



The Maronite Voice



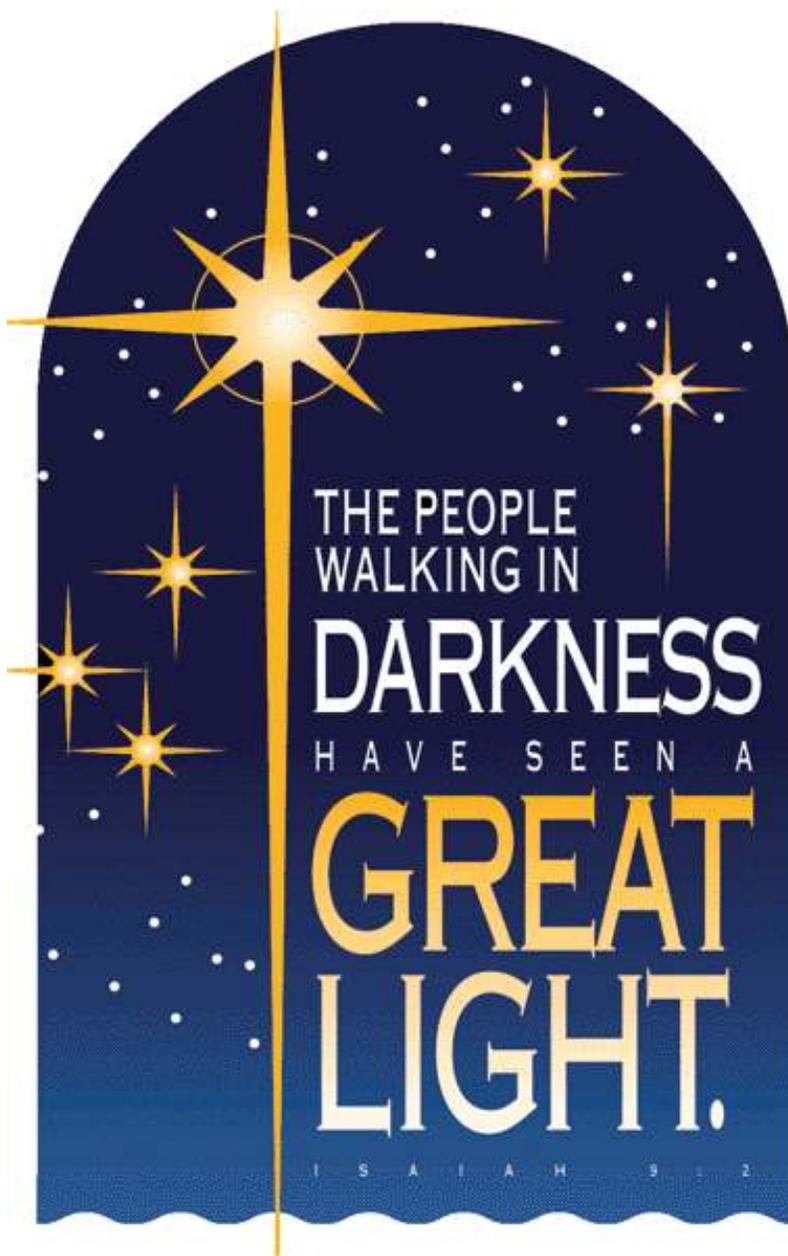
A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

Volume X

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December 2014

Come Home for Christmas!



Fed up with self-righteous people? I am too, but there is a problem: the worst offender is me! The famous English philosopher and critic G.K. Chesterton used to ask: "What's wrong with the world?" And he would answer, "I am!"

There are two kinds of self-righteous people: those who come to Church, and those who do not. Those who go to Church, and are bent on their own self-righteousness, look down on everyone else, and sometimes think they leave justified - a little like the Pharisee in the Temple, who in Jesus' story looked down on the tax collector. You know the story. Modern day Pharisees also compare themselves to others and say, "I'm in much better shape than this or that one!" But are they?

Just because they have succeeded morally, where others have failed, does that make them better than others? Regarding someone who morally has fallen, Saint Francis used to say: "There, but for the grace of God, go I!" Thus, because everyone is capable of making major mistakes in life, it would be far better if the self-righteous Church-goer would reach out a helping hand to the struggling person, rather than look down on them.

Nonetheless, there is hope for the self-righteous Church-goer. He can always repent and correct his mistake, because he hears the Gospel, receives Holy Communion, shares the same table, and spends time under the same roof with other sinners. He at least has a chance!

The self-righteous person who doesn't come to Church says in his heart: "How can I associate with those hypocrites who go to Church? They cheat, they lie, and they make themselves to be something they are not. It is better for me to stay away from them, for their bad morals may corrupt me!"

However, the non-Church-going person has only a snowball's chance in "you know where" to improve his lot. He will continue to look down on others from his self-righteous perch, and not have a chance to hear the

Word of God, to receive Holy Communion, or to share fellowship with his fellow sinners. He will remain isolated in his own self-righteous thoughts of others and have no opportunity to be challenged about his superior attitude.

(Continues on page 20)

Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

December 6, 2014

Enthronement of Metropolitan Joseph Zehlaoui, Antiochian Orthodox Church, Brooklyn, N.Y.

December 7, 2014

Pastoral Visit to St. Elias Church, Birmingham, Ala.

December 13 - 14, 2014

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Church, Cleveland, Ohio, and Elevation of Msgr. Peter Karam to the Honor of *Periodeut*.

December 20 - 21, 2014

Saint Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

December 25, 2014

Christmas Celebration, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon/St. Peter Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

December 27 - 28, 2014

Pastoral Visit to Sharbel Church, Portland, Ore., and Ordination to Priesthood of Monk Mark Anthony

December 31, 2014

New Year's Eve, St. Jude Church, West Covina, Calif.

January 6, 2015

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Church, Minneapolis, Minn., and Elevation of Msgr. sharbel Maroun to Chorbishop. □

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Maronite Convention 2015

Saint Maron Maronite Church

Cleveland, Ohio

July 1 - 5, 2015

For more information
contact the NAM office
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Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn

Eparchial Assignments

His Excellency Bishop Gregory J. Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, has made the following eparchial assignments effective January 1, 2015:

- At the request of the Religious Superior of the Maronite Lebanese Missionaries (M.L.M.) revoked the assignment of **Fr. George BouChaya**, as Pastor of St. Anne Church in Watervliet, New York. Fr. BouChaya will return to Lebanon to assume an assignment in his Religious Community. Bishop Mansour would like to thank Fr. BouChaya's Superior and Religious Community for sharing him with us.
- **Chorbishop John D. Faris**, as Administrator of St. Anne Church in Watervliet. This is in addition to his current assignment as Pastor of Saint Louis Gonzaga Church, Utica, N.Y.
- **Fr. Elias Khalil** as Parochial Vicar to Saint Anne Church in Watervliet. This is in addition to his current assignment as Parochial Vicar of Saint Louis Gonzaga Church, Utica, N. Y. □

Christmas Directives

Christmas Novena

His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour has asked that the Maronite Christmas Novena be celebrated in all the parishes of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn from December 15 to December 23, 2014, inclusive.

Christmas Eve Liturgy

It is not the custom of the Maronite Church to celebrate Christmas before midnight. However, the Chancery Office is fully aware that in many areas the Christmas Eve Liturgy (around 5:00 p.m.) is very popular. Pastors are urged to do all they can to maintain the Midnight tradition if at all possible. □

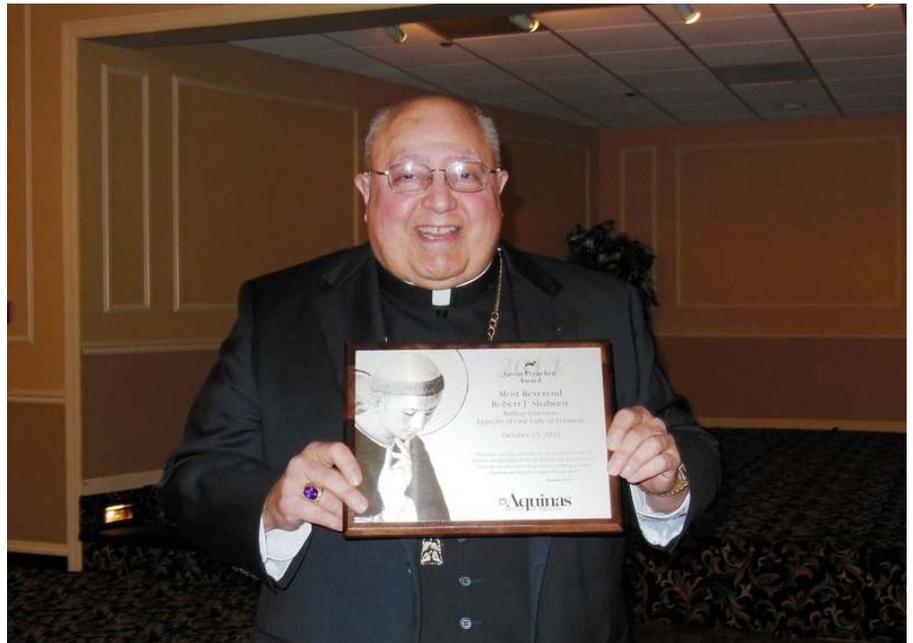
St. Louis, Missouri

Bishop Emeritus Robert Shaheen Receives "Great Preacher Award"

by Shelly Vitale

On Thursday, October 23, 2014, Bishop *Emeritus* Robert J. Shaheen of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon was presented the "Great Preacher Award" by the Aquinas Institute of Theology. This special occasion was held at The Cedars' Banquet Hall at St. Raymond Maronite Cathedral in St. Louis, Missouri. Hundreds of distinguished guests, clergy, religious, laity, parishioners, family and friends of the Bishop were present, including Bishop Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, Auxiliary Bishop Edward Rice of St. Louis, Chorbishop Moussa Joseph, Rector of St. Raymond Cathedral, and the Bishop's brothers John and William Shaheen. "The Great Preacher Award" was established in 1995 by the Dominicans and is given to those who show great pastoral leadership in the Catholic community. This year was even more special because through Bishop Shaheen and all Maronite Catholics there is a link between Eastern and Western Christianity. The Bishop is the twentieth recipient of the award.

The evening began with opening remarks by the Master of Ceremonies, Reverend Sean Charles Martin, President of Aquinas Institute of Theology. The invocation prayer was delivered by Dominic McManus, O.P. before a delicious dinner was served and everyone had an opportunity to socialize. After dinner, Key Note Speaker Bishop Elias Zaidan spoke eloquently about evangelization and how Christ asks all of us to preach the good news joyfully. He conveyed that Bishop Shaheen is a great example and that he is a great shepherd who knows his flock very well, not only in St. Louis, but all over the diocese. He said that his powerful preaching always brings the message of God with compassion, conviction and belief. He congratulated the Bishop and then asked everyone to heed the phrase, "Words interest me; actions influence me."



Reverend Martin presented Bishop Shaheen with a plaque naming him the Aquinas Institute of Theology "Great Preacher Award" recipient 2014. The Reverend read a short biography of the Bishop's life. He was born in Danbury, Connecticut, to Albert and Aileen Shaheen; he was the oldest of four boys. In 1961, he enrolled in the Maronite Seminary in Washington, D.C. He was ordained Subdeacon in 1962 and a Priest in 1964. In 1967 he was named Administrator and then Pastor of St. Raymond Church in St. Louis, where he remained until his retirement. He was ordained Archpriest in 1978 and then made Chorbishop in 1986. He was consecrated a Bishop in 2001.

Bishop Shaheen was instrumental in developing St. Raymond Church from a four-family flat into the beautiful St. Raymond Maronite Cathedral. Once he arrived at St. Raymond, he organized and celebrated Maronite liturgies, established religious education classes and hosted several National Apostolate of Maronite conventions. Privately, the Bishop has shown much generosity toward the poor and homeless who have come to the rectory door over the years, and he has helped many parishioners in need. He has met Popes

and dignitaries, but the Bishop is the most down-to-earth and approachable person one will ever meet. With his leadership, St. Raymond is now the home of the Cathedral, rectory, Cedar's Banquet Hall, the Maronite Pastoral Center and the Maronite Heritage Institute, all of which serve faithful Maronites throughout the country.

Bishop Shaheen's acceptance speech was endearing. He mentioned that his voice was weak due to a recent surgery. He was humbled by such an honor and felt there were many other deserving recipients. He accepted the award in the name of all those who have done much to spread God's Word. He thanked the Institute and everyone for being there in his honor. The evening concluded with a closing prayer by Mrs. Jennifer Theby-Quinn, an Aquinas Institute student. Congratulations to Bishop *Emeritus* Robert J. Shaheen for this great recognition. □



Waterbury, Connecticut Subdeaconate Ordination



by Phyllis Tarsi

On October 18, 2014, Chorbishop Joseph F. Kaddo ordained Dean Joseph Tarsi to the Orders of Cantor, Lector, and Subdeacon at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church in Waterbury, Conn. As this was once home to the Chorbishop, it was an honor and pleasure having him back at Our Lady of Lebanon Church for the ordination. In a beautifully decorated church filled with fall flowers, Subdeacon Dean was received by parishioners, his family and friends, and visiting clergy.

Rev. Father Alex Joseph, Administrator, welcomed everyone and introduced the visiting clergy: Father Dany Abi-Akar, former Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church who is Administrator of St. John Paul II in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.; Father Jim Sullivan, Spiritual Director of Subdeacon Dean from Torrington, Conn.; Father Naji Kiwan; Subdeacon George Jabbour; Randy Michaels, Subdeacon candidate from St. Anthony Maronite Church in Danbury; Conn.; and Nadim Daou, Subdeacon candidate from St. Anthony Maronite Church, Lawrence, Mass.

Father Jack Morrison, Pastor of Our Lady of Purgatory Church in New Bedford, Mass., and Eparchial Director of Ministries, assisted Chorbishop Kaddo and gave the homily and delighted everyone with his lightheartedness and wonderful sense of humor.

Many of those in attendance had never witnessed the Maronite Church and its traditions and found the evening to be very beautiful and spiritually uplifting.

The evening concluded with a meal prepared by the ladies of the parish in Cedars Hall. Our Lady of Lebanon Church wishes to thank everyone who attended the ordination and was involved in making this a beautiful and very special evening.

New Knights of Columbus Council



On Monday, October 27, 2014, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Parish of Waterbury, Conn., welcomed the Most Reverend Bishop Gregory J. Mansour to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and to accept the Charter from the Knights of Columbus for their newly organized Knights Council, St. Maron # 42. Father Alex Joseph, Administrator, and Father Miled Jrieg, Pastor of St. Maron Maronite Church in Torrington, Conn., concelebrated. Subdeacons Paul Comeau and David Leard, Esq., Camille Atallah and Dean Tarsi assisted.

In attendance for this occasion were the Knights of Columbus State Officers and several of the Knights of Columbus Fourth Degree Honor Guard, parishioners, family and friends.

Following the Liturgy and ceremony for the presentation of the Charter, refreshments were served in the Church Hall. Thank you to all the people who worked hard to get this Council started and make this a special evening. □



Deadline for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is December 26, 2014.

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

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The Maronite Voice

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Olean, New York Church Dedication



The interior of St. Joseph Church in Olean, N.Y.

by Fr. Anthony Salim, Pastor

Just more than three years after the devastating fire that destroyed their parish church, the parishioners of St. Joseph Maronite Church in Olean, New York, and their good friends celebrated a weekend of re-consecration and renewal of their parish complex October 24 - 26, 2014, with great and jubilation. With them was our Bishop Gregory Mansour, as well as Bishop Richard Malone of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo and other clergy and laity from the New York Southern tier, as well as from places around the country.

On Friday, Bishop Gregory shared a meal and a congenial gathering with the members of the Parish Advisory Council and their spouses.

On Saturday, Bishops Gregory and Richard led all in prayer at the *Qoorbono*, or Divine Liturgy, during which the two bishops consecrated the new altar with holy Chrism. The altar stone with a relic from the former church had been placed in the altar. Both bishops also sprinkled the walls of the church with holy water, as all the clergy processed around the newly-renovated church. All prayed well and chanted *a capella* the new hymns prepared in the current liturgical books.

Following the well attended Liturgy, there was a cocktail hour with delicious Lebanese appetizers. A lovely, catered dinner for over 150 guests was served in the hall of the newly-built Parish Community Center. Speeches included congratulatory words, and Fr. Anthony J. Salim, Pastor, thanked the many parishioners who served on committees that made the dinner and indeed the whole weekend a great success. Members of the Parish Council presented to Father words of gratitude and gifts. A good time was had by all.

On Sunday, Bishop Gregory and Father Anthony led worshipers in the *Qoorbono*. Following the Liturgy, an Open House with refreshments was held for the people of the Olean area to visit the Church and Community Center. The event

was well attended, and many commented on the beauty of both church and center. This concluded a celebratory weekend that capped a fruitful process of recovery with hope.

Massabki Award



by Fr. Anthony Salim

At the dinner for the Dedication of St. Joseph Church Complex in Olean, N.Y., on October 26, 2014, Mr. Steve Zlockie was awarded the National Apostolate of Maronites Massabki Award for 2014. Before a group of over 150 guests, Bishop Gregory Mansour presented Steve with the award, which recognizes work selflessly done within and on behalf of the parish community and, by extension, the Eparchy.

Steve has been a long-time member of St. Joseph Church. His abilities are many, and he has not hesitated to put these talents to work. Whether it is a simple job to improve the parish house or a big task, such as currently serving as Chairman of the Parish Stewardship Council, and many things in between, Steve excels. When the parish experienced a five month interim period in 2011 between the departure of former pastor, Fr. Joseph Akiki, and the arrival of current pastor, Fr. Anthony J. Salim, Steve and two other St. Joseph parishioners were appointed by Bishop Mansour to serve as temporary trustees. In addition, during the process of building the parish Community Center and the renovation of the existing church, Steve, with parishioner Terry Brennan, served as liaison between Fr. Anthony and the project architect and the contractor. In addition to these material tasks, Steve is a faithful member of the parish, and he lives out fully the life of the Community.

All at the award presentation agreed that Steve Zlockie was a worthy recipient of the 2014 Massabki Award. □



Springfield, Massachusetts *Fall Harvest Bazaar*



by Kathy LaBella

On November 8 - 9, 2014, the women's guild of St. Anthony Maronite Church in Springfield, Mass., held its annual Fall Harvest Bazaar. Forty-six vendors participated, showcasing their hand crafted articles of clothing, arts and crafts, and jewelry. Throughout the two-day event, several raffles were held for themed baskets and turkeys. Homemade Middle Eastern food and pastries were the highlight of the event. A food court also provided a comfortable way to relax and visit with friends and parishioners amidst the shopping. Sincere thanks goes out to the dedicated and hard-working women of the guild who worked tirelessly preparing the food and sponsoring the event. □

Fort Lauderdale, Florida *Oktoberfest*



by Deacon John Jarvis

On Sunday, October 8, 2014, the parishioners of the Heart of Jesus Maronite Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., enjoyed their first-ever Oktoberfest. A new

parishioner, of German descent, thought it would be a wonderful idea if everyone had a chance to savor the foods of Germany. It would also be a great opportunity to raise money for the Church. She volunteered to arrange the menus and donate and cook much of the food with the assistance of the Ladies Guild. The parish hall was filled for a wonderful meal and a great time. It will not be our last Oktoberfest. □

Minneapolis, Minnesota *NAM Poster Contest*



by Joni Moses

Monsignor sharbel Maroun, Pastor of Saint Maron Church in Minneapolis, Minn., acknowledged the third place national placement in the NAM poster contest to Karlie Reynolds, third grade MCF student. Karlie was costumed to honor the visit of Saint Rafka relics to the parish.

On Sunday, October 26, 2014, the Sunday before All Saints, all students of the parish were asked to dress as holy saints and other religious, enter church with Msgr. Maroun, and sit in the sanctuary. □

Food for Thought

“Without love, deeds, even the most brilliant, count as nothing.”

St. Thérèse de Lisieux

THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL



Perpetual Members

★ L. Lászlo Pallos
*Saint Joseph Maronite Church
Atlanta, Ga.*

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For more information about the Order ask your Pastor, visit www.orderstsharbel.org, or write to:

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109 Remsen Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

or

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
1021 South 10th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104

Houston, Texas MYA Workshop



From left: Fathers Milad Yaghi and Tony Massad, Bishops Gregory Mansour and Elias Zaidan, and Fathers Rodolph Wakim and Pierre Elkhoury

by Cornilia Issa

Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church, Houston, Texas, had the honor of hosting the Sixth Annual MYA Workshop from October 31 - November 2, 2014. Over 180 Maronite young adults, aged 18 - 35, traveled across the nation to learn more about their Maronite faith. The attendees were blessed by the presence of Bishops Gregory Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and A. Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, as well as Fathers Milad Yaghi and Pierre Elkhoury, Houston; Tony Massad, Livonia, Mich.; and Rodolph Wakim, Pittsburgh, Penn. Also present at the workshop were Mother Marla Marie and Sister Therese Maria, who led the Morning Prayer on Saturday and led the choir throughout the weekend.

The theme for this year was "GPS: Finding Light in a Dark World." The workshop's guest speaker, Paul Thomas, gave a touching testimony of the experiences that led him to convert to the Maronite faith. He spoke of the trials he endured after years of darkness and drug abuse and spoke of the loving grace of God that saved him and led him to the light.

Attendees actively participated in a discussion forum: "Today's Struggles of Young Adults and the Church Teachings," led by Bishops Mansour and Zaidan and Father Massad. The young adults were given the opportunity through this forum to learn more about and grow closer to their faith.

On Sunday, both Bishops concelebrated the Divine Liturgy at Our Lady of the Cedars Church. After the service, the Daughters of Mary organization served brunch in the Cedar Hall to send off the young attendees in true Lebanese style.

Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church would like to thank all those who attended, and in a special way, those in the Houston parish who helped make this event a success. ☐



Youngstown, Ohio

Appeal from the Antonine Sisters



by Sister Marie Madeleine Iskandar
Superior, Antonine Maronite Sisters of Youngstown

Dear Maronite Faithful,

"I don't know what I'd do without you!" At the Antonine Sisters Adult Day Care, we hear these words all the time. They're said by the grateful families of the people for whom we care, but those words also describe the way my Sisters and I feel about you. Let me explain.

In 1995, when we were building an Adult Day Care center, we asked the Maronite faithful in America for help. Donations came in from around the country, and the response was overwhelming. Because of this generosity, we were able to build a bright, cheerful Adult Day Care center. Here, elderly and disabled men and women are welcomed with Christian hospitality and treated with love and dignity.

Today, we're asking again for help from every Maronite faithful in America. We are building a new residential assisted living and memory care facility next door to the Day Care. Called "Antonine Village," this project will extend our ministry to older adults who need more care than is possible in a day care setting.

Antonine Village will feature a mix of independent living, assisted living and memory care units. Residents will enjoy three dining rooms, two activity rooms, and a computer room. Religious services will take place in the Antonine Village's very own chapel.

We are asking you to support this growth in our ministry with a generous gift in the next four weeks. Your timely donation will help us finish construction on the Antonine Village this year.

As I said earlier, we don't know what we would do without you. The support of individual parishioners like you has been a vital part of the Antonine Sisters' ministry in America for more than two decades. Our ministry is your ministry. Your gift received in the next four weeks will help ensure that elderly men and women can move in to the Antonine Village before winter. All gifts are tax deductible. Won't you please help us finish the construction of the Antonine Village?

We are grateful for all the support we receive from the Maronite faithful. We thank God for our benefactors and pray for them daily. May God bless you and your loved ones. ☐

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

December 3 - 4, 2014

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

December 5 - 6, 2014

Vespers and Enthronement of the Antiochene Orthodox Metropolitan, Joseph Zehlaoui, Brooklyn, N.Y.

December 8, 2014

Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary Visit and talk to the Papal Foundation on Middle Eastern Christians, Washington, D.C.

December 13 - 14, 2014

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

December 15 - 16, 2014

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

December 21 - 25, 2014

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

December 26, 2014

Visit to Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Miami, Fla., and Family Visit

January 2 - 11, 2015

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

January 12 - 16, 2015

Annual Clergy Retreat, North Palm Beach, Fla. ☐



Our warm personal greetings to you and your families as we celebrate the Incarnation of the Son of God.

We are grateful for the support you have given us during the year.

May the Prince of Peace fill your hearts with His Love and Peace at Christmas and in the New Year.

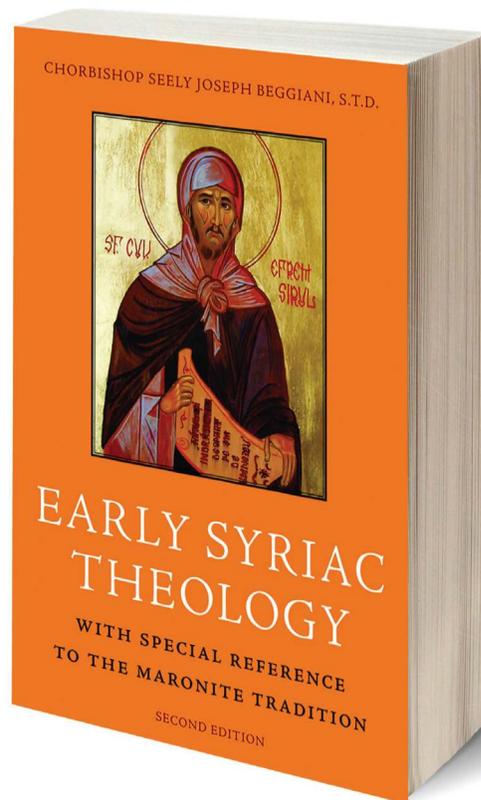
From all of us here at The Maronite Voice, Merry Christmas and a Blessed and Joyful 2015.

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On the Mercy of God and Human Forgiveness

by Fr. David Fisher

It is "God, Who is rich in mercy" whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father: it is His very Son who, in Himself, has manifested Him and made Him known to us. Memorable in this regard is the moment when Philip, one of the twelve Apostles, turned to Christ and said: "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied"; and Jesus replied: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me...? He who has seen me has seen the Father." These words were spoken during the farewell discourse at the end of the Paschal Supper, which was followed by the events of those holy days during which confirmation was to be given once and for all of the fact that "God, Who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Saint John Paul II, *Dives In Misericordia*).

Saint John Paul II devoted the second Encyclical of his Pontificate to the topic of Mercy, realizing, as he so often pointed out, that while men and women have progressed so much in the sciences and technology, they have forgotten the need for God's mercy. Unlike previous centuries of human existence, where people often found themselves defenseless to the forces of nature and disease, today's advancements in science, medicine, civic health and sanitation, etc., have given human beings a false sense of ownership of the world. The result is that while so much good has come from human progress in these areas, a dark, amoral self-destructive force has come about also, due to the lack of realizing our daily need for God's mercy.

Humanity's false sense of ownership also has produced a false sense of power over the world, as if we are creators of the universe rather than the "beloved" creatures of time and space. Rather than seekers of God's mercy, we see ourselves as the dispensers of mercy and the framers of ethics and morals, be they counter to the Natural Law or not. Not even the lessons of two world wars, the threatened nuclear

devastation of the cold war, and the evil of two atheistic regimes, Nazism and Communism, have taught us that our attempts to usurp the power of God make for a worse, not a better, world.

It is only in letting go of this false sense of human achievement that we realize we are, as mystically portrayed in Chinese Taoist monumental landscape painting - specks of dust in a vast universe. But Christianity teaches us we are "beloved" specks of dust, dust that God breathed life into and claimed as his sons and daughters, and gave us "stewardship" over the rest of the landscape he had painted into being. Letting go of this false sense of power over the world means acknowledging that there is a power greater than ourselves. As long as we see ourselves as lawgiver, creator and judge of life and death, we are beholden to no one, but once we look behind the curtain, as in the Wizard of Oz, we are confronted with fragile, limited and sinful humanity. At that moment of truth of conversion of heart, it is then we simultaneously realize our need for God's mercy. The need for mercy springs forth from the realization of humility. We see this illustrated in the Gospel of Luke, where the apostles had been fishing all night and catching no fish. Jesus appears to them and tells them to cast their nets into the water. Peter, believing that they had exhausted their "human will" in trying to catch fish, seemed indignant that the Lord would doubt them, that there were no fish to catch. The dialogue between Jesus and Peter proclaims the need for humility: "When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man.' For he and all his companions were completely awestruck at the catch they had made; so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid'" (Luke 5:8-10).

It is only in seeking and accepting God's mercy that we also learn the virtue of forgiveness. At its deepest level forgiveness is imitating Christ, not in usurping His power of divine mercy in forgiving, but in extending in our

own limited fashion the limitless love of God that is realized in forgiveness. Out of countless examples in Sacred Scripture, two examples are given to illustrate the point: "Meanwhile Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning He came again to the temple. All the people came to Him and He sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They said this to test Him, so that they might have some charge to bring against Him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, He straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.'" And once again He bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before Him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.'" And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (John 8: 1-11).

In this powerful passage we see that the Law of Christ differs from the Mosaic Law, for the Law of Christ is mercy and forgiveness, a Divine Mercy that only He has the power to give, and a forgiveness that transforms lives. The mercy of God loosens the debt, and the forgiveness of God changes the heart.

We find also in Matthew: "Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times'" (Matthew 18:21-22).

(Continues on page 20)

The Hand of God, that Hidden Thread of Divine Providence in the First Year of My Priestly Life

by Fr. George Hajj

Sixteen months and some days have passed since July 5, 2013, the day when the Most Reverend Bishop Robert J. Shaheen imposed his hands on me and ordained me a priest of Jesus Christ for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon during the Maronite Convention in Tampa, Florida.

This year has been the best of my life. It has been the most challenging as well, but the best. Everything I have done this year has been a first: My first baptism, my first funeral, my first sick call, my first Holy Thursday of the

Mysteries, the feast day of the priesthood - that day was very special for me with the community of St. Maron in Cleveland, Ohio - and my first participation ever in the consecration of the oils during Holy Week with my new bishop, A. Elias Zaidan, who consecrated the oils for the first time in his life as well. God's providence arranged many 'firsts' for the two of us during this year.

It's also been a year of mistakes too. None of us is perfect. Projects fail, phone calls are missed, but the Lord makes up for my failings. I've grown accustomed to saying I'm sorry, and I've learned a lot from my mistakes and shortcomings.

Now as the second year of priesthood unravels, and while I have now had many 'firsts', the Lord is giving me fresh experiences and fresh encounters with His people and most importantly with Himself. In a special way, he is giving me the administration and pastoral care of His people in Cincinnati, the queen city of our nation.

I love what I do everyday. Some days are more tiresome than others; some days are more rewarding than others. Nonetheless, I love being a priest. Standing at the altar preaching the Good News and speaking in the name of the Lord, saying the words of Consecration and invoking the Holy Spirit to descend upon us and upon the offering remain for me the most moving and sacred part of my day. To say "This is my Body" is a challenge like none other. I have also become aware of my own sinfulness as I say those most sacred words. I am constantly amazed and moved by the sanctity and goodness of the people of God I meet in the church, and especially in the confessional. The people I meet make me want to be not only a better priest, but a better man.

Looking back over this past year, I see what God has done through me, to me, and for me. Most importantly, I see the



hand of His care on my shoulder, reassuring and guiding me, and that hidden golden thread of divine providence always twinkling in my life. This hidden thread has been there in every milestone of this journey, starting with the story of the rich young man (Matthew 19:16-30) during the discernment weekend at the seminary, to the real presence of Sts. Sharbel and Rafka during my ordination, after inviting them to be there. There was the gospel reading of Jesus' return to Nazareth (Luke 4:17-22) during my Liturgy of thanksgiving at my home parish of St. Sharbel in Warren, Mich., and the gospel reading of the fourth Sunday of the season of the Exultation of the Holy Cross on my first liturgy in Cincinnati, Ohio, where Jesus asks: "Who is the faithful and wise servant who his master has put in charge of his household?" (Matthew 24:25). The examples are many, but the reality of it all is that God's hand has been guiding every step of the way. I am so immensely grateful for this life, for this gift. I didn't choose this life; God called me to it. But I know I can't go wrong if I am doing His will. I pray every day that I have the strength to carry on, to continue to do His will, to continue to love His people as much as I can. It's worth it, so, so worth it.

I am most grateful to my formators, my parents, the people of God who taught by their faith, Msgr. Seely Beggiani my rector at the Seminary, Fr. McManus my spiritual director and Msgr. Karam with whom I worked during my first year of priesthood. Thank you. ☐



***If the Lord
is Calling
You,
The
Church
Needs
You!***

If you feel that you have a vocation to the Priesthood or religious life, please contact your Pastor or write to:

Fr. Gary George, Director
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
Office of Vocations
1021 South 10th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104

Or

Fr. Dominique Hanna, Director
Eparchy of Saint Maron
Office of Vocations
c/o St. Joseph Church
502 Seminole Ave. NE
Atlanta, GA 30307

Or

Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary
7164 Alaska Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20012

Newtown Square, Pennsylvania *St. Sharbel Church*



From left: Fathers Canulli, Khallouf and Mouawad

by Lillian Shahade

October and November have been very eventful at St. Sharbel Church in Newtown Square, Penn. We started with celebrating the anniversary of the priestly ordination of Villanova University professor of art, Fr. Richard Canulli, OSA, and congratulating him on his new book *Approaching The Divine - A Primer For Iconography*, which is a collection of original icons - transfigurations of beauty and windows to heaven. His book comes out in December. Fr. Richard has been assisting at St. Sharbel in Fr. Paul Mouawad's absence and during Fr. Raymond's vacation.

On the Consecration of the Church Sunday, November 2, 2014, Fr. Raymond Khallouf blessed the altar and the four corners of the Church while the designated faithful dressed the altar and adorned it with flowers. The same day many of the children dressed as saints in honor of All Saints Day and processed with the priest and altar servers.

On the Renewal of the Church Sunday, November 9, 2014, the parishioners of Saint Sharbel Maronite Church, got a very welcome surprise as Fr. Raymond Khallouf, Fr. Richard Canulli and Fr. Paul Mouawad concelebrated the Divine Liturgy. Fr. Paul had suffered a stroke last year and had been in Lebanon recuperating. At the coffee hour Fr. Paul cut a cake in honor of his much anticipated return. He was happy to see everyone and they were just as delighted to see him.

On Saturday, December 13, parishioners and friends will hold a Christmas party in honor of Fr. Paul. All are invited to join in wishing Fr. Paul a warm welcome back and thanking him for his many years of dedicated service, not only at St. Sharbel but wherever he was assigned.

Fr. Raymond Khallouf and the parishioners of St. Sharbel Church wish the readers of *The Maronite Voice* a very Blessed Christmas and a beautiful New Year. □

Worcester, Massachusetts *MYA September Festivities*



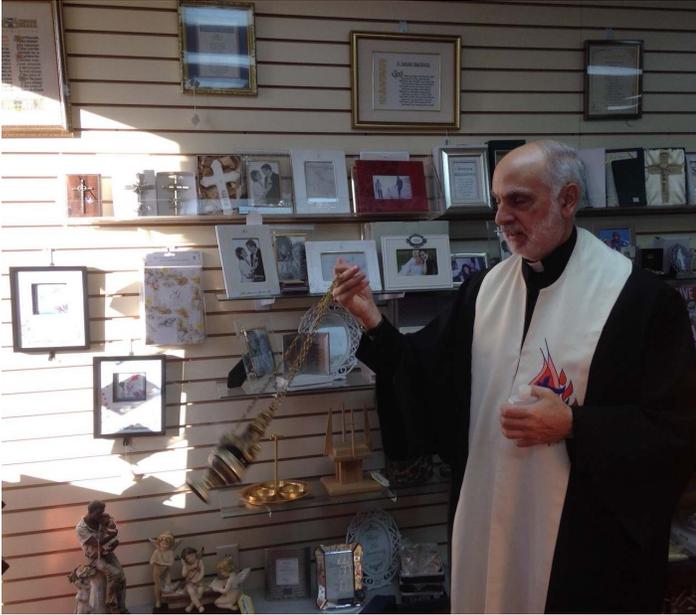
by Miriam Chouki

September was an eventful month for the Maronite Young Adults (MYA) of Our Lady of Mercy In Worcester, Mass. It began with a visit to St. Anthony Maronite Church in Springfield, Mass., when that parish hosted the first class Relic of St. Anthony of Padua. The MYA attended the Divine Liturgy together, venerated the relics, wrote their prayers to St. Anthony, and blessed their rosaries, crosses, etc. with the Relic. The visit provided the MYA with the opportunity to join together in prayer and grow spiritually, which they strive for greatly. Following the visit to the Relic of St. Anthony, the MYA headed to the "Big E" festival in West Springfield, Mass., for a fun-filled day at the largest fair in New England. They were able to enjoy the entertainment throughout the fair and the delicious foods from around the world, and they spent some quality time with one another in bonds and learned more about these activities for the growth of their MYA group.

Later on in the month, the MYA went to Honey Pot Hill Orchards in Stow, Mass., on a beautiful, warm day to pick delicious apples. The next week, the MYA gathered together and spent their Saturday night making caramel apples for a fundraiser at the Church. Despite the fact that it took a long time and a lot of hard work to make all of the apples, the MYA worked together to complete this task and had fun doing so. The caramel apple fundraiser was a great success thanks to the generosity of the parishioners at Our Lady of Mercy Church. Their support was both encouraging and inspiring for the MYA. In a matter of a month, the MYA planned events which helped them grow spiritually and worked together as a team, which is what they hope to do in the subsequent months as well. □



Birmingham, Alabama *Special Blessing*



On Sunday, November 9, 2014, Danny and Pal Bostany hosted an open house at Alpha Church Supply in Birmingham, Alabama, capping off a celebratory year, which noted thirty years in business and the grand opening of their new store at 121 West Valley Avenue. Dozens of well-wishers mingled, shopped, and toured the new surroundings. The festivities finished with the blessing of the building and business by Chorbishop Richard Saad, Pastor of St. Elias Maronite Church in Birmingham, Alabama. □

Worcester, Massachusetts *Children's Retreat*



by Natalie Salameh

On Saturday, November 22, 2014, the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light offered a retreat day for the children of Our Lady of Mercy Parish, Worcester, Mass., with the focus on how God teaches us to give

ourselves in love in the events of the Season of the Glorious Birth of Our Lord. The children were reminded of the great gift of Jesus at Christmas, and were challenged to think of ways that they can prepare for Christmas by being more generous and loving. During the day, the children were able to participate in a nativity play which they enthusiastically staged for their Pastor, Fr. Gaby Hoyek, and a number of volunteers. □

Boston, Massachusetts *MYA Thanksgiving*

by Julie Ibrahim

Thanksgiving: a day where families gather around with their loved ones for hours, to eat and drink and to celebrate their appreciation for everything they have. What about those friends who are family? The answer: "friends-giving."

We, the Maronite Young Adults, of Our Lady of the Cedars in Boston, Mass., under the guidance of our Pastor, Fr. Georges El-Khali, Ph.D., have proudly celebrated our first annual "friends-giving" on Friday, November 21, 2014.

The evening began with gathering and holding hands as Fr. El-Khali led us in prayer before the meal. Each member prepared their favorite dish for a Thanksgiving feast! Jalapeño peppers were the favorite appetizers, fluffy mashed potatoes and a twenty pound turkey filled our stomachs as we struggled to make room for the homemade pumpkin cheesecake for dessert! MYA member Antoine Laham provided the music with his *DJ-ing* skills allowing for *dabke*, dancing, and even a little bit of karaoke all night.

God's love brought us together, and the love we have for each other is what made this an amazing night, and what makes us family. The MYA of Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon Church would like to wish you all a blessed Thanksgiving and we look forward to next year! "And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18). □



St. Rafka's Relics Visit the Maronite Church in the U.S.

Livonia, Michigan



by Holly Hilu

The Parishioners of Saint Rafka Church in Livonia, Michigan, joyfully welcomed the relics of their Patron Saint, St. Rafka, on Monday, October 27, for an historic three-day visit to their parish. As part of a nation-wide tour, the visit commemorated the 100th Anniversary of the beloved saint's entrance into Eternal Life with Christ.

Upon arrival, St. Rafka's Relics were received at the entrance to the church by His Excellency Bishop A. Elias Zaidan and the Pastor of St. Rafka Church, Fr. Tony Massad. Bishop Zaidan incensed the blessed relics and escorted them into the church in solemn procession, accompanied by Fr. Milad Yaghi, Personal Secretary to Bishop Zaidan, Fr. Paul Azzi, Defender of the Cases of the Saints, and Sr. Raghida Younes Antoun of the Lebanese Maronite Order of Nuns. Members of the congregation followed, carrying candles and singing hymns of devotion to their beloved saint as the relics were carried to their position of honor atop the steps to the altar. Bishop Zaidan blessed the church community and expressed that he shared in the parishioners' joy during this special visit, encouraging them to grow in their faith through the presence of their Patron Saint's relics. Divine Liturgy was then celebrated, during which Fr. Massad described the example of St. Rafka's life as one which demonstrated true devotion to Christ, particularly Christ Crucified.

Fr. Paul Azzi addressed the congregation and elaborated on St. Rafka's life as well as the history and significance of these holy relics. This marked the beginning of three beautiful days of prayer and worship as hundreds of visitors came from near and far to venerate St. Rafka's relics. Mr. Abdo Helou, reporter for OTV television station in Lebanon, covered the event in its entirety.

Members of the church Worship Committee and Music Ministry collaborated with Fr. Tony Massad to coordinate the worship program over the three-day period. According to the daily schedule prepared by these groups, the faithful participated in Maronite Morning and Evening Prayers (*Safro*

and *Ramsho*), St. Rafka's Liturgy and Novena, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, the Holy Rosary, Guided Meditation, Reconciliation, Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament. Each day, visitors had opportunities for individual veneration of St. Rafka's relics.

The Ladies' Social Committee provided refreshments for the visitors throughout the three days in the Social Hall and served as hosts for the delegation who stayed on-site at the parish rectory. Additionally, these ladies staffed the information table and served as greeters alongside the ushers as guests entered the church.

Throughout the three-day visit, parishioners and guests spoke of what a great honor and blessing it was to have the opportunity to venerate the relics of their patron saint. Many of the faithful said, "I can truly feel her presence here with us," as they expressed their devotion and love to St. Rafka. Certainly, this historic event was even more meaningful to the parishioners because it took place during the same year that the Mission of St. Rafka became dedicated as St. Rafka Church. The Family of St. Rafka Church in Livonia continues to express their deep gratitude for this opportunity that helped them grow deeper in their faith, closer to their Patron Saint, and stronger as a community. □

Cincinnati, Ohio



by Linda Conour and Maggie Samaan

The relics of St. Rafka traveling throughout the United States, made a visit to St. Anthony of Padua Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Friday, October 31- Saturday, November 1, 2014. As this was truly a once in a lifetime event, parishioners from St. Anthony of Padua Church, St. Ignatius of Antioch Church, Dayton, Ohio, Maronite Catholics from Columbus, Ohio, Lexington and Louisville, Kentucky and other local area Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches gathered, anxiously awaiting the arrival of St. Rafka's relics.

The Divine Liturgy was concelebrated by Father George Hajj, Monsignor Ignace Sadek, and Father Paul Azzi with Subdeacons Tom Simon, Don George, Mark Floyd, Ghazi Faddoul and George Faddoul assisting. Sister Raghida Antoun, from the Convent at St. Joseph's Monastery in *Jrabta - Batroun*, Lebanon, accompanied the Relics.

(Continues on page 18)



Vocations Awareness Winners

The need for vocations in the Church is critical. One of NAM's most significant undertakings has been its assistance to the Church in promoting an awareness of vocations. As part of its Vocation Awareness Program, NAM conducts an annual Vocations Awareness Poster/Essay/Multimedia Contest for Maronite religious education students from kindergarten through high school. A packet which includes a cover letter, contest brochure, local contest brochure and a contest flyer for posting is sent to each parish. In further support of vocations, NAM is closely aligned with the Order of Saint Sharbel and invites all Maronite clergy, religious and seminarians in the United States as guests of NAM at all NAM events. We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all of the winners for 2014 and to remind everyone that the new contest for 2015 is underway. Information has been sent to the pastors and directors of religious education in all the parishes.

NAM 2014 Vocations Awareness Contest Winners

Essays

Kindergarten / Grade One

Write a prayer thanking God for a priest, deacon, subdeacon or religious

Diana Haddad Heart of Jesus Mission, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
Bridget George St. Anthony Church, Glen Allen, Va.
Mona AbouAssi St. Anthony Church, Glen Allen, Va.

Grades Two and Three

Write a prayer thanking God for those studying for the priesthood

Jamie Callard St. Maron Church, Youngstown, Ohio
Natalie Roberts St. Anthony Church, Glen Allen, Va.
Julian Chaoul St. Anthony Church, Glen Allen, Va.

Grades Four through Six

Write a letter of thanks to a priest, deacon, subdeacon or religious

Michael Urban Blessed Teresa of Calcutta Mission, Darlington, Penn.
Marta Michael Blessed Teresa of Calcutta Mission, Darlington, Penn.
Tony BouSamra Our Lady of Victory, Carnegie, Penn.

Grades Seven through Nine

Write an essay describing an event in your life where a priest, deacon, subdeacon or religious made a difference

Mark El-Hallal Our Lady of Lebanon, Washington, D.C.
Maroun Harb St. George Church, San Antonio, Tex.

George Haddad Heart of Jesus Mission, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Grades Ten through Twelve

Write an essay describing the process of discernment needed to discover if one has a vocation

Paul El-Hallal Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Washington, D.C.

Poster Winners

Kindergarten / Grade One

Priests, deacons subdeacons having fun

Cloe Nader St. George Church, San Antonio, Tex.
Julia Burus St. Elias Church, Birmingham, Ala.
Serena Aslou Heart of Jesus Mission, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Grades Two and Three

Families "grow" vocations

Lexie Filipe St. Anthony of the Desert Church, Fall River, Mass.
Catherine Brownwell St. Anthony of the Desert Church, Fall River, Mass.
Karlie Reynolds St. Maron Church, Minneapolis, Minn.

Grades Four through Six

God is calling, Are you listening?

Vanessa lahoud Heart of Jesus Mission, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
Sophia Moran St. John Maron Church, Buffalo, N.Y.
Trevor Khanji St. John Maron Church, Buffalo, N.Y.

Grades Seven through Nine

God needs you to lead His flock

Nadine Sadaka Our Lady of Victory, Carnegie, Penn.
Sophie El-Hallal Our Lady of Lebanon church, Washington, D.C.

Multimedia

Grades Seven through Twelve

Compose a 3-5 minute Powerpoint or video presentation that shows a day in the life of a seminarian, subdeacon, deacon, priest, bishop or religious

Tiana Eladem Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Gaielle Harb St. George Church, San Antonio, Tex.
Paul Lahoud Heart of Jesus Mission, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. □



NAM Scholarship Winners

The NAM Scholarship Committee is pleased to announce the winners of the NAM Scholarships for the 2014 - 2015 school year. Each winner will receive a \$1000 scholarship pending notification of enrollment in college. This scholarship may be renewed for one additional year provided the recipient maintains a 3.0 or better average on a 4.0 scale and enrolls for an additional year in college.

John A. Solomon Memorial MYO Scholarship Winners

- Daniel Bolus, St. Elias Maronite Church, Birmingham, Ala.
- Leah Feghali, St. Therese Church, Tulsa, Okla.

Naomi and Paul Kassouf NAM Scholarship Winners

- Gaielle Harb, St. George Maronite Church, San Antonio, Tex.
- Patrick Harb, St. Jude Maronite Church, Orlando, Fla.

Thomas and Jennie Ayooob Memorial NAM Scholarship Winner

- Samir Karam, St. Maron Maronite Church, Detroit, Mich.

St. John Maron, Orange, Calif., Scholarship Winner

- Maya Hanna

The five winners from last year are asked to contact the NAM office at 914-964-3070 or nam@namnews.org for verification that each qualifies for the second \$1000. Last year's recipients were: **Jupiter El-Asmar**, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.; **Raissa El-Houayek**, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.; **Rebecca Elkhoury**, St. Maron Church, Minneapolis, Minn.; **Anees Ragy**, St. Joseph Maronite Church, Atlanta, Ga.; and **Joseph Sahyoun**, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church, Millbrae, Calif.

NAM Scholarships in Lebanon

The National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) Proudly announces scholarships for a semester in Lebanon for the 2015 school year at **University of the Holy Spirit (USEK)**, *Kaslik*. It includes full tuition, dormitory and \$500 once completed:

- Gabriel Rizk, Our Lady of Lebanon, Washington, D.C.
- Theresa Rizk, Our Lady of Lebanon, Washington, D.C.

For more information and applications, contact your pastor or NAM delegates, or online: WWW.NAMNEWS.ORG, or by email nam@namnews.org, or call NAM at (914) 964-3070. □



Cleveland, Ohio Continued Preparation for the 2015 Convention

The Maronite Community in Cleveland, Ohio, is proud and excited to host the 52nd Annual National Apostolate of Maronites Convention from Wednesday, July 1, to Sunday, July 5, 2015, at the historic Renaissance Hotel on Public Square. On behalf of Monsignor Peter Karam, the NAM 2015 Cleveland Convention Chairs Henry and Judy Hilow, and the entire Cleveland Maronite Community, we look forward to welcoming you!

We are blessed to have the opportunity to showcase our beautiful city and bring together our national Maronite Community for a week of religious reflection, spiritual activities, inspiring and educational workshops, festivities and more. The youth and young adults will also have Cleveland excursions planned by MYA convention chair Marianne Dergham and her committee, including a trip to University Circle Museums (universitycircle.org), evenings out on the town with the Cleveland MYA, and Theology on Tap with Father Tony Massad at Town Hall Ohio City Urban Café + Bar (www.townhallohiocity.com). We also encourage our attendees to visit the incredible historic and cultural experiences that Cleveland has to offer. A trip to Cleveland is not complete without a visit to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and the Science Center on the beautiful shores of Lake Erie, University Circle's Cleveland Art Museum, Cleveland Botanical Gardens, Crawford Auto Museum, The Natural History Museum, our Westside Market on West 25th, home to over one hundred food vendors representing cultures from around the world, and our restaurants and deli's on West 6th, East 4th, Tremont, and Ohio City, to name a few.

Reservations at the Renaissance Hotel may be made for \$129 a night if booked by June 8, 2015. For more information and to reserve, please contact 1-800-HOTESL1 with the code "NAM" or visit <http://goo.gl/2IMXvS>. Self-parking at the hotel is 50% off to all NAM hotel guests (\$13.50 a day). We would love for our NAM attendees to be together at the Renaissance Hotel, so we urge you to reserve your rooms early. Please stay posted for information regarding the Convention's schedule of events and registration! □

Annual Maronite Youth Conference

The Annual Maronite Youth Conference is scheduled for July 6 - 11, 2015, at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Penn. More information will be available in the near future. □



The Lebanese Model: A Multi-Religious Solution for Syria and Iraq?

by Kevin J. Jones

The Apostolic Nuncio to Lebanon has said the country is a model of multi-religious coexistence that could help resolve violent sectarian conflicts in the Middle East. "There are no majorities or minorities here, but each one is part of the whole," Archbishop Gabriele Caccia told several Catholic reporters in a recent meeting at the nunciature in *Jounieh*, Lebanon.

"Even at this moment, if we look at a solution for Iraq and Syria, one group is dominating all the others," he said. "Their inspiration could be Lebanon, where there is space for all communities."

The archbishop said that Lebanon is "very open to the West." On the other hand, it is also "very traditional in values." He described this as a "sign of balance" amid its many contradictions.

The country's population is divided unevenly between Maronite and other Christians, *Shia* and *Sunni* Muslims, and *Druze*.

Archbishop Caccia said the country's constitution rejects both laicism and theocracy. The state allows each community to behave according to its laws.

"This is a way to stay together," he said. He described the country not as a "democracy of numbers" but a "democracy of common decisions" that reflects both Christian and non-Christian visions. "There are no majorities or minorities here, but each one is part of the whole."

Lebanon's neighbor Syria has been engulfed in a civil war since early 2011, when demonstrations critical of President Bashar al-Assad were attacked by government forces that triggered further violence. More than 200,000 people have been killed, and eleven million [are] displaced from their homes.

Assad, an Alawite Muslim, has drawn support from Shia Muslims and religious minorities including Christians, while his opposition has drawn support from Syria's majority Sunni Muslim community. Hundreds of smaller militias with shifting loyalties also control small regions of Syria.



A view of Beirut, the Capitol of Lebanon (Credit: marviikad via Flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0)).

Iraq, for its part, has devolved into sectarian conflict and persecution following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. The regional situation is further complicated by the rise of the Islamic State and al-Nusra Front, both of which have support from some Sunni Muslims and are active in Iraq and Syria as well as small areas of Lebanon. The groups seek the restoration of a caliphate and the imposition of a strict interpretation of Islamic law.

Archbishop Caccia said that the Islamic State, also known by its Arabic acronym *Daesh*, has tried to sow "discord" in the Lebanese army and claims that the army is supporting the Shia political party and militant group *Hezbollah*.

"They have tried to divide the army, because the army is the institution which keeps everyone together and is able to control the territory," Archbishop Caccia said. "Until now, it hasn't worked because all political leaders were united to condemn this effort."

The Lebanese army last week reestablished control of the northern city of *Tripoli* after clashes with militant supporters of the Islamic State and *al-Nusra* Front. These supporters object to *Hezbollah*'s support for Assad in Syria.

Archbishop Caccia, who has served as nuncio to Lebanon since 2009, said the preservation of political stability in Lebanon is "vital" to providing an example to the region.

The nuncio cited St. John Paul II's 1997 speech in *Beirut*, in which the Pope said Lebanon is "more than a country, it is a message," a message of freedom and of coexistence.

The country's constitutional power-sharing agreement requires the country's prime minister to be a Sunni Muslim, the country's president must be a Maronite Christian, and the Speaker of the Parliament a Shiite Muslim. Half of parliamentary deputies and ministerial positions are allocated to Christians.

Unlike most other countries in the Middle East, religious conversions are legal in Lebanon. The nuncio praised this respect for conscience that coexists in a system he said [that] allows 18 different religious communities "to have a say in the country."

Lebanon is "very complex, but beautiful," the nuncio said. He said that it is very difficult to move in elite society without meeting people from different religious communities, especially in the capital of *Beirut*.

"There are family ties, because

sometimes you have one family that has one branch Christian and one branch Muslim, but in the end there is the same family."

Archbishop Caccia also noted the absence of a sitting president in Lebanon. The Christian community continues to be divided between two coalitions: the pro-Syrian government faction known as the March 8 Alliance and the anti-Syrian government faction known as the March 14 Alliance. They take their names from the dates of massive protests in March 2005.

The nuncio tied the lack of a president to the instability in the region. He emphasized that most Lebanese, as well as major world powers, are intent on avoiding another civil war.

From 1975 to 1990, the country's deadly civil war killed over 150,000 people. Scars of the war are still evident in Beirut, where bullet-marked buildings and burned out movie theaters still stand, locals say, as a reminder to avoid the destruction of war.

Archbishop Caccia said the country is "relatively peaceful and calm," but that Pope Francis is nevertheless "very much worried" by the situation there. Papal concerns include humanitarian issues related to helping the victims of conflict, and the arms trade supplying the fighting. Archbishop Caccia stressed that atrocities are being committed against both Christians and Muslims. He said the damage to Christians is "collateral damage" of the major policies of the great powers in the region. The fate of Christians "is not something which really interests the big political agendas of the great nations." "Of course they have to do something, just in case, but it is not a priority."

However, the nuncio stressed that Lebanese Christians have played the role of a bridge between Shia and Sunni Muslims. He said that Lebanon has many single-religion villages of Shia, Sunni, Christians, and Druze. "But in mixed villages, you will never find a village where there are Shia and Sunni. But you can find Sunni and Christian, Druze and Christian, Shia and Christian."

"Christians have the possibility to talk, and to be a bridge, for everyone," the nuncio said, noting Christians' role in education and in providing a "vision of society." The presence of Christians in the Middle East is also vital for those who see freedom and democratic values as global solutions to political problems.

Archbishop Caccia said, "It is more clever to help communities who are living in this part of the world and share this mentality, than to destroy and take out these people, (than) to try to convince the others from outside that they have to change (their) minds. □

(CNA/EWTN News, Nov. 13, 2014)

Cincinnati, Ohio

Continued from page 14

During the evening, Father Paul Azzi shared a story of a miracle that took place in Lebanon recently through the intercession St. Rafka. Monsignor Ignace Sadek reflected on his own personal miracle that he received as a new born

Television journalist and reporter Abdo Helou captured the event and sent news video to OTV, a Television station in Lebanon and other Lebanese news agencies. After the

Liturgy, attendees were given the opportunity for personal prayer and reflection with the relics of St. Rafka. A movie on her life was played during the evening reception.

On Saturday, a packed crowd filled the Church for Divine Liturgy, prayers, and veneration of the Relics.

Tequesta (Palm Beach), Florida



by Eliane Rizkallah Eljouni

On November 16, 2014, parishioners and guests of Mary Mother of the Light Church in Tequesta, Fla., welcomed the relics of St. Rafka with the chiming of bells and the singing of spiritual hymns.

Fr. Alaa Issa, Pastor, Fr. Paul Azzi, who accompanied the relics from St. Joseph's Monastery in *Jrabta*, Lebanon, and Fr. Patrick Daugherty, a local Passionist priest, celebrated the Divine Liturgy.

At the beginning of the liturgy, Fr. Issa thanked Fr. Paul Azzi, Mother Martha Bassil, Sister Raghida Antoun and Mr. Abdo Helou for the blessed gift that they brought to us in Florida and other Maronite parishes throughout the U.S.

During his homily, Fr. Issa emphasized the virtues of St. Rafka. He explained her amazing desire to share in the suffering of Our Lord, how even though she was blind and in agonizing pain, she was not afraid and she kept working, praying and thanking God. "Do not be afraid" were the Angel's words to Zachariah, and in turn Fr. Issa's words to us. In the face of suffering and hardship, we must be like St. Rafka and have faith and trust in God, who knows all things and sees all things.

Mrs. Laurice ElHilow welcomed St. Rafka saying: "Welcome St. Rafka to our church, to our families, to our hearts. You came to open our minds and our hearts to help us understand what attracted you to love God the way you did and to teach us to follow your example," and she hoped: "During this visit, St. Rafka will remind us where we came from and to be faithful to what we were made of."

The Liturgy concluded with a procession outside the church, where all who were gathered received the blessings of the relics. After liturgy, everyone came together in the social hall to share a thanksgiving dinner. □



Mid-Atlantic East Regional NAM Convention

January 30 - February 1, 2015

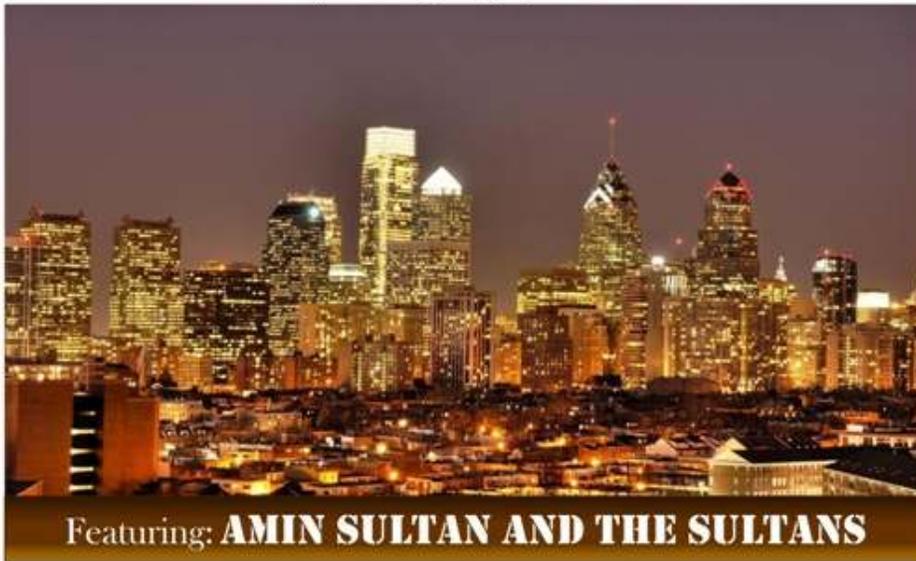
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Saint Maron Church

Philadelphia, PA

With His Excellency

Bishop Gregory J. Mansour



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(914) 964-3070



DoubleTree by Hilton

Philadelphia Center City
237 S. Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

For Reservation:

Call: (800) 222-8733

Code: NAM

Deadline: 01/09/2015

Rates per night:

\$ 99.00: Single/Double

\$109.00: Triple

\$119.00: Quad

Subject to applicable taxes



Schedule of Events



FRIDAY JANUARY 30, 2015

3:00 PM - 6:00 PM Registration (Church Hall)
7:00 PM - 8:00 PM Divine Liturgy (Church)
8:00 PM - 12:00 AM Welcome Hafli (Church Hall)

SATURDAY JANUARY 31, 2015

9:00 AM Registration (Church Hall)
9:30 AM - 10:00 AM Prayer Services (Church)
10:00 AM - 11:50 AM Workshop I (Church)
Dr. Anne Borik
"Prayer in Motion"
10:00 AM - 11:50 AM Workshop II - MYOMYA (Church Hall)
Fr. Tony Massad
"Social Issues - Catholic Perspective"

6:00 PM - 7:00 PM Divine Liturgy (Church)
7:00 PM - 8:00 PM Cocktail Hour (Hotel)
8:00 PM - 1:00 AM Grand Hafli (Hotel)

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2015

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM Divine Liturgy (Church)
12:00 PM - 2:00 PM Farewell Brunch (Church Hall)



Super Bowl Party - Sunday, February 1, 2015 at 5:00 PM at the Church Hall

Come Home for Christmas

Continues from page 1

Let's be frank, there is hypocrisy inside and outside the Church. Everyone, including yours truly, is a hypocrite; in fact, all people are self righteous to a certain degree, and all people naturally compare themselves to others, and hope to come out justified, and sometimes without any desire to lift a finger of mercy to the one who "but for the grace of God goes I."

Chesterton was right. "What's wrong with the world? I am!" However, and here is the bottom line, at least the Church-goer (even if it's only Christmas) still has a "snowball's" chance "you know where"!

Dearly beloved and fellow hypocrites, come home for Christmas! ☐

+ Gregory John Mansour
Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn

On the Mercy of God and Human Forgiveness

Continued from page 10

Jesus instructs Peter that if he is forgiven by God, then he too must be a forgiving person and that forgiveness knows no bounds or limits. The same way in which God has responded to our sinfulness with loving mercy and forgiveness, we too must respond the same way to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

A forgiving heart is a heart that realizes its own desire and need to be forgiven. This is so necessary for all Christian communities to realize. How can we draw all men and women to our community of faith, if we do not live the example of Christ by being merciful and forgiving? In living the life of grace we come to understand that ownership within the Church is not like in the world. We do not own the

Church, we do not own the destiny of the Church, we do not own holiness of the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ, founded on the merciful altar of the Cross and in which our sins, against whom we were powerless, have been forgiven and in which we are transformed by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

If we are to evangelize, then living from the context of thanksgiving for God's mercy and forgiveness towards us and extending that mercy and forgiveness to others is an imperative. ☐

About the Author

Father David A. Fisher is the former Pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Maronite Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is an Adjunct Professor in Philosophy, Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio.

All Are Called to Holiness

Pope Francis devoted his November 19, 2014, general audience to the universal call to holiness. "First, we must bear in mind that holiness is not something that we can procure for ourselves or obtain with our quality and our skills," he said. "Holiness is given to us by the Lord Jesus, when He takes us up with Him and clothes us in Himself, making us like Him."

Emphasizing that "holiness is not just for bishops, priests, or religious," the Pope said that "it is by living with love and offering Christian witness in our daily tasks that we are called to become saints, and everyone in the particular condition and state of life in which they find themselves."

Pope Francis listed many little steps to holiness, including Sunday Mass, Holy Communion, the Rosary, other prayers, choosing not to gossip, loving one's spouse, listening to one's children, and assisting the poor.

"Small things are small steps toward holiness," he said. "And every step towards holiness will make us better people, free from selfishness and being closed in on ourselves, and open us up to our brothers and sisters and their needs." ☐

(CWNews, November 19, 2014)