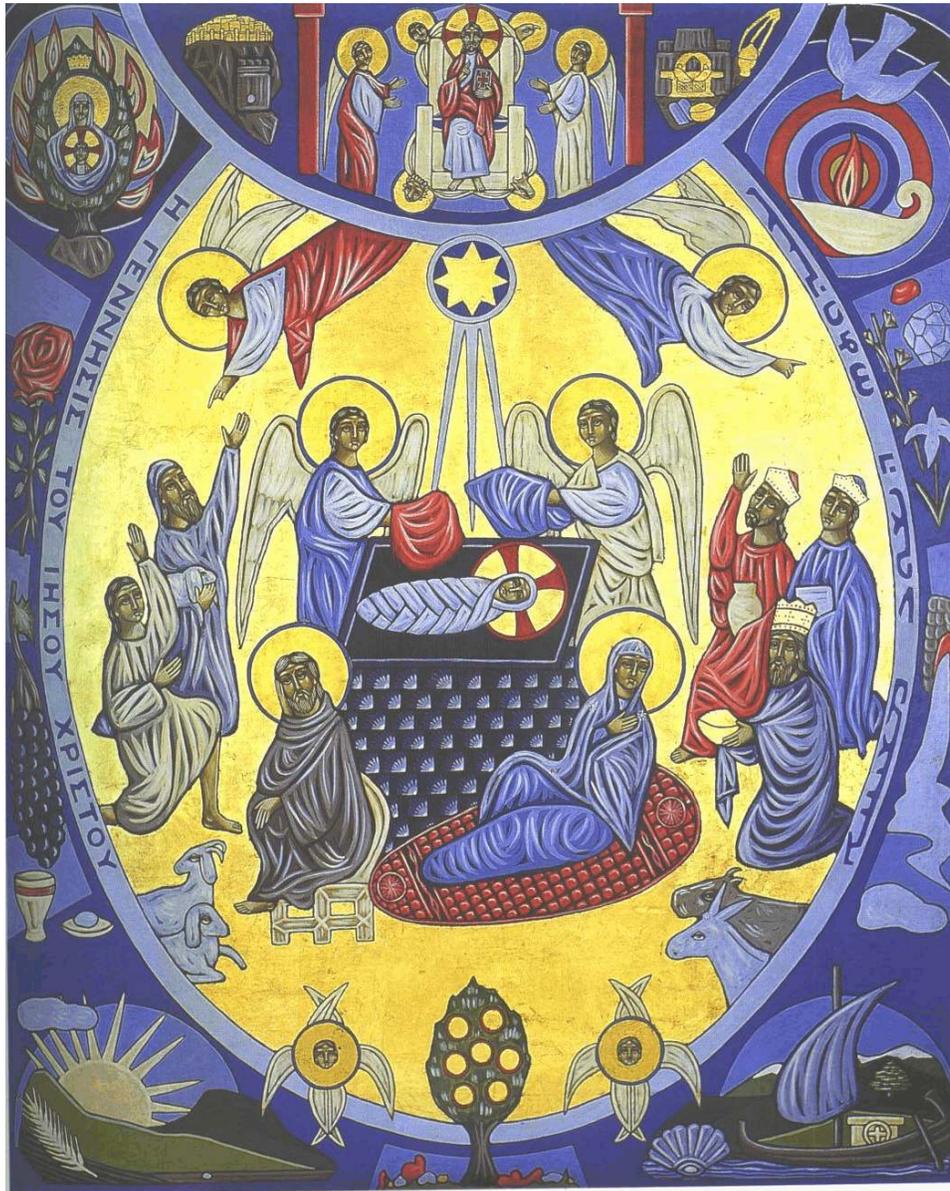
A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA



Volume VIII

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The Maronite Voice would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to Their Excellencies Bishop Robert Shaheen, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, and Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, as well as to its readers and all Maronite faithful for their support throughout the year. We pray that 2012 will be a year filled with God's Peace and Blessings to all.

Schedule of Bishop Robert Shaheen

January 14 - 15, 2012

Saint Ephrem Parish, San Diego, Calif.

January 23 - 27, 2012

Annual Clergy Retreat, California

February 10 - 12, 2012

100th Year Anniversary of St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

February 17 - 20, 2012

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

February 25, 2012

Men's Society Dinner, The Cedars Hall, Saint Louis, Mo. □

Houston, Texas Construction Update

The building of a multi-purpose "storage" facility on the parish property of Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Houston, Texas, was made a priority by Fr. Milad Yaghi, and the project was initiated by the building committee in late summer.

The engineering and architectural design of the structure, foundation, interior and exterior, as well as any necessary site improvements to accommodate the new building are now substantially complete. Permitting from the regulatory agencies is underway, and as soon as approvals are secured, construction activity can begin. The building steel structure has already been purchased and delivered to the site. It is only awaiting governmental approvals to allow the start of construction.

Once this building is complete and the existing building on the Dorrance property is emptied, the latter can be removed to make room for the parking lot construction, which will provide much-needed parking relief during the Parish's busy functions. Construction on both projects should be completed by Fall of 2012. □

Legacy Society of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

Bishop Robert Shaheen, D.D., Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, announced the creation of a Legacy Society to recognize individuals who name the Eparchy or a parish within the Eparchy as a beneficiary in a will or estate plan.

"We want to encourage the faithful to remember their parish and Eparchy when writing their will or deciding on the disposition of their estate," stated Bishop Shaheen. "Most Roman Catholic dioceses in America have been promoting this for years with great success. We will now begin to do this."

In addition to Catholic dioceses, many hospitals, colleges, foundations, and other non-profit organizations in America routinely solicit and receive estate gifts.

Benefits of membership in the Legacy Society of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon will include an annual meeting with the Bishop, being listed as a member of the Legacy Society in publications (unless an anonymous option is chosen), being remembered in a monthly Mass by the Bishop, and receiving informational mailings about estate planning from the Eparchy's new Stewardship Office. Additional benefits may be added at the discretion of the Bishop. Membership in the Society can also be anonymous, if a member wishes.

Written notice of a bequest being made to the Eparchy or a parish must be given to the Eparchy's Stewardship Office. For more information, people are encouraged to contact the Eparchy's Stewardship Director, John F. Kurey, Esq., MBA, at (314) 231-1021 or at maroniteswest@yahoo.com. □

The Maronite Voice

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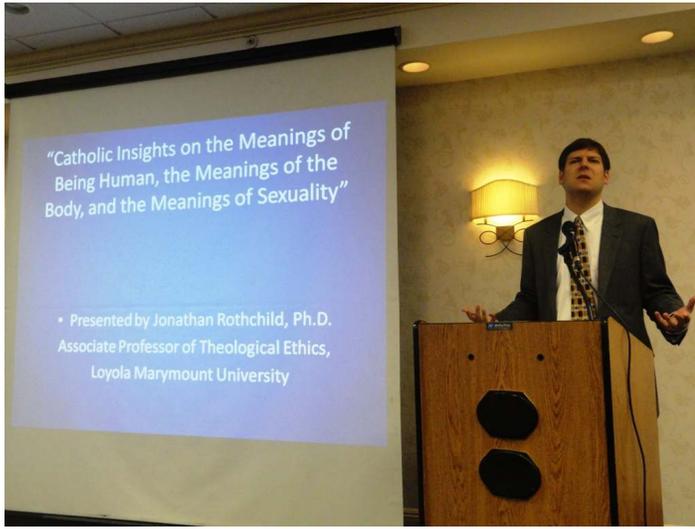
St. George Maronite Church

San Antonio, Texas

July 2 - 8, 2012

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

Los Angeles, California Maronite Young Adults Annual Workshop



The third annual Maronite Young Adult (MYA) Workshop was held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Beverly Hills, California, from October 28 - 30, 2011. The event entitled "A Faith Guided Young Adult Life" drew 115 participants for a long weekend of spirituality, fellowship and fun. Participants included seven priests and four national MYA Board members and represented over thirty parishes from both eparchies.

The workshop began Friday afternoon with an opening prayer and an icebreaker led by the Director of Young Adults for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, Fr. Elias Sleiman from Los Angeles. A Lebanese dinner was held at the hotel followed by a trip to Hollywood, where young adults toured the famous Hollywood Walk of Fame and enjoyed the area's numerous attractions.

Saturday marked an all-day workshop agenda with two presentations and discussions led by Dr. Jonathan Rothchild from the Department of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University. The morning presentation about Catholic insights on the meanings of sexuality, the human body, and being human was followed by a Divine Liturgy and lunch. The afternoon presentation focused on the context, condition, and communication of sexuality along with balancing faith and tradition in a morally complex modern world. A renewal and reconciliation service later in the evening ended the workshop's schedule for the day. The young adults then had a chance to explore Santa Monica at night where some showed off their Halloween costumes and participated in local festivities.

The workshop concluded Sunday with a breakfast followed by a Divine Liturgy at Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral in Los Angeles.

This year's theme focused on morality and the challenges of living a daily life in light of the Catholic faith and traditions. It gave young adults the opportunity to express their thoughts, speak about their experiences and seek enlightenment in their faith.

The event was a great success thanks to the efforts put forth by the Directors of Young Adults from both eparchies, Father Elie Mikhael for the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and Father Elias Sleiman for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, along with the National MYA Board and the local workshop committee. Although neither bishop could attend the workshop, both were active in the planning process and communicated with the workshop participants via speaker phone on Saturday.

The workshop continues to grow and improve every year, and the City of Angels attracted a record number of participants this year. Thank you to everyone involved and to all MYA members who participated from across the country. Until we meet again next year! ☐

Brooklyn, New York Christmas Cheer



by Salma T. Vahdat

The MYO of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y., spread cheer to the residents of the Cobble Hill Health Center on Sunday, December 11, 2011. Fifteen members of the MYO, accompanied by their moderator, Therese Abi Habib, and chaperones, Anthony Hoyawek and Sarya Abi Habib, visited the nursing home and rehabilitation facility, where an air of anticipation awaited them.

In the spirit of Christmas, they gathered small gifts and parcels of cookies for distribution to the residents. They were very well received and a lovely lady even remarked that she had had her hair and nails done for the occasion. Another smilingly told the group that they had made her day. The sight of the youth prompted one gentleman to reminisce about his nieces and nephews.

The youth visited all three floors of the facility, caroling along the way, a member playing saxophone, and distributing their goodies. It was a wonderful day for the disabled to be remembered and a fulfilling day for our Maronite youth to experience the joy they gave to many who are isolated. They plan to return on a monthly basis. ☐

Detroit, Michigan 100 Years of Maronite Heritage Celebrated



On the weekend of September 30 - October 2, 2011, the Maronite Community of Metropolitan Detroit, Michigan, gathered at St. Maron Maronite Church to celebrate over one hundred years of Maronite Heritage in Detroit. Several events, attended by 1200 people, were held during the weekend to honor and celebrate the efforts of the families who sacrificed to come to Detroit and establish the Maronite Community there.

The celebration began on Friday night with the Knights of Columbus Annual Clergy Appreciation Night. This event is held every year to acknowledge clergy for their service to the community. The Pastor of St. Maron Church, Msgr. Louis Baz, the Pastor of St. Sharbel Church, Msgr. Jibran BouMerhi, and the Administrator of the Mission of St. Rafka, Fr. Gaby Hoyek, attended with several other clergy from the area. This event also serves as a fundraiser for the Maronite Seminarians in Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary in Washington, D.C. K of C Grand Knight, Edward O'Brien, spoke of the arrival of the first Maronite priest in Detroit and how the people of Detroit banded together to build their own Church, St. Maron. The Grand Knight closed by asking for support of the seminarians and all young men who aspire to the priesthood to assure Maronite priests for the next hundred years.

The events continued on Saturday with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy concelebrated by Msgr. Baz and other Detroit area priests. In the Church, during this Liturgy and for the entire weekend, Banners of various clubs from the Detroit Church organizations were displayed all weekend in the church, with the oldest preserved banner dating from 1916. The Liturgy was followed by a grand banquet in the newly renovated St. Maron Banquet Center. Highlights of the evening included an Arabic Band and singer, a DJ, and a Silent Auction. Msgr. Baz spoke of the Maronite Church in Detroit and acknowledged the work of the 100 Year Committee. He presented a bouquet of roses to the General Chairwoman, Ms. Theresa Ghafari.

The next day, following the morning Liturgy, a family fun day celebration was held. For the entire afternoon and

into the early evening the community gathered to enjoy music and dancing, games, clowns, and many types of food donated by the various Lebanese restaurants and stores in the area. During the afternoon the crowd was treated to a fine performance of the St. Sharbel *Dabke* Troupe. This Troupe is comprised of three groups, children through teens, all under the direction of Ms. Antoinette Habbouche. The annual fall raffle drawing for St. Maron was the concluding event of the long and joyous celebration. □

Springfield, Massachusetts Pasta Dinner for Tornado Victims



Just when battered Western Massachusetts was finally catching her breath from all the violent weather events of the year, another devastating storm struck at the end of October, knocking out power for a week in some places. Ironically, the destructive effects of this storm made it necessary to postpone the free pasta supper, scheduled for the tornado survivors of the previous storm. Two thousand meatballs and sixty pounds of pasta later, the free pasta supper, which was also open to the public, was finally held on November 7, 2011, at St. Anthony's Maronite Church in Springfield, Mass. Sponsored by the Women's Guild, over 250 hot meals were served that rainy night to a grateful and resilient community.

At the same event, a check for \$7,100 was presented to Catholic Charities by St. Anthony's Church to benefit the local community of East Forest Park. This money was raised by a local Pub and was distributed to three churches, St. Anthony being one of them. The same night, the Hannoush family shared in the generosity and donated an additional \$3,000 to Catholic Charities. In an effort to help those devastated by the tornados, the parishioners of St. Anthony Church also collected over 200 blankets, which were given to Catholic Charities to be dispersed to those in need. St. Anthony Church is committed to practicing the Christian values of helping others. □



Pray for Vocations



From left: Sr. Terese, Bishop Mansour and Sr. Marla Marie.

As Maronite Servants of Christ the Light, we offer daily a special prayer for vocations asking for an increase to our Maronite Servants of Christ the Light. We also pray for our bishops, priests, deacons, subdeacons and seminarians. Every day we select one of our clergy and dedicate a day of prayer and sacrifice for his vocation.

Please consider being a Vocations Prayer Angel and join us in this daily intention. Also, a group of families at Our Lady of Lebanon parish in Washington, D.C., has responded to the Holy Fathers' request to be "spiritual mothers" to priests by committing to pray for a specific priest on a daily basis. If you would like more information on this program, please contact Sister Marla at sister@maroniteservants.org or via telephone at (508) 996-1753. □

Washington, D.C. Eastern Catholic Vocations Fair

On Sunday, January 22, 2012, the Eastern Catholic Bishops of the United States of America (USCCB Region XV) is pleased to host the first ever Eastern Catholic Vocations Fair at the Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine of the Holy Family in Washington, D.C., from 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. The Eastern Catholic Bishops of the United States invite all students in the area as well as interested people to come on by and learn about the importance of Christ's call in their lives to the priesthood, diaconate, and religious life. This is also a great chance to learn about the various Eastern Catholic Churches that are here in the U.S., serving a diverse community of immigrants from countries like Iraq, Lebanon, Romania, Syria, Ukraine and many others, but also serving generations of Americans over the years. Come and see! The Maronite Seminarians and the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light will be there. For more

information, check out their facebook page at www.facebook.com/EasternCatholicVocationsFairUSA, or contact: Rev. Paul J. Makar at 215-627-0143. □

Utica, New York Judge Retires from Bench

by Chorbishop John D. Faris

Justice Anthony F. Shaheen, a life-long parishioner and trustee of Saint Louis Gonzaga Maronite Church, Utica, New York, recently retired from the New York State Supreme Court after twenty-eight years on the bench. Chorbishop John D. Faris gave the invocation at the dinner offered in honor of the judge at the Hotel Utica on December 2, 2011.



Born on June 9, 1935, the child of immigrant parents, Sarah and Fouad Shaheen, respectively from Palestine and Lebanon, Anthony Shaheen was raised and educated in Utica, N.Y. The future justice received his baccalaureate degree from Utica College and his Juris Doctor degree from Syracuse University College of Law. He then engaged in the private practice of law more than twenty years in Utica.

He served in the National Guard from November 1961 to November 1966. He served as Corporation Counsel for the City of Utica in 1972-73. He was Chairman of the Oneida County Republican Party for many years; and party members remember him as being one of the best party chairs ever to serve in that position. He was then elected New York State Supreme Court Justice to serve a six-county Judicial District (Oneida, Onondaga, Herkimer, Oswego, Jefferson and Lewis Counties).

Justice Shaheen served with great skill and integrity from January 1, 1984 until his mandatory retirement on December 31, 2011, earning him the reputation as a judge who was fair, patient, practical, and respectful of attorneys and litigants.

The Maronite Church takes pride in the service that Justice Shaheen has given to his community in the cause of justice. □

Food For Thought

"Educating Young People in Justice and Peace' is a task for every generation. ... For the ecclesial community, educating men and women in peace is part of the mission received from Christ, it is an integral part of evangelization, because the Gospel of Christ is also the Gospel of justice and peace."

(Pope Benedict XVI on January 1, 2012)

Brooklyn, New York Investiture to the Dignity of *Periodeut*



Assisted by Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Bishop Gregory Mansour ordains Fr. James Root to the Rank of *Periodeut*.

by Salma T. Vahdat

Saturday, December 3, 2011, marked a joyous day for the Community of Faith of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn Heights, N.Y. At a Divine Liturgy of Investiture, well attended by the parish, clergy, family and friends from seminary days, Fr. James Root, Rector, was ordained to the rank of *Periodeut* with the title of Monsignor by the Most Reverend Gregory J. Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. It was a solemn occasion, and many witnessed the ceremony for the first time. The ritual and tradition of *Beit Maroun* are replete with beauty and symbolism and one could not help but be awed by the ceremony.

The Most Reverend Stephen Hector Doueïhi, Bishop Emeritus, was the narrator of the investiture and it only added a deeper understanding of what was taking place. Bishop Stephen Hector is also known for his wry sense of humor and it was present in his joyous narration.

In his homily, Bishop Mansour explained that, in addition to the three familiar ordained roles of deacon, priest and bishop, the Maronite Church has six additional orders. These are Cantor, Lector and Subdeacon who assist the Deacon. Archdeacon, *Periodeut* and Chorbishop assist the Bishop. He suggested that the rank of *Periodeut* would add to Msgr. James responsibilities. He acknowledged the fact that Msgr. Jim is a "strong leader with a tender heart which makes him especially suited for shepherding in the name of Christ." He said he will share in the ministry of the Bishop. No small task.

