



The Maronite Voice

A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA



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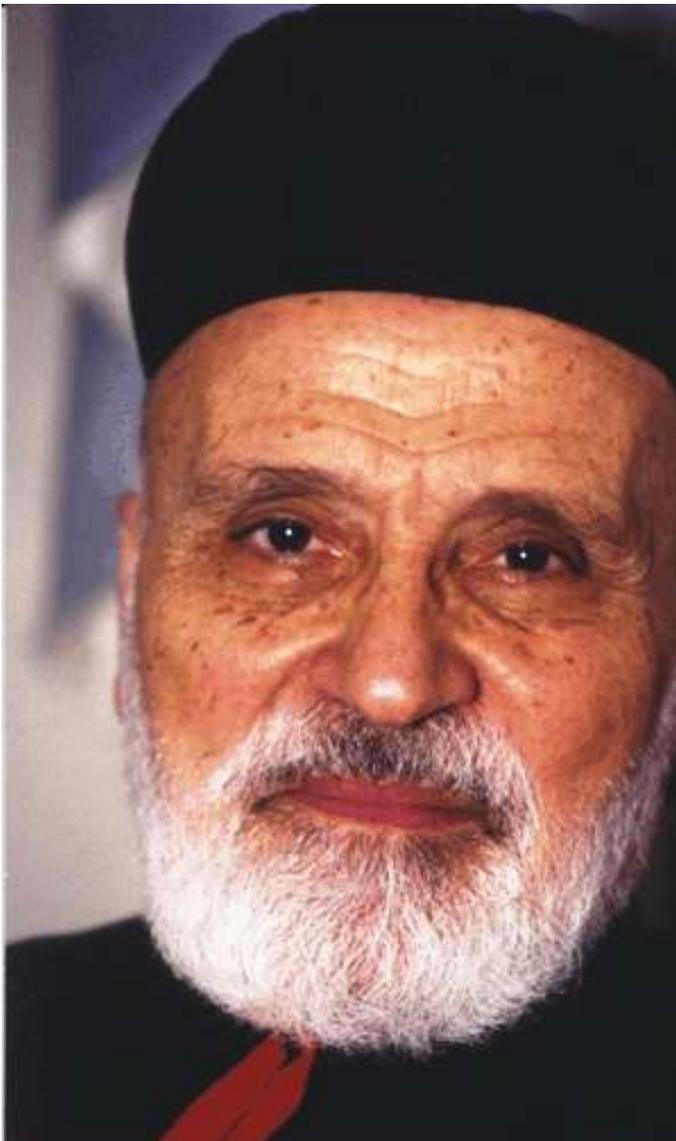
March 2011

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A Tribute to Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir

During this Jubilee Year of St. Maron, the Maronite Church finds herself in a unique position, one that calls for much prayer. There are six Maronite bishops who are retirement age and above, and the Synod of Maronite Bishops needs to elect successors for them. Likewise, Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir has submitted his resignation to the Holy See and the Holy Father has accepted, which means that this month the forty five Maronite Bishops throughout the world will be convoked to a Synod to elect his successor. In the midst of these important upcoming decisions, the Church calls upon all her sons and daughters to pray.

My own personal reflection and prayer during this time has been focused on a sense of gratitude for our Patriarch who has led us through difficult times and is still leading as Father and Head of our Church. Below is a simple tribute to him.



Maronite Patriarch, Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir, is one of those unique leaders who come on history's stage, make a difference, and then fade away without much fanfare. On March 5, 2011 the Church will honor him for his service as Bishop and Patriarch, but, in fact, there are no words to express the gratitude that is due to him.

Patriarch Sfeir has stood before world leaders and powerful interests and proclaimed the truth with a disarming love and a peaceful spirit that is truly beautiful to behold. He is deep down a monk, a simple son of Saint Maron. He has spent almost his entire life in the monastery of Bkerke. He lives soberly, eats sparingly, maintains a balance of prayer and work, and attends attentively to all that his burden of office asks of him. I have seen him get off a plane from South Africa to New York and after a 17 hour flight endure a full day of meetings with United Nations officials, Lebanese embassy officials and guests, and then lead an evening Lenten prayer service at our Cathedral.

The Patriarch is a free man who wants others to live in freedom. In this way he imitates the free man, Saint Maron, who by living in the truth of Christ, became the inspiration for a Church as well as a nation. Our Patriarch's recent pastoral letter on Saint Maron is a treasure chest of inspiration for anyone who loves the Maronites, loves Lebanon, and loves that true spiritual freedom that enables us to love God and our fellow man.

With the Maronite Bishops at his side in 2000, Patriarch Sfeir asked the government to the east of Lebanon to withdraw their troops and military personnel from Lebanon and to do so as a friend. He had also called upon the government to the south of Lebanon to leave southern Lebanon, to honor the dignity and territorial sovereignty of Lebanon.

(Continues on page 20)

Schedule of Bishop Robert Shaheen

March 2, 2011

Maronite Bishops' Synod, Bkerke, Lebanon

April 1 - 2, 2011

Symposium on the Middle East, Detroit, Mich.

April 3, 2011

Solemn Divine Liturgy at St. Sharbel, Warren, Mich.

April 11 - 12, 2011

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

April 14, 2011

History Committee Meeting, Heritage Institute Center, St. Louis, Mo.

April 17, 2011

Palm Sunday Celebration, St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

April 18 - 24, 2011

Holy Week and Easter Celebration, St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo. □

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St. Sharbel Church
Newtown Square, Pennsylvania

July 6- 10, 2011

For more information
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Eparchial Condolences



Subdeacon Abraham Abdulla, passed away on Saturday, February 5, 2011, in Haverhill, Massachusetts, at the age of 83. Subdeacon Abdulla is survived by his wife, Louise, three children and their spouses, six grandchildren, one great grandchild and several nieces and nephews.

He was ordained to the subdiaconate in 1978 and has served at Saint Anthony Church in Lawrence, Mass., since then.

The Funeral was held on Thursday, February 10, at Saint Anthony in Lawrence. Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Louise Abdulla, 191 Maple Street, A2, Lawrence, MA 01841.

Bishop Gregory Mansour, along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Subdeacon Abdulla's family.

May the Lord God grant Subdeacon Abraham eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to his family and loved ones. □

Eparchial Appointments

The Most Reverend Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, has made the following Eparchial assignments:

Revoked the appointment of **Msgr. Ronald Beshara** as Administrator of Mary, Mother of Light Mission, West Palm Beach, Florida, and granted him a sabbatical leave for a period of six months, effective February 1, 2011.

With the approval of the Most Reverend Thomas Wenski Bishop of the Archdiocese of Miami, Florida, appointed **Fr. Jorge Perales** as temporary Administrator of Mary, Mother of the Light Mission, in Greenacres [West Palm Beach], Florida, effective February 2, 2011, and will remain in effect for four months, until May 31, 2011.

Granted **Fr. Joseph Akiki**, Pastor of St. Joseph Church, Olean, N.Y., a sabbatical leave effective March 1, 2011

Granted **Fr. Cyprian Apfleck**, Administrator of St. Rafka Retreat Center, Shelbourne, Vermont, permission to return to his home Diocese as of March 23, 2011. □

Cincinnati, Ohio 100TH Anniversary Celebration



by Linda Conour

The weekend of October 9 - 10, 2010, marked a historic and joyous occasion as St. Anthony of Padua Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, celebrated its 100th Anniversary. The Church's history began in 1910 in the downtown Cincinnati area where Lebanese immigrants worked, lived, and began to worship together in the Maronite tradition that started in their homeland. Many of the Church's current Parishioners are third and fourth generation descendants of the founding families, making the Celebration weekend that much more special and meaningful. Reverend Kayata was the first Pastor of the Church, and in 1955 the Church moved to its current location on Victory Parkway in East Walnut Hills under the guidance of its beloved Pastor and leader for forty years, the late Monsignor Joseph A. Abood. The Parish has grown and changed throughout the years while facing many challenges, but is flourishing today under its current Pastor Father David A. Fisher.

The 100th Anniversary Committee spent nine months of hard work and dedication in preparation for this historic weekend. The Committee consisted of Joe Sowma, General Chairperson; Linda Conour, Banquet Chairperson; Maria Chemaly, Brunch Chairperson; Judy Ganim, Remembrance Book; Helen Sarky; Martha Wakim; Subdeacon Tom Simon and Father David Fisher. Many members of the Parish offered their assistance throughout the planning stages as well.

On Saturday, October 9, more than 300 Parishioners and friends gathered together in the Monsignor Joseph A. Abood Maronite Center that was elegantly decorated for an evening of remembrance and celebration. A cocktail reception complete with traditional *Mezza* prepared by the Parish's Chef Semaan Dargham and music performed by Kathleen Moniaci started off the evening. A delicious sit-down dinner was catered by Village Pantry Catering. Chorbishop Michael Kail, Pastor of St. Maron Church in Youngstown, joined Father David Fisher and former St. Anthony of Padua Pastor Anthony J. Salim in blessing and honoring the Parish both past and present. City of Cincinnati Councilwoman Leslie Ghiz presented to Father Fisher and the entire Parish a Proclamation from Cincinnati Mayor Mark Mallory making October 9, 2010 "St. Anthony of Padua Church Day." Each family was also given a Remembrance Book that was filled

with pictures of parishioners and pastors from each decade, and family histories detailing the lineage and stories of how the fore-founders made their way from the Middle East to Cincinnati. After dinner, the dancing and music brought the Parish to their feet, with entertainment provided by David Hakim and his Middle Eastern Band.

