



The Maronite Voice



A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA

Volume XV

Issue No. 1

January 2018

Let Us Pray for World Peace and Do Something with Our Lives to Make the World Better

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

From the time of the early Church January first commemorated the Circumcision of Our Lord, eight days after his birth, as was the Jewish custom.

Circumcision, which had its origins in God's command to Abraham, is about belonging to the household of God. For Abraham and his descendants, a person was either completely devoted to and belonged to God, or else was outside his household.

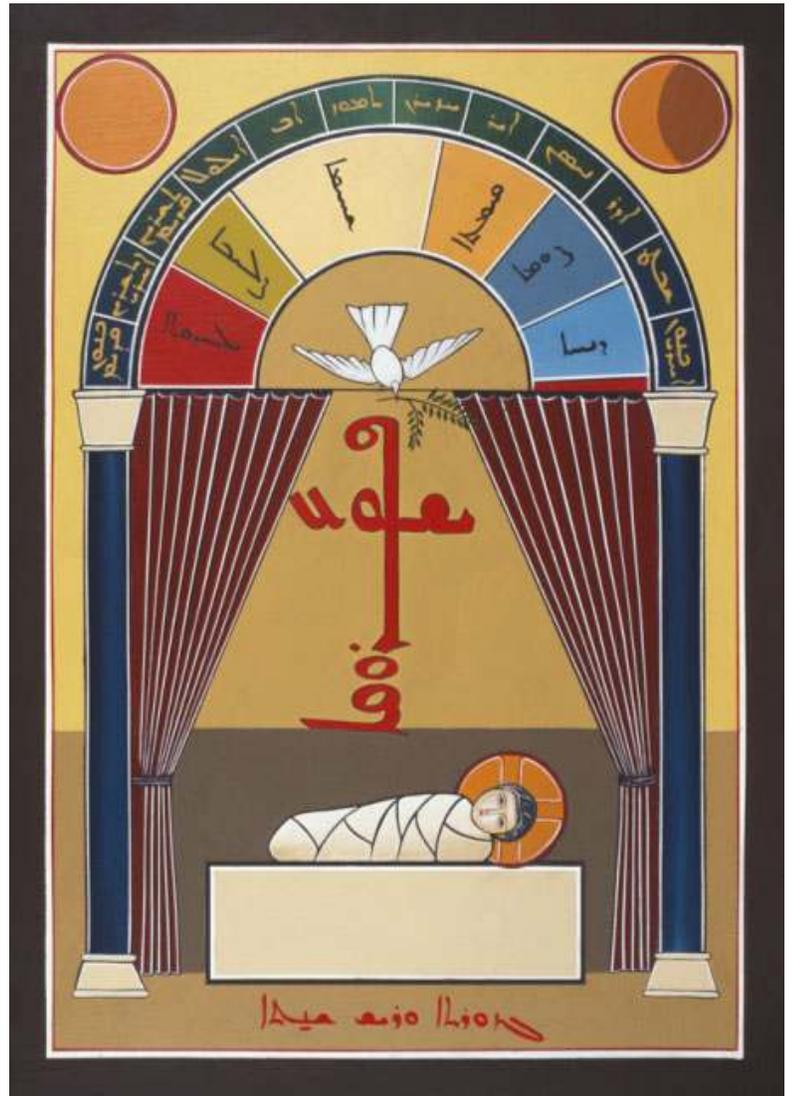
With the coming of the awaited Messiah the promise God made to Abraham, and his descendent David, was wonderfully fulfilled in Christ, and Jew and Gentile alike were now invited into this household by means of faith. Thus Baptism replaced Circumcision, and belonging to God's household became universally possible; all that was required was faith in the promises of God as fulfilled in Christ.

It is thus only right and just that we Christians, born again in the waters of Baptism, see the whole world as our home. And when we pray for world peace, we mean it!

Since 1967, every January 1st has also been consecrated by the Church as a Day of Prayer for World Peace. Pope Paul VI established this as a way to remind us of Pope Saint John XXIII's Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), which in 1963 was written to challenge and give hope to a world torn apart by the threat of nuclear war.