Toward the final conclusion of the ritual, and one which summed up the role of the priest and now *periodeut*, Bishop Gregory entrusted the community to our new Monsignor with this prayer:

"I entrust to you the holy Church of God, Our Lady of

Lebanon in the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, and all her priests, deacons and children, that they may submit to your jurisdiction. For, in their name you were elected, and by God's will and their agreement, you were perfected in this dignity.

"You are theirs, and they are yours. Bind, loose, command and judge in justice. Do not dare act otherwise, for God did not elect you to break sinners, but to heal them and bring them back to contrition.

"Loose, forgive and love the innocent. Reprimand those who stray, support the oppressed, and condemn the oppressors. Show favor to no one. Assist the widows, visit the sick, and watch over the needy. Give to those who ask of you.

"Beware of pride, vain-glory, deceit, lies, excommunication and curses. Pursue humility and patience. For they exalt you in the eyes of the living God and place you at his right hand." What a solemn, simple, yet exquisite command!

Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Vicar General of the Eparchy, assisted Bishop Gregory. Sponsors of Msgr. Root were Msgr. David George of Massachusetts and Msgr. Peter Waslo, a classmate from seminary days and now Vicar General of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of the Ukrainians of Philadelphia. Other clergy in attendance were Rev. Geoffrey Abdallah, Msgr. Maroun Asmar, Rev. Sam Najjar, Rev. Rodolph Wakim, Rev. Naji Kiwan, Rev. Tony Akoury, Rev. Vincent Farhat, Rev. Michael Marrone, Rev. Michael Oliverie, Deacon Naji Youseff and Deacon Anthony Koury. The Cathedral's choir, under the direction of Rev. Geoffrey Abdallah, served the Liturgy

Following the Liturgy of the Investiture, the community was invited to the Social Hall for a luncheon, where all could greet the new Monsignor and wish him well. □

Cincinnati, Ohio *Fall Festival*



On November 20, 2011, St. Anthony of Padua Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, had its 2011 Fall Festival. The day began with the Divine Liturgy, followed by foods, prizes and raffles, which made the festival a very enjoyable and successful day. □

Atlanta, Georgia Maronites Got Talent



by John Doueir

More than 150 people gathered at St. Joseph Maronite Church's Hall in Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday, September 17, to watch members of the community unveil their hidden talents at the Second Annual "Maronites Got Talent" show. Back by popular demand, the event featured contestants of all ages and talents as they put on a show that made it a night to remember for the second year in a row. It was organized by the Maronite Young Adults Group and proceeds helped members attend the Third Annual MYA Workshop in Los Angeles, California.

The event was heavily promoted on social media and in church for weeks as contestants practiced their performances and the MYA planned for an improved and unique theatrical experience with Father Dominique Hanna. New contestants wowed the crowd with their skills and talents while returning ones built on their epic performances from last year. Three judges critiqued the efforts and presented winners from three age categories with "Maronites Got Talent" trophies.

The show was designed last year by the MYA of Atlanta to bring families of the community together for a fun fellowship event. After its first success, news reached NAM and plans are ongoing to take it to the national convention.

MYO/MYA Lock-In

On September 4 - 5, 2011, the MYA organized a lock-in at St. Joseph Maronite Church for both MYA and MYO members. The intent of the lock-in was to bridge the gap between the older and the younger generations and also to emphasize the importance of the youth and their role in the church.

There were two talks given by Father Dominique Hanna, Administrator, as well as games, sports, a confession service, and a hands on Liturgy where Fr. Hanna showed the participants every step that happens during the Liturgy and what those steps mean. It was a great bonding experience that will help by keeping the youth involved in the church. □

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

January 1, 2012

Pastoral Visit to Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Miami, Fla.

January 6, 2012

Epiphany Liturgy at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

January 7 - 8, 2012

Pastoral Visit to St. Jude Maronite Church, Orlando, Fla.

January 9 - 13, 2012

Annual Clergy Retreat, West Palm Beach, Fla.

January 15, 2012

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

January 18, 2012

Meeting with Pastoral and Stewardship Council members, Blessed John Paul II Maronite Mission, Westchester, N.Y.

January 22, 2012

Pro-life Vigil Mass, Washington, D.C.

January 23, 2012

Pro-life March, Washington, D.C.

January 26, 2012

Meeting with Coptic Orthodox Leaders in New York

January 28 - 29, 2012

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Church, Philadelphia, Penn.

February 5, 2012

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

February 10 - 12, 2012

Centennial Celebration of St. Anthony Maronite Church, Glen Allen (Richmond), Virginia. □



Deadline for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is January 25, 2012.

The Maronite Voice is the official Newsletter of the Eparchy of Our

Lady of Lebanon and of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn.

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

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Pictures must be original. Digital pictures must be in "JPG" format and in high resolution. The Maronite Voice is also available online, in PDF format, at www.stmaron.org. □

Uniontown, Pennsylvania *St. George Ladies Guild Christmas Party*

by Dr. Mabel Howard

The Ladies Guild of St. George Maronite Catholic Church in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, held its annual Christmas party at the Uniontown Country Club. This served as a time for the ladies to relax and enjoy an excellent meal in the comfort and friendship of guild members and guests. Many activities at this social event included Christmas carols, games, door prizes, and gift exchanges. The Ladies Guild also collected donations to support our troops in the Middle East. The Ladies Christmas party was a successful and festive event to remember.

Maronite Men's Group Parish Breakfast

The St. George Maronite Men's Group of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, sponsored a parish breakfast after Church services during the holiday season. The members spearheaded the fundraiser to help finance church remodeling projects. It also gave parishioners an opportunity to socialize and enjoy the warmth of family and friends. The men were grateful to the Ladies Guild members who worked with them to help prepare the breakfast foods.

The Maronite Men's Group meets with Father Nadim Helou monthly to discuss spiritual teachings of the Maronite Church and its cultural legacy. These sessions provide a forum to educate parishioners about the Syriac Antiochene Maronite Catholic Church and to promote their Lebanese American heritage. The Group strives to collaborate in unity and faith with the Maronite Church under the guidance of His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai, and Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron. □

Maronite History Committee

If.....

by Ramona Milford

If the 19th century emigration of Maronites from the Middle East to the United States had not taken place as it did, the entire existence of our Maronite Church within the United States may not have happened.

If those early immigrants did not prioritize their faith and seek places of worship for that faith as one of their first tasks, the Maronite Church within the United States may not have developed.

If there were no early missionary priests who sacrificed much to come to the United States before being officially assigned by the Patriarch, the Maronite Church in the United States may not have remained together.

In the season of the birth of Jesus Christ, as we all try to seek a little bit of "quiet" and give thanks for what we are, it would be nice to think about all of those early immigrants who came to the United States in the 1870s through the early 1900s bringing with them their *faith from the mountains*. If their faith had not been a priority in their lives, how far would our Maronite Church in the United States be today?

History is so much more than just a chronology of events, a list of what was first and last or jumbling of names and faces. If we are listening in that little bit of "quiet" we seek, history should be our guide, our teacher and our glimpse into our future.

The History Committee continues to gather research and archives as we attempt to include the records from Lebanon with the records within the United States in order to tell the story of each parish community from their beginning to the present. In addition to each parish we want to include the beautiful stories of the Seminary, the Antonine Sisters and the National Shrine, the Order of Saint Sharbel, both Eparchies, the Exarchate and the more recent additions including the Chapel in the National Basilica, the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light and the Maronite Heritage Institute.

A sub-committee of the History Committee is diligently collecting and researching information relative to the priests in service to the Maronite Church. This includes those early visiting priests, those who died here and never returned to their country of birth, those who worked in partnership with the Latin Church Bishops here, and those who kept the faith of the people strong in all that they did.

The Committee has short and longer term plans that include the publication of two books, continued expansion and development of a website (www.usmaronites.com), a presentation at NAM as well as DVD and other media development.

If you would like to be part of the permanent archive we are building, you may do so by participating in the following and encouraging your friends or relatives who are Maronite to do the same:

Maronites Remembered. Send us a photo not larger than 5x7 or send it in a .jpeg format electronically (color or b/w) of a deceased Maronite relative, friend, parishioner, etc. along with not more than 125 words describing that person and we will include it in our website as well as add the information into the Maronite Heritage archives. You will receive your original photos back upon request.

A Tapestry of Faith. If you have any short story you would like to share about your family, your parish, your participation in the MYO/MYA or your Maronite faith that you believe is inspiring, humorous or historical in nature - send it to us or email it in .doc format with not more than 125 words. We also ask that you sign the story. This is a special request of all of those who are Maronite now but did not grow up as a Maronite. Your inquiries and comments are always encouraged and can be sent as follows along with all other information to: ramonamarie26@att.net, or by mail to Ramona Milford, c/o Maronites, 9860 Tesson Creek, St. Louis, MO 63123. On behalf of the History Committee may you all have a New Year full of blessings. □

Peoria, Illinois Newly Ordained Bishop Celebrates Liturgy

by Laurice Joseph

In June 2011, the Synod of Bishops of the Maronite Patriarchal Church elected (Monsignor at the time) Hanna Alwan, Auxiliary Bishop at the Patriarchal Curia in Bkerke, Lebanon. His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI approved the election, accepting him into the Ecclesial Communion. He was ordained as Bishop on September 16, 2011 at *Diman*, Lebanon. On October 2, 2011, he celebrated his first Liturgy in America as a Bishop at St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church in Peoria, Illinois. Bishop Alwan's family are members of this parish, and they proudly assisted Bishop Hanna with the Liturgy. Bishop Hanna's homily to the parishioners paralleled his most symbolic Coat of Arms: "In lumine Tuo videmus lumen" (In Your light, we see light). "Jesus is the Light; therefore, we are a people of the Light, we are not a people of darkness, nor will we ever be."

Bishop Alwan's family hosted a lunch reception in his honor and it was held at the *Ito* Society Club. Among the many guest speakers who paid tribute to Bishop Alwan was His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Rai who was visiting St. Sharbel Church

Bishop Alwan's journey of love and igniting the world took years of deliberate and diligent preparation. Early education with the Franciscan Fathers in Tripoli, was followed by his secondary education at the College des Apotres in *Jounieh*, Lebanon.

He joined the Congregation of Maronite Lebanese Missionaries in 1968, where he and his twin brother Khalil were ordained priests on July 18, 1981, after having professed their perpetual vows.

He completed his theological studies at Freiburg University in Switzerland and at the Holy Spirit University, *Kaslik*, Lebanon. He obtained his Doctorate in Ecclesiastical and Civil Law from the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome, and worked as a judge at the Unified Maronite Tribunal for five years.

Bishop Hanna Alwan taught Canon Law at Holy Spirit University in *Kaslik*, Lebanon; Sagesse University in Beirut, Lebanon; and St. Paul College in *Harissa*, Lebanon. He was appointed in Rome as the Advocate of Justice at the



Bishop Hanna Alwan

Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota from 1990 to 1996. He was promoted to Judge to the Vatican Tribunal Court of the Roman Rota in 1996 and served in that position until September 2011.

In 2000, he reopened the Maronite College in Rome, which was closed in 1939, during World War II. He was the Rector of the College (2000-2010) when he resigned to devote his time to teaching and writing in the field of justice.

While in Rome he assumed many duties in the Vatican department, such as commissar in cases of dispensation from unconsummated marriages and cases of laicization from priestly duties in the Congregation of Divine Worship.

Bishop Hanna Alwan served as legal counselor for the Congregation of the Eastern Churches from 1994-2011. He also taught jurisprudence at the Tribunal of The Roman Rota at the College of the Roman Rota Tribunal at the Vatican. Between 1996 - 2011, he taught Eastern Canon Law at Urbana Pontifical University, the Pontifical Institute of Saint Anselm in Rome, and at the Pontifical Catholic University of The Holy Cross.

He has authored many legal and scientific articles concerning Canonical Eastern laws and the Canonical process of ecclesiastical tribunals and the repercussions of civil marriage. He has also written articles on politics in the Eastern countries. His articles have been published in scientific journals and books in Italian, French and Arabic. He speaks French, Italian, Latin, English, German, Syriac and Arabic. He is also proficient in Spanish and Portuguese. □

NAM Semester in Lebanon Scholarship Recipients

The NAM Scholarship Committee is pleased to announce the winners of the 2012 "A Semester in Lebanon Scholarships" for the 2012 school year. Each winner will receive full tuition and dormitory expenses and \$500 after completing the semester with a 3.0 GPA or above.

Notre Dame University (NDU – Louaize)

Spring Semester

- ◆ Layelle Abi-Rached, St. Maron, Cleveland, Ohio
- ◆ Charlice Wehbe, Our Lady's Maronite Church, Austin, Texas

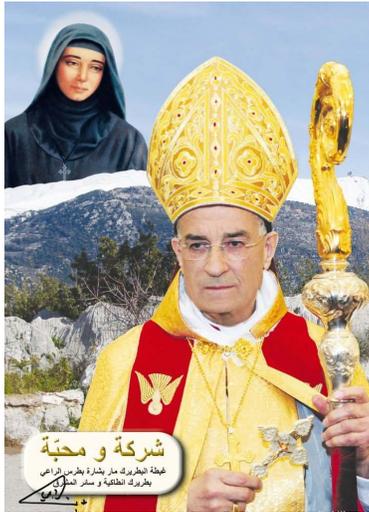
University of the Holy Spirit (USEK – Kaslik)

Summer Semester

- ◆ Mathew Issa, St. Elias, Birmingham, Alabama
- ◆ Jonathan Nammour, Our Lady Star of the East, Pleasantville, New Jersey

Congratulations to all and good luck. □





"Communion and Love, His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. The photo is taken from www.strafkahill.com.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the middle of the night, 2011 years ago, the light of the glory of God shone on simple shepherds over the Bethlehem cave, and his angel came to announce to them and through them to the whole world, the Good News: "A savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord." At the same time, in the skies over Persia, a unique star appeared, prompting pagan scholars to see it as a sign of the birth of the King of the Ages to come (Matthew 2:1-2). They came to Bethlehem: simple shepherds from near, and rich magi scholars from afar. They prostrated in homage before the Divine Child and presented Him with the gifts of their faith, hope and love. He reciprocated by sharing with them the Divine nature. We, in Lebanon, the East and in the countries of expansion, likewise prostrate before the nativity cave to be enlightened by the Light of Truth announced to the whole world, and to be sanctified by the grace of the Divine life bequeathed to us. The echo of the words of Pope Leo the Great, resounds in the depths of our hearts saying, "Christian, acknowledge your dignity, and become a sharer in the Divine nature, refuse to return to the old baseness by degenerate conduct" (Sermon 21, On the Feast of the Nativity, Para 3).

It is a joyous occasion for me, on behalf

"I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: A savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord" (Luke 2:10 - 11)

Christmas 2011 Message of His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

of the Patriarchal See, His Beatitude Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir, Their Excellencies the Bishops, the priests, monks and nuns, and all the helpers here to express our best wishes to our brothers and sisters in Lebanon, the Middle East and the countries of expansion and to all citizens here and abroad, at the birth of Our Lord Jesus, Redeemer and Savior of all people, and the coming of the New Year 2012. Prayers accompany these good wishes so that the Divine Child may shower an abundance of graces and goodness, and bless the coming year with peace, tranquility and a dignified life.

Christmas - A Cave, A Star and A Tree

A Cave

The Cave reminds us of the Incarnation of the Word of God, as Luke recounted in his Gospel. It also presents us with examples to emulate, such as humility and poverty, two models that Christ our Lord followed because of his love for humanity, impelling us to change from within, through the grace of the One who entered our humanity. "The Son of God," says Pope Leo the Great, "has so united Himself with us and us with Him that the descent of God to man's estate became the exaltation of man to God's" (Sermon 27, On the Feast of the Nativity, Para 2).

O how impoverished we are and in great need for God's love to abide in our hearts this Christmas, as it abided in the heart of His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the hearts of the saints! O how impoverished we are for that love that would enrich us with human sentiments and ethics in our dealing with others and in all our communication, especially on the part of the authorities and representatives of

the nation in Parliament and the Cabinet, that we may live the beauty of "communion and love" in our own family, in our social family and in our national family. Communion, first and foremost, is union with God at the committed spiritual level and union with all people at the level of relations, where every individual, group and member of society may give his/her cumulative worth; thus, a diverse and integrated society is established. Love is the bond of that communion, its springhead and its goal.

O how impoverished we are and how much we need humility before God and man that we may be able to leave the darkness of pride and egoism; the darkness of pretension and self sufficiency; the darkness of refusal of the one who differs in opinion and aspirations; from the darkness of forcefulness, haughtiness and the branding of others with treachery!

O how impoverished we are and how much we need the virtue of poverty of self and enrichment in God; poverty manifested in detachment from personal interest and from personal material and sectarian gains at the expense of the common good. Every person in authority is in need of this virtue; the one who is without it, is the weakest of the weak.

A Star

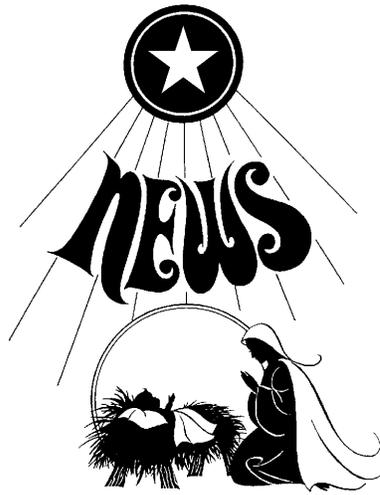
Christmas is a Star; and that Star is Christ; is the "Word of God made flesh" (John 1:14), Who entered into a perpetual dialogue with every person, enlightening him on the path of life, revealing to him the splendor of truth amidst the darkness of perplexity and of lies. This Star led the magi to the new born Messiah. When the Star vanished over Jerusalem, the magi logically went looking for Him at the king's palace, where might, culture and knowledge

were, but He was not born there. God does not appear where worldly power dwells, or where there is the power of riches or the power of weapons, or the power of authority. But the Word of the Holy Scriptures informed them that He was to be born in Bethlehem and that Word appeared anew in the Star which led them to the place of His birth among the humble and the lowly. There, the King of the world was born, to indicate that His Kingship is freedom and love. This King is not born except in the hearts of the truly free: those free from self, from their own whims, from their own perversions and from the enticements of the world. The King is born in the hearts of those who truly love God and love each and every person. They alone respect freedom in all its dimensions and witness to this love in their works and the exercise of their responsibilities. Come brothers and sisters; let us search for the Star in the Word of God, Who erected His tent in the Church and made of Her "the pillar of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

A Tree

Christmas is a Tree, decorated and lit. This, in fact, is the Church, sparkling with the light of Christ, Her founder Who abides in Her; in fact, She is one with His Mystery. She is Christ in His fullness. This is how the Apostle John saw her: "the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband to be a new earth and a new heaven" (Revelation 21:1-2). This reality is present wherever people live in communion and love, vertically united to God through the Divine Word, prayer and the grace of the sacraments and horizontally united with all people through solidarity, connection, cooperation and integration.

The Christmas Tree, with its twinkling lights is the Face of the Church reflecting Christ, the Light of the Nations. Glad tidings of joy are proclaimed to all people through His Gospel. His Gospel is the light of truth to minds, the light of healing grace to souls and the reviving light of love to hearts. This sparkling Church, like the Christmas Tree, is charged by Her Master to proclaim His Gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15); this Gospel



decorates the Church with saints, prophets, martyrs and confessors. Come all you Christians! Let us decorate the Church with different kinds of talents and gifts, which the Holy Spirit poured out upon us and upon every person that we may be an "added value" in our society.

Greetings to All from in front of the Cave, the Star and the Tree

You who are in Lebanon, we salute you and congratulate you on the Feast. Come let us build the nation with its mission, and live in the diversity of our Christian and Muslim communities among others, and in the diversity of our cultures, aspirations, opinions, and political and national choices, along with the beauty of our unity, solidarity and connections, and be for each other and our Lebanese society an added value. This is how Christians and Muslims wanted Lebanon to be when they invented their National Pact in 1943, and committed to living together, to be an added value for each other. After nearly seventy years of experience, let us renew our National Pact through a new social contract and continue writing the history of groups that have decided to live together in peace and overcome each crisis that comes their way by virtue of their geopolitical position. Let us build an "added value" state with stability and radiance of its role on the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, within the Arab milieu, and the international community.

You who are in the countries of the Middle East we salute you with the best wishes of Christmas, in peace and hope, as you endure the tribulations of wars, conflicts and conflicting claims, having before your eyes and consciences many questions concerning the future and our common destiny. In the midst of darkness, may the light and glory of God shine on you as on the night of the Nativity of Christ the Lord when the angels chanted: "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth and good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). We look forward with you, through the wishes of Christmas and the New Year, to the birth of a real Arab Spring, one of peace and stability based on religious, cultural and ethnic pluralism, equality of citizenship and democracy, and distanced far from the singleness of race, religion, confession and opinion.

You who are in the countries of the expansion and under every sky we salute you and congratulate you on this Feast. May the light of Christ the Lord shine upon you with all His gifts and graces, and unite us with the joy of His Nativity, for He has been united with every person through His Incarnation. To you are our best wishes that the New Year may be filled with peace, goodwill and success.

To us and to all people in the darkness of this world, the proclamation of the heavens is renewed: "To us is born a Savior" (Luke 2:11). And we proclaim the message of peace and hope: "Christ is born! Alleluia!" □



The Cedar of Lebanon

Danbury, Connecticut

A Visit to the Missionary Sisters of the Most Holy Sacrament



A Missionary Sister of the Most Holy Sacrament teaches an English class at their school in *Beit Hebbak*, Lebanon.

by Jacqueline A. Salame

What began many years ago as two separate ideas, to give back in some way and to go to Lebanon to better understand my heritage, came together this summer on what would become an experience of a lifetime.

I had the privilege, along with my cousin Lauren Kilcourse and my niece Alexandra Salame, with the help of Fr. Jean Younes of St. Anthony's in Danbury, Conn., and Msgr. Sami Hayek (whom I have known since the age of ten), to travel to Lebanon and embark on an adventure that has forever changed me.

It all began with Msgr. Sami and the Missionary Sisters of the Most Holy Sacrament in *Kfarmashoun*, Lebanon. It was from here that we started our journey. We would begin to understand the country from which our ancestors had come. They showed us Lebanon in a way that we could never have experienced without them. We traveled across the entire country visiting several villages seeing how the Lebanese people really lived and observed the work the sisters were doing. This also allowed us to meet many people and to participate in the daily life of the families, to teach the children, to understand where our Lebanese traditions came from and of course to enjoy the endless hospitality of the Lebanese people.

The Order of the Missionary Sisters of the Most Holy Sacrament was founded in 1965 by Msgr. Emil Geara, as a religious congregation, in *Ain Warka*, to educate girls from the villages on how to live a virtuous life. They were taught academic subjects as well as real life skills. Today the sisters operate eight missions across Lebanon. They educate both boys and girls starting from as early as a few months old. Many of the children come from the poorest families and are in many instances considered to be social cases. They give medical care to the poor and take care of the elderly. All of

the services are provided for little or no money. The people are asked to pay only what they can afford and are never turned away.

Msgr. Sami, after much research, made the decision to give his life savings to the Sisters because of the important work they are doing. His donations are helping to continue that work and also expand the school at *Beit Hebbak* that serves 1100 children. He resides with the Sisters at *Kfarmashoun* and acts as a spiritual leader for the community. The facility is a home for elderly women as well as a place that is used for retreats, summer camp, and various other cultural and social events. It is here that we lived; taught English to the village children and kept company with the sisters, Msgr. Sami and the elderly. They helped us with our Lebanese and shared traditional songs with us. We even had occasion to help the Sisters and the teachers at *Beit Hebbak* with their English and were serenaded by them with the "ABC Song." We shared many stories and lots of laughter. I believe for each and every one of us who came together in those six weeks that the experience left its mark in some important way.

There is, of course, much more to share. But at this time of giving, I would like to ask each and every one of you to remember those people that are helping to rebuild Lebanon not just physically but spiritually. I have never seen anything like the resolve and determination of the Lebanese people, both young and old. The Sisters need our help to continue their legacy of caring for those who are the poorest and the abandoned, and nurturing and educating the children who are the future of the country. □



Christians by Numbers Around the World

Report Sees Shift in Global Distribution

Christians account for almost a third of the world's population. This was one of the findings in a report published Monday by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

The data from the 2010 survey of more than 200 countries found that worldwide, there are 2.18 billion Christians, nearly a third of the estimated global population at that time of 6.9 billion.

The report looked at what has changed in the past century. Since 1910 the number of Christians nearly quadrupled, from about 600 million to more than 2 billion. In that time, however, world population rose sharply, from around 1.8 billion in 1910 to 6.9 billion. So, the percentage of Christians dipped a bit, going from 35% to 32%.

Christians, nevertheless, remain the world's largest religious group. Muslims, according to previous studies by the Pew group, account for a bit under a quarter of the world's population.

The survey found that almost half, 48%, of Christians live in the 10 countries with the largest number of Christians.

Three of the top ten countries are in the Americas -- the United States, Brazil and Mexico. Two are in Europe -- Russia and Germany. Two are in the Asia-Pacific region -- the Philippines and China. And three are in sub-Saharan Africa -- Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia.

In spite of so many being in a small number of countries, Christians are still a majority of the population in 158 countries and territories, about two-thirds of all the countries and territories in the world.

Distribution Shift

The spread of countries reflects a major shift in where Christians are to be found. In 1910, about two-thirds of the world's Christians lived in Europe. A century later only 26% of Christians live in Europe. More than a third are now found in the Americas, 37%, while just under a quarter, 24%, live in sub-Saharan Africa. The Asia-Pacific region accounts for 13%.

Taking Europe and the Americas together, these two still make up a majority of Christians, with 63%. That is, however, a notable decline from the 1910 level of 93%. In both regions the numbers of Christians have dropped. In 1910, 95% of Europe's population was Christian, but by 2010 it was only 76%. In the Americas over the same period it went from 96% to 86%.

This decline contrasts with the dramatic change in sub-Saharan Africa. In 1910 only 9% were Christians, but a century later the Christian faith had exploded, making up 63% of the population.

While the overall numbers in Asia and the Pacific are still low, the percentage more than doubled, from 3% to 7%.

The Middle East and North Africa are the regions with the lowest number of Christians. They account for only about 4% of the population, or around 13 million people.

In fact, the report pointed out, there are more Christians in Indonesia, which has a Muslim majority, than there are in all the 20 countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

And the changes in Africa mean that Nigeria now has more than twice as many Protestants as Germany, where the Protestant Reformation originated.

Church Groups

There are 1.1 billion Catholics worldwide, according to the report. This means they account for half of the global Christian population.

Brazil is the country with the largest number of Catholics, at 134 million. This means there are more Catholics in Brazil than in Italy, France and Spain combined.

Catholics are a majority of the population in 67 countries. The Americas accounts for 48% of the global number, with almost 40% in Latin America alone. Europe comes second with 24% of the world's Catholics, while sub-Saharan Africa makes up 16% and the Asia-Pacific region has 12%.

The broad definition of Protestants the report uses means they number 801 million worldwide, or 37% of the global Christian population. Protestants form a majority of the total population in 49 countries.

Despite the European origins of the Protestant churches

the survey found that only two of the ten countries with the largest Protestant populations are European.

The country with the largest number of Protestants is the United States, with about 160 million, making up 20% of the worldwide total. Nigeria comes second, with nearly 60 million Protestants, and China is in third place with approximately 58 million.

China, in fact, has the world's seventh-largest Christian population, which the report estimated at 67 million. The report acknowledged the difficulty of obtaining reliable data on religion in China, but according to its results, in Asia only the Philippines, with 87 million, has more Christians.

There are about 260 million Orthodox Christians, the study found, which accounts for 12% of the global Christian population.

Russia is home to the largest group of Orthodox with 39% of them. Ethiopia has the second-largest population, 13.4% of the global number. While Constantinople is the seat of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Turkey's Orthodox population is small, at about 180,000. Despite Ethiopia's large numbers Europe remains the center of Orthodox Christianity, with 77% of the global numbers.

The report gives a more precise idea of what observers have been commenting on in recent years regarding the shift of Christianity to the Global South. The rapid growth of Christians in Africa and China will likely continue, with significant implications for Christianity. □

(Zenit.org, December 23, 2010)

Christmas Is More Than an Anniversary Christ's Coming Is an Event of Today



Pope Benedict XVI says that we have the same opportunity the shepherds of Bethlehem had: acknowledging and receiving the Christ Child, who comes "today," now, to each of us.

The Pope emphasized this point at the general audience

on December 21, 2011, saying that it is important to understand that Christmas is more than an anniversary of a past event, of Jesus' birth. "Christmas, in fact, is not a mere anniversary of Jesus' birth -- it is also this, but it is more," the Holy Father said at the last general audience of 2011. "It is the celebration of a mystery that has marked and continues to mark mankind's history -- God himself came to dwell among us, he made himself one of us; a mystery that concerns our faith and our very lives; a mystery that we experience concretely in the liturgical celebrations, especially in the Holy Mass."

So, the Pontiff said, we can live out now and participate in an event that occurred more than 2,000 years ago. "During the Holy Mass on Christmas night, we will repeat as a refrain to the responsorial psalm, these words: 'Today a Savior is born for us.' This adverb of time 'Today,' which is used repeatedly throughout the Christmas celebrations, refers to the event of Jesus' birth and to the salvation that the incarnation of the Son of God comes to bring," he explained. "In the liturgy, this event reaches beyond the limits of space and time and becomes actual, present; its effect continues, even amidst the passing of days, years and centuries. In indicating that Jesus is born 'today,' the liturgy does not use a meaningless phrase, but underscores that this birth affects and permeates the whole of history -- even today, it remains a reality to which we may attain, precisely in the liturgy."



Entering God's World

Christmas, the Pope said, is a renewal of the conviction that God is really present, "still 'flesh' and not only far away: though also with the Father, he is close to us. In that Child born in Bethlehem, God drew near to man: We can encounter him now -- in a 'today' whose sun knows no setting."

The Holy Father said this point is important because "modern man -- a man of 'the sensible,' of the empirically verifiable -- finds it increasingly more difficult to open his horizons and enter the world of God."

The Redemption is a historical reality, he emphasized, but Jesus, the Son of God, "became man and remains man."

He added: "The Eternal entered into the limits of time and space, in order to make possible an encounter with Him 'today.' The liturgical texts of Christmas help us to understand that the events of salvation wrought by Christ are always actual -- the interest of every man and of all mankind."

"When, within liturgical celebrations, we hear or proclaim this 'Today a Savior is born for us,' we are not employing an empty, conventional expression; rather, we mean that God offers us 'today,' now, to me, to each one of us, the possibility of acknowledging and receiving him like the shepherds in Bethlehem, so that he might be born in our lives and renew them, illumine them, transform them by his grace, by his presence." □

(Zenit.org, December 21, 2011)

"Only the God Who Is Love, and the Love Which Is God, Could Choose to Save Us in This Way"

Pope's Urbi et Orbi Address

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Rome and throughout the world!

Christ is born for us! Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to the men and women whom he loves. May all people hear an echo of the message of Bethlehem which the Catholic Church repeats in every continent, beyond the confines of every nation, language and culture. The Son of the Virgin Mary is born for everyone; he is the Savior of all.

This is how Christ is invoked in an ancient liturgical antiphon: "O Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, hope and salvation of the peoples: come to save us, O Lord our God". *Veni ad salvandum nos!* Come to save us! This is the cry raised by men and women in every age, who sense that by themselves they cannot prevail over difficulties and dangers. They need to put their hands in a greater and stronger hand, a hand which reaches out to them from on high. Dear brothers and sisters, this hand is Jesus, born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary. He is the hand that God extends to humanity, to draw us out of the mire of sin and to set us firmly on rock, the secure rock of his Truth and his Love (cf. Ps 40:2).

This is the meaning of the Child's name, the name which, by God's will, Mary and Joseph gave him: he is named Jesus, which means "Savior" (cf. Mt 1:21; Lk 1:31). He was sent by God the Father to save us above all from the evil deeply rooted in man and in history: the evil of separation from God, the prideful presumption of being self-sufficient, of trying to compete with God and to take his place, to decide what is good and evil, to be the master of life and death (cf. Gen 3:1-7). This is the great evil, the great sin, from which we human beings cannot save ourselves unless we rely on God's help, unless we cry out to him: "*Veni ad salvandum nos!* -- Come to save us!"

The very fact that we cry to heaven in this way already sets us aright; it makes us true to ourselves: we are in fact those who cried out to God and were saved (cf. Esth [LXX] 10:3ff.). God is the Saviour; we are those who are in peril. He is the physician; we are the infirm. To realize this is the first step towards salvation, towards emerging from the maze in which we have been locked by our pride. To lift our eyes to heaven, to stretch out our hands and call for help is our means of escape, provided that there is Someone who hears us and can come to our assistance.

Jesus Christ is the proof that God has heard our cry. And not

only this! God's love for us is so strong that he cannot remain aloof; he comes out of himself to enter into our midst and to share fully in our human condition (cf. Ex 3:7-12). The answer to our cry which God gave in Jesus infinitely transcends our expectations, achieving a solidarity which cannot be human alone, but divine. Only the God who is love, and the love which is God, could choose to save us in this way, which is certainly the lengthiest way, yet the way which respects the truth about him and about us: the way of reconciliation, dialogue and cooperation.

Dear brothers and sisters in Rome and throughout the world, on this Christmas 2011, let us then turn to the Child of Bethlehem, to the Son of the Virgin Mary, and say: "Come to save us!" Let us repeat these words in spiritual union with the many people who experience particularly difficult situations; let us speak out for those who have no voice.

Together let us ask God's help for the peoples of the Horn of Africa, who suffer from hunger and food shortages, aggravated at times by a persistent state of insecurity. May the international community not fail to offer assistance to the many displaced persons coming from that region and whose dignity has been sorely tried.

May the Lord grant comfort to the peoples of South-East Asia, particularly Thailand and the Philippines, who are still enduring grave hardships as a result of the recent floods.

May the Lord come to the aid of our world torn by so many conflicts which even today stain the earth with blood. May the Prince of Peace grant peace and stability to that Land where he chose to come into the world, and encourage the resumption of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. May he bring an end to the violence in Syria, where so much blood has already been shed. May he foster full reconciliation and stability in Iraq and Afghanistan. May he grant renewed vigour to all elements of society in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East as they strive to advance the common good.

May the birth of the Savior support the prospects of dialogue and cooperation in Myanmar, in the pursuit of shared solutions. May the Nativity of the Redeemer ensure political stability to the countries of the Great Lakes Region of Africa, and assist the people of South Sudan in their commitment to safeguarding the rights of all citizens.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us turn our gaze anew to the grotto of Bethlehem. The Child whom we contemplate is our salvation! He has brought to the world a universal message of reconciliation and peace. Let us open our hearts to him; let us receive him into our lives. Once more let us say to him, with joy and confidence: "*Veni ad salvandum nos!*"

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The Many Meanings of Christmas

Expert on St. Francis Considers the Crib and Other Elements of Jesus' Birthday

by Antonio Gaspari

Has the birth of the Child Jesus truly changed the history of humanity? Is it true that the powerful understood immediately the importance of that birth? Why do we measure time based on that event in Bethlehem?

To answer these and other questions, ZENIT spoke with Father Pietro Messa, President of the Higher School of Medieval and Franciscan Studies of Rome's Antonianum Pontifical University.

ZENIT: *What is the significance in history of the figure of the Child Jesus and, specifically, of the crib made by St. Francis?*

Father Messa: We know that the early Christians, all of them being of the Jewish religion, observed the Sabbath, but on the following day, that is the present Sunday, they gathered to commemorate the Resurrection. Hence, the first celebration held par excellence was Easter. Subsequently, other events of Jesus' life began to be celebrated, such as the birth fixed on December 25, namely, on the same day in which previously the *Sol Invictus* was celebrated, that is, the celebration of not being overcome by darkness, given that the winter solstice had passed, the days began to be longer and light imposed itself on the darkness of the night. From celebration they passed to representation and from there to pilgrimages to Bethlehem, the city of David, from whose descent Jesus was born.

The pilgrimages -- at once an expression and incentive of the relationship with the places of Jesus' life -- were the engine for the narration and representation of Jesus' humanity. It is in this context that Brother Francis of Assisi's desire is situated, expressed to the people of *Greccio*, Italy, in 1223, in order to see "with human eyes," how the Child Jesus was laid to rest in a crib between the donkey and the ox. And thus, on Christmas Eve, on the crib where the two animals of tradition were, the Eucharist was celebrated in such a way that one could see "with the eyes of the body" the bread and wine consecrated and believe, thanks to the Holy Spirit, in the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ.

ZENIT: *In a secularized world such as today's, the birth of the Child Jesus is trivialized and inserted in the context of a "myth," in which children alone can believe. According to Christians, why has this birth changed the world?*

Father Messa: It could be that the worst demystification of Christmas is not that of believing that it is a myth, but its reduction to a celebration of kindness, altruism, of helping the needy. It is not that these things are unimportant, or that they are not present in the Gospel, but what is key is that Jesus came to us because He has opted for our poverty. He

gives us His hand to the end, when His arm will be stretched on the cross. As the Poor Clare Sister Chiara Tarcisia, of the St. Clare pro-monastery of Assisi, said in the last months of her life: "What is important in life is to love, but especially to allow oneself to be loved!" And Christmas is a propitious time to allow oneself to be loved. This doesn't lead us to passivity because Jesus loves us as we are, but He doesn't leave us as we are. His presence transforms and initiates a new humanity.

ZENIT: *Why do Christians speak of Jesus as Savior?*

Father Messa: Jesus of Nazareth -- a village from which, according to some, nothing good could come -- walked on the roads of Palestine and, as happens with other persons, they also wondered who He was. The answers to such questions were the most diverse, but one who is not enclosed in his own schemes realizes that every answer is inadequate or, better said, not very exhaustive. And thus his reality as Messiah was increasingly recognized, that is, the anointed by the Most High and, hence, the Savior. However, the person of Jesus, even when arriving at some definitive certainties in the dogmas, opens constant questions and, as the saints show us, there is always something more to astonish us; that is, something to pause to contemplate with wonder.

ZENIT: *The date, the star, the Wise Men: Are these the elements to remember Christmas as an event that happened in history?*

Father Messa: The account of Jesus has been given within the coordinates of history, that is, in a place and time: the place is that of Palestine and the time is -- as we say in the Creed -- "under Pontius Pilate." However, this isn't enough because many saw his humanity, listened to his word, admired also the miracles He wrought, but only some believed in his divinity. As St. Francis of Assisi says in his first Admonition, the disciples saw his humanity "with human eyes," but they believed in his divinity. Hence, in Jesus there is a real history but also something that surpasses history; that is why it is important, as Pope Benedict XVI reminds, that there should be a reason open to the mystery and a reasoned faith. Otherwise, we will fall into rationalism or fideism.

Jesus is a rational event, but which surpasses reason and when reason wishes to understand everything, that is, when it has the pretension of understanding it all, one falls into rationalism. Likewise, when faith excludes history and the discoveries of reason, it becomes a fideism that appears deviant, even violent.

ZENIT: *In addition to Christians, are there others who have given importance to the birth that occurred more than 2,000 years ago?*

Father Messa: Many people, including Muslims, for whom Jesus is a great prophet. Monsignor Padovese said that, present at the Christmas Mass were also Muslims and in one of his homilies he was able to take wise advantage of this presence. He said that everyone celebrated Jesus' birth; for some, because He was a great prophet, for Christians because

He was the manifestation of mercy, more than that, being the Son of God He was the presence of God among men.

ZENIT: *Why does the greater part of humanity mark time from that birth?*

Father Messa: In 313 the Edict of Milan was issued which in a certain sense marked the end of the persecutions; subsequently Christianity became the official religion. Thus, the computation of time began to be marked from His birth, recognizing in it the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies and promises, as well as the beginning of a new era. Paraphrasing Blessed John Paul II: He is "the center of the cosmos and of history." □

(Zenit.org, December 23, 2011)

Why Hating Is Too Easy and Forgiving Is Too Hard

Psychologist Considers the Reasons People Choose Bitterness

Though hatred ferments within a person and prevents positive achievements, still, it seems to be on the rise. Doctor Paul C. Vitz, associate professor and senior scholar at the Institute for the Psychological Sciences, is asking why.

"Hatred sort of 'pickles' a person," he says, "filling them with resentment, bitterness, and even depression." But a glance at the news reveals that hatred is active in the world today.

Vitz is researching hatred and its role as a barrier to forgiveness. ZENIT spoke with him about his research and some of the underlying causes for hate.

ZENIT: *You've been researching the topic of interpersonal hatred for some time. How did you first become interested and involved in this topic?*

Vitz: I've been interested in forgiveness for many years, especially due to the relatively recent work of Bob Enright and Everett Worthington and others. From that, I got interested in the barriers to forgiveness by themselves. Why is it so hard to forgive? Certainly one of those barriers is hatred, especially hatred between people.

ZENIT: *Why is this such an important topic today? Are there unintended and perhaps even long-term consequences of interpersonal hatred?*

Vitz: All you have to do is read the newspaper to see how active hatred is in our world today. That's a "no brainer." That's why the issue is so important. And it is also possible that the increase in narcissism and feelings of self-entitlement, so common in our country today, have led to an increase in the experience of anger, frustration, resentment and even hatred. After all, if you are the "most important person in the whole world" and you subscribe to

the Burger King philosophy of "Have it your way," any failure of others or the environment to satisfy you is cause for rage. Unfortunately, there are also many long-term consequences, and unending cycles of revenge are one of them. And for individuals, hatred sort of "pickles" a person, filling them with resentment, bitterness, and even depression. And of course it keeps people from doing anything positive with their lives.

ZENIT: *What does the psychology of hatred and forgiveness say to a planet increasingly marked by terrorism and by violent outbreaks in schools and other public places, such as last summer's tragedy in Norway?*

Vitz: What it says is that we had better find out why hatred is so common, and how to remove it, or at least reduce it greatly. On the other hand, one of the reasons for the general awareness of violence and hatred is the media's love affair with it. Apparently most news is bad news, and certainly any report of violence and hatred seems to get into the media a thousand times faster than any report of love and forgiveness. Now perhaps the media is just pandering to a kind of universal human nature. But I suspect that there is something special about recent history in this country and in much of the world that shows an increased preoccupation with hatred and violence. It would be interesting to do a study on the proportion of violent news items in today's media, as compared to 100 or 150 years ago.

ZENIT: *You speak of hatred as something that, in some way, people enjoy. How can this be? And how can it be overcome?*

Vitz: People certainly enjoy hatred, or it wouldn't be so popular in the world's literature and on television and in movies today. In a temporary way, hatred makes you feel morally superior and gives you energy and purpose, but at the price of long-term debilitation. In many ways, interpersonal hatred is a kind of defense mechanism protecting the ego or narcissism of the individual. And presumably, as Christians, we all know that this interpersonal hatred is wrong, and was explicitly rejected by Our Lord. We are called to love our enemies, not hate them, as difficult as this is. This is a complex topic that needs much more coverage, and I have spoken about this elsewhere, but one good way to start overcoming hatred for your enemies is to pray for them. □

(Zenit.org, November 29, 2011).

About the Author

Dr. Vitz is Associate Professor and Senior Scholar at the Institute for the Psychological Sciences (IPS), a Catholic graduate school of psychology in Arlington, Virginia.

Holy Family, An Icon of the Domestic Church

Prayer in the Holy Family of Nazareth was the theme of Pope Benedict XVI's catechesis during the general audience on Wednesday, December 28, 2011, which was held in the Paul VI Hall in the presence of 7,000

pilgrims. "The house of Nazareth," the Pope explained, "is a school of prayer where we learn to listen, to meditate, to penetrate the deepest meaning of the manifestation of the Son of God, drawing our example from Mary, Joseph and Jesus."

"Mary is the peerless model for the contemplation of Christ," he said. She "lived with her eyes on Christ and treasured His every word ... Luke the Evangelist makes Mary's heart known to us, her faith, her hope, her obedience, her interior life and prayer, her free adherence to Christ. All of these came from the gift of the Holy Spirit, which descended upon her just as it descended upon the Apostles according to Christ's promise. This image of Mary makes her a model for all believers."

Mary's capacity to live by the gaze of God is "contagious," the Holy Father went on. "The first to experience this was St. Joseph ... With Mary, and later with Jesus, he began a new rapport with God, he began to accept Him into his life, to enter into His plan of salvation, to do His will."

Although the Gospel has not preserved any of Joseph's words, "his is a silent but faithful presence, constant and active. ... Joseph fulfilled his paternal role in all aspects." In this context, the Pope explained how Joseph had educated Jesus to pray, taking Him to the synagogue on Saturdays and guiding domestic prayer in the morning and evening. "Thus, in the rhythm of the days spent in Nazareth, between Joseph's humble dwelling and his workshop, Jesus learned to alternate prayer and work, also offering up to God the fatigue by which they earned the bread the family needed."

Pope Benedict XVI then turned his attention to the pilgrimage of Mary, Joseph and Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, as narrated in the Gospel of St. Luke. "The Jewish family, like the Christian family, prays in the intimacy of the home, but it also prays together in the community recognizing itself as part of the pilgrim People of God," he said.

Jesus' first words - "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house" - pronounced when Mary and Joseph found Him sitting among the teachers in the Temple, are a key to understanding Christian prayer. "From that moment, the life of the Holy Family became even richer in prayer, because the profound significance of the relationship with God the Father began to spread from the Heart of the boy (then adolescent, then young man) Jesus to the hearts of Mary and Joseph.

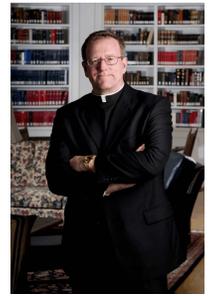
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Moneyball” and Spiritual Leadership

by Rev. Robert Barron

Father Robert Barron is the founder of the global ministry, Word on Fire, and the Francis Cardinal George Professor of Faith and Culture at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Mich. He is the creator and host of a new ten-episode documentary series called "Catholicism" airing this Fall on PBS stations across the country. Learn more about the series at www.CatholicismSeries.com



The management of the 2002 Oakland Athletics found itself in a bind. The team had performed very well the previous year, making it to the playoffs, but in the offseason, three of its best players were lured away by lucrative contracts offered by east coast powerhouses. In a relatively small market and with a very limited budget, the A’s had to find a way to compete. Their general manager, former big-leaguer Billy Beane, stumbled upon a revolutionary strategy to make the Athletics winners while remaining within their means. It doesn’t sound exactly like the kind of story line that Hollywood would embrace with enthusiasm, but it provides the foundation for a terrific film called “Moneyball,” starring Brad Pitt as the visionary general manager. “Moneyball” is not only a great baseball film; it is also a compelling exploration of the dynamics of leadership and the psychology of success. And as such, as I hope to show, it is a movie that teaches a great deal about the spiritual life.

Beane’s breakthrough occurred through the ministrations of a young, untested, Yale-trained, junior executive named Peter Brand (played by Jonah Hill). Setting aside the assumptions that had, for decades, determined the way baseball talent was assessed, Brand asked a pair of elemental questions: What wins games? Answer: Scoring runs. And what makes scoring runs possible? Answer: Getting on base. Therefore, he concluded, if you want to win games, you have to acquire players who have a knack for getting on base, through hits, walks, getting struck with the ball, etc. He had developed a metric for determining precisely who had that ability—and found that, more often than not, baseball executives and scouts overlooked or undervalued those very players.

Inspired by Brand’s vision, and armed with his statistics, Beane assembled his scouts for a meeting regarding the acquisition of players for

the upcoming year. Over and again, the grizzled and experienced baseball men spoke of the “look” or the “body” of a player, the way the ball “jumped off the bat” of one prospect, the “confidence” of another. Exasperated, Beane shouted, “but do they get on base?!” He was implying that a great looking, athletic, skillful player might not actually be the kind of player that wins games. He wanted his scouts, who were beguiled by the romance of the game, to share his own clarity of vision in regard to their ultimate purpose. Needless to say, the old veterans didn’t jump right on board. Neither did the manager; neither did the sports writers; neither did the fans. And when Beane’s team, assembled according to Brand’s calculations, started the season slowly, the critics came out in force, accusing the general manager of arrogantly standing athwart years of baseball common sense. But Beane stuck to his guns, and the team “of misfit toys” began to gel, and then to excel, and finally to produce the longest winning-streak in American League history.

The single most important quality of a leader is clarity of vision, and his second most important quality is a willingness to do what he has to do in order to realize that vision. Lincoln was no great economist; he did not have extensive experience in government; he was not a particularly skilled legislator, but at the most dire moment in American history, he saw with crystal clarity what the country needed and he had the intestinal fortitude to make it happen. “If I can save the Union by freeing some of the slaves, I will do it; if I can save the Union by freeing none of the slaves, I will do it; if I can save the Union by freeing all of the slaves, I will do it,” he famously said. Then, in the course of the war, despite choruses of criticism, he fired and hired a whole bevy of generals until he found the man he needed. When people complained about the drunken General Ulysses Grant, Lincoln said, “I can’t spare this

man; he fights,” and then, playfully, “send a case of Grant’s whiskey to all my other commanders.” The President knew that he had to win the Civil War and that in order to win the Civil War he needed a general who would bring the battle to the enemy.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus turns on two young men who are following him and asks, “What do you want?” It’s an indispensably important question. Many people go through life not really knowing what they, most fundamentally, want, and accordingly, they drift. The correct answer to Jesus’ question is “eternal life” or “friendship with God” or “holiness.” This corresponds to Billy Beane’s “scoring runs” or Lincoln’s “winning the Civil War,” for it is the simple, clear, unambiguous articulation of The Goal that any believer should have as he endeavors to “lead his life.” Now other people may know, more or less, what they want spiritually, but they lack the courage and attention to pursue that end in the face of distractions and opposition. They know that they should be growing in holiness, but the secular culture proposes sex, pleasure, power, and honor so attractively, that they lose their way. Or perhaps, they receive withering criticism from those who are stuck in the old, standard way of life, and they give in.

What is true at the personal level obtains at the institutional level as well. How many Catholic dioceses can clearly state their objective, what it is, precisely, that they are trying to accomplish through all of their programs and activities? How many bishops can see past old patterns and tired strategies that are no longer serving the purpose of making people holy? How many can resist (or dismantle) bureaucracies whose *raison d’être* is self-preservation rather than the proclamation of the Gospel? “Moneyball” is a portrait of leadership in the world of baseball. But its lessons apply to any seeker on the spiritual path. □

San Antonio, Texas, Prepares for the 49th Annual Maronite Convention

by Julie Mery



During one of the early convention meetings, the task was to create a logo/magnet design. It was truly a brainstorming meeting. Our main goal was to incorporate the Maronite faith, our city (San Antonio), and the 2012 national convention. Many options were brought before us, as well as many great ideas. We finally agreed

on the motto for our logo, "The Maronite Mission...Deep In The Heart of Texas." In the next few paragraphs, you will see why we are truly a city with many missions.

Our Faith

The mission of our Maronite faith is one we want to capitalize on and instill in every person. The Maronite community as a whole is very strong in Texas, despite having only five churches within our massive state. St. George was the first church in the "Lone Star State," founded in 1925, and has been led by many Maronite priests. In 1990, San Antonio welcomed with open arms our first Maronite missionary, Rev. Abdallah Zaidan, M.L.M., as the new pastor. Since then our community has held on strong and flourished through the years with the Maronite Lebanese Missionaries (MLM) being our leaders and spiritual fathers. Our current priests, Rev. Ghassan Mattar (MLM) and Rev. Charles Khachan (MLM) are constantly enriching us about our religion, and characterize how our faith should be the true foundation of our everyday life and well being. During his visit, His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai commented on the strength of our community and how pleased he was that we had kept our Maronite faith through all the generations. We are as strong as our faith and San Antonio are strong.

Our City

Did you know San Antonio is currently the 7th largest city in the U.S.? Our history and uniqueness are what makes our city what it is today. A strong Spanish history is displayed throughout the city and draws many tourists to come and vacation here. San Antonio, named after St. Anthony, is indeed a tourist destination city. The history of this beautiful city is centered around the five Catholic missions built from 1690 -1750. The most famous landmark in Texas is one of the missions know as the "Alamo."

Primarily a Roman Catholic diocese, San Antonio welcomed the Maronites who began arriving around 1900, and in 1925, the first Maronite church in Texas (St. George) was built in downtown San Antonio. Today we are a very young 87 years old.

Our Convention, July 4-8, 2012

San Antonio will be hosting the 49th National Convention. Our mission is to assure our hospitality to all our fellow Maronites from the moment you arrive in San Antonio to the time you leave. The parishioners of St. George are ready to demonstrate how our faith, our leaders, our church and our city are the backbone of this mission. The meaning of the word will be seen or felt during the convention through the workshops, excursions, programs, the day and evening events, the liturgies, the meetings and when we gather in the hospitality room and lobby. Mark your calendar for July 4 - 8, 2012, to experience this plus a whole lot more. Our community is truly honored and excited to host this convention and to make sure you get a real feel and taste of our city.

For more information on the Maronite Convention of 2012 and all of NAM's programs and events visit WWW.NAMNEWS.ORG or call (914) 964-3070 or contact by email at NAM@NAMNEWS.org. □

Pleasantville, New Jersey Christmas Recital



Fr. Elie Saade leads the Christmas Recital at Our Lady Star of the East Mission.

by Rana Nammour

On Friday, December 23, 2011, Our Lady Star of the East Maronite Mission, Pleasantville, N.J., put on its first annual Christmas Recital. The choir, consisting of adult and youth parishioners, performed Christmas hymns in English, Arabic, and Aramaic conducted by Father Elie Saade. Tamara Nammour performed a special hymn, written and composed by Fr. Elie Saade especially for this Christmas. The Youth choir, consisting of children as young as two to eighteen years of age was conducted by Rose Malki Nammour. □

Glen Allen, Virginia Concludes Its Charitable Drive



High School students present a nativity play on December 18, 2011, at St. Anthony Maronite Church.

St. Anthony Maronite Catholic Church in Glen Allen (Richmond), Virginia, began and ended its 2011 charitable and religious activities with children in mind.

St. Anthony's annual Golf Tournament, held on Sunday, October 2, raised \$12,000 for orphaned children in Lebanon. The golfers and their supporters enjoyed the day which ended with a Lebanese meal. In a letter addressed to Bishop Mansour and a copy to Msgr. George Sebaali, Pastor, Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai thanked St. Anthony's parishioners for their donations and assured them that the funds were transferred to needy orphanages in Lebanon.

The annual Benefit Dinner held on December 4 also was widely supported. About 350 people attended the dinner, and \$17,400 was sent to Bishop Gregory Mansour who then sent it on, earmarked "orphaned children," to His Beatitude Patriarch Rai.

The annual Christmas Star program began the Sunday after Thanksgiving. Parishioners chose stars from the tree in the vestibule of the church and brought in their gifts by December 18. Over 200 gifts and needed items were distributed to residents of Hilliard House, a center for battered women and children, and other disadvantaged families in the Richmond area.

The final charitable drive of the year celebrated children also. On December 18, to celebrate Genealogy Sunday, the teens presented a nativity play prior to the Liturgy, and each Sunday School class sang Christmas carols. During the Liturgy, the high school youth read the readings and petitions, carried the gifts and ushered. The children of the parish sang during the liturgy. Afterwards, the parish hosted a Breakfast with Santa. Each child brought a canned food item to benefit the Commonwealth Catholic Charities. Nearly 300 people participated. □

Holy Family

Continued from page 18

The Family of Nazareth was the first model of the Church in which, in the presence of Jesus and thanks to His mediation, a filial rapport with God came to transform even interpersonal relations."

"The Holy Family," Pope Benedict XVI concluded, "is an icon of the domestic Church, which is called to pray together. The family is the first school of prayer where, from their infancy, children learn to perceive God thanks to the teaching and example of their parents. An authentically Christian education cannot neglect the experience of prayer. If we do not learn to pray in the family, it will be difficult to fill this gap later. I would, then, like to invite people to rediscover the beauty of praying together as a family, following the school of the Holy Family of Nazareth." □