On Sunday, October 10, Chorbishop Michael Kail celebrated the Divine Liturgy in honor of the 100th Anniversary. The Chorbishop reflected on the fore-founders of the Church who came together in hopes of what had transpired over the weekend: a Parish still together and growing strong after 100 years - worshipping today in the same Maronite tradition as the past. A Brunch reception was held immediately following the Liturgy in the Monsignor Joseph A. Abood Maronite Center where the Parish once again came together to joyously reflect on their past history and look forward to continuing their success for many more years to come. □

St. Paul, Minnesota Icon Dedication



by Mary Beth Doohar

On the weekend of January 29 - 30, 2011, the parishioners and friends of Holy Family Maronite Church in Mendota Heights [St. Paul], Minn., unveiled a much anticipated Holy Family Icon, designed and painted specifically by and for our parish. This event comes as a part of a sanctuary renovation project that started in 2008, following the relocation of the parish to Mendota Heights - some five miles southwest of the original St. Paul location.

After the Gospel reading, Fr. Rodrigue Constantin, Pastor, unveiled the Icon. It measures four by five foot; the colors were bold yet soft, the eyes loving and caring, the hands open and welcoming. It was designed by Fr. Rodrigue, aided by the Sanctuary Renovation Committee (Mary Mansur, Kevin Mueller and Mary Margaret Boldt). A talented local iconographer, Nick Markell of Markell Studios, also helped design and painted the icon. This icon was made possible thanks to the generosity of Mary Mansur, Ed and Adele Mansur, and Joe and Marsha Mansur. Fr. Rodrigue briefly explained to the parish the deep symbolism and theology of the icon, then blessed and consecrated it. □

Youngstown, Ohio 100 - Year Anniversary Kick-off!



by Sister Celine Nohra

On Sunday February 13, 2010, St. Maron Church in Youngstown, Ohio, celebrated its 100th anniversary kick-off. Parishioners filled the church participating in a special liturgy for the occasion. Excited Maronite Christian Formation (MCF) students processed in with the clergy and altar servers carrying banners, frames, crosses and other articles or wearing T-shirts that they designed especially for this event. For weeks, our youths have been preparing for this celebration. It was a great sight walking into classrooms seeing kids working with their dedicated teachers, sensing the enthusiasm and having the reassurance that the time we spend nurturing the faith of our children is not in vain. Even parents were involved in the preparation! It is not surprising that this year we broke last year's highest attendance record for MCF with even more students maintaining a perfect attendance! The Ladies Guild prepared a lunch following liturgy and beautifully decorated the hall which was packed with family and friends enjoying the variety of food. This is only the start of a great year since more activities and celebrations are being planned. As our wholehearted pastor Chorbishop Mike Kail mentioned in his homily, we have so many blessings and reasons to celebrate: the 1600th anniversary for Saint Maron, the 100th anniversary of our local church, the gift of the living and deceased priests who served our parish and that of our ancestors who built a great legacy by trusting God and supporting their priests. And here we are today, growing in number but also in wisdom and belief, transferring our faith and values to the next generation who will carry on with the Spirit of Maron and the same zeal for as long as God wills. □

Food for Thought

The Lord does us the honor of placing his confidence in us and calling us to the ministry, showing us his mercy. This call is not reserved for a few; it is for everyone, each in his own state of life.

Pope John Paul II

Brooklyn, New York Feast of Saint Maron

by Salma T. Vahdat

On Wednesday, February 9, 2011, the feast day of our patron, St. Maron, His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Cathedral in Brooklyn, New York. Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Vicar General; Very Reverend James Root, Rector of the Cathedral and Bishop Emeritus Stephen Hector Doueihi concelebrated.

This year is the 1600th Anniversary of the death of the revered ascetic and hermit, Maron. In his homily, Bishop Mansour focused on St. Maron's desire to achieve a unity with God and a freedom to join oneself with God. He suggested that we all look within ourselves for that same essence of selflessness and search for perfection in the light of the Lord that our patron, St. Maron so exemplified.

Following the Divine Liturgy, the Knights of St. Maron hosted a dinner for the parish in the Cathedral Social Hall which was well attended. The Cathedral Parish also celebrated our patron's anniversary at a formal dinner (*hafli*) at Terrace on the Park in Queens on Saturday evening, February 19. The event was co-chaired by John Safi and Joseph Shaia, Jr. A highlight of the evening was the presentation of the NAM sponsored Faith of the Mountain and Massabki Awards. These awards, named after the three martyred Massabki Brothers - Patrons of the Laity, are in recognition for outstanding dedication of the laity to the parish community and the Lay Apostolate. The Faith of the Mountain Award, specifically for young adults, was given to Patrick Abou Chrouh, a past President of the MYO. He was also an Altar Server and assists in a variety of capacities including all fund raisers for the Cathedral, MYO, Spiritual Life and mentoring of our youth.

Pierre and Norma Haddad received the Silver Massabki Award. Pierre is the President of the Knights of St. Maron, the men's organization of the Cathedral. He leads the ushers and assists at all Cathedral functions. He has worked in close association with his wife, Norma, who heads the Heritage Program (both Religious Education and Arabic Classes). Norma teaches the First Communion class as well and is presently the chairperson of the Spiritual Life of the Cathedral as requested by our rector, Fr. Root and the Pastoral Council.

The conclusion of the celebrations of this Jubilee Year of St. Maron will occur on the Feast Day of St. John Maron, First Maronite Patriarch, March 2, at a Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral. The Cathedral Family will be joined by clergy of different rites including Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, Bishop of Brooklyn; Bishop Stephen Hector Doueihi, Bishop Emeritus of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn; Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Maron; Very Reverend James A. Root, Rector of the Cathedral; Rev. Antoine Rizk, Church of the Virgin Mary of Brooklyn; Very Reverend Thomas Zain, St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral of Brooklyn. A reception for the clergy and parishioners will follow in the Cathedral Social Hall. □

Minneapolis, Minnesota

St. Maron Feast Day Celebration



by Joan Moses

The church of Saint Maron in Minneapolis, Minn., celebrated Liturgy for the feast day of its patron Saint Maron on Sunday, February 13, 2011. Archbishop John Nienstedt of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis presided. The Archbishop delivered a beautiful homily on the 108-year history of the parish. He began and closed his comments in his traditional manner, with song: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have called you and you are mine." Archbishop Nienstedt reminded parishioners to be as proud of their church founders who were dedicated to the devotion of the Maronite faith through great stress and trials as they are proud of Saint Maron himself. Those who built the original church laid a foundation of faith for all to come, their descendants and those who have joined this church throughout the decades.

Monsignor sharbel Maroun, Pastor, presented the parish with a gold cedar tree about a foot tall that bears two display discs, one with a painting of Saint Maron and the other holds a certified relic of Saint Maron. It will be permanently displayed at the mosaic of Saint Maron in the front of the church.

Badr Awad led the choir; Yaoob Jacobs read the Epistle and the Knights of Columbus formed the honor guards.

Monsignor sharbel closed the Liturgy with gracious words for Archbishop Nienstedt, for our founders and Saint Maron, and for all the devoted members of the congregation. He then gave the *Faith of the Mountain* award to Michael Zerka; the Saint Maron award to Lenora Rivera; and the Silver Massabki Award to Carla and Karam Bedros. All four recipients are greatly appreciated by the congregation as each one is active in many areas of service to the church and is always ready and willing to take on fresh challenges. A reception followed in the Cedars Hall.

The previous night, Cedars Hall was the site of the annual Saint Maron *Hafli*; Joe Youssef, Studio *El Fann* winner from *Thoum*, [Batroun, Lebanon], volunteered his singing talents and Roukos Jacobs provided the musical

accompaniment. The children of Maronite Christian Formation created three-way display boards filled with artwork and writings to honor Saint Maron. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will be held for 1600 minutes to close the jubilee celebration of Saint Maron starting Tuesday, March 1, and close with an evening Liturgy on Wednesday, March 2. □

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

March 3 - 16, 2011

Maronite Bishops' Synod, *Bkerke*, Lebanon

March 18 - 20, 2011

Feast of St. Joseph and the 100th Anniversary of St. Joseph Church, Atlanta, Ga.

March 21, 2011

USCCB Pro-Life Meeting, Washington, D.C.

March 22, 2011

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

March 23, 2011

Task Force for Lebanon Dinner, Washington, D.C.

March 24, 2011

USCCB Catechesis Meeting, Washington, D.C.

March 25 - 26, 2011

MYO/MYA Retreat, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

March 27, 2011

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

April 3, 2011

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

April 4, 2011

Eparchial Presbyteral Council Meeting and Blessing of the Holy Oils, Brooklyn, N.Y.

April 5, 2011

Eparchial Finance Council Meeting, Brooklyn, N.Y.

April 8 -10, 2011

Pastoral Visit to St. George Church, Uniontown, Penn.

April 12 -15, 2011

Eastern Catholic Bishops Meeting and Eparchial History Committee Meeting, St. Louis, Mo. □

Murray, Utah St. Maron Collage



Pictured from left to right: Makiya Johns, Jazelle Johns, MacKenzie Allem and Tanesha Johns.

by Pam Watkins

As St. Jude Maronite Church in Murray, Utah, prepared to Celebrate the momentous 1600th Anniversary Feast of St. Maron, the MYO decided to make an Educational Collage. In addition to adding to their own knowledge of St. Maron and the Maronite Church, the collage was on display during the St. Maron Feast day activities to educate and inform Parishioners and Visitors alike. □

Akron, Ohio Combined Youth Retreat



On Saturday, January 29, 2011, the combined MYO from St. Maron Church in Cleveland and from Our Lady of the Cedars in Akron, Ohio, came together for an evening of prayer, food and dancing as they celebrated their faith and friendship. The evening began with a special Divine Liturgy for the youth, celebrated by Father Tony

Massad from St. Maron and Father Toufic Nasr, Pastor of Our Lady of the Cedars. Following liturgy, the youth enjoyed an evening of pizza, music, video games and a movie. Food and drink were donated by parishioners, youth advisors Elias Hazkial and John Jesser and a donation from the St. Maron's MYO. The youth are now getting prepared for the upcoming regional MYO retreat at St. Sharbel in Warren, Mich. □

Detroit, Michigan Feast of Saint Maron



Left to right: Mike Maygar, Fr. Hanna Tayar, Fr. Gaby Hoyek, Msgr. Louis Baz and Msgr. Gebran Bou Merhe.

On Saturday February 5, 2011, St. Maron Church, Detroit, Michigan, celebrated the Feast of St. Maron with a Divine Liturgy. Msgr. Louis Baz, Pastor, was the main celebrant. Msgr. Gebran Bou Merhe, Fr. Gaby Hoyek, Fr. Hanna Tayyar, and two monks from the Order of the Blessed Mary concelebrated. Mike Maygar assisted.

In his homily, Msgr. Baz spoke about St. Maron and how the three Detroit Maronite Churches, St. Maron, St. Sharbel and St. Rafka came together for that special event. Msgr. Baz spoke about the life of St. Maron and the special 1600 years since the death of St. Maron and how we should be united in prayers and in our spiritual life. A banquet followed the Liturgy. □

the Deadline is...

Deadline for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is March 25, 2011.

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. □

Birmingham, Alabama *Ladies' Altar Society Honored*

by Janet Wyrick

The 57th Annual Feast of St. Maron Banquet at St. Elias in Birmingham, Alabama, honored the Ladies' Altar Society and celebrated its 100th Anniversary. The Banquet was held on Sunday, February 13, 2011 following a Solemn Liturgy for the Feast of St. Maron. The banquet was prepared by members of the parish and held in the church hall. Mistress of Ceremonies was Tammi Dahle. Speakers included Gina Henley, Mary Milton, Elizabeth Boackle, and Peggy Antoun. Parishioners delighted in hearing stories of the Ladies' Altar Society and its service to the church from the early days until the present. The ladies have always played a vital part in the life of the parish community and will continue to do so. Chorbishop Richard Saad presented the following awards to deserving parishioners: Parishioner of the Year to Janice Toner; Silver Massabki Medal to Gina Henley; and Faith of the Mountain Award to Anthony Bolus. □

Washington D.C. *MYA Launch New Lecture Series*

by Janine Helou

On Sunday January 23, 2011, the young adult group of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Washington, D.C., officially launched a new lecture series called *Faith of the Mountain*. We had been working on this series for most of 2010, with the goal of having consistent lecture events every two months. We have always wanted to contribute something new to the life of the parish. We wanted our contribution to not only be academic, but also spiritual, new and interesting. After many brainstorming sessions, we decided that a lecture series was the best vehicle for the ideas and speakers we wanted to introduce.

We chose the name for our series in honor of Chorbishop Dominique Ashkar's hard work, and for being our inspiration for it. He has always been supportive of our group activities and ambitions. He is never shy in letting us know that he believes we can aim for big goals and achieve them successfully. We launched our official event that Sunday, hoping it would prove him right. The Massabki Brothers was the topic for the lecture that day. The MYA had been unanimously in favor of bringing Mr. Louis Ragy from Atlanta, Georgia, to be the speaker. Mr. Ragy, NAM board member and fervent Massabki advocate, was more than happy to accommodate us in our request.

Since the Massabki brothers were martyred while protecting the Franciscan Fathers at their monastery in Damascus, Syria, we decided to invite the current Franciscan Brothers of the "Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land" in Washington, D.C., to attend. Three Brothers came, and read a Massabki prayer to start off the event. We were lucky to also have in attendance Sr. Marla and Sr. Therese Maria, of Maronite Servants of Christ the Light.

The lecture was very well attended. Mr. Ragy began his

lecture, giving the audience a look at the personal lives of the Massabki family, before the massacre of July 10, 1860. He also shared bone relics of the Franciscan Fathers and the three brothers. The audience was then treated to a movie-style documentary about the lives of the brothers and their martyrdom. Mr. Ragy spoke about NAM's work and involvement raising money for their canonization. He spoke of NAM's rebuilding efforts of the Massabki altar in Damascus, and showed a photo of the finished altar.

The lecture was an hour long, and the audience discussion session went on for forty minutes. At the conclusion the MYA presented Mr. Ragy with a \$300 donation towards the Massabki cause, and a pledge to help keep the cause alive in the parish. Mr. Ragy thanked the MYA and the parish community. The MYA invited everyone to mingle and enjoy the light refreshments prepared for them.

We are happy to share our story with our fellow Maronites across the U.S. We are excited, as we are currently in the middle of preparing our next lecture, which will be during Lent. A message to all our fellow Young Adults: Don't be afraid to launch big projects at your churches - you never know how well received your event will be until you go for it! □

San Francisco, California *St. Maron Feast Day*



From left to right, Tommy Tedros, Rose Summers, Roula and Pierre Haddad (Massabki Medal recipients), Tania Darza (*Faith of The Mountain* award recipient). Sudeacon Tony Boukhalil, Deacon Fady Chidiac, Fr. John Nahal, Subdeacon Albert Constantine and Subdeacon Fadi Bazouzi.

Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church, San Francisco Bay area, California, celebrated the feast of its Patron and Founder Saint Maron on Sunday, February 13, 2011. The community was honored by the presence of NAM President, Tommy Tedros, and Vice-president of the Southwest Region, Subdeacon Albert Constantine. During The Divine Liturgy, all officers/members of all committees/organizations of the Parish were blessed and installed. Certificates were awarded to different volunteers. A reception was held in the Maronite Education Center, sponsored by the Maroun Family. □

Danbury, Connecticut *A Two Day Celebration*



Fr. Jean Younes with Bishop Robert Shaheen.

St. Anthony Maronite Church in Danbury, Conn., celebrated St. Maron Jubilee on Saturday February 12. Despite the bitter winter in Connecticut, 325 attended and Father Jean Younes, Pastor, expressed his gratitude to all who contributed to making it a successful event.

It began on Friday, February 11 with a special dinner hosted by Richard Jowdy, President of the Lebanon-American Club. Their Excellencies Bishop Gregory Mansour, Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, and Bishop Robert Shaheen, Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and Father Younes joined the men of the Lebanese community for dinner.

On Saturday February 12, St Anthony Church and the Lebanon American Club again hosted an early luncheon organized by Joseph Walkovich to bring together the Lebanese Ambassador to the United States in Washington, D.C., Mr. Antoine Chided, Congressman Christopher Murphy, Mayor Michael Jarjoura of Waterbury with Bishop Mansour, Bishop Shaheen, Father Jean Younes, and Msgr. Michael Skrocki, Pastor of St. Ann Melkite Catholic Church in Danbury.

In the evening, parishioners, guests and friends attended the Divine Liturgy at St. Anthony Maronite Church. Bishop Mansour presided along with Bishop Shaheen, Bishop William Lori of Bridgeport, Father Jean Younes and many local priests. Bishop Lori delivered the homily which focused on the meaning of the legacy of St. Maron. [The full text of Bishop Lori's homily is on page 14].

Following the Liturgy a banquet at the Amber Room in Danbury was held where three bishops, ten priests and Ambassador Antoine Chided met with Senator Richard Blumenthal, Congressman Christopher Murphy, Mayor Mark Boughton of Danbury and Representative Leaders of the Area.

Masters of Ceremony Mark Chory and Tom Saadi called on Father Greg Mecca to give the invocation followed by Beverly Ackel who sang the American and Lebanese Anthems. A DVD of Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir giving a special blessing to all the guests was shown.

The program proceeded with Bishop William Lori

speaking about the two lungs of the Eastern and Western Catholic Churches. Interesting was Bishop Shaheen who talked about his memories and his attachment to his hometown, Danbury. Bishop Mansour then educated all present with the history, life and heritage of the Maronite Church in the U.S.A. Mayor Mark Boughton of Danbury commended the Lebanese community for their achievements in the city. Congressman Chris Murphy and Richard Blumenthal gave praise to the relationship of the U.S.A. and Lebanon. Keynote Speaker, Mr. Antoine Chedid, Lebanese Ambassador to the U.S., narrated his gratitude for the current situation in Lebanon and hope for real peace in the Middle East.

Father Jean Younes and the Bishops concluded by giving recognition to the Marouns of St. Anthony Church. Special certificates of blessings from the Holy Father in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI were given to Maroun Salame, Maroun Najjar, and Maroun Touma.

Mike Naber and Father Jean Younes presented Ferris and Linda Nasser with the Silver Massabki Award for 2011 and the *Faith of the Mountain* Award to Christopher Ackell. Each Senior 70 and above of St. Anthony Church received a certificate and St. Maron medallion for their long time contributions to the church. After Mgr. Michael Skrocki gave the closing benediction, Fr. Younes invited all to stay and enjoy a night of Lebanese and American music with dancing. □

Glen Allen, Virginia *Three Day Spiritual Pilgrimage*

by Cathy George

The parishioners of Saint Anthony Maronite Church in Glen Allen (Richmond), Virginia, celebrated St. Anthony's feast day on Sunday January 16. After the 11:00 liturgy, the Junior Youth Club, an organization of children aged 8 through 12, presented a puppet show of the life of Saint Anthony. This was followed by a reception for all the church.

In honor of the Year of St. Maron, the Parish held a "three-day spiritual pilgrimage" on February 7, 8, and 9. Each evening after a 6:30 liturgy in honor of St. Maron, a different presentation took place. On Monday, a brief history of the early monastics was given. The Youth Club, youth aged 13 through 18, presented a play based on *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century* by Thomas Merton. Carmen Dailey, one of their advisors, adapted the play which allowed the students to take the parts of the ancient abbots and abbesses who imparted bits of spiritual advice to the audience. On Tuesday, the story of St. Maron and the history of the Maronites until the present was given. On Wednesday, the parishioners learned about the Maronite Church in the expansion, especially in the United States. Each presentation was followed by a catered buffet. Up to 150 parishioners were present during each event. □



Birmingham, Alabama Annual Festival



Members of St. Elias Church prepare *kibbee* for their upcoming festival.

The St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church in Birmingham, Alabama, is having its Thirteenth Annual Lebanese Food and Cultural Festival on April 29 and 30. There is no admission charge.

Some of the Lebanese delicacies that will be offered during the Festival will include *baked kibbee*, rolled grape leaves, spinach pies, *baked kibbee* and *falafel* sandwiches, *tabouli*, grilled Lebanese lemon chicken, *homus* and pita bread. For dessert the public can sample Lebanese sweets including a variety of *baklava*, *kiak*, and Lebanese ice cream.

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

Nightly entertainment will again feature the popular Amin Sultan Band from New York outside in a tent with music and dancing from 6:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The public is also invited to attend our Liturgy service which will start at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. Inside the main Hall, Friday night and Saturday, on stage, our youth will perform traditional Lebanese dances.

Beginning on Friday night and concluding Saturday at 8:30 p.m., a Silent Auction will be held. Twenty-five percent of all proceeds for the Festival will go to local and national charities other than St. Elias. In the last twelve years St. Elias has donated over \$220,000.00 to other charities from Festival proceeds. For more information, check out our website at www.stelias.org/festival_2011.html. □

Wheeling, West Virginia Pastor's 60th Birthday



Fr. Bakhos Chidiac, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, is surrounded by some of his parishioners to celebrate his 60th birthday.

Our Lady of Lebanon Parish in Wheeling, West Virginia, celebrated the 60th birthday of its Pastor, Fr. Bakhos Chidiac. The Women's Society and the Cedar Club hosted a brunch following the Divine Liturgy on February 6, 2011. Fr. Chidiac has been the Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon for ten years. During that time, thanks to his perseverance and the dedication and generosity of the parishioners and friends, the Parish has seen many accomplishments, including a new addition which houses a social hall, handicap accessible restrooms and an elevator for easy access into the church. While working closely with the Parish Council, Fr. Chidiac led the way to many needed projects. Remarkably, all were done while leaving the parish debt free. Our Lady of Lebanon celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2006 and while many churches in the area have closed their doors, Our Lady of Lebanon is very proud to remain a strong and viable presence in the community. □

Lenten Devotion



The Most Reverend Bishops Robert Shaheen and Gregory Mansour have issued the following Lenten guidelines for the Maronites of the United States:

All parish priests are to celebrate the **Benediction with the Cross** every Friday of Lent except for the Great Friday of the Crucifixion. This service may be preceded by other popular devotions such as Evening Prayer (*Ramsho*), Stations of the Cross or even the Divine Liturgy. Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament should not take place on Fridays of Lent. □



The Time Has Come for Bold Steps



The Lobby of the Maronite Heritage Institute

Something exciting and challenging is going to take place, with your help. In order to ensure that the Maronite Church will continue to flourish in the next century and beyond, we must act now, joining hands and hearts in a new adventure. We have reached our goal with the completion of our Maronite Heritage Center and our desire is to continue to develop and support this Institute.

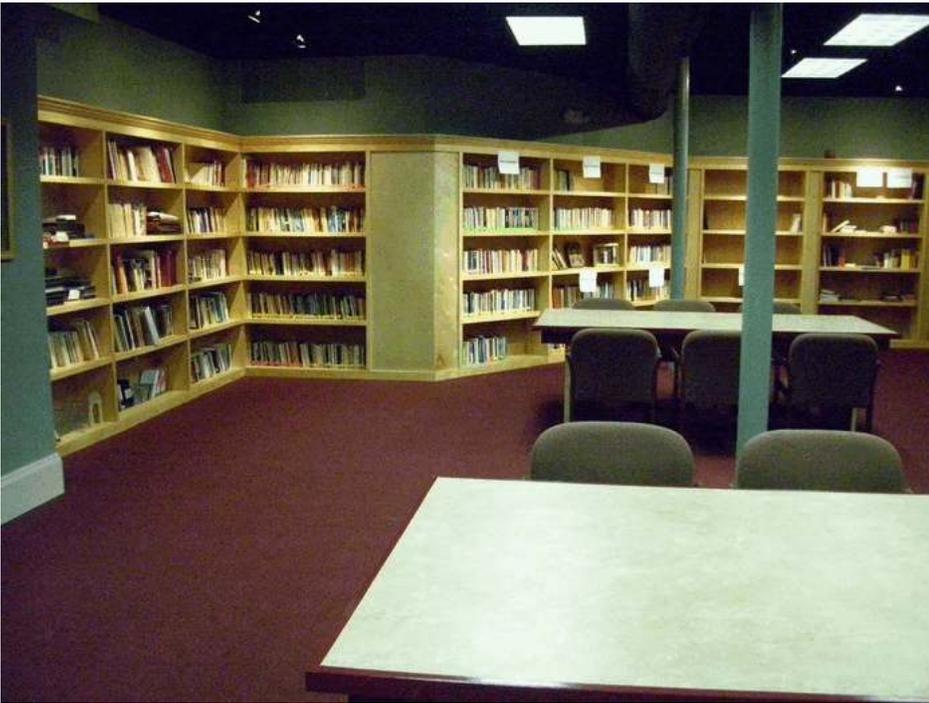
The first groups of Maronite

immigrants to the United States at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries could only have dreamed of the time when the seed of their faith would take root across the nation. Could they have predicted, that we, the proud generation born of their vision and their sacrifices, would have to take bold steps in order to capture and preserve the history of their struggles and to ensure their stories will continue to nurture and strengthen the growth of the Maronite Church for centuries to

come? The time has come for bold steps!

The Maronite Heritage Institute will be a center for education, research, conferences, retreats and preservation. It will be a place where we can gather and present the history of our people, from the first Maronites who came to this great country to the present day. Using the latest, audio, visual and media technologies, it will provide a centralized and dynamic means for maintaining our archived materials, our historical documents and the richness of our ecclesiastical patrimony, all of which distinguishes our unique Eastern Catholic tradition and liturgical expression. Maronites from across the country will be able to come and research their family histories or record their own stories and the stories of their parents and grandparents for the benefit of their children, grandchildren and future generations.

It is my intention that the Maronite Heritage Institute will become *the* vibrant center for lecture and study about our place in the Church and the world today, and about our opportunities to shape the future. The Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon will establish a relationship with Saint Louis University, one of the top Catholic universities in the nation, to hopefully forward this purpose. This relationship can bring some of the best educational minds and resources to bear on the



The Library

religious, cultural and political issues that affect and are affected by Maronites. Annual lecture series, days of reflection, youth seminars and workshops, business conferences and audio visual publications will inspire dialog about how to bring our eastern spirituality, culture and traditions to inform and enhance our culture to the

west. In addition periodic spiritual seminars will teach laity, seminarians and clergy alike to re-root ourselves in the spirituality of our saints and explore deeply what it means to be Maronite in this beloved country. We are exploring the exciting possibility of a media network in which we can broadcast nationally and globally our Maronite

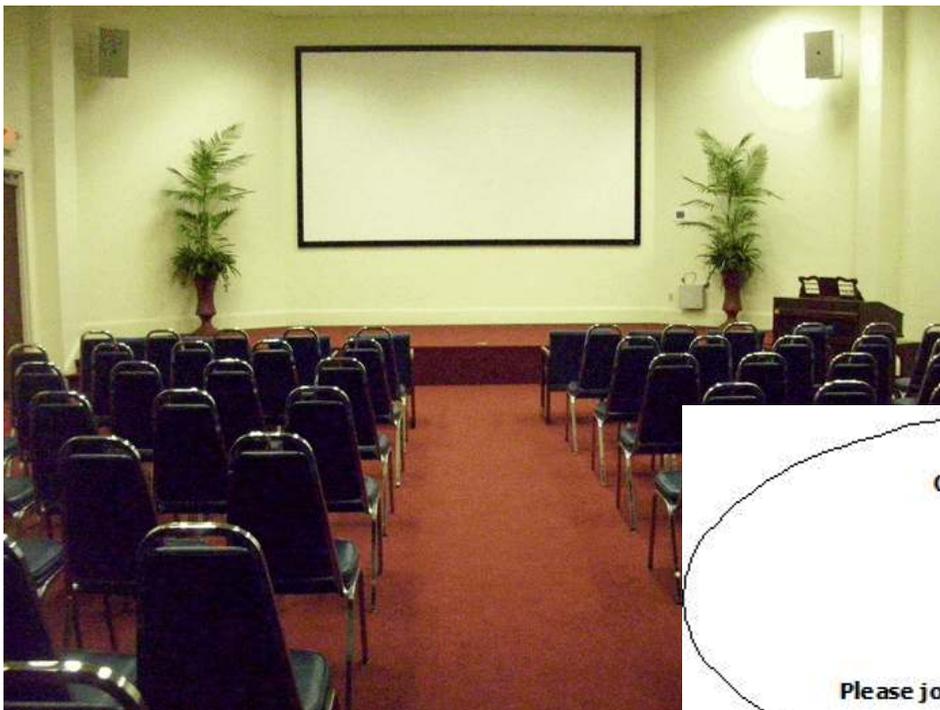
programs. These are just some of the exciting initiatives that the Maronite Heritage Institute will bring.

We must learn about the times and the cultures of our ancestors. We must understand our past to be able to build for the future. We must examine our roots to learn more about ourselves so that we can share with those who come after us a sense of meaning and identity of our culture. For just as a tree without roots will soon die, a people without roots will soon be weak and dried up, having no real basis for future growth and development.

As time passes on and new communities of Maronites continue to spring up throughout the United States, it becomes essential to have a central, forward thinking institution completely dedicated to studying our past, assessing our present, and planning for our future. For more information about this new adventure, please contact the Maronite Heritage Institute at (314) 231-1416. We welcome everyone from around the country to visit us next time they are in St. Louis.

Sincerely

Bishop Robert J. Shaheen



Latest audio and video technology will be used.

Official Opening Ceremony
May 19th – 22nd, 2011
Grand Hafli
Saturday May 21st
Please join us in St. Louis for the weekend!

Foster Vocations in the Parish



Fr. Anthony Salim, Pastor of St. Theresa Church in Brockton, Mass., Sister Marla Marie and youth celebrate the parish Valentine brunch.

by Sister Marla Marie Lucas

"**P**roposing Vocations in the Local Church" is the theme of a letter written by Pope Benedict XVI for the 48th World Day of Prayer for Vocations to be celebrated on May 15, 2011. The Holy Father calls on parishes and the wider community to make it a priority to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life. He writes, "It is essential that every local Church become more sensitive and attentive to the pastoral care of vocations, helping children and young people in particular at every level of family, parish and associations - as Jesus did with his disciples."

He also calls on the Christian community to assist men and women who are being called to serve the Church, especially since they face struggles and resistance in our secularized society. "Particularly in these times, when the voice of the Lord seems to be drowned out by 'other voices' and his invitation to follow him by the gift of one's own life may seem too difficult, every Christian community, every member of the Church, needs consciously to feel responsibility for promoting vocations."

The Holy Father, first and foremost, urges that parishes and families pray for vocations. "Vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life are first and foremost the fruit of constant contact with the living God and insistent prayer lifted up to the 'Lord of the harvest', whether in parish communities, in Christian families or in groups specifically devoted to prayer for vocations."

In addition, he stresses the need to embrace those who have recognized the "call" with the embrace of the parish family. "It is important to encourage and support those who show clear signs of a call to priestly life and religious

consecration, and to enable them to feel the warmth of the whole community as they respond 'yes' to God and the Church."

Perhaps your parish can highlight this year's World Day of Prayer for Vocations by offering at least one opportunity to respond to the Holy Father's teaching. Here in the U.S., our young Maronites have the opportunity to offer their lives in service to the Church as a priest or consecrated religious nun or monk. Prayers for vocations are available on our US Maronite Vocations website, www.vineyardofthelord.com. Also available on this website are video and print resources promoting vocations. □

Denver, Colorado First Vocation



Assisted by Fr. Armando Elkhoury, Chorbishop Richard Saad ordains Chris Pond to the Order of Subdeacon.

by Lora Soliman

There was a sense of calm and peace and of profound fulfillment for Christopher Pond as he stood before the Altar of St. Rafka Church, Denver, Colorado, and was ordained to the Orders of Cantor, Lector and Subdeacon on the eve of Epiphany, January 5, 2011. As he stood before Chorbishop Richard Saad of St. Elias Maronite Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and his own parish priest, Fr. Armando Elkhoury, Chris felt that he had "finally answered a calling to serve God. I felt this profound sense of peace and a tremendous feeling of amazing Grace." Chris' wife Yolanda and daughter Olivia, along with Chris' mother Joan Robinson, Step Father Rick Robinson, sister Julianne Whitelaw and his brother Mark Pond stood proudly as he was ordained. Chris had long felt the desire to become a Deacon and feels that his great uncle Lawrence Mich, who was in the first class of permanent deacons in the Archdiocese of Denver after Vatican II, may have influenced him in many ways. After the solemnity of the service, a celebration dinner put together by the Ladies Society of St. Rafka followed in the Church Hall. As is typical for this parish, there was a delicious and bountiful assortment of dishes, fruits and sweets to celebrate the ordination of St. Rafka's first Subdeacon. For this parish

the pride in having their own Subdeacon after only being consecrated four years ago was very evident.

To be ordained on Epiphany was especially symbolic for Chris as it was "the beginning of Christ's public ministry and so, too, the beginning of my own." His journey to become Subdeacon in the Maronite Church began when he attended the "Signing of the Chalice" on Great Friday of the Crucifixion at what was then St. Rafka Maronite Mission in 2005. His interest in Eastern Traditions drew him to St. Rafka. He had already attended services at the Orthodox Cathedral and the Byzantine Catholic Church in Denver. He found out about the Maronite Mission in Colorado through searching the internet. "I didn't know what to expect," said Chris, a Roman Catholic at the time, as he related his first visit to St. Rafka's. A beloved parishioner who has since passed away, Terese Clark, greeted him immediately. "She asked me if I was a priest. I told her I wasn't and then she asked me to sit next to her. She began sharing with me what the Maronites were all about." Chris was asked to read the Epistle that morning and felt very welcome. He thoroughly enjoyed the service, stating that the Anaphora was one of the two most ancient Anaphoras of the entire Church. "I have always felt in my personal journey that the more ancient the practice, the closer one comes to Christ," says Chris who believes the adherence to the old is very important.

That Sunday, Chris returned with his wife Yolanda and young daughter Olivia, to celebrate the Great Sunday of the Resurrection with the parishioners of St. Rafka. Worshiping in a school gym did not deter him from returning! He was again asked to read the Epistle. After that, he began coming every other Sunday to attend the Divine Liturgy. During this time, Chris went to Austin, Texas and while he was there met Fr. Sawyer who is the pastor of Our Lady's Maronite Church. Fr. Sawyer took Chris on a tour of the church and explained the meaning of the architecture. Chris was profoundly impacted "because of the Maronite Church's adherence to the old." After that visit, he began praying the Maronite Daily Prayers. "I began to feel quite strongly in my heart that I had a Maronite soul," said Chris. He began his formation to become Subdeacon after Bishop Shaheen approved his application and gave him permission. He met several hours every week with Fr. Armando, also did extensive reading of Vatican II Documents, Canon Law and books on the role of clerics as he prepared. After completing the requirements, he and Fr. Armando submitted his application which was approved by Bishop Shaheen. In 2010, he officially transferred to the Maronite Church.

Chris was serving the Maronite Church even before he became Subdeacon. For many people who listen to the daily prayers found on the website www.thehiddenpearl.org, the peaceful sound of Chris' voice can be heard reciting the daily prayers of the faithful along with Fr. Armando. It was a tremendous commitment of faith and time on their part to record daily prayers for the entire liturgical year. In fact, Fr. Armando said that it was Chris' idea to publish the podcasts. They become quite popular with several thousand downloads every month. Bishop Gregory Mansour informed Chris at last year's Maronite Convention in Birmingham that there are several thousand downloads monthly of the podcasts and that priests in Lebanon are using them to learn English.

Chris also points out that the Maronite Church and her saints are becoming more known in the U.S. He recently

attended the opening of the Formation House at Denver's St. John Vianney Seminary. This brand new dormitory was built to house first year seminarians to assist them in their formation before moving them in with older seminarians. Chris proudly relates that among the four beautiful stained glass windows in the Formation House is one of St. Sharbel. He says it was very moving to see this there.

Born in Philadelphia, Penn., with no Middle Eastern heritage, Chris chose to become a Maronite. As Fr. Armando constantly reminds his parishioners, when one becomes a Maronite, they inherit the rich tradition of the Maronite Church and become heirs of all the Maronites who came before. They become protectors and promoters of the Antiochene Syriac Maronite faith and heritage. Chris also became a Secular Discalced Carmelite after he began coming to St. Rafka. He joined the third order of Carmelites after he began worshiping at St. Rafka. Carmelites are a religious order founded on Mt. Carmel near St. Elijah's Well in what is now Haifa, Israel. The focus of the Order is contemplative prayer and lay people are able to participate in the work of the Order through a formal formation program that takes approximately six years. At the conclusion of this formation, a Secular Carmelite takes religious vows much like a nun, but appropriate to their state of life. As a Carmelite, Chris had to choose a religious name. He proudly chose "Mathias of the Blessed Cedar of Lebanon."

Chris has a degree in Psychology and dual Masters degrees in Health Administration and Business Administration. For the last four and a half years, Chris has worked as the Director of Youth Protection for the Archdiocese of Denver and is the liaison for Roman Catholic Archbishop Chaput at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on these issues. He leads the program "Called to Protect" that teaches safety for children and young adults. He also assists the Vicar for Clergy in investigating any allegations regarding inappropriate conduct of priests and deacons with children. Chris feels fulfillment in doing this work as it "helps keep our children safe and teaches both parents and children on how to be safe. I also have the opportunity to help accused priests clear their names in regards to false accusations as we try to move forward from this crisis that began in 2002." The document titled the "Charter of Protection for Children and Young People" formulated by U.S. Catholic Bishops which guides Chris' office has also been agreed to be followed by the two Maronite eparchies in the United States.

When asked what he feels now as he stands at the altar during Sunday's Divine Liturgy and looks out at the parishioners who have come to worship, Chris eloquently said "I have a definite feeling of the holiness of God and a profound feeling of serving Him as I look at the families for whom I pray and have been called to serve. I feel very blessed." The community of St. Rafka Maronite Church is very proud and honored to have Chris as her Subdeacon. □



Saint Maron's Day Homily

by
Bishop William Lori

On February 12, 2011, St. Anthony Maronite Church, Danbury, Conn., celebrated the Feast of Saint Maron. His Excellency Bishop William Lori of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Conn., delivered the following homily.



Bishop William Lori

Standing before you this afternoon, I am, in the memorable words of Pope John Paul II "breathing with both lungs" - that is, with the lungs of both Eastern and Western Christianity. And the air which I am privileged to inhale in this celebration of the feast of St. Maron is that of a Church with her own rich and beautiful liturgical heritage; it is that of a Church who traces her roots to Antioch 'where the disciples were first called Christians' (Acts 11:26). It is the holy atmosphere of a Church who faithfully proclaims and adheres to the ancient Chalcedonian faith in Christ, truly God and truly man. The air I draw in is that of a Church who uniquely took her identity from a man and a monastery, a Church of asceticism and adoration. Yes, the air I breathe in is that of a Church fully united to Apostolic See, in deepest communion with His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, a Church reflecting the ancient bond of communion between Rome and Antioch; a Church who embodies that "a new hope" for peace not only in the Middle East but indeed throughout the world, a Church the presence of whose children strengthens all the holy Churches of God in the United States and around the world.

I thank you for the privilege of preaching on the Feast of St. Maron and of celebrating with you this Divine Liturgy, the privilege of learning from the life and example of your patron saint, the hermit, priest, and father of the Maronite Church.

Let me add parenthetically that St. Maron has so much to teach Western Christians in our tendency to separate monastic spirituality from apostolic activity, our propensity for action at the expense of contemplation!

Scriptural Lessons

Writing to his disciple, Timothy, St. Paul tells us that "all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching." Indeed, the Scripture passages proclaimed in this Divine

Liturgy, shed their light upon the life of St. Maron and St. Maron, in his turn, helps us see more profoundly the meaning of these Scripture passages for our life and mission in these times at once bright with promise and fraught with danger.

St. Paul wrote to the saintly bishop, Timothy, to encourage him always to be a good and holy pastor in the service of his people. Paul praised Timothy for following his example in various ways: in his teaching, his conduct, his mission, his faith, his patience, his love, his steadfast endurance amid persecution; his sufferings, both mental and physical.

St. Paul could have addressed these same words of praise to St. Maron. Indeed Cardinal Sfeir in his recent pastoral letter of Saint Maron rightly identified St. Maron as "a prophetic evangelist in the Pauline sense, who by his vivid faith, his outstanding virtues, his ideal life style, his prophetic preaching, and his radiant commitment to the environment was able to set the spiritual tone for a Church who came to bear his name unlike any other churches."

In the reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. John, Jesus teaches us that the grain of wheat must die in order to produce much fruit: "Whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life."

Born in the mid-fourth century near the town of Cyrus in modern-day Turkey, Maron lost his life by becoming a hermit on Mount Nabo, and by inhabiting an abandoned pagan temple and filling it with the light of Christ, through fasting and all forms of bodily deprivation, through contemplative prayer, and the offering of the Divine Liturgy.

Mostly, however, St. Maron lived in the open air, exposed to the forces of nature, not unlike the grain of wheat that falls to the ground, dies, and produces much fruit. His life embodies what it means 'to belong to God and not to one's own self.' Thus freed from the limitations imposed by seeking one's own comfort, St. Maron became a beacon of hope, a city on a mountaintop - his monastic prayer, his asceticism, his utter desire to know and love God above all things - this attracted countless people who came to him really to learn the Gospel and to be cured of their infirmities, both spiritual and physical. First in ancient Syria and ultimately in Lebanon, St. Maron firmly planted the ancient faith of the Church and indelibly inscribed it upon a culture and in a nation.

Rightly then, did Patriarch Sfeir speak of the "altruism" of St. Maron, that is to say, his utterly self-less love. In his splendid pastoral letter, the Patriarch teaches us that as hermit and monk, as a man of utter self-sacrifice and loving contemplation, St. Maron shows us the greatness and the beauty of Christianity

and why we should defend the Christian religion even unto death; and at the same time, St. Maron confirms the dignity of the human person, "for whom God became man" in Jesus Christ, – for through Jesus you and I carry about in our mortal bodies "values that are more important than life itself."

In St. Maron we find the kind of self-less love Jesus modeled for us in his earthly life, that self-less love which gives us a glimpse of the inner life of God, where, in the oneness of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit exist in pure self-giving. What praise and thanks we owe to God and to his Providence, for the radiant self-giving love of St. Maron, a love at the heart of your own identity, at the heart of a church whose witness to Christ is more important than ever.

Applications

After some 1600 years, the fragrance of St. Maron's holiness fills our souls, the beauty of his holiness inspires us. The times in which we live are very different from the days of St. Maron, yet then as now, people are looking for a beacon of light in the darkness. They are searching for something deeper, something more stable and reliable than earthly pleasures, ephemeral profits, or self-destructive behaviors. They are seeking more than what our neo-pagan world has to offer, and more than any superficial version of Christianity can offer. No one will follow Christ if, so to speak, we try to "domesticate" him, that is to say, to yoke him into the service of our selfish desires and the aims of a godless secularity.

You, dear friends, are the spiritual descendants of St. Maron, you are his sons and his daughters, who bear in yourselves a heritage of holiness capable of showing to the world the truth, the beauty, the goodness, and the coherence of Christianity, capable of leading those who dwell in darkness toward the light of Christ.

While you may not sit atop a pillar, or inhabit a formerly pagan temple, or live under the elements of sun and wind, rain and hail, ice and snow - nonetheless, you and I, together with all the baptized, are called to genuine holiness, that is to say, to a graced participation in God's inner life and love. Sharing in his holiness transforms how you think, speak, and act; his grace transforms the decisions you make; it undergirds the fidelity with which you live your God-given vocations. Like St. Maron, you are called to attract others to Christ principally by the witness of a holy life that manifests to others both the beauty of God and the truth of our human dignity.

In an era when the eyes of the world are focused on the Middle East, and currently on the historic events unfolding in Egypt, you, the spiritual sons and daughters of St. Maron, play a role that no one else in the world can play. While we may rightly hail the possibility of democracy in Egypt, we know how crucial it is for us to pray and seek for just & peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians, everywhere in the world. We cannot forget the violence directed against Christians in the Middle East, the denial of their freedom to worship & efforts to drive them from their homelands. Nor can we forget that Lebanon, for all her

challenges and trials, remains "more than a country but indeed a mission", in the words of John Paul II. And that mission is to show a world living under the dark shadow of terrorism how indeed Christians and Muslims can live not just along side of each other because of a bi-lateral agreement but rather how to live with each other in a civilization of love. No one should underestimate how challenging this mission really is but everyone should seek refuge in the prayers of St. Maron and take inspiration in the example which he left for us. This we do as we seek to defend the faith and at the same time to defend Lebanon herself and the presence of Christians in Lebanon as elsewhere, living in peace and harmony with their neighbors amid a world fraught with tension.

Conclusion Pentecost and Springtime

If the Holy Synod on Lebanon and the Synod for the Catholic Bishops of the Middle East constitute "a new Pentecost" for the Maronite Church, so also this celebration of the 1600th anniversary of the passing of St. Maron into eternal life will lead the Maronite Church into a new springtime, and with her, the Church universal - a new springtime in which we, like St. Maron, contemplate the face of Christ so that we may be strong in bearing witness to the faith of the Apostles, so that we may defend and proclaim the primacy of holiness, so that we may serve the needs of humanity with that self-less love which comes from God and leads us back to God, to whom glory and praise are due, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, living and reigning forever and ever. Amen! □



Pope Benedict XVI Blesses Statue of St. Maron Patron of Maronites Placed in Niche of St. Peter

Before arriving in Paul VI Hall for the general audience on Wednesday, February 23, 200, Pope Benedict XVI made a stop to visit the newest addition to the facade of St. Peter's Basilica, a statue of the 5th-century monk, St. Maron.

The 16-foot, 20-ton statue was recently placed in the last vacant outer niche of St. Peter's Basilica. The Maronite Catholic Church commissioned the work for the jubilee year that marked 1,600 years since the death of the saint, who is an important figure for the Church in Lebanon and recognized as the father of the Maronites.

Spanish artist Augusto Duenas sculpted the statue out from a single block of Carrara marble. The statue portrays St. Maron in the act of offering to the world a small Maronite-style church, which he is holding in his left hand. The saint is wearing a long stole and holds a staff in his right hand. Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir, Patriarch of Antioch and the Whole East of the Maronites, and Lebanese President Michel Suleiman accompanied Pope Benedict XVI for the ceremony. Before blessing the statue, the Pope quoted



"It is the only place you can find such a large population of Christians," he added. "The Christians in other Middle Eastern countries count on the Christians of Lebanon. They sustain the other Middle Eastern Christians." □

Zenit.org, February 24, 2011

Pope Accepts Resignation of Maronite Patriarch

A Letter from the Pope addressed to His Beatitude Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir for the occasion of his resignation from the office of Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites, Lebanon, was made public on February 26, 2011.

The Holy Father notes how "the year consecrated to the 1600th anniversary of the death of St. Maron is drawing to a close. The Maronite Church has experienced a period of grace in this exceptional Jubilee Year, which has also been the coronation of your own service for the greater glory of God and for the good of all your faithful."

"For nearly twenty-five years", Pope Benedict XVI writes, "you worked with your two predecessors in the See of Antioch before being elected by the Synod to succeed them on April 19, 1986. ... You began your noble ministry of Patriarch of the Maronites amidst the torment of the war which bloodied the face of Lebanon for so many years. With the ardent desire for peace in your country, you led the Church and traveled the world to console those obliged to emigrate. Finally, peace returned, ever fragile but still extant."

The Holy Father recalls Pope John Paul II's visit to Beirut in 1997 to sign the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "A new hope for Lebanon" which, Pope Benedict writes, "re-emphasized your Church's constant bond with Peter's Successor." The Letter also mentions Cardinal Sfeir's participation in the 2010 Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, as President Delegate "*ad honorem*".

"You have chosen to resign from your office as Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites in this special circumstance, and I accept your free and magnanimous decision as an expression of great humility and profound detachment", says the Pope. "I am sure", he concludes, "that you will always accompany the journey of the Maronite Church with your prayers, your wise counsel and your sacrifice".

Global Catholic Population Continues to Grow Nearly Half of Church's Members Live in the Americas

The number of baptized Catholics on the planet continues to grow and half of their number are in the Americas. The number of priests and seminarians is also on the rise.

the Psalms: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, they will grow like a cedar in Lebanon."

Unity with Rome

In an interview with ZENIT in October, Lebanese Father Michele Saghbiny, the Academic Dean of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) in Rome, reflected on the significance of placing St. Maron in a niche of St. Peter's Basilica.

"He is the Patron of the Maronite Church, but he is also a Catholic saint and so belongs to all the Church's rites," said Father Saghbiny. "His disciples defended the teachings of the Chalcedonian Council and then found themselves to be the only Chalcedonians in the area until the reunification of some of the other Eastern rites centuries later.

"The importance of St. Maron and his disciples is their remaining in unity with Rome, the only [Eastern] Church that remained in unity of faith with the bishop of Rome. The Maronite Church is the only [Eastern Church] that does not have two branches -- one orthodox, one Catholic. All the others are referred to as 'uniate.'"

"Also," he continued, "when the Crusaders arrived for the first time in the Middle East, they came into contact with the substantial community of Chalcedonian Christians native to that area, the Maronites. After communication with Rome was re-established at that time, Pope Innocent II recognized the authority of the Maronite Patriarchate of Antioch."

Father Saghbiny noted that the Maronites are most present in Lebanon, which is the only country that is "both Arabic and of a Christian nature."

This is some of what can be learned from the data of the 2011 Papal Yearbook, the *Annuario Pontificio*, presented to Pope Benedict XVI on Saturday, February 19, 2011 by his Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, and Archbishop Fernando Filoni, Undersecretary for General Affairs.

The statistical data from the year 2009 furnish a summary view of the principal dynamics of the Catholic Church in her 2,956 ecclesiastical entities across the globe: The number of baptized Catholics has increased from nearly 1.16 billion in 2008 to 1.18 billion in 2009, with an absolute increase of 15 million faithful.

The distribution of Catholics among the continents differs notably from that of the population. In regard to percentage of the global population, between 2008 and 2009 the Americas did not change, keeping at a steady 13.6%. In the same two years, the number of Catholics in the Americas climbed to a level that constitutes 49.4% of the Catholic population of the world.

In Asia the Catholic population grew from 10.6% to 10.7% while the total population of Asia is 60.7% of the world's population.

The total population of Europe, with respect to the total population of the globe, was three points below that of the Americas and represented 24% of the world's Catholic population.

The countries of Africa and Oceania were both reported to be 15.2% of the world's population and 0.8% of the total Catholic population of the planet.

Between 2008 and 2009 the number of bishops in the world grew from 5,002 to 5,065, increasing 1.3%. Africa led in this growth (1.8%), followed by Oceania (1.5%), while Asia and the Americas were below the median at 0.8% and 1.2% respectively. Europe was on a par with the median at 1.3%.

The number of priests continues the trend of moderate increase that began in 2000. The number of diocesan and religious priests grew in the last decade from 405,178 in 2000 to 410,593 in 2009.

In 2009 the number of priests increased by 0.34% over 2008. This figure derives from the 0.08% decrease in religious priests and the 0.56% increase in diocesan priests. There was a decrease in religious priests on every continent except for Asia and Africa.

The number of permanent deacons increased 2.5% between 2008 and 2009, from 37,203 to 38,155. The total population of professed women religious decreased from 739,068 in 2008 to 729,371 in 2009, despite the growth in numbers in Africa and Asia.

The number of candidates for the priesthood has climbed 0.82%, increasing from 117,024 in 2008 to 117,978 in 2009. A large part of the growth is attributable to Asia and Africa where the percentages of increase were 2.39% and 2.2% respectively. Europe and the Americas registered contractions of 1.64% and 0.17% respectively during the period. □

Zenit.org, February 20, 2011

Philadelphia Gets Ready for Maronite Convention

by Claudine EL-Beyrouty

The long cold winter months are quickly winding down and it is time to start planning for summer vacation. The Maronite Convention, hosted by St. Sharbel Church in Newtown Square [Philadelphia], Pennsylvania, and sponsored by NAM, July 6 - 10, 2011, is the perfect family trip with offerings that old and young will enjoy. The city and surrounding area include beaches, amusement parks, historical sites, and excellent dining and shopping.

The Convention will be based in the Sheraton Philadelphia Center City Hotel in the heart of the city's art and cultural area. Within two miles of the hotel are the Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Franklin Institute Science Museum, and the National Constitution Center. The hotel features a complimentary fitness center and an indoor pool.

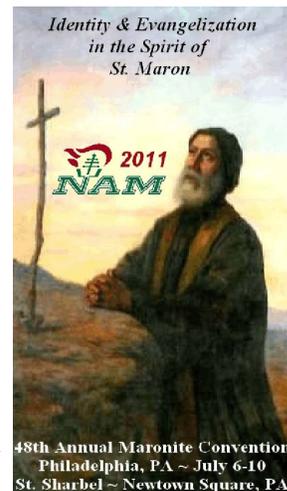
The NAM convention rates are unbeatable and parking is available to all guests with a valid convention badge for \$10/day. The Sheraton Hotel is located at 201 North 17th Street. The rate is \$119 per night single/double/triple/quad (Ask for NAM Convention). One room night will be billed to your credit card as soon as you make your room reservation. Please plan to book your rooms soon.

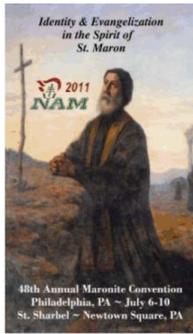
Unlike prior years, the hotel registration process is separate of the conference registration. Please contact the Sheraton hotel directly at 1(800) 325-3525 or at (215) 448-2000 to make your reservation.

Despite the allure of the City, Convention goers will want to make sure to be back in the hotel in time for the evening galas each night as the itinerary includes some of the best known entertainers in both religious and popular culture.

Wednesday night will feature a buffet "picnic on the bay" theme with a DJ. Thursday night's Italian themed dinner will feature Joumana Mdawar, famous for her renditions of both spiritual music and Lebanese classics and her work with renowned composer Joseph Khalife. Her music has lifted the spirits of audiences around the globe, including a performance before Pope John Paul II. Friday night will be Mediterranean fare and the music of Yousef Chamoun and band. The grand banquet Saturday night will feature Lebanese recording artist Tony Kiwan performing his numerous hit songs. Admittance to all banquets and dinners is included in the registration packages.

The convention in Philadelphia is sure to keep everyone busy, both day and evening. Look for more information shortly on our workshops and exhibits. Please see our advertising form on the adjacent page and consider sponsoring an ad in this year's convention book. Additional information can be found at www.namnews.org and on our parish website and www.saintsharbel.org. □





48th Annual Maronite Convention July 6-10, 2011

Sponsored by National Apostolate of Maronites

Hosted by St. Sharbel Maronite Church, Newtown Square, Pennsylvania



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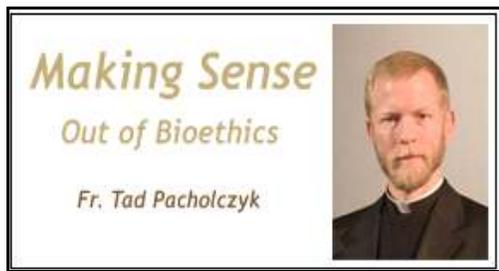
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Working Through A Hard Death

Mercy of Jesus. I am of the opinion that God gave Mom an opportunity to be on the cross with Him."

Real suffering engages a lot of complex emotions. We may worry that our crosses will be more than we can bear. We may not see how our sufferings could really have any value or meaning. In the end, suffering can make us bitter or it can make us better, depending upon how we respond to it and use it to enter into deeper union with the Lord who suffered and died a hard death for us.

Care givers and health care professionals can and often do greatly assist those who are suffering and dying. Even with careful pain management and comfort measures, however, the dying process can still be agonizing and difficult. Each death has a unique and particular trajectory, but even the most difficult and unpleasant deaths often have powerful graces and remarkable opportunities for growth mysteriously interwoven into them.

Some time ago, I corresponded with a registered nurse about her mother's final battle with lung cancer. She described the unexpected shifts in her mother's condition that had taken place over a period of eight days: "...passing through a day of Cheyne-Stokes respirations [a pattern of deep breathing, followed by stoppage of breathing, followed by repetition of the cycle], days of such shallow breathing that death seemed literally one breath away, days of calm coma, two days where the smell of imminent death was detectable, signs of diminished extremity perfusions coming and then going, coming and then going, day after day, no urine output, then urine output, then no urine, then urine again, emerge from this state and embark upon three hours of increasingly severe respiratory distress culminating in a violent respiratory arrest."

No stranger to death and dying, this nurse had assisted countless other patients with pain, air and hunger management. During her mom's final hours, she had significantly increased morphine doses per hospice protocols, but with little or no apparent relief. Her mother's death ended up being very hard. Reflecting on it afterwards, she realized that if she had not been both a healthcare professional and a person who trusted deeply in God, she would have been, to use her own words, "out of my mind with horror."

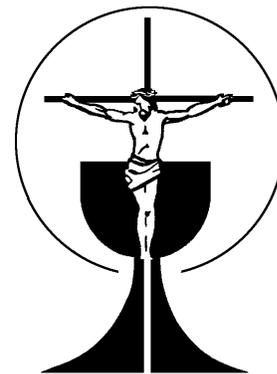
Why certain deaths are so much harder than others is no easier to explain than why certain lives are so much harder than others. It gives us pause, though, to ask whether suffering doesn't have some hidden but important meaning, however it enters our lives. As we seek to use the tools of medicine to alleviate the suffering of those who are dying, we realize how delicate a balancing act it can be, fraught with difficult decisions about dosages and interventions, and not always guaranteed to work. When pain and suffering cannot be alleviated, patients ought to be helped to appreciate the Christian understanding of redemptive suffering.

The nurse described how she and her mother had experienced this Christian understanding themselves: "My Mom and I prayed hard and much over this past year. She was expected to die a year ago. As we began to understand that she was actually improving and that she (and I) had been given this gift of time, we became increasingly devoted to the Divine

I'm reminded of a story I once heard about a priest in Poland who taught at the seminary. Each year, there had been fewer candidates entering the seminary, rarely more than eight or nine, and it was becoming a serious concern for the seminary and the diocese. One day, this priest learned he had a terminal illness, with only a few months to live. Shortly afterwards, he turned to God and said: "Lord Jesus, I will do my best to offer up the sufferings that lie ahead of me, whatever they may be, but I would ask that you send us eighteen new candidates for next year's incoming class." The good priest faced an excruciating death, but a few months later when the candidates started showing up at the seminary, there were exactly eighteen new students in the class.

His story speaks of how suffering has meaning whenever we unite it to the redemptive sufferings of Christ. Our sufferings and struggles are an important, albeit temporary, part of our journey. They are a harbinger of a greater destiny and a promise of our transformation. Pope John Paul II once described it this way: "The cross of Christ throws salvific light, in a most penetrating way, on man's life... the cross reaches man together with the resurrection." Our experience of suffering and death, even a very hard death, offers us mysterious and dramatic graces, with the reassurance that God himself is ever near to those who carry their cross.

Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. See www.ncbcenter.org. □



A Tribute to Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir

Continued from page 1

He stood before American Presidents (Bishop Shaheen and I had the joy to witness this twice) and urged them to do all they could to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which continues to cause tragic consequences to the entire region. We are still waiting, hoping. He has stood before his own beloved Lebanese citizens - Sunni, Shiite, Druze and Christians - and asked that all parties disarm and respect Lebanon's special mission as a refuge for minorities and a pluralistic society. Some ignore him and some ridicule him. This is his present lot of suffering, for the sake of a Lebanon he believes in and loves. Nonetheless, by the grace of God, he suffers well, as throughout history Maronite Patriarchs before him have suffered well and triumphed.

Patriarch Sfeir has two life passions: the Maronite Church and Lebanon. Each has become for him a treasure worth living and dying for. History will look kindly upon him, as it did other historical figures such as Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi who both espoused a non-violent, strong yet loving, militancy, like that of our Lord's, that has confounded the powerful with an innate logic of love and a simple goodness that has produced amazing spiritual fruits without measure.

Your Eminence and Beatitude, Father and Head of the Maronite Church throughout the world, Patriarch and Cardinal Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir, thank you for your visionary leadership and your love for the Church you serve and the country you love.

+ Gregory John Mansour

Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn ☐

Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania Mystery of Chrismation



Mrs. Jameil Grant, Lauren MacMullen, Subdeacon Crosby Sparks, Fr. Hanna Karam, Luke Richards, Collin MacMullen, Mr. Peter Bonczewski and Frankie Nockley

On February 20, 2011, the Holy Mystery of Chrismation [Confirmation] was celebrated at St. Anthony and St. George Church, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Miss Lauren MacMullen and Master Collin MacMullen were sealed by the Holy Spirit, with the Holy Oil of *Myron* [Chrism] during the Liturgy by Father Hanna Karam. The children were asked to learn about a Maronite Saint who they wished to emulate as they continue to follow their Maronite faith. Lauren chose St. Aquilina and Collin chose St. Lucian as their Chrismation names. Mrs. Jameil Grant, Lauren's Grandmother, was her sponsor. Mr. Peter Bonczewski, Maronite Religious Education teacher, was Collin's sponsor. Following the Liturgy, a reception was held in the Church Hall. ☐