Our world-wide Church preaches the good news of Our Lord's salvation, and as an authentic and constitutive part of her mission, as our Popes have often reminded us, we have a most amazing humanitarian outreach, more engaged than any other organization on earth, including the United Nations and the Red Cross.

Our own Catholic Relief Services (the Caritas of the United States for the poor overseas) is the largest of the 165 national Caritas organizations and serves the world in 117 countries. We serve the poor, Catholic and non-Catholic, because Our Lord served Jew and Gentile alike. Because of Jesus the whole world is our parish, and the Pope, our parish priest.



The Circumcision of the Lord by Fr. Abdo Badawi, Holy Spirit University, Kaslik, Lebanon.

(Continues on page 15)

Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

January 6 - 7, 2018

Epiphany at Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon – St. Peter Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

January 8 - 12, 2018

Clergy Annual Retreat, Franciscan Renewal Center, Phoenix, Ariz.

January 14, 2018

Subdeacon Ordination of Emile Abboud, Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon - St. Peter Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.

January 18 - 21, 2018

Pastoral Visit to St. Joseph Church, Phoenix, Ariz.

February 2 - 3, 2018

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Church, Detroit, Mich.

February 4, 2018

St. Maron's Feast Day Celebration, St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

February 6, 2018

Ordination and Enthronement of Bishop-Elect W. Shawn McKnight, Jefferson City, MO

February 8, 2018

Maronite Divine Liturgy at St. John Seminary, Camarillo, Calif.

February 9 - 11, 2018

Pastoral Visit to St. Maron Parish, Cleveland, Ohio. ☐

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

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Maronite Convention 2018

Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Catholic Church

Houston, Texas

July 11 - 15, 2018

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

www.Namnews.org
www.Namconvention2018.com



Eparchial Appointments

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

- ★ Appointed **Deacon Joseph Chibli** as the Eparchial Liaison with Catholic Relief Services effective January 31, 2018. Deacon Shibley will also remain in his assignment at St. Sharbel Church in New Brunswick, N.J.
- ★ Revoked the appointment of **Fr. Antoun Youssef** as Parochial Vicar of Saint John Maron Church, Williamsville, N.Y., and appointed him as Parochial Vicar of Saint Anthony Church in Lawrence, Mass., effective November 15, 2017.
- ★ Revoked the appointment of **Fr. Jebrael Moussallem** as Temporary Pastor of Our Lady of Victory Maronite Church, Pittsburgh, Penn., and appointed him as Pastoral Administrator of Mary, Mother of the Light Mission, Tequesta [Palm Beach], Florida, effective January 1, 2018.
- ★ Revoked the appointment of **Fr. Jack Morrison** as Administrator of Mary, Mother of the Light Mission in Tequesta, Fla., in honor of his request to retire early because of health reasons. Fr. Morrison will continue to serve as the Eparchial Director of the Office of Ministry. ☐

Food For Thought

Let us pray for Christians suffering persecution, often amid the shameful silence of so many. ☐

Pope Francis

Saint Louis, Missouri

Cathedral Celebrates Patron Feast Day

by Shelly Vitale

The Saint Raymond Maronite Cathedral community in Saint Louis, Mo., along with Father John Nahal, Rector, celebrated the Feast of Saint Raymond on November 18 - 19, 2017. The weekend began on Saturday evening with a dinner-dance at the Cedars Hall. The guests enjoyed a delicious meal, under the direction of Tony Bouaoun, and were entertained by singer Tony Mikhael and Band; it was a fun-filled evening.

On Sunday morning at 11:00 o'clock, the parish community joined together for the Divine Liturgy celebrated by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon. The procession was led by The Knights of Saint Gregory the Great along with the Honor Guard by the members of Saint Sharbel. Representatives from various organizations processed carrying symbolic banners.

During the liturgy, there was a blessing with the Relics of Saint Raymond; all those present had the opportunity to revere them. After the Liturgy, everyone gathered together at the Cedars Hall where Bishop Zaidan, assisted by Father John, dedicated a beautiful plaque in honor of the late Bishop Robert J. Shaheen. The plaque depicts a beautiful portrait of the late Bishop with the inscription, "In Prayerful Remembrance of Most Reverend Bishop Robert J. Shaheen, Born June 3, 1937, Ordained Priest May 2, 1964, Consecrated Bishop, February 15, 2001, Entered into Eternal Life, August 9, 2017." Bishop Shaheen was assigned Pastor of Saint Raymond Church in 1967, built a new church in 1975, a new rectory in 1977 and a new banquet hall in 1979. The plaque will remain on display as a perpetual memorial of the beloved Bishop for all of his devotion, loyalty and great work.

Following the dedication, a luncheon and program took place, emceed by radio personality Trish Gazall. Bishop Zaidan, on behalf of His Beatitude Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai, awarded the Saint Maron Medal and Certificate to Deacon Lou Peters for his commitment and dedication. He



From left: Deacon Lou Peters, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan and Fr. John Nahal.

stated that the Deacon is a very good man who is well respected. Deacon Lou was very humbled. He thanked the Patriarch, Bishop Zaidan, Father John and the parishioners for their participation and devotion. He quoted the late Bishop Shaheen stating, "The church is not just a pile of rocks, for it is the people that are the foundation of the church." Deacon Lou Peters, Ed.D., spent forty years in Catholic Education. he was ordained a Subdeacon in 1977, and Deacon in 2005, serving the Saint Raymond community. The late Bishop Shaheen appointed him Director of the Office of Ministry in 2001, and in 2005, the Director of the Office of Religious Education for the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles. In 2013, he was appointed the Chancellor of the Eparchy by Bishop Zaidan. Before ending the evening, members representing all the organizations of the parish joined Bishop Zaidan and Father John for the joyous occasion of the "Burning of the Church Debt." Everyone joined together to light the fire. The Bishop thanked all present for their enthusiasm and hard work. The Saint Raymond Parish community would like to thank Father John Nahal and the Event Committee including: Doctor Sam Hawatmeh, Tony Bouaoun, Mary Cohen Ehlen, Diana Deeba, Mary

Denny, Pam Gazall, Trish Gazall and all the volunteers that made the weekend celebration so special. □



Appeal from Caritas Lebanon

Christians in Lebanon are suffering! If you are able to relieve some of the suffering, please contact

Fr. Elias Abi Sarkis, Director
8315 South 107th East Ave.
Tulsa, OK 74133
Ph: 918-872-7400

or visit *Caritas Lebanon* at
<http://www.caritas.org.lb>.

Checks may be made payable to
Caritas Lebanon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Washington, D.C. *MYO Retreat*



by Jad Abisaleh and Elias Moura

On Saturday, November 18, 2017, the Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Washington D.C., came together for an in-church day retreat. This meeting was special to all members because they united as a family of faith. The MYO learned about spirituality, discussed a chapter of the Bible, and transformed the day into something beautiful for all the MYO to cherish spiritually and socially.

One of the chaperons, thought this was a great idea. "I think it was very good, very interesting. We chose a very good passage for us to read, and the interaction between all the members was really good. We felt that we are missing out, and we should have it a little more often and integrate more social activities in between, involving more activities, but it was really well done."

Most of the attendees agreed that it was an "inspiring day of recollection, filled with much fun and fellowship and it was very enriching in spirit and religion."

We gathered around the table to break bread, which reminded us of every Sunday and how we come to church to break bread at the altar of God.

The MYO hopes to repeat these meetings and retreats as many times as they can, because they are children of the Church and they want to deepen their understanding of how they can carry on the mission of Christ entrusted to all of us, in love and caring for each other, and for the less fortunate as well. □

Boston, Massachusetts *Order of Saint Sharbel Fundraiser*

by Roseanne Solomon

On Saturday, December 2, 2017, the members of the Order of Saint Sharbel of Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon Church in Boston, Mass., hosted their first annual fundraising event to benefit Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary in Washington, D.C. This year's event was a Spaghetti Supper held after the Divine Liturgy. Members of the Order of Saint Sharbel donated, prepared, and served all

the food. With the help of several generous monetary gifts, we were able to raise \$1,275. We hope that groups in other parishes will be encouraged to run a small event in their parish to benefit the Seminary. With our help, the heavy burden of educating our future priests will be greatly alleviated and we will take an active role in fostering vocations for the future of the Maronite Church in the United States. □

Waterville, Maine *Church 90th Anniversary*



Fefa Deeb chats with, from left, Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai and Bishop Gregory Mansour during the Patriarch's visit to Waterville in 2016. (Photo by Mark Morin).

by Larry Grard

St. Joseph Maronite Catholic Church, Waterville, Me., celebrated its 90th anniversary in 2017, with a *hafli* and the creation of an endowment fund. Former Secretary of State and U.S. Senator George Mitchell, who attended St. Joseph Church as a child, spoke at the endowment kickoff.

The 90th birthday activities also salute the proud Lebanese population of Waterville, one that emigrated there in the late 19th century, to take up jobs in the city's textile mills. The first Maronite Church opened in 1927 at a former home on the corner of Front and Appleton Streets, where the elegant church, built in 1950, now stands.

Fefa Deeb was two years old when Fr. Joseph Awad performed the first Liturgy at the old church. Deeb was there, and she's gone to Mass at St. Joseph ever since. She makes the three-minute walk from her childhood home for daily Liturgy, where she reads the Epistle at a lectern built by her immigrant father, Sam. She directs the choir and keeps the books. On Good Friday, Deeb performs the deeply touching ritual in a hauntingly beautiful Syriac tone that no one else can replicate. "It's a lament to the Blessed Mother," said Deeb, who does her best to teach other parishioners the ritual. "It is a very, very beautiful prayer."

With the church population still aging and the population shrinking, St. Joseph thought it was the right time to begin the endowment for the future. The Lebanon Youth Society, which sold its property several years ago, contributed \$100,000 to the fund.

"The 90th anniversary was celebrated and finished, if you like, at the *hafli*," said Fr. James Doran. "Of course, with the revitalization of Waterville, we look forward with hope for possibilities to communicate the beauties of our Syriac Maronite tradition. St. Joseph has remained ever faithful in its place downtown and this would be a wonderful continuation in that perseverance."

Father James said that Fefa is a "beautiful soul, not only because she has been here "since the beginning, but because she is profoundly Catholic in her soul. She seeks the glory of God and the good of this parish, and while she has eyes to see and knows the ups-and-downs of the last ninety years of this community, she has that rare quality to rise above human pettiness, politics and intrigue," Father James said. "Her intent is always to transcend the often ill-considered human concerns and worries and to seek the greater good that is the Compassionate One Himself. Half this spirit would be a blessing in most of us; its fullness is a true grace. May God be her reward."

Sam and Lottie Deeb came to this country from Lebanon in the early 20th century. Fefa and her only sibling, George, who lives in Syracuse, were born in Waterville, at a time when the immigrants did their best to learn the English language – and to follow their faith.

"I was thirteen when we moved here," Deeb said from her living room at 1 Deeb St., a stone's throw from Joseph's Market, which has served the Lebanese population for decades. "I was baptized at Sacred Heart Church because we didn't have a church at the time. In 1927 we had our first priest."

Prior to that, a Maronite priest would come from Massachusetts to hear confessions, Deeb recalled. Then came Father Awad. "Our Maronite rite became a social gathering," Deeb said. "Every month we would recognize a different saint."

But the Waterville church was not part of any Eparchy. There were no phonics to provide language translations in the prayer/song book. Deeb recalled that Marie Nagem and other young Lebanese girls worked on the phonics for the translations.

"My brother George and Lee Peters and Joe Nesaralla assisted the priest with Syriac services," she said. "We wrote it phonetically for them." Deeb, meanwhile, who remained single her entire life, was ahead of her time in the education field. Following seventeen years working at the Hathaway Shirt factory, she made a move in 1959, at the age of thirty-four, to continue her education. She enrolled at nearby Thomas Business College, then completed her final year at the University of Maine, earning undergraduate degrees in business education and economics. Today, she owns Master's degrees in economics and education. For twenty-six years, Deeb taught at Thomas College, retiring in 1990.

Deeb took care of her parents until their deaths in the late 1970s, and never forgot her roots. "The church was the center for us," she said. "It was our everything. I feel an affinity to my church that didn't stop me from getting an education."

St. Joseph is the only Catholic parish of the Eastern traditions in Maine. Father James noted that the church is "a jewel" for its physical beauty, the windows and altar being most noteworthy, but it is the sacred tradition of Antioch that makes for its greatest treasure.

"Our heritage as the children of St. Maron sixteen centuries after his death means that we have inherited an

inimitable treasure to be passed on to others," he said. "It is not just that we are Catholics and part of the universal Body of Christ, but that within that Body we are special heirs of the very first disciples of Antioch and the ascetics of the Syrian plains.

"For all intents and purposes, Antioch and her glory has passed into the dust of history, but we are the living heirs of that Community of Pentecost in Antioch that had first had to flee Jerusalem due to persecution. We shall be judged as to how well we cherish, foster and pass on this redemptive gift to others." □

Uniontown, Pennsylvania *Ladies' Christmas Celebration*



by *Dr. Mabel George Howard*

On December 3, 2017, the Ladies Guild and Altar & Rosary Society of St. George Maronite Catholic Church in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, held its annual Christmas Celebration in the parish hall. This was a wonderful opportunity for the ladies to relax with family and friends, enjoy a delicious meal, exchange gifts, and win prizes. It was also an important time to recognize the efforts and hard work of these dedicated and formidable women who are affectionately referred to as the "backbone of the church."

In light of this blessed and holy season, a prayer was said in memory of the deceased members who faithfully served God and the St. George parish family for many years and touched our hearts forever. Poems were recited to tell the story of Christmas and to remind us that many times in our busy lives we sometimes forget about what is really important during this holy season and throughout the year -- the importance of understanding and helping one another, the importance of kindness, and the importance of peace, love, and God's blessings. The ladies' Christmas party was a successful, joyous, and festive event to remember. □

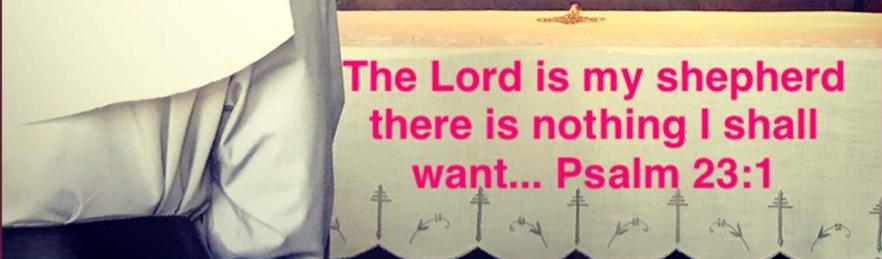




Women's Discernment Retreat

April 6-8, 2018

**How is God calling me to serve through the gift of my life?
What is my mission in the life of the Church?**



The Lord is my shepherd
there is nothing I shall
want... Psalm 23:1

Hosted by the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light

WHAT *Prayerfully reflect on the Lord's will for your life and how to discern your call.*

WHO: Women between the ages of 18-35 who are open to discerning marriage or religious life or single life of service.

WHERE: Mother of the Light Convent, 856 Tucker Rd Dartmouth MA 02747.

WHEN: Friday April 6 at 7pm with supper. Concludes Sunday April 8 at 3pm.

COST: Suggested donation \$100 to help cover some expenses.
Includes all meals and accommodation.
Please bring your own toiletries and towels.

Register by: Sunday March 25

Contact: To register for the weekend or to find out more information:
Sister Marla Marie Lucas sister@maroniteservants.org or 202-213-7700

The weekend will include:

- *Divine Liturgy, Confession, Eucharistic Adoration
- *Talks on Religious life, Marriage & Vocational Discernment
- *Fellowship with other young women

www.maroniteservants.org

THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL



Annual Members

★ **Doctor Adib Chaaya,**
*St. Maron Church, Philadelphia,
Penn.*

★ **Theresa Buzaid,**
*St. Anthony Maronite Church
Danbury, Conn.*

The Order of Saint Sharbel is an organization of lay people and clergy who have pledged their spiritual strength and financial support for Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary and the retired Maronite clergy of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA.

For more information about the Order ask your Pastor, visit www.orderstsharbel.org

or
write to:

Eparchy of Saint Maron
109 Remsen Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

or

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

Houston, Texas *Children's Christmas Program*



by Samantha Georges

December 16, 2017, was a very special day at Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Houston, Tex. The children's Christmas program, held on the Church grounds, included workshops that appealed to children of all ages. The goal was to make it a special day for the children of the Religious Education Program [CCE], but also one that would include those who do not attend CCE.

As people entered the event from the Cedar Hall, the first workshop was a cookie-decorating station. The MYO had prepared over three hundred sugar cookies for kids to decorate with colorful icing and to pack in Christmas bags to take home.

Just around the corner was our prayer room, decorated perfectly for both prayer reflection and fun. There, children wrote Christmas wishes and prayers on small papers, which were rolled and placed in ornaments the kids had also decorated. The completed ornaments were used for decorating our parish Christmas tree, which is now placed in the Church and is to be blessed at the Christmas Eve Children's Liturgy.

The next station was a small cozy room where Christmas stories were read to the children who huddled on the floor around our story-telling elves. The children watched and listened as the classic "Twas the Night Before Christmas" story came to life with animated reading and many beautiful visuals.

The last workshop, and the biggest hit with the kids, was the crafts workshop. The library of the Pastoral Center and its neighboring classroom were transformed into art rooms where the kids enjoyed making and decorating gingerbread houses and various Christmas ornaments for their trees at home. These included a nativity scene, Christmas trees with religious phrases, and small pieces of art in the shape of the word "Joy."

When the workshop part of the program was over, everyone moved back to the hall, where our talented young actors presented a retelling of the Nativity of Jesus: a poor, helpless young boy dreams he is present at the birth of Jesus, and just before waking up, receives the biggest gift of all--holding Baby Jesus in his arms.

Of course, no children's Christmas program would be complete without the traditional visit of Santa Claus. While most kids were excited to see and take pictures with Santa, a few were terrified. One thing, however, brought a smile to everyone's face: the presents handed out by Santa and his elves. Who could be upset with toys and candy? ☐

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Youth Choir Christmas Play



by Adam C. Kassab

Our Lady of Victory's Youth Choir, Carnegie [Pittsburgh], Penn., delighted the crowd at their annual

Christmas Nativity Play as they performed the nativity story and sang traditional Maronite Christmas hymns coupled with popular Christmas songs. May our youth always stand under the loving, graceful and protective gaze of Our Blessed Mother. ☐

Low Cost Opportunity For Noursat

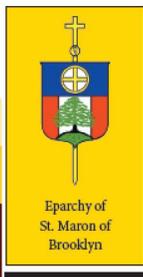
Sling is an internet-based TV service that will allow you to access the various NOURSAT channels at a reasonable cost. The service requires an internet connection and purchase of a unit that would run on the television such as a "flash-drive" (for example, Roku). There are various packages that can be added to Arabic Mosaic for additional charges. However, with the basic Arabic Mosaic you can get for free: TV Charity, Noursat Mariam, Noursat Kids, Noursat Music, Noursat of the East and others.

You can learn more about it by logging into www.sling.com or calling 1-888-940-6789. ☐

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GO TO: www.orderstsharbel.org



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Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles
1021 S. 10th Street
Saint Louis, MO 63104
maroniteswest@yahoo.com

Fall River, Massachusetts 5th Annual Winter Concert



Choir Members: Dawn Ayoub, William Ayoub, Stephanie Beaudry, Mirna Bouramia, Samya Brownell, William Brownell, JoAnn Bullard, Sharon Carney Andrews, David Faris, Carol Guimond, Nancy Hanoud, Paula Karam, Rochelle Kieron, Evan Massoud, Charlie Murray, Mizette Nasser, Ed Rappold, Julia Rappold, Michelle Rappold and Rouba Youssef. (Photo by Alain K. Photography).

by Evan Massoud

"Five" is a nice number (just ask any New England Patriots fan), and for the choir at St. Anthony of the Desert Church in Fall River, Mass., "five" represents a milestone year. Back in 2013, our first-ever concert was supposed to be the final fundraiser for our church's new organ, but it has turned into an annual tradition that everyone looks forward to.

The night began with the Children's Living Nativity, which was followed by a special Christmas Edition of Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah, with lyrics specific to the Nativity Scene. After the opening act, the choir went on with the show, belting out hit after hit. Songs from the program included: "Wonderful Christmastime," "Do You Hear What I Hear?," and "Laylat Al Milad," an Arabic Christmas song. There were even some audience-participation songs to add to the fun.

With a full church, the Concert was a total success. On behalf of the choir, we want to thank all of the volunteers behind the scenes who helped make this event possible, as well as the audience for supporting our efforts and joining us for this special evening of music. □



Eparchial Condolences



Mr. Otis Evan (Peter) Root, father of Monsignor James Root, Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, passed away on December 14, 2017. He was ninety-nine years of age. Peter now joins his beloved wife Marie Therese Ferris. From their union they had two children, John and Monsignor James. He is also a grandfather of three and great-grandfather of three.

The Funeral Liturgy was celebrated on Tuesday, December 19, 2017, at Saint Maron Church in Cleveland, Ohio. Condolences may be sent to:

Monsignor James Root
Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral
113 Remsen Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Bishop Gregory Mansour, along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, extends his heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Msgr. James' family and relatives.

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

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

January 6 - 7, 2018

Visit to Heart of Jesus Mission, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

January 8 - 12, 2018

Annual Eparchial Clergy Retreat, Our Lady of Florida Retreat House, Palm Beach, Fla.

January 13 -14, 2018

Visit to Mary, Mother of the Light Mission, Tequesta [Palm Beach], Fla.

January 18 - 19, 2018

Pro-Life Vigil and March, Washington, D.C.

January 21, 2018

Peter Root's Forty-Day Anniversary, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

February 4, 2018

Saint Maron Feast Day Celebration, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y. □

Food For Thought

God is in love with us. He draws us to Him with tenderness by being born poor and fragile among us, like one of us.

Pope Francis, December 27, 2017



On Spiritual Direction by Mary Woods

When I first entered my spiritual director's office on a damp December afternoon, I had very limited notions of what our time together would be like. Would we discuss God in an abstract, theological sense to increase my knowledge in the Faith? Would we carefully examine the events of my life in an attempt to decipher what God had been trying to tell me, like puzzling over an encrypted code? Was I going to be interrogated about my personal and spiritual life?

The answer to each of these questions was both yes and no, erasing my misconceptions of spiritual direction and opening the door to the beautiful fruits that it truly offers.

The purpose of spiritual direction is to help you deepen your relationship with God. It leads you to see the ways that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life, and it guides you to grow in prayer and in virtue. Ultimately, a spiritual director will accompany you in your walk with Christ: prayerfully discerning areas where God is calling you to make your heart and mind more like His, opening your heart to the countless graces and blessings God is giving you, identifying areas where God is leading you toward greater healing, and teaching you to see things, little by little, through His eyes.

If a person decided that he wanted to run a marathon, he could read many books about running, buy shoes and other equipment, and start training all on his own. However, it may be very helpful for the person to also seek the counsel and advice of someone who has already been running marathons. They could give insight into common struggles and help the person to devise a training plan based on his personal fitness and lifestyle.

Similarly, it can be very helpful in the spiritual life to seek guidance from someone who is at a greater level of spiritual maturity than yourself. A person who is walking the path of holiness can use his or her wisdom and experience to help you develop a profound sense of the Lord's presence in your own life and to see where God may be leading you. He or she can offer insightful application of scripture or Church teaching, or suggest various reflections, prayers, or devotions that would be particularly fruitful for you.

As Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered

together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Trusting that Christ's presence steadily rests at the center of their encounters, a spiritual director and directee meet together, and, calling upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seek to identify God's gentle movements in the spiritual life of the directee. A good spiritual director will help you to keep your eyes fixed upward on Christ, in both suffering and joy, rather than gazing outward onto the matters of the world in your daily experience.

When I was first looking for a spiritual director, I can remember feeling nervous about being able to find the right person. There were a number of things to consider—I knew that it was important to seek someone who had experience as a spiritual director, had a spiritual outlook that was similar to mine but would also call me to deeper prayer, and with whom I felt at ease to converse freely. But, as St. Teresa of Avila said, "The Lord will give you a director if you are really humble and desire to meet with the right person."

There can be numerous ways that God can call you to a particular spiritual director. There may be a priest who gives a homily or offers counsel in the sacrament of reconciliation that seems to speak to you in a special way. There may be a person who has a deep devotion to a saint to whom you are distinctively drawn. In my personal experience, I was at an evening retreat, and one of the leaders led us in prayer. There was a certain reverence and gentleness in the words that she chose for her prayer that touched my heart very deeply. Soon afterward, I asked her if she offered spiritual direction and to prayerfully consider taking me as a spiritual directee, and we have been journeying together ever since.

While some people prefer to have a spiritual director with the same gender as themselves, and others prefer to have priests, there is no specific distinction in regards to age, gender, vocation, or profession. St. Pope John Paul II's first spiritual director was a tailor! It is important to remember that, in any director-directee relationship, the only real spiritual director is God. □

A Certain Servant

by
Father Joseph Daiif

Being a follower of Christ is a blessing. He granted me gifts beyond my expectations. The story of my vocation goes back to my childhood, where I, along with my two brothers and two sisters, was raised as a good Christian under the care of good and loving parents and with excellent instruction of a well-known Catholic school in *Zgharta*, in Northern Lebanon. I wanted to become a monk when I was nine years old, and the Rosary has been in my pocket ever since. I prayed the Rosary daily. What beautiful moments of my childhood I spent in the Church. I still remember how my soul rejoiced in the spirit when I prayed.

Time passed by, and the attraction to Jesus remained incredibly high when I reached Grade eight (*Brevet*). Here is a funny story: I presented the first official exam in 1993, when I was fourteen years old, and I failed in my first and second attempts. In 1994, I failed again. With four unsuccessful attempts, I had to leave school at the age of fifteen. I first started working as a tailor, then in a hospital, and afterwards, I went into military service.

The Turning Point

I was twenty-one years old when I finished the military service. Those twelve months created a severe thirst for the Lord. On many Sundays, I couldn't attend Mass. I prayed the Rosary every day. At the threshold of the new millennium, my prayers were growing more powerful, more focused, more reverent. I learned how to kneel down and worship the Holy Eucharist for fifteen minutes daily. It was, and still is, one of the best prayers of my life.

In March 2000, a friend of mine was ordained a priest. I was in the Church for the ordination. Luckily, the vocation never dies. "Lord," I prayed, "I would love to become a priest." I knew it was impossible, for I had no "Brevet," and the college requires a High School certificate. However, nothing is impossible with the Lord. On Wednesday, March 29, 2000, as I was attending Mass in church, strange and powerful feelings captured me from inside. It wasn't a voice or a vision. It was a certainty, an assurance; I knew in my heart that this was His way of calling me. Once Pope Benedict XVI was asked: "How many ways are there to God?" "As many as there are people," he replied. And Pope Benedict is absolutely right.

I wanted to obey the calling, but the obstacles were many: How can I go back to school after six years of freedom? How could I, at twenty-one years old, attend school with much

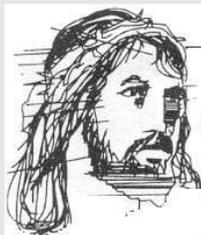


Fr. Joseph Daiif

younger students? What about my pride? I was so unschooled and ignorant, and I hated to study. I sat down and prayed and prayed; I then calculated the cost to see if I could return to school or not. Now, it may sound easy as I share this story, but back then, the idea of becoming a priest was beyond my imagination. It was a dream.

Briefly, I studied for the official exam during April, May and June, and I took the exam the first week of July. And finally, after five trials, I did it...I passed. How funny and ironic a scene it was: a young man of twenty-two years old, holding the *Brevet* certificate. The next step was High School (three years). And I passed that exam too. Throughout that entire time, the disclosure of my vocation was still under wraps. Nobