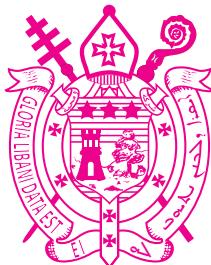


COMMUNION AND LOVE

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PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST

COMMUNION AND LOVE

THE FIRST PASTORAL LETTER
BY HIS BEATITUDE

BECHARA BOUTROS RAI
PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST

TO
THE BISHOPS, CLERGY, RELIGIOUS
TO ALL FAITHFUL, SONS AND DAUGHTERS
OF OUR MARONITE CHURCH,
AND ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL.

ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY
OF HIS INVESTITURE

FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION
TO THE VIRGIN MARY
MARCH 25th 2012

BECHARA BOUTROS RAI

BY THE GRACE OF GOD

PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST

TO OUR BROTHERS BISHOPS,
THE CLERGY, AND RELIGIOUS,
TO OUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS IN THE MARONITE CHURCH
TO ALL FAITHFUL,
AND PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL.

PEACE AND APOSTOLIC BLESSING

INTRODUCTION

1. “Communion and Love” is the motto of my patriarchal ministry, which I chose the day I was elected as Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, by the Synod of Bishops of our Maronite Church headed by His Beatitude the Patriarch Mar Nasrallah Boutros Cardinal Sfeir, father and head of our Maronite Syriac Antiochian Church, on the morning of Tuesday March 15th, 2011. I drew this motto from the ambiance of prayer, brotherhood and renewal that dominated the Electoral Holy Synod, and from the need of our Lebanese, Eastern and Expansion societies for greater unity and love, I was as well,

inspired by the Synod of Bishops' Special Assembly for the Middle East, held in Rome from October 10th till 24th, 2010 under the title "Communion and Testimony". I proclaimed my motto during the thanksgiving prayer, which followed the electoral session in the presence of a large number of clergy and lay faithful who fled to the Patriarchal See as the announcement was heard. I developed it extensively in the investiture mass sermon on the March 25th, Feast of the Annunciation to Mary. I wanted it to be a practical commitment motto in my collaboration with my Brothers Bishops, members of our Church Synod, with the clergy, religious, sons and daughters in Lebanon, in the patriarchal jurisdiction and abroad, as well as the good-will people. Committing to Communion is both personal and communal within two dimensions: The **ascendant** one based on unity with God in prayer, grace of sacraments, and bible reading; and the **lateral** one is based on consultation, solidarity, interdependence and unity with all people. In both dimensions **love** is the source, the tie and the bond.

2. I sought Ecclesiastical Communion in Love from His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI who granted it to me on March 24th 2011 and I expressed the bonds of communion and love to my brothers Patriarchs of our Eastern Churches.

They reciprocated with their presence at the investiture ceremony as a commencement for permanent ecclesiastical unity and cooperation in Lebanon, the Middle East, and abroad. I pledged “to work on the ecumenical level, cooperating with love and responsibility with their Holinesses and Beatitudes, the Patriarchs and Bishops of the Orthodox Churches, and with the Evangelical Church communities, in particular through the Middle East Council of Churches.”

3. I pledged before the heads of sister countries representatives present at the investiture mass, that “for the sake of **communion and love**, we endeavor together in the **Middle East countries**, to preserve and strengthen our collaborative relations within the Arab world, and undertake an honest and deep dialogue with our brothers, in various Muslim communities, to build together a future of conviviality, since «**a common destiny** ties Muslims and Christians, in our both communities, in Lebanon and other countries of the region, as well as a specific **culture** to us, built together and to which have contributed civilizations that occupied our land, and a shared heritage we have created together and endeavor on its cultural development»¹.

1- John Paul II, A New Hope for Lebanon, 1997, 93

4. I proclaimed that we, “in the track of **communion and love**, work in cooperation with the children of our Church abroad, across the five continents. For whether they are in organized dioceses or in missions ministered by religious, or groups that are part of local dioceses, they resemble the branches of their Churches’ tree. It is crucial to tie these branches to the base of the Mother Church, so they may be nourished by its sap to become stronger and fruit fuller. It is the mystery of the Church – communion which the Lord Jesus taught it in the proverb of the tree and the branches. He says: “I am the vine , you are the branches, He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings fourth much fruit: for without me, you can do nothing”

(John 15:5)

5. As for Lebanon, we consider it to be the **nation of communion and love**, firstly through its **National Pact** based on conviviality between Christians and Muslims, and fortified by the constitution that outlines in its introduction: “There is no legitimacy for any authority which contradicts the pact of conviviality”², and secondly, through its **Formula**, comprising equity in governance and administration between Christians and Muslims. It is hoped that this

2- The Constitution of the Lebanese Republic, Introduction, section Y.

formula provides stability of existence, realization of democracy, and economic prosperity provided it remains in constant development in accordance with the requirements of modernity and historical experience.³

6. This commitment in communion and love applies the plan drawn by the Apostolic Exhortation “A New Hope for Lebanon” whose headings: communion within the Catholic Church in Lebanon, with the Catholic Church in the Middle East, with the Catholic communities in the expansion, with the entire Catholic Church, dialogue with the Orthodox churches, with the Protestant church communities, and through the Middle East Council of Churches.⁴

This commitment is inspired by the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held in October 2010 in Rome. This proposal will be detailed in the Apostolic Exhortation, expected to be signed by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

On the first anniversary of my Patriarchal investiture, I address you this message entitled **Communion and Love**. It consists of four

3- The Maronite Center for Documentation and Research, **The Charter of Political Action in the Light of the Church Teachings and Lebanon's Specificity**, p. 3

4- **A New Hope for Lebanon**, 1997, pp 80-88.

chapters: in the **first** chapter, I outline the concept of communion and love, in the **second**, its realization in the Patriarchal Curia, in the **third**, its implementation in the pastoral visits, and in the **fourth** its application in the national life.

CHAPTER I

CONCEPT

OF COMMUNION AND LOVE

I. The Concept of communion

7. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is referred to, as the “Church – Communion Council”. It defined the Church as “a sacrament, namely, a sign, an instrument for profound union with God, and for the unity of all of humankind”.⁵ This is the concept of communion: it is, in an ascendant way, the union of people with God Almighty and the Trinity, and in a lateral way, a union between each other. The Church means communion and its accomplishments. He, who enters into communion with God through the Church, is also in communion with his brothers, and all those who unite with God are as well united with each other. God is the source of communion and the Church is its instrument so that the Holy Spirit, which works within and through it, realizes the communion of the believers with God and among them.

5- The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, 1.

This **Church- Communion**, in its essence, reflects the communion of the three hypostases in the unity of nature.⁶ It is a community gathered in unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, given that the Church is the work of God. In the Son's baptism, realized by the Holy Spirit, man becomes a Son of the Father, and by partaking in the one Eucharistic body, he enters into communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as well as with all the believers in Christ. Paul the Apostle teaches: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partakers of that one bread. (1 Cor. 10: 16 - 17). All those believers comprise in Christ one body which is the Church⁷ in accordance with the teaching of Paul the Apostle: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor.12: 12-13). It is the Spirit that revives, sanctifies and leads it, uniting it in communion and ministry, overflowing it with talents, gifts and

6- The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, 4.

7- *Ibid.*, 2-3.

level of ministry, creating different statues among Church members and diversity in judicial relations.⁸ The Spirit, says Paul the Apostle, “Gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4: 11-13).

8. The Apostolic Exhortation “**A New Hope for Lebanon**,” teaches that the Church is not limited to its visible dimension that might reveal it as an organized community; rather, it institutes, through its mysterious character, a communion with the heavenly saints’ community. It is the One Church on earth, blessed with heavenly graces. It is a composed reality, comprising both human and divine natures, firmly interconnected. This Church is vertically the mystery of everyone’s personal unity with the Divine Trinity, and horizontally, with every human being. This unity begins with faith on earth and reaches its eschatological perfection in the Glorified Church in heaven. This **Church-communion** in its both vertical and horizontal dimension, and in its visible

8- The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, 4, 12,13, 32.

aspect: the human sensible social side, and in its invisible aspect: its union by grace with God, and in Him with all mankind constitutes, on the image of its Master, a divine and human condition connected in time and space with what it entails in historical, geographical, social and cultural justifications.⁹

9. **Communion** is a call to us Christians to live it in the Church community and society. Without it we are unable to bring forth fruit in the familial, social and civic life, in our ecumenical activity, and in the daily culturally and nationally dialogue with our Muslim brothers.

10. Communion has specificities. It is a **spiritual communion** brought by the Holy Spirit between faithful since it is the unifying principle, as the soul to the body. This communion is realized in baptism, fortified by the gifts of the Holy Spirit through anointing, and perfected by the Eucharist. It leads to communion with the Holy Trinity.

Through baptism we are born anew from water and Spirit and we enter into the Kingdom of God (Jn 3:15), i.e in communion with God the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We become witnesses to Him. Through it we were drawn in the image of Christ, in the mystery of His death

9- The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, 19 and 20.

and resurrection, so we live a new life (*Rom. 6: 11-14*). We became parts of His body and in both, the local and universal Church, committed to communion and testimony, called to live here and now in fraternal communion among each other and with others, without race, language, religion or social status discrimination.

By receiving in the sacrament of the Eucharist **the body and the Blood of the Lord**, the faithful enters into the profound ecclesiastical communion, as the Apostle Paul states: “For we, though many are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” (*1 Cor. 10:17*). Through the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, the Church experiences this communion between its members towards daily testimony in society. Given that the sacrament of the Eucharist derives from the Paschal Mystery, i.e the death and resurrection of Christ for the salvation of the world, the basis of communion and its source is the Paschal Mystery itself: “We remember your death O Lord, and we confess your resurrection and we await your second coming”. This communion consists of, nourished and develops through the word of God in the Holy Bible, and living it in all of our personal, social and political life dimensions.

11. Communion is an intrinsic unity between the faithful and their Church, based upon a

partnership of life, faith, sacraments and love¹⁰, in an ecclesiastical organized order. The canons identifies the contents of this communion in both its organic and hierarchical facets as follows:

The Christian faithful are those who have been established as people of God by their union with Christ through baptism. They shared, somehow, his priestly, prophetic and royal ministries. Thus, they are called, to carry out the mission God has entrusted them with, in both the Church and the world. It is a Church, as formed and organized as a society, fulfilled in the Catholic Church led by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him.¹¹ The Faithfull's complete communion with their Church requires a commitment of three: profess the faith components, acknowledge the seven sacraments and submit to the authority and canons in their Church.¹²

12. The **liturgy** established in the Oriental Christians' life a fundamental element for their spiritual unity, as well as a communion, cooperation and bond between them. It enabled them to instill Christian values within the cultures of their societies

10- The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, 7 and 9; Council Resolution on the Ecumenical Movement 7, 14, and 15.

11- **Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches**, can. 7.

12- *Ibid.*, can. 8.

in various fields through music, poetry, artifacts, architecture and icons.

What weakens the Christians in their societies is their **regression in religious practice** and participation in liturgical activities is generally due to four reasons: outer attachment to the Church without conscious personal faith; religious individualism which is a type of faith that lacks belonging; absence of theological and pastoral concept of the sacraments due to a deficiency in appropriate liturgical teaching and the spread of secular spirit, its domination over societies, and the prevail of relativism within them.

Therefore, it is imperative to **strengthen liturgical renewal** in texts and celebrations, according to the Faithfull's needs and expectations, while strengthening the deep knowledge of the apostolic and living church traditions. It should be shaped upon today's form of communication and to all age categories. It is necessary that canticles, hymns, and liturgical texts be enriched with words of God who realizes what He says, so through them a personal encounter may take place between God and man. The sacramental life enters the faithful, through Christ in the new life, moreover, into the space of communion and testimony. It roots them deeper in the divine filiation.

II. The Concept of Love.¹³

13. It is love that springs from God who “is Love” (1 Jn 4:8). It has come down to us through the incarnated Son of God (Agapé), who sacrificed himself for us by His death on the cross, and who redeemed us through His resurrection. This divine love, from above, heightens the love of man embedded in selfishness and self-loving (Eros), and raises it to the Highness mystery of God, opens it to the other’s needs and make it self-giving for the sake of brotherhood. On one side, this divine descendent love, and on the other side, the ascendant human love, are symbolized by the ladder Jacob saw in a dream, linking heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28:12). This love represents the dynamic and essence of communion.

Through His love, God enters into communion with humankind upon creation. He seeks man through the incarnation of His Only Son. God sacrificed Humankind by His crucifixion and blessed man through His resurrection. He bequeathed Humankind the word of life, the grace of the sacraments and the gift of the Holy Spirit, allowing people to enter in their turn, into communion with

13- Derived from the encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, **God is Love**, 2005, 3-8.

God and with each others.¹⁴ Thus, we must revive this communion in both its vertical dimension, i.e. unity with God, and in its horizontal one, the unity with people by societal love.

14. Love is the essence and the dynamic of our daily life. Human life is built upon the mutual love between us and God. The love within us is a response to God's love for us, for He who took the initiative (1 Jn. 4:10) and incarnated His love for us through the Only Son whom He sent to the world, so that we might live through Him (1 Jn. 4:9). Through Him, we come to see the face of the Father (Jn 14:9). Our love for others became a path to God. He who shuts his eyes on a brother is shutting them on God.¹⁵

Love requires imitating the **Christ** in solidarity with those who live in sadness, loss or fatefulness by accompanying and pondering them, as Jesus did with the two Emmaus disciples (Lk 24: 13-35) to liberate them from hopelessness and despair, to sow quietude in their souls and peace in their hearts.

15. Love comprises mind, will, and emotion. Knowing God is the way to His love. And saying YES to His wish, unites the mind, the will and the emotion in a universal act of love. Consequently,

14- **God is Love**, 5, 12-13, 17.

15- *Ibid.*, 16-17.

God's will, revealed in His commandments, words and the Church's teachings will not be strange nor intruding; moreover, His wish will become ours. In this light St Augustine affirms that "God is closer to me than I am to myself".¹⁶ Therefore, I want what God wants and I detest what he detests. Though, my love for every human being becomes possible because I love him in God and with God. I do not only look at him through my eyes and feelings, but through the gaze of Jesus Christ. His friend is m and love grows in love.¹⁷

16. We encounter and experiment the love of God in the liturgy and prayer of the Church and in the faithful community life where we sense the presence of God, where we learn how to meet Him in our daily life, and how to make our pastoral community a "community of love" reflecting the divine Trinitarian love according to St. Augustine: "You see God the Trinity, when you see the love of the community".¹⁸ The ecclesiastical community is called to be in the world, a witness to the love of God in Jesus the Son and, consequently, one single family¹⁹

16- St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 3/6/11.

17- God is Love, 17-18.

18- St. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 8/8/11.

19- God is Love, 19.

17. Love is not just emotion or human feelings; it is an **apostolic ministry** alongside of proclaiming the Gospel and the grace of mysteries. It is, therefore, a basic element for the Church as we read in the Acts of the Apostles where they share in the breaking of bread and prayer...and share everything they own (Acts 2: 42-44). This text outlines us that the basic elements of the Church are three: the Apostle's teaching (Kerygma), the prayer and Divine Liturgy (Liturgia), the communion in materials and the ministry of love (Diakonia). The twelve apostles undertook the first adjustment in the ministry of love by establishing the first seven deacons. They laid their apostolic hands on them, entrusted them with the ministry of love towards the poor, the widows and the needy so they devote themselves to both the ministry of the word and sacraments, according to their sacerdotal authority (Acts 6:1-6). This is how the adjustment of the ministry of love went by in the Church through the generations to present day.²⁰

The duty of dioceses, parishes and religious orders is to organize the ministry of love to the structural level, to involve faithful so we all become indeed Disciples of Christ, as the Lord himself said: “By this all will know that you are my disciples,

20- God is Love, 19-25.

if you have love for one another.” (Jn. 13:35). Given that the Church is the **servant of humankind**; its spiritual mission cannot be separated from its social one that aims at developing a person in his nature and dignity. Man is the path of the Church as he was the path of Christ.²¹

18. It is known that the **duty of love towards our brother is written by the Creator in the nature of the human beings**. This means that Christian life spreads beyond the boundaries of faith as revealed to us in the **Good Samaritan** (Lk. 10: 27-34). The love of humankind is not imposed externally; rather, it wells up in the heart through active faith (Gal. 5:6). When a believer encounters Jesus Christ, he opens his eyes on the others and ignites love in the heart. Therefore, the ministry of love is a presence a, in the midst of one’s brothers and the midst of their needs, an access to the logic of God who calls for love and who gave in the person of Jesus, the Model and the Ideal. Hence, the Lord entrusted us to love one another as He loved us (Jn. 13: 34).

This love, like the love of Christ, is a “**perceiving heart**” regardless, unconditionally, spontaneously and impulsively, so that society becomes humanized

21- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, text 15: the Maronite Church in the World Today, 23, 2006.

by the Good in the Hic and Nunc. We are truly in need of all the perceiving hearts education in the family, school, church and society!

Love, like the love of Christ, is a **Gratuitous Love**. It never turns into a way of attracting the other into our religion, party, community, faction, or organization. The love of God is absolutely gratuitous. This is how It appeared in Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification.²²

This love, in all its concepts applies to the plan of reviving unity in diversity, to the ecumenical dialogue with Churches out of our shared heritage. It also applies to the dialogue with religions, in particular with Muslims in our Arab world, based on our common Arabic culture, single fate and shared cause, for the sake of conviviality, in a mutual respect, cooperation, rights and duties in citizenship.

19. Love requires Justice so that a person could fulfill his entity, thus, the statement by St. Irenaeus is accomplished in him: “The glory of God is the living man”. He needs these two virtues, to nurture and grow. **Justice** is a duty for man as a citizen in the earthly society, and **love** is a duty for him as a member of the Church, mystical body of Christ. A **strong cooperation, based on love and justice**, must

22- God is Love, 31-32.

take place between the Church and the political authority for the sake of the common good and their shared wellbeing.

Justice is the duty of the state and political activity; Love is the duty of the Church and apostolic mission: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Mt 22:21). Justice secures the common good through which derives the good of humankind and every man. It also secures for him the opportunity to earn his bread through the dignity of work. Love secures for man his spiritual, ethical and moral good; it awakens the mind and purifies the conscience, to live according to the requirements of justice and build its structure.

Justice and Love complement each other: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Mt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3). Justice provides bread, and Love grants consolation to the spirit, succor to the soul, and dedication to the heart.

At a certain point, dioceses, parishes, religious orders and institutions must secure structures that ensure commitment to the justice, and to the ministry of love.²³

23- God is Love, 26-29; Pope Benedict XVI, Lenten Letter of 2006.

20. The Maronite Patriarchal Synod evokes that the Church, as “a Mother and a Teacher,” carries a message to save the Man, to preserve his dignity, and defend his rights. The Church, hence, has a function and a stance in the service of justice and love on the educational, scientific, political, economical, social, media and environmental levels.²⁴

24- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, 15/26.

CHAPTER II

THE PATRIARCHAL CURIA THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNION AND LOVE

21. The mystery of the Church-communion appears in the Synod spirit and academic work. The Eastern Churches Code of Canons, particularly Canon 114, outlines the establishing of the Patriarchal Curia comprising diverse specialized departments.

In addition to the patriarchal vicar general of the Patriarchal Eparchy,²⁵ who assists the Patriarch in assigned tasks²⁶, and the two collaborator' patriarchal vicars,²⁷ one to supervise the offices of the Patriarchal Curia in assisted by the secretary general, and the other for legal and juridical matters, also stands the permanent synod, the patriarchal waqf officer, the council for economic affairs, the patriarchal chancellor, the commission for liturgical affairs, and the patriarchal court of appeals. A secretariat general and administrative offices have been established for the realization of communion and love, to implement

25- Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, can. 245.

26- *Ibid.*, can. 38, clause 1.

27- *Ibid.*, can. 87.

the directives of the Holy See and recommendations of the Maronite Patriarchal Synod for Lebanon, the Patriarchal sphere, and the Expansion, as well as what is recommended by the Synod of our Maronite Church bishops. It pursues the implementation of the decrees and resolutions made by the Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon in cooperation with its commissions, by the Council of the Catholic Eastern Patriarchs, and the Middle East Council of Churches. These departments also attend to follow-up development and reform affairs concerning His Beatitude or assistants.

We are working according to the following recommendation of the Maronite Patriarchal Synod: “Due to the new reality represented in the Maronite Church prevalence, with all what it entails in geographic, demographic, cultural and ecclesiastical dimensions, the Synod recommends a scientific and an accurate settlement to ensure communication, communion, strengthening of the suitable structure to the Maronite Patriarchate for its expansion, so as to activate the spiritual renewal, clerical reform, teaching, research, culture, education, as well as social and economical development, and the ecumenical dialogue..”²⁸

28- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, decrees of the fifth text.

22. Curia offices represent an **advisory reference for the Patriarch**, set up according to his needs to implement work directly, or with the assistance of the dioceses bishops, the superior generals to realize “Synodality”, communion and love. The function of the offices is to consult, coordinate and collaborate with the Episcopal commissions emanating from the Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon on current and common matters, with the assemblies, committees, councils and institutions, which either stand in the Patriarchate, dioceses or religious orders. There is no conflict of interests and duties, no duality, no neglect, rather coordination, synergy and planning in common work on the level of our Maronite Church.

The Curia includes offices directly connected to the Patriarch. Other offices are in charge of ecclesiastical matters, others for pastoral lay matters, some others for social, economic and developmental matters, some for general national matters, and others to bolster these offices.

I. The Offices Directly Connected to the Patriarch

23. We have established the **Eparchial secretariat general** known as the Chancellery of the Curia, and which is referred to in canon 123. It is

responsible for documenting the Patriarch affairs, Patriarchal Curia, correspondence; archiving and recording events, communicating, and providing signed official statements according to canons 254 and 256.

We established the Patriarch's secretary office, in charge of the Patriarch's agenda. The secretary receives and accompanies visitors, arranges schedules for the Patriarch's pastoral visits in Lebanon, and for writing down final reports.

We created a **media office**, responsible for issuing daily statements about it organizes and coordinates the journalists' activities at the Patriarchal See, and is in charge of coordinating and accompanying the Patriarch in his pastoral visits outside Lebanon, then issuing final reports.

II. The Ecclesiastical Affairs Offices

24. The following-up commission of the Maronite Patriarchal Synod that has pursued, since the conclusion of its tasks, the generalization process of the Synod texts to every Maronite Church, granting and endeavoring to implement its recommendations, is affiliated to the Patriarchal Curia to be a think-tank. It plans and participates with the offices of this curia, in completing the process of implementing

the Synod's recommendations. It strives to prepare future synods according to canons 140-145.

We have originated the Following Eight Offices:

1. Office of Dioceses and Religious Orders Affairs replacing “the patriarchal department of coordination between the bishops and religious orders.” It undertakes the office specified tasks following that become his, with any necessary modifications. It endeavors to strengthen cooperation and coordination between the dioceses and Maronite religious orders, and to organize mutual reports in the light of the ecclesiastical canons and the Maronite tradition.

2. The Office of Priests' Affairs in charge of consolidating the sacerdotal spirituality according to the Church's teachings and its canons, and the Patriarchal Synod teachings.²⁹ It helps the priest in developing his spiritual life, it pays attention to him, back him up in solving his problems, in cooperation and coordination with his diocese's bishop.

3. The Office of the Expansion Affairs aims at deepening the Maronite Patriarchate relations with the congregations in the Expansion through the dioceses, religious orders, and related Maronite

29- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, Priests and Deacons in the Maronite Church, 22-30.

secular institutions. This office works towards consolidating the communion between the Maronite of Lebanon and Maronite in the Expansion. It contributes in transferring the Oriental ecclesiastical heritage to the new generations in tying the Maronite expansion to their spiritual, theological, liturgical and human roots, and to their spiritual nation Lebanon, according to the plan set out by the Maronite Patriarchal Synod.³⁰ This office is also in charge of proposing a mechanism for the clergy and religious preparation and distribution in the countries of the Expansion in different dioceses and missions. All of this is to be undertaken in coordination and cooperation with the bishops and dioceses in the Expansion.

4. The Office of Patrimony and Cultural Property aims at protecting the Maronite identity by preserving the Maronite history evidence, and uncovering heritage and cultural property of all types by placing them at the disposal of researchers and visitors. This office comprises three departments:

The Archives that collects deeds and documents related to the Maronite Church in Lebanon, the Patriarchal sphere, and the Expansion countries.

30- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, The Maronite Church and its Global Diaspora, 31-45.

A Central Library specialized in the Maronite cultural heritage; it collects Maronite writings and their compositions, forming a scientific and trustworthy reference for researchers.

A Museum which collects some of the Maronite Church's cultural properties. It reflects its ancient history, its status, role and testimony in its Levantine world and its worldwide expansion.

This office also highlights the **Maronite Patriarchal Sees** through history and works on elaborating projects for their restoration in collaboration with relevant authorities.

5. The Office of Liturgical Celebrations, organizes liturgical celebrations headed by the Patriarch, prepares its texts and supervises its performance according to the ceremonial books, and coordinates its broadcasting via radio, television, and networks.

6. The Office of the Patriarchal Choir. This choir serves certain official liturgical celebrations in the Patriarchal Sanctuary, based on the Syriac Antochian musical patrimony and the noble Maronite tradition.

7. The Office of Ecumenical Relations strives to strengthen ecumenical commitment in the Maronite Church on the spiritual, theological, pastoral, and social levels. Its establishment was recommended and

outlined by the Maronite Patriarchal Synod.³¹ This commitment consolidates the Christian presence in Lebanon and the Middle East by the spirit of the Gospel and the ministry to humankind. The Maronite Church has in it a special role given its singular position in the Antiochian family and its complete communion with the Roman Apostolic See. The office, in the light of the Maronite Patriarchal Synod recommendations, suggests means to strengthen communion among the Christians of the Arab East by activating the Maronite commitment with them. On one hand, they strive to live the integrity of their Antiochian origins, and on the other hand, they strengthen the unified Christian testimony in our Middle Eastern environment. In addition, they also strive to testify to the Maronite specificity within the Catholic Church and among the Christians in the Expansion, affirming the integral Christian belief amid ecclesiastical plurality.

8. The Office of Relations and Dialogue between Religions spreads awareness and knowledge of the proper concepts upon which are built relations with Muslims and those of other religions. These relations are based on the teachings of the

31- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, The Identity of the Maronite Church and its Vocation and Mission, 40-48.

Universal Church and the Apostolic Exhortation “A New Hope for Lebanon”, and from the experience of the Maronite Church in this domain, as it is briefed by the Maronite Patriarchal Synod.³² This office proposes methods for implementing its recommendations to overcome on one hand the obstacles in the Christian – Muslim relations, and consolidates its future on the other.³³ It coordinates when required with the Episcopal Commission for Christian-Muslim dialogue, and with the National Commission for Dialogue.

III. The Pastoral Offices for the Laity

25. We considered that the lay pastoral priorities are connected to marriage, family, youth and the woman. Hence, we established offices for them.

1. A Pastoral Office for Marriage and Family aware Maronite families on their principal vocation, which is building a family according to God’s intentions. God established the sacrament of marriage for the good of the spouses to procreate and raise children such as that the family becomes a domestic church that transmits Faith from

32- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, The Presence of the Maronite Church in the Patriarchal Domain, 28-39.

33- *Ibid.*, 47-69, Decrees 2 and 4 and their mechanisms.

generation to generation, and teaches prayer. The family is a fundamental cell in society. It educates on social relations, solidarity, interdependence and connections. It is a natural first school for educating human and ethical values. This office coordinates with the Episcopal Commission for the Family and Life, with neediness pastoral commissions in the dioceses in its pursuit to propose ways of implementing the Maronite Patriarchal Synod teachings and recommendations³⁴ in Lebanon, the Patriarchal sphere, and in the Expansion.

2. The Pastoral Office for the Youth. This office follows the teaching and recommendations set out by the Maronite Patriarchal Synod.³⁵ Therefore, it organizes meetings for the youth with the Patriarch, proposes the subject for commutating between what the youth wishes to say to the Church and to the Patriarch, and what the latter wish to tell them. These meetings also aim at developing a sense of ecclesiastical and national belonging and commitment amongst the youth and its realization through an active presence on the diocese and society levels, as well as deepening the communion between the youth and the pastors of the Church. It works

34- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, Text 10, The Maronite Family.

35- *Ibid.*, The Youth.

towards strengthening its openness on ecumenical activity and relations with religions. The office organizes the Youth Maronite Day in coordination with the Lay Faithful Apostolic Council and the youth committees in the dioceses, the pastoral activity in universities, the apostolic movements and organizations related to the youth.

3. The Pastoral Office for the Woman. This office displays practical proposals to assist the woman in realizing her specific vocation, in committing to an active and important role in the family, the Church and the society according to the Church teachings, and in particular the Papal letters concerning the woman.³⁶

The proposals address women as the woman, the mother, the wife, the sister, the daughter, the worker, the single and the consecrated.

IV. The Offices of Social, Economic and Developmental Affairs.

26. The Patriarchate keeps undertaking its ministry in social, economical and developmental matters through these current institutions:

36- John Paul II, *The Dignity of Women*, 1988; John Paul II, *To Women*, 1995.

1. The Economical Affairs Council. This council oversees, along with the Patriarchal waqf officer, the management and investment of the Patriarchal See properties in Bkerke, Diman, and the Patriarchal vicariates in Rome, Paris, Marseille and Jerusalem. On the level of the trust (waqf), dioceses and religious orders properties, it endeavors, within the canonic Church sphere, to implement the Maronite Patriarchal Synod teachings and recommendations.³⁷

2. The Maronite Social Institution undertakes residential projects for the low income persons, to help the youth establish a family and remain in Lebanon. It has its own structure and regulations.

3. Health and Social Security Fund strengthens the synergy among its affiliated members in order to prevent dangers, and covers medical and hospitalization costs. It provides the members and their families, familial, social, scholar and residential aid, according to the Church teachings and in view of accomplishing the mission of love.

27. In addition to these institutions we have established two new offices.

1. The Social and Development Affairs Office in cooperation with the relevant institutions realizes

37- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, The Maronite Church and Economic Matters, especially sections 59-64, and rec. 3.

the developmental, agricultural, industrial, and touristic projects in peripheral and rural regions, to provide job opportunities, and maintain citizens in their towns and villages. It strives to properly invest the trust (Awqaf) charitable properties in cooperation with its representatives, to realize its social, human and pastoral objectives. It coordinates with civil and ecclesiastical charitable institutions to meet the needy necessities. It, therefore, works to implement the Maronite Patriarchal Synod teachings and recommendations on the social matters.³⁸

2. The Educational Affairs Office, based on the recommendations of the Maronite Patriarchal Synod 16th and 17th texts, this office comprises a team that carries the Church's educational vocation in the general, technical and High Education fields. It strives to implement the Church teaching, coordinating the educational policies with the Church expectations and the society common good. In this way, it coordinates and deliberates with Secretariat General of Catholic Schools and the Episcopal Commission for High Education.

38- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, The Maronite Church and Societal Matters, 21-43; recommendations: 1, 4-7.

V. The National Public Affairs Offices.

28. Due to the Maronite Patriarchate's historical role in both national and public domains, and given the acquired referrals and foreign relations, we established three offices:

1. The Internal National Affairs Office. This office functions out of the strong duty of cooperation between the Maronite Church and the Lebanese state institutions for the sake of the common and mutual good. It follows up common files with the relevant institutions, oversees a strategy situation to urge and guide the youth towards assuming responsibilities in the public sector.

2. The Foreign Affairs office strives to strengthen the relations between the Maronite Patriarchate and both Arab and foreign embassies in Lebanon, to consolidate the Maronite Church role, to serve the Maronite causes in the Patriarchal sphere and in Expansion.

3. The Land and Environment office promotes in rising up the value of the land by increasing awareness on it, preserving it, investing in it and not selling it. It places a global development strategy to preserve the land and water in cooperation with Lebanese State Institutions and the international development organizations. It also works with the dioceses and Religious orders, to safeguard

the environment in its properties, related trusts (Awqaf), and to launch an environmental awareness campaign.

VI. The Curia offices Back-up

29. The Curia offices need two supports: a scientific and a financial one. This back-up is provided through:

1. The Maronite Center for Documentation and Research provides the Curia offices with its needs in studies, scientific researches and statistical data. It outlines the global strategic plan acknowledged by the Patriarchate, inspiring the offices in all activity.

2. The Fundraising and Development office endeavors to realize the Patriarchal Curia office tasks by combining efforts and involving the optimum of our society's children on both the financial and moral levels.

CHAPTER III

THE COMMUNION AND LOVE PRACTICE

30. “Communion and Love” is perfected by practice. This is what I undertook from the start and unceasingly, all over my first year in the Patriarchal ministry.

I. With His Holiness the Pope and the Apostolic See

Upon my election as Patriarch I sought **Ecclesiastical Communion** with His Holiness the Pope Benedictus XVI, who granted it to me in a kind letter on March 24th 2011. This letter was recited in the investiture mass on March 25th. His Holiness expressed in it “the kiss of love with the ecclesiastical communion”. He hoped that the Patriarch, who carries the name of Peter along with his original name, would continue the mission entrusted to him by the Lord Jesus upon the apostles “to preserve His Church in unity, truth and love. He should be an apostle of unity so that the Lebanese nation, through everybody’s cooperation, ecumenical activity and dialogue between religions, may fulfill its role in the

Middle East and in the whole world, on the synergy and peace levels”.

31. From April 11th to the 16th 2011, I visited His Holiness the Pope and the Apostolic See, to tangibly express this ecclesiastical communion. On April 14th, I had a private encounter with His Holiness, followed by a general meeting with the bishops, superior generals, associates, and the Lebanese delegation representing the Lebanese family in all its components. Exchanges took place. His Holiness affirmed in his statement that this “ecclesiastical communion will originally be expressed in the Divine Liturgy to be held the next day, in the body and blood of Christ beside the tomb of St Peter. There, the complete communion will occur between Apostle’s prince successor and the 77th successor of the first Patriarch John Maron.” He added: “Since you are in the heart of the Middle East, you have a great duty towards humankind; it is the love of Christ that urges you to declare the good news, which is the salvation. There is an urgent necessity to proclaim the Gospel to those who know little about it, or have turned away from the Church, and to the vital forces present in Lebanon and the Middle East.”

On April 15th, the celebration of the Eucharist in St Peter’s Basilica was held. Beside St.

Peter's tomb, I celebrated mass with His Eminence Leonardo Cardinal Sandri, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches president. He represented His Holiness the Pope, in the presence of several Cardinals, bishops, superior generals, clergy, religious, the Lebanese delegation, and a large number faithful. We shared the body and blood of the Lord, the sacramental communion that gives ecclesiastical communion all its meaning. It is completed between the bishop of Rome and the Patriarch of Antioch on basis of communion with the Christ and His Church.

Later on, Cardinal Sandri organized an honorary encounter in Eastern Churches Synod Hall. That gave me the opportunity to express ecclesiastical communion with the Apostolic See Curia through the cardinals, bishops and the heads of departments. I also visited with the accompanying bishops, a number of these departments for the same purpose.

Our Maronite Church Communion with His Holiness the Pope and the Apostolic See is immemorial. Its establishment dates back first as the Monastery of Saint Maron community, known as "Bayt Maron" in the 5th Century, then as a Patriarchal Church at the end of the 7th century. This complete communion granted our Church an ecumenical role

in our region. Then, after the Maronite College was founded in Rome in 1584, it opened up to the West and created a cultural bridge between East and West, granting it a pioneering and ecumenical role in the Middle Eastern renaissance.³⁹

II. With the Lebanese Civic and ecclesiastical Authorities

32. In the purpose of exchanging communion and love, I made on the April 1st, 4th, 5th, and 6th 2011, official visits to the President of Lebanese Republic General Michel Sulaiman, to the Head of Parliament Mr. Nabih Berri, the Prime Minister of the interim government Sheikh Saad al-Hariri, and the elected Prime Minister Mr. Najib Miqati. The trust bonds and cooperation between the Church and the political authorities were renewed through these visits, to attain the common goal of serving man, society and nation, with the total separation of power between them both and a distinguishing on the ways and means levels.

The visits also included the heads of the Islamic Communities, the Mufti of the Republic Sheikh

39- Maronite Patriarchal Synod, text 2: The Identity of the Maronite Church and its Vocation and Mission, 29-34; text 18: The Maronite Church and Culture, 15-22.

Muhammad Rashid Kabbani, the vice-president of the Higher Shiite Islamic Council Sheikh Abd al-Amir Kabalan, and the Sheikh Aql of the Druze Muwahids, Naim Hasan. We confirmed our shared responsibility in of testimony to Christian – Muslim conviviality, the dialogue of life and culture, as well as the cooperation through our unity, encounters and consultations. The Christian – Muslim cooperation in Lebanon ensures the strengthening of synergic bonds mutual ties with the Arab world, i.e. “dialogue and cooperation between the Christians and Muslims of Lebanon help fulfilling the same move in the Middle East countries. The Christians and Muslims of these countries are called to build together a future of conviviality that aims at developing their peoples in a human and moral way.”⁴⁰

Communion was exchanged with the Catholic Churches Patriarchs by visiting the Catholic Greek Melkite Patriarch Gregorius the Third Lahham, the Armenian Catholic Patriarch Narcis Pedros the Eighteenth, and the Syrian Catholic Patriarch Mar Aghnatius Yusuf the Third Yunan. Together we represent together the Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon and we are all members of the Assembly of the Catholic Patriarchs

40- A New Hope for Lebanon, 93

of the East; in addition to the Catholic Copts, the Chaldeans patriarchs, and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. My visit's aim was to confirm our unity and our spirit of communality, to strengthen and increase consultation and cooperation in all apostolic, social, developmental areas; and the acts of charity in Lebanon, in the Patriarchal sphere, and the Expansion.⁴¹

I visited the Patriarch Aghnatius IV Hazim, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, and the Catholicos of the Armenian Orthodox Aram the First. Hereby, I would like to express my thankfulness to the **Orthodox Church and Heads of Churches Patriarchs** who visited me, hoping one day, to visit them in return at their Sees. I assured everyone my resolution on ecumenical cooperation, especially through activating the Middle East Council of Churches tasks, through which we arise in our Middle Eastern world the Christ's unique Church. We also testify to the Christ in our unity, our common ministry, and to the church that conducts a dialogue with other religions especially Muslims, a dialogue of truth and love, based on our common Levantine Antiochian Heritage.

41- A New Hope for Lebanon, 81-87

III. With the Maronite Political Leaders.

33. Communion and Love first begins in the inner household. Therefore, it was crucial to invite the four Maronite leaders: the former Lebanese President Sheikh Amin al-Gemayel, the former Prime Minister Deputy General Michel Aoun, the former minister Deputy Sulaiman Frangieh, and the Head of the Lebanese Forces Dr. Samir Geagea. The four are in a controversial partition on the political choice about protecting Lebanon as an entity, a protective strong state, and on preserving the effective Christian presence in society and in the state. One part believes in the secure Sunnis coalition, and another with the Shiites. The meeting was held in a spiritual atmosphere at the Patriarchal See on Tuesday April 19th 2011 during the Holy week preparing Easter. This encounter began and concluded with two spiritual discourses given by the hermit father Jouhanna Khawand from the Lebanese Maronite Order.

The leaders concluded by considering the two political choices rather complementary than contradictory, in a democratic country that respects freedoms and differences. They committed to preserve the nation unity, to respect its principles, to protect its basic interests, and avoid convulsive

speeches in the media. It was agreed that meetings would take place with Maronite Deputies to discuss common national issues. In fact, regular encounters were held treating so far three subjects: land sale, Christian presence in state administration, and the parliamentary elections law. Other subjects will follow.

The leaders encounter and their consequent meetings with Maronite deputies left a great positive effect on all citizens both in the country and abroad.

IV. With the Heads of the Muslim Communities

34. Communion and love is to be spread among the Lebanese in a sharp political division state, on a sectarian background due to the 8th of March and the 14th of March alliances. Communion requires our unity demonstration as heads of Christian and Muslim communities, to be a pillar for Lebanese unity in their various confessions, on both personal relations, constitutional levels and national constants levels. Therefore, along with these spiritual chiefs, I called for a **Christian-Muslim Spiritual Summit** held at the Patriarchal See in Bkerke on May 12th 2011. After my official visit to France and before a pastoral visit to the United States of America I called for a second summit with the Mufti of the Republic held

in his office in Beirut on September 27th September 2011, to proclaim needs in Lebanon and Arab World current events. Both summits were attended by the Catholic and Orthodox churches Patriarchs, the head of the Evangelical community, the heads of the Islamic communities, i.e. Sunnis, Shiites, Druze Muwahadins and Alawites. The **following national principles and constants were underlined:**

1. Strengthening the national unity among Lebanese to preserve Lebanon's immunity, message veracity, and to face the challenges and developments in the Arab region.
2. Considering the Lebanese state a source of common strength and custody for Lebanese citizens, this requires increasing in their faith in the state. They should support its institutions, while the political leaderships must be aware of disagreements caused by choices or points of view turning into conflicts and hostilities.
3. Committing to the culture of dialogue that respects various points of views, leads to the realization of harmony and common good. It represents the best method to treat the great national issues based on the constitution, the National Pact and the conventional national principles.
4. Strengthening the national sense of belonging culturally, educationally, socially and politically;

fortifying the state pillars, respecting its constitution and laws, enabling the handling of economic, social and subsistence problems that cause emigration and the country's vital strength drainage.

5. Committing to the constitutional institutions to deal with contra versions, to depend only on the army and the legal security forces capable of safeguarding Law and Order.

6. The State right to liberate its lands from Israeli or any other occupation, and the protection of Lebanon's sovereignty, freedom and independence.

7. The importance of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which is the key to peace, security and stability in the Middle East region.

8. Calling upon the youth to hold on to their land, their national values and the culture of openness to diversity, to reject extremism and self withdrawal into ghettos.

9. Strengthening cooperative and fraternal bonds between Lebanon and Arab countries towards the good, peace and stability. Lebanon is indeed a part of the Arab world in identity, culture and destiny; The Lebanese were pioneers in spreading the renaissance and enlightenment in this East. As for the Christians, their presence in this East is historical and autochthonous; they play a fundamental and imperative role in their countries.

10. Respecting the human's dignity and basic freedoms, including individual, religious, and political ones, as well as freedom of speech. Considering diversity as a source of wealth, and citizenship a basis of equality in rights and duties.

11. Keeping the current movements in the Arab countries from slipping and diverting away from their original goals, while claiming freedom, dignity, justice and democracy, and rejecting all types of oppression, violence and tyranny.

12. Rejecting the settlement of the Palestinian refugees and defending their right of return to their homeland according to UN Security Council resolution no. 194.

The heads of the Muslim and Christian communities agreed on holding regular spiritual summits and continuous consultations.

The two spiritual summits generated internal and external relieves, contributed in breaking tensions, clarifying positions, and focusing on a common national vision.

V. Pastoral Visits

35. I would like to express my gratitude, appreciation and love to all Lebanese, Christians and Muslims from all communities and confessions,

all parties, movements and position, for they have conveyed their love and faith in me since my election as Patriarch. They were all, in various ways, pioneers in living “**Communion and Love**” towards me. When I, as Patriarch, undertook pastoral visits to our Maronite dioceses, a duty by the Church canons, which requires a visit every five years, the Lebanese, in all regions, insisted that the visit should include them all. Christians from all Churches, Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelicals, as well as the Muslims from all the communities, Sunnis, Shiites, Druze and Alawites. They all embraced me with their love, hospitality and generosity. I express them my love, estimation and loyalty. How often did I repeat that I am with everyone and for everyone. Together, we must build our society and beloved country Lebanon. Each and every person, community or group is indispensable. My unwavering conviction is that every Lebanese, every Lebanese community and confession is in itself an added value in our social and national fabric, to be evaluated, preserved and developed. On this basis we build “Communion in Love,” in a mutual trust, by accepting each other, in the wealth of our diversity, to seek the truth that gathers and liberates, to build a nation that secures everyone a dignified life in all its spiritual, moral, social and national dimensions.

What I experienced with the Lebanese in the country, I also did among them in the Expansion and in other Middle East countries. They have all my gratitude and esteem. I am proud of them, of their virtue, courage and morals.

In the “communion and love” spirit, and as my response and confirmation, I undertook pastoral visits included dioceses and regions, in Lebanon and abroad, as well as religious orders, monasteries, and Church institutions. I relate these visits in this general message confirming their permanent presence in my prayers, my communion and love.

1. Visits to Lebanon's Dioceses

36. I successively visited our dioceses in Lebanon, upon a kind request of their bishops who accompanied me in:

The Patriarchal Vicariate in Jounieh with His Excellency the Patriarchal Vicar Bishop Antoine Nabil Andary (April 2 and 3, 2011), the Diocese of Antelias with His Excellency Bishop Joseph Bechara (April 9 and 10), the Diocese of Ehden-Zgharta with His Excellency the Patriarchal Vicar Bishop Samir Mazloum (May 27 and 28), the Patriarchal Vicariate in Sarba with His Excellency the Patriarchal Vicar Bishop Guy Boulos Noujeim

(May 28 and 30), the parish of Qornet El Hamra – the Diocese of Antelias, on the centennial Jubilee of the Sacred Heart Church with the bishop of the diocese (June 30), the Diocese of Batroun with His Excellency Bishop Boulos Emile Saade (July 2 and 3), the Diocese of Jbeil with the Patriarchal administrator Mgr. Joseph Mouawad (July 16 -18), the Diocese of Tripoli, the two districts of Zawiya and Daniyya, with His Excellency Bishop Georges Bou Jaoudeh, (July 30 and 31), the Patriarchal Vicariate in al-Jibbeh: the mountain parishes from al-Hadath to Kfarzghab with His Excellency the Patriarchal Vicar Bishop Francis Baisary (August 4, 12, 19, 24, 26, 31), and the Diocese of Sidon: the city of Sidon, East Sidon towns, the district of Jezzine and al-Shouf with His Excellency Bishop Elias Nassar (August 6-8), the Diocese of Baalbek – Deir al-Ahmar with His Excellency Bishop Semaan Atallah (August 14-15), Tannourine and the rural villages in the Diocese of Batroun with the Bishop of the Diocese (August 21), the region of Kfardebian, Baskinta and the Patriarchal Vicariate neighborhood in Sarba with the Patriarchal Vicar (August 27-28), the mountainous areas of Jbeil diocese celebrating the foundation stone of the Beatified Brother Estephan church in Gharfin, as well as the celebration of his feast day in Lehfed

with the Patriarchal Administrator (August 29), the region of Baalbek and Hermel in the Diocese of Baalbek – Deir El Ahmar with the Diocese Bishop (August 17- 18), the mountainous areas of the Antelias Diocese with the Bishop of the Diocese (September 13), the Diocese of Beirut with His Excellency Bishop Boulos Matar (September 14), the Diocese of Tyre with His Excellency Bishop Choukrallah Nabil El-Hage (September 24-26), the Patriarchal Vicariate in Sarba in a special audience with its clergy in the presence of His Excellency the Patriarchal Vicar (November 12), the region of Koura in the Diocese of Tripoli on November 13 on the occasion of the 150th year anniversary of the Christian Brothers Schools in Tripoli/Dedeh with the Bishop of the Diocese, the parishes of al-Bouar, al-Uqaybi, Mar Doumit monastery, and the state hospital in the Patriarchal Vicariate of Jounieh (December 17), followed by the Diocese of al-Ghineh with the Patriarchal Vicar (December 18), the Diocese of Beirut, the coastal area with the bishop of the diocese (February 4 – 9, 2012).

2. Visits to the Religious Orders

37. I visited consecutively the following religious orders upon a kind superior generals invitation:

The Maronite Mariamite Order in Notre Dame of al-Louaizé Monastery (April 5, 2011), the Lebanese Maronite Order in Mar Antonius – Ghazir convent (April 26), the Antonine Order in of Mar Roukoz – al-Diwaneh Monastery (May 21), the Lebanese Maronite Nuns in Mar Youssef Jrabta convent on the occasion of St Rafqa commemoration (June 11), the the congregation of the Holy Cross sisters Jal el Dib for the commemoration of Beatified Father Yaacoub al-Haddad (June 26), twice the Lebanese Missionaries in Mar Yuhannah al-Habib Monastery – Jounieh (June 27), their Monastery at al-Kreim in Ghosta (December 30), The Maronite Holy Family Congregation – Ibrine Convent (July 20), twice to al-Karmel Walidat Allah Convent in Harissa (December 4 and 26), the Convent of Sayydet al-Haqleh (December 7), the Convent of the Annunciation-the Visitation Nuns /al-Ziyarah in Zouk Mikayel (December 10), the Two Sacred Heart's Institution in Bayt al-Sayydeh – Hadath Beirut (December 29), the Basilian Chouerite Order in Mar Youhannah al-Sayyegh Monastery in al-Khenshara (December 30), the Antonine Sisters Congregation in Mar Doumit – Roumieh (January 14, 2012), St Theresa the Little Jesus Congregation in their Headquarters Convent – al-Kleiat (January 17).

3. Visits to the Church Institutions

38. I visited the following Church institutions:

The Patriarchal Seminary in Ghazir (May 24, 2011), St Augustine Seminary in Kafra – Ain Saadeh (May 30), St Anthony of Padua Seminary in Karmsadeh (June 4), Notre Dame of al-Louaizé school of the Maronite Mariamite Order, where 250 students graduated under my patronage on June 29, the Antonine University - Baabda (July 15), where 300 graduated under my patronage in various specializations, the Institute for the Disabled persons and the Lebanese Hospital of the Lebanese Maronite Order in Beit Shabab (December 1), Hotel Dieu Hospital in Beirut (December 3), the Hospice in Jounieh (February 17, 2012), and finally the Holy Cross Hospital with the Prime Minister and the Public Health Minister (February 20).

4. Visits to Dioceses Outside of Lebanon

39. Always with “Communion and Love” spirit, I made pastoral visits to the dioceses outside Lebanon and to countries comprising Maronite communities.

On the occasion of my first visit to Rome to express the ecclesiastical communion, between April 11-16, I visited our religious orders in their convents and centers. I visited the St Antony the

Great Mariamite Monastery, St Isaih Monastery of the Antonine Fathers, and the St Charbel Procurate for the Lebanese Maronite Fathers. I met at our Pontifical College our Maronite community who gathers in St Maroun Church and in the College to celebrate Mass, to teach catechism to children and hold pastoral activities. The Vicariate of Rome has recognized it as a sub-parish. I took as well the opportunity to visit Giorgio Napolitano, the President of Italy, the vice prime Minister and the Foreign Affairs Minister.

When I responded to an invitation by the French president Nicolas Sarkozy for an official visit to France on September 3-11, I visited our parish in Our Lady of Lebanon Church – Paris, and St Charbel Parish in Suresnes, the Holy Cross Sisters Parish in Lourdes, and our parish in Marseille.

40. I also visited **our two dioceses in the United States of America** from October 1 to 23. We started it by a second encounter with the Expansion Bishops Excellencies: Robert Chahin, Gregory Mansour, Estephan-Hector Douaihy (United States), Joseph Khoury (Canada), Edgar Madi (Brazil), Charbel Merhi (Argentina), and George Saad Abi Younes (Mexico). The encounter was held in the presence of Bishop Paul Sayah, the Patriarchal Vicar General, Bishop Hannah Alwan, the Patriarchal Vicar for

legal and juridical matters, and the superior generals of the Maronite Orders, Abbot Boutros Tarabay (Maronite Mariamite Order), Abbot Daoud Raidy (Antonine Order), Reverend Elie Madi (Lebanese Maronite Missionaries), the Father Assistant General Neematallah El Hashem, representing Abbot Tannous Nemeh (Lebanese Maronite Order), and many other fathers. We then visited numerous parishes in both dioceses accompanied by the two bishops. We concluded with a visit to the United Nations in New York by a meeting with the Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and we handed him a written memorandum.

41. We noticed that the **Lebanese communities abroad, whether Maronite or else**, are increasing in number through marriage and emigration, and that their economic situation is generally selected. They are worthy of praise because they are ecclesiastically and civically respected; They participate in the development of the host countries and their societies, they help their families in Lebanon, they financially support the parish and the social projects in their Lebanese towns, and they practice their faith in their dioceses, participate in all its constructive, social and parish projects. They are influential in these societies and countries. We praised the bishops' supervision, the clergy and religious commitment in the existing

dioceses and missions, for the excellence of their liturgical celebrations and for their total integrity to the Maronite tradition. We encouraged the necessity to register their marriages, births and children by the diplomatic missions and registration offices. We emphasized on the value of the Lebanese nationality and passing it generation after generation, for its rights, advantages and guarantees on the national, economic and social levels. We called upon them to safeguard their land in Lebanon and their original homelands, for it is a guarantee for the future and a protection for their identity, traditions and history.

42. I visited Baghdad with the Patriarch Mar Aghnatius Yusuf III Yunan from October 31 to November 2, on the first commemoration of the massacre in Sayyidat al-Najat. We met the heads of the churches, the vice president of the republic Mr Tariq al-Hashimi, the head of parliament Mr Usamah al-Nujaifi, and the Prime Minister Mr Nouri al-Maliki who generously hosted us and guaranteed our security.

43. I visited the Diocese of Cyprus answering an invitation by His Excellency Bishop Yousef Soueif (February 10-13, 2012), and I visited all its parishes, especially the Maronite villages that were displaced after the Turkish occupation of the northern part in: Aya Marina, Asomatos, Karpash, and Kormagiti. I

promised to pursue their case with the appropriate parties. We met the official and spiritual authorities, ahead, the President Mr Dimitri Christophias and the head of the Greek Orthodox bishops of Cyprus Chrisostomos II.

I visited the Patriarchal Vicariate in Jordan, answering the invitation of our Patriarchal Vicar General Bishop Boulos Sayah (March 8-11). We visited His Royal Highness King Abdallah II bin al-Husayn, and His Royal Highness Prince Al Hassan bin Talal the Head of the Arab Intellectual Forum. We placed the foundation stone of St Maroun Church in “al-Maghtas” area on the Jordan River, on a piece of land offered by the King to the Maronite as he did for all the other Churches. By the by, clergy and faithful delegations came to visit us from the Parishes of Jerusalem and Galilee: Nazareth, al-Jash, Kfarbaram, Haifa, and Acre.

I visited the State of Qatar on an official invitation from its Emir, where I met our Lebanese and Maronite communities (March 11-13). We visited His Royal Highness the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifah Al Thani, the Prime Minister - Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasim Al Thani, the Deputy Prime Minister the Head of Supervision and Transparency Mr Abdallah bin Hamad al-Attiyah, and the Minister of Awqaf

and Islamic Affairs Dr. Ghaith al-Kawari. We also met His Excellency Bishop Camillo Ballin and we discussed with him the Maronite clergy status and appointing in the region under his jurisdiction.

I finally undertook a pastoral and ecumenical visit to **the Diocese of Egypt**, which coincided with the death of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, the Pope of Alexandria and the Patriarchal See of St Mark the Evangelist. I was to meet with him to activate Ecumenical activities among various Churches. His Holiness was one of the Christianity pillars in the Arab world, and an idol of high ethics and forgiveness. I pray God to compensate Egypt and the Coptic Church with the best of good shepherds. During the visit, following an invitation by His Excellency Bishop Francois Eid, the bishop of the diocese and accompanied by him, we encountered our parishes faithful in Cairo, New Egypt, and Alexandria, we met members of the Mariamite order and the faithful (March 17-21). We visited consecutively: His Eminence Patriarch Cardinal Antonius Najib, the Apostolic Nuncio, Bishop Michael Fitzgerald, the Patriarch of Alexandria the 2nd for the Greek Orthodox, we met bishops from various Churches in addition to other spiritual leaders, and the Egyptian Prime Minister, the two assistants of the Foreign minister. We renewed cooperation with

them all on the Middle East level in both terms: the ecclesiastical communion and ecumenical work, the Muslim-Christian dialogue for conviviality, the enrichment patrimonies traditions, and special values to each religion and community, as well as the commitment to our countries and its people's culturally, economically, democratically, nationally developmentally and in modernity.

44. We generally affirmed to all the Christians wherever they are, and to the public opinion in all places, two fundamentals:

A. To consider the Christian presence in Lebanon and Middle Eastern countries a presence of the whole Church in its mission and testimony, not as numeral minority. The Christian citizens in these countries are autochthonous and genuine since Christ, the apostles and the Early Church. They imprinted the cultures of the region with the Gospel values. They spread and preserved the Christian faith in the East. They taught the Christian principles relating to human dignity and human rights, public freedoms and accepting the other though different, as well as the dialogue, conviviality, justice and peace.

B. To consider Lebanon with its message and its role as a model in its Middle Eastern context, not simply as a small country poor in its natural resources, but as a model for the Middle East countries with its

National Pact and Formula, based upon conviviality, equal and balanced participation in government and in administration between Christians and Muslims, according to the constitution decrees. To consider its value as a secular state that separates the religion and the state while respecting God, His laws and all religions, recognizing the legal and juridical sectarian authority relating to worship, belief, marriage and the family. Consequently it is a parliamentary democratic system that recognizes all civic freedoms, Human Rights Declaration and the rotation of power. Lebanon was and will always be the pioneer of the cultural, social and modern renaissance in the Middle East.

VI. Impressions from the Pastoral Visits

45. My pastoral visits in Lebanon and abroad allowed me to **recognize the importance of our people** in their societies and countries, as well as their virtues and values.

Our people are good and loving. It was revealed in their happiness, joy, greetings, great patience on the streets in the heat and cold, adults, young, old, youth and children, sick, ailing, politicians, officials, juridical, media, civilians and militaries. This is the yearning of the generations and their waits for

the day when the Lebanese recognizes and lives his origins and traditions.

Our people are generous and welcoming. In spite of the economic crisis, they were openhanded in hospitality and gifts. Our people would rather be broke, than break a hospitality principle. It is a loyalty to history and authenticity. Just as their love was limitless, so was their immeasurable generosity. Between their endearing poverty and their generosity, our people bet profits and loss records.

Our people are rooted in their land resisting the need to sell it and the buyers' temptations. They are aware that their land is the pillar of their existence in the nation. Upon it they wrote their history and from it they received their identity and on it they carried out their vocation. The land is a mother that embraces and raises them on the values. Selling land is both betraying it and what it stands for.

Our people is the people of the resurrection: all the regions and parishes I visited, and especially those who suffered from wars and conflicts, removed all the traces and **rose from the ashes** that very often, had left behind a burnt land. I am not only talking about towns and villages facades, but its depths, peripheries, and suburbs. They have all regained the beauty of its Creator. All this is thanks to the Lebanese who, like the Phoenix, is able to

emerge from its ashes in more beauty, splendor and strength.

Our people are one in its sectarian diversity and social structure. We heard their yearning for transcending their divisions. I realized that the sectarism is not the problem, but the source of the political exploitation. I am confident that the communities in Lebanon will be the foundation stone in establishing peace and stability. Religion in our East may still be the first Peace master. People estimate its religious values. Religious and sectarian Peace is the basis for peace in Lebanon and the Arab world. The unity of believers comes from the uniqueness of the one God in whom they believe. We believe in one God, whether Islam expresses in terms of the Only One God, or Christianity in terms of the One God in three hypostases. The One God is a fundamental source of peace among those who believe in Him.

When the destructive war that tore the Lebanese social fabric was over, they removed the demarcation lines checkpoints and returned to their land and their natural environment, despite some on the tapis exceptional matters. They went back to conviviality, mutual forgiveness; they turned the page of the war and rebuilt their social structure. The great conciliations took place, especially in Mount Lebanon.

We tested it through our pastoral visits in Lebanon, Middle East, Europe and America and truth be said: our people overtook the authorities in this field. If only leaderships follow the example of our people, if only they live with each other the way our people live reconciliation and forgiveness. Like us, they became weary of the divisions; and Lebanon is in dire need of loyal authority for the unity of our people and our national entity. Through dialogue and the others acceptance, we live and persevere. Through division and fights, however, we die and expire. People decline and fade away, but Lebanon the entity, the Pact and the model remains as long as there are deep active good wills.

Our people are firm in their hope and ethics. They are stronger to be broken because they are the people of hope. Hope is the guarantee of their future. The future of people, nations, youth, family and society is in the hands of those who plant hope in the hearts of new generations and hope in a better society.

He who has the education on hope is able to build societies. Lebanon is in dire need of true, pure, non-partisan and colorless education. What unite us are humanity, citizenship, knowledge and ethics. We are diversified in our religions and communities; each one is different in his character. However, the

beauty of what unites us as Lebanese is citizenship, humanity and the culture of conviviality.

Christ taught us to love all the people; I am only a human being when I carry in my heart all the love for all people, without any aversion, hater or rancor. This is what Jesus Christ taught us and this is how we must be, to realize our Christian vocation.

VII. The call of Faithfulness to Our Vocation and Mission

46. To strengthen communion and love, I call for faithfulness to our vocation and mission:

To the church Pastors

With you O pastors, the descendants of the apostles and my partners in my ministry, I renew the vow we took the day Christ the Lord granted us the honor of ministering his people, He who sacrificed Himself for them out of His love. He bequeathed to Peter the head of the Church after He confirmed his great love for Him: “Do you love me? Tend My sheep” (Jn. 21:16). In this way, the Lord revealed that every authority in the family, Church, society and state requires a strong love for Christ in its heart.

Given that authority is a noble art in the service of man and the common good, it presumes holding

within the charity that is the authority's spirit, law and dynamic. Love is the essence of God's nature, as John the Apostle declared: "God is Love" (1Jn 4:8). Since God is love He is the Creator, Redeemer and Absolver: the Father loved us and created us, the Son loved us and redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit loved us and absolved us. Any accountability function, answering a spiritual, familial or civil authority should love those under his custody and to accomplish any kind of a ministry with love.

To the Clergy

47. The day, in which the hand of the bishop on his sacerdotal ordination was laid on your heads, you shared the priesthood of Christ. You were created on His image and embodiment. The Father sanctified you and sent you into the world (Jn. 10:36) as teachers, consecrators, and pastors. Today, I call upon you to remember that day of yours, in which Jesus, the eternal priest, established the priesthood of the New Testament, the Maundy Thursday. During the Last Supper we were born in our priesthood from the sacrament of the Eucharist into which the Lord poured His eternal love.

You were established in the Church, O beloved priests, to give the community the Word of God nutriment through sermons and teaching, the grace of redemption by administrating the

sacraments that are life-giving through the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴²

48. You are the Servants of God's Word. On you, as Episcopal assistants, lay the duty to announce the Gospel **to all people** in the name and consigning of Christ the Lord: "Go into the entire world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mk 16:15).

You are the servants of the salvation sacraments, the divine worship and the prayer. Through Baptism you initiate the believers into the people of God's community, as living members of the Church; through the sacrament of repentance you reconcile sinners with God and the Church; through the ointments you lessen and sanctify the suffering of the sick; through the Eucharist you offer the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the world, and the feast of His body and blood to give life to the faithful. In the Eucharist, all the spiritual good of the Church is present; through the Host of the Christ and with it, the faithful offer their labor, themselves and their families as spiritual offerings to God.

You are the pastors of the people of God, you undertake the duty of Christ, the Head and the

42- Second Vatican Council, Synodical Decree Concerning the Life and Ministry of the Clergy, 2

Shepherd, through the bishops' ministry authority, and which you carry out in the name of Christ, the great Shepherd of Shepherds (1 Pet 5:4). **You gather the family of God in** brotherhood revived through unity; you lead its members to the Father through Christ the Head, and through the Holy Spirit's guidance and action.

Since your mission is to build a believing community, it is your duty to establish relations with everyone, marked by kindness, loyalty to Christ, to Church teaching and Christian life, to advise them according to the counsel of the St Paul the Apostle: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." (2 Tim. 4:2). It is your duty as zealous priests to help the faithful live a life of openness towards others, far from selfishness, in accordance with the new code of love exigencies, so you serve others with the talents given to you by God, you carry out your duties among human communities in a Christian spirit, and you dedicate the poor and the weak a special attention for Christ disguises Himself in them (Mt. 25:40).

To the Consecrated

49. The eyes of everyone are upon you, O you who have consecrated yourselves to the perfection of love and the service of people of God, to be the

ample response to the challenges of our world and the relief to the turbulent souls of our youth.

Your consecrated life is a constant pursuit for holiness by overcoming the three worldly temptations: the temptation of the eye, the desire of the body and the conceit of life, through the evangelical virtues: poverty, chastity and obedience.

The Middle East Synod recommendations emphasized the basic elements of religious life, which essence is structured to communion and love, I mean: the commitment to abide by Jesus Christ, following His steps, emulating His virtues, especially His poverty, purity and obedience, which allowed Him to attain the pinnacle of love by sacrificing Himself for us on the cross; the fidelity to the religious spirituality that smoothes each one of us personality, to be a living stone in the edifice of the Church.

The Church invokes you to be present everywhere, to properly hand out institutions and persons, to coordinate and cooperate between the religious orders and dioceses for a more effective and global ministry, especially in the deprived areas. It invokes your presence commitment in the Arab world we fundamentally belong to, and in which we have Christians; as well as in the expansion where children of our Church are spread throughout the five continents.

I pray the Lord that clerical and religious vocations grow and proliferate because the “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few” (Mt 9:37). The Lord of the harvest is capable of sending laborers to His harvest.

To the Lay Faithful

50. You belong to Church – Mystery by faith and baptism. Faith in Christ the Redeemer and only Savior, **and Baptism** of the second birth as the children of God in the Holy Spirit, for a new life, have made you as St Augustine states “Not just Christians but Christ Himself.” Through union with Him, you became a spiritual edifice filled with the presence of God. You are the image of the Church in the heart of society and the closest image for people, moreover, as Pope Pius XII assures you that “You do not only belong to the Church but you are the Church and its front line.”⁴³ It is not sufficient that our churches are beautiful in their stonework, architecture and furniture, but they should be beautiful in their believers.

“Only beauty redeems the world”, as the famous Russian writer Dostoyevsky wrote. We acquire beauty through the Gospel culture, the Church teaching, the grace of the Sacraments, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

43- John Paul II, *The Lay Apostolate*, 9.

You are called upon to make your world beautiful through the beauty of your marital and family life, the beauty of culture and learning, the beauty of politics and the economy, the beauty of the media and advertising, and through the beauty of trade and business. Abide, therefore, for the sake of this purpose, in Me the Church – Mystery uniting in Christ, the unity of the branches with the vine, for He is calling you: “Abide in Me, and I in you.”

(Jn 15:4).

To the Youth

51. You are in the age of ambition and the life aim discovery. I gaze with you to the future with its expectations and challenges. You are the hope of the Church, family and society; you are the generation that creates loyal citizens. **The Church, family, society and nation will be tomorrow what you are today.** You are the future, and with you I resolve to live in **communion and love**, vertically in union with God and horizontally through union with all people.

Your vocation is to sanctify your world through the yeast of the Gospel, and drawing your peers to the path of growth and progress in discovering their unrepeated life project. **The Church embraces you** with love, trust and hope. It shares your concerns, cares for your interests, hopes and expectations. Therefore, commit yourselves to your Church, its life,

mission and teaching, for it gives you a permanent youthfulness state by the novelty of the Gospel and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In front of the dangers facing you from any direction, the Lord Jesus repeatedly tells you: “Do not fear!” (Mt 14:27) prepare yourselves through knowledge, morals, aptitude and willingness. Root yourselves in land and build the nation with your hands, your struggle, and your faith in it and in yourselves. To you, the Beatified Pope John Paul II, the beloved of the youth, says: “Do not fear. Open the doors of your minds and hearts to Christ. You are the guardians of the dawn”.

CHAPTER IV

COMMUNION AND LOVE IN NATIONAL LIFE

52. National life cannot be lived without “communion and love.” It finds its basis and expanse in the elements of our national life in Lebanon.

1. The National Pact and the Lebanese Formula.

“Communion and Love” is Lebanon’s specificity due to its National Pact and its Formula.

Through the National Pact, Christians and Muslims committed since 1943 to the “communion” of conviviality in a way that the Lebanese system should be civic, halfway between the theocratic system that unites religion and state, and the secular one completely separating them. This civic system in Lebanon separates religion and state, acknowledges clause 9 of the constitution “The freedom of belief, the fulfillment of God worship, the respect for all religions, confessions and civil status systems.” This Pact is based on the motto: “No to the East and no to the West”. It affirms the mission of Lebanon in its Levantine context without melting in it. It waves

subordination to East and West, distinguishing itself from East theocracies and West atheist secularism. What is meant by **positive neutrality** is a Lebanon, according to speeches and statements that accompanied the Pact, a Lebanon, independent republic, Arab in identity and belonging, cooperative with Arab and foreign states, while preserving a balance among all, without anyone's custody, superiority and consortium.⁴⁴

53. In the Lebanese formula, Christians and Muslims committed to equally participate in government and administration. In the context of implementing the formula through conviviality, the Christians and Muslims executed their vows of protecting Lebanon, its sovereignty and independence, to martyrdom of great men. This formula, subject to development on the National Pact and Constitution basis, found a way that is built on trust, cooperation and love between all. It is firstly a communion in a communal consensual government, and the agreement that the president should be a Maronite, the head of parliament a Shiite and the Prime Minister a Sunni. Secondly, an adoption of an equal participation formula in

44- See: Introduction to the Lebanese Constitution, and the Charter of Political Action, p. 29.

parliament, government, and principal or equivalent administrative positions. Thirdly, a deference of balance in all other administrative positions on competence basis, with all its dimensions. Hoping this formula would be developed to secure greater stability in the country fabric, to achieve democracy and economic growth.

The basis of the National Pact and this formula is trust, love through citizenship, and cooperation by all groups to raise Lebanon and its specificity.⁴⁵

2. The Way Out of Crisis.

54. Today, we sense the need to strengthen communion and love on the national, social and political levels. The national division, the social fission and the governmental stagnation cannot persist. It is crucial to find a way out of the structural continuous crisis from one government to another, which is causing an economic, social, and crisis subsistence, making Lebanon a country that succumbs under public dept threatening the worst consequences, depriving the majority of the Lebanese people from a dignified life, and forcing

45- See the elements of this specificity in the Charter of Political Action, pp. 25-30.

many of our young generations and vital active forces to emigrate.

Political disagreement is natural and required in democracy. However, it is unacceptable that the competitive political parties strive to mutual elimination to the point of sometimes accusing each other of betrayal. Consequently, it is unacceptable to undertake in some cases, the state resources partition and the money and taxes squandering at the expense of the state itself, the nation and its people. It is the duty of good will people to consider a solution to the bad administration and corruption, to set out and agree on revitalization, and implement it in the spirit of “communion and love”.

We see the necessity of starting from the National Pact and the Constitution to make a wise and gradual move in the light of lived experience towards a double goal that secures true reform, different from conflict of interests, and which leads with God’s help to a way out of our crisis. This double goal is the completion of the civic state, the structure of its political formula, and the setting of a new social and national agreement.

Therefore, it is imperative to bolster the spirit of belonging to the state before belonging to a confession, party, or community, rather, to make affiliation to these elements a path that leads to the

state. Affiliation is awareness and commitment. Awareness is discerning the position and role of every citizen and community, so as this citizen puts his capabilities to establish and develop a civic state. Commitment is educating the citizen on this awareness through an education that starts in the family, concludes in school and university, continues through the media in all its sectors and mechanisms, matures in social life, and is consolidated through the quality of performance in public administration and in the exercise of authority.

3. The completion of the Civic State

55. We say **completion of the civic state** because since Lebanon inception, based on clause 9 of the Constitution back to 1926 that has not changed even after its emendation in 1990, is a civic state, i.e. a non-religious, non-sectarian and non-confessional state. It has neither religion, nor community or confession. It is a completely neutral state at equal distance from religions, communities, and religious confessions acknowledged in Lebanon. They carry out their rites, rituals, traditions and civil status in total freedom, with the state protection and guarantee, provided they do not harm the public system and domestic peace. If the current

Lebanese formula relies on balanced communities' representation in government and administration, as we have seen, this is due to the fact that this formula made Lebanon a quasi-sectarian federation affecting its nature as a civic state. Lebanon itself consists of factions that have their own specificities and historical extension, all of which insist on their cultures, exceptional characteristics, and active presence along with their efforts to create a global state expressing their actual conviviality intention.

56. The path towards the completion of the civic state requires above all things **to end the constant struggle over power between and within the communities**. It is an endless struggle that feeds and strengthens negative foreign interventions. Lebanon needs the reestablishment of every community course in its relation with the state and other communities. It needs the development of a strong state that imposes law, protects the citizen, and preserves the diverse entities that constitutes the Lebanese national structure. Lebanon needs statesmen in addition to sectarians. For those who are employed in the state public positions coming from their affiliation to a community, should work for the whole state, the common good, and the benefit of all citizens; not simply for the benefit of their own community members.

It is required from the communities to accept and respect the state neutrality, and endeavor to prevent mutual domination. The state must accept the specificity of the communities and their vital, historical, geographical, and cultural dimension; it must respect and benefit from the added value each community represents.

4. The civic state requirements

57. These demands require a **parliamentary election law** that ensures a satisfactory national representation, and at the same time, strengthens the Pact of conviviality. It must politically interpret it through elections, respects all the constituents in the regions, prevent the choices and of citizens by creating homogenous blocks or sectarian lobbies.

58. It similarly requires **the preservation of land ownership**, and not forcing owners to sell it to other communities out of need, luring, or for projects harming the free conviviality principal. The land ownership is the basis of balance and dignified conviviality, the respect for the communities particularities; and because it is one important element that guarantee their continuity and development.

59. The completion of the civic state requires turning it into a universal **neutral state** among the communities, the regional and international conflicts, based on centralized and decentralized codes.

The **centralization of the state** requires the independence of the administration and justice systems from politics, the endorsement of necessary laws to prevent the politicians' interventions in administration, the bond strengthening and activation between public administration and the elected political administration, the insurance of rights and duties to all citizens. If, however, the politicians continue to interfere in the administration by electing their employees, the latter loyalty will be guided towards that influential politician instead of the nation and the common good. The administration does not rest on satisfying the politicians but the people and their rights.

Expanded and non-restrictive Decentralization ensures balanced economic, social, cultural and secure development. It supports innovation and free productive economy; it spreads social justice across all regions, guarantees them security and stability. It strengthens the sense of belonging, loyalty and love of their nation.

The rise of a powerful state based on centralization and decentralization, necessitates **fighting corruption** by finding a legal way to hold

the high authorities accountable; consequently, the guarantee to charge the lower officials.

60. The civic state requires as well finding mechanisms that prevent the suspension of the constitutional institutions tasks, to activate these institutions that enable the political, economic and secure stability. Out of it, to consolidate the councils and monitoring bodies in order to prevent public money wasting. To respect the court judgments coming from the administration, to realize a balance between public responsibilities and jurisdictions, to globalize constitutional and legal deadlines on all decision-making levels.

This is how we build a fair state, complete in its laws and executive competence, enabling it to truly secure the citizen's rights. We then proceed to accomplish the civic state in total citizenship rights and duties parity.

5. The Civic state external dimension and the Neutrality of Lebanon

61. The establishment of Lebanon's cited civic state gives it **external dimensions** related to the Arab world, in terms of affiliation and mission, and in the Mediterranean world in terms of Lebanon's location on the Mediterranean Sea basin.

In the Arab world, Lebanon has a peaceful and stable role in the region due to its human geopolitical composition. It should strive to globalize its pluralistic experience in unity, to live in parity between Christians and Muslim in a democratic system, to respect public freedoms and human rights. It should work on solving regional troubles, avoid Arab and Islamic conflicts, and commit itself at the same time to the Arab cause and Arab culture and civilization, as well as to the peace harmony mission among people of the region, and to participate in the human renaissance in the Arab world.

In the Mediterranean, Lebanon's location on the eastern bank of the Mediterranean Sea basin, made it “One of its beacons, and a doorway to one of its most important civilizations.”⁴⁶ This allowed it to be a bridge between East and West on the cultural, economical and social levels and calls it to commit to the issues of the basin, especially by spreading the values of modernity and democracy. To strengthen human rights, resist terrorism, and find a fair solution to the Palestinian cause,⁴⁷ to strive in connecting Europe to the Arab world, and more committed to a just and global peace by solving both the Israeli – Palestinian and the Israeli – Arab conflicts.

46- A New Hope for Lebanon, 1

47- The Charter of Political Action, p. 27

62. Due to its location and role, Lebanon is concerned to represent a gathering oasis and a factor of stability to the regional countries. It is an emblem of hope raised for everyone, since conviviality, cooperation, dialogue of life, culture and common destiny of Muslims and Christians positively reflects on the East, giving its societies a special taste.⁴⁸ Internal and external endeavors should render Lebanon “A neutral country characterized as a model country for religious, cultural, and global dialogue, open to all countries in a mutual sincerity, cooperation, and respect spirit, committed to the causes of the region and the world in all related issues to peace, justice, rights and people’s evolution. It does not interfere in regional and international axes politics, is not centered on external alliances involved in interests struggles and influence on Lebanese territory and at Lebanon’s expense.”⁴⁹

6. The economic Development and Social Justice

63. Through economic development, we create job opportunities to enroot our youth in their land by using their innovative energies in Lebanon to prevent them from emigrating.

48- The Charter of Political Action, p. 28

49- *Ibid.*, p. 32b

The legitimacy of every political activity in its basic composition and reason of being derives from the rule of raising people's life standards and lifestyles. To straighten up, a capable, protectable and insuring civic state must swear on serving the person as an entity. This necessitates an exit from political hassle, petty interests and personal goals, so the socio-economic project becomes a priority in Lebanon's resurrection out of its crisis.

Both the economic development and the social justice must correlate. They can only erect through the fight of corruption, the fair distribution of national wealth, and balanced development.

Economic development is the natural introduction to fulfill the social justice. When the citizen trusts in his present and the future of his children, internal stability is reinforced and civil peace is settled. Only the transparent democratic civic state is able to behold such appropriate environment and to globally treat all issues. To cease the economic decline, attract foreign investment and consolidate the country immunity facing all types of challenges, some necessary procedures should be taken, which top objective is to launch development and attract investments.

The ways to achieve these demands are for instance:

a) Strengthening auditing structures and fighting corruption, since the fundamental conditions for economy growth and development are a proper administration of public money, its useless squandering, accountability on perpetrators, and application of all laws.

b) Reducing public debt because the most important criterion of economy evaluation of a nation lies in the ratio of debt versus gross national product. Growth in GNP at a greater rate than public debt interest is imperative to national economic development and fast growth. This is a duty not a choice.

c) Reforming Electricity sector, since it is the basic engine for industrial and agricultural production. Therefore, it is necessary to draw up a swift emergency plan to treat this issue in cooperation with the private sector, to keep politics away from this file and to put a stop to the waste.

d) Controlling the fuel sector in a better way, since the fuel prices increase leads to severe negative consequences in the producing sectors. Fuel sets the effective scale of consumer products, and basic life services.

e) Strengthening industry and agriculture as the basis of balance in our economy by attracting investment and by exporting, in addition to fortifying

the national capacity in the services sector, tourism and trade ones.

f) Creating a model industrial and agricultural environment that attracts capital funds, after innovating a modern and ready infrastructure out of sanitary, water systems, networks and roads, in accordance with a creative urban management. The importance of this environment is that it opens the doors to job opportunities, creates accommodations along with all the necessities of civil life, leading to enroot the working citizen to his land and his village, as well as to cease migrations to the big cities.

g) Activating partnership between the socio-economic partners, namely, the public and private sectors, alongside a cooperative and complementary partnership between the relevant ministries.

This requires:

- the revival of the Socio-Economic Council's,
- the reform of the National Social Security Fund and the implementation of old age pension fund,
- the debts discharges to private hospitals, gratuitous schools, and social institutions comprising old age homes, orphanages, and special needs centers,
- the activation of public transport,
- the establishment of popular markets in the regions,

- the consumption reinforcement , by reducing the price of products to strengthen citizen's buying power,

-the display of exportation incentives, investment outlay increase and raise of job opportunities figures

h) Investing in the gas and oil resources lying beneath our sea and probably even in our territories. These are one of the graces granted to our nation for the benefit, ease and progress of people, and the safety of its social stability; investing our water resources with all its benefits in numerous sectors.

i) Communicating with the Lebanese in the Expansion by encouraging and safeguarding external investments. This requires activating the foreign ministry and embassies duties in undertaking a pioneering role in economical connections, and highlighting to emigrant Lebanese the available investment opportunities in Lebanon. Their investment in Lebanon will strengthen development capacities in our national economy and will increase the GDP.

We, therefore, call upon the state officials' authorities to open constructive dialogue doors, to treat the economic and social issues, to create a plan for economic revival and activation in congruence with both social justice and economic development concepts. Let us not forget the importance of the

Constitution requirements concerning the annual budget and the financial administration accounts. We also hold the political authorities responsible for preserving public and private institutions and improving their services to the citizens.

CONCLUSION

64. Communion and love as described in this universal letter guides our life course within our Maronite Church in Lebanon, within the Patriarchal sphere, and in the Expansion. With the Eastern Catholic Churches in the context of Assembly of the Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops, with the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East, with the fraternal Orthodox Churches, the Evangelical groups, the Middle East Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches.

It also guides the course of our life and mission on the national level, with the civic official authorities and our Muslim brothers, and with those of other religions who live in our area.

We commit ourselves to “communion and love” in its vertical and horizontal dimensions, for the sake of man’s unity with God on the one hand, and his unity with his fellow human on the other, as an introduction towards a wider unity that comprises our people, nations, and all humankind. Our

support lays in the love of God, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14).

We grant you our apostolic love and blessings.

Bkerke, March 25th, 2012

The Feast of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary.



+ Bechara Boutros Rai

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bechara Boutros Rai". A small cross symbol is placed before the name.

Patriarch of Antioch and all the East

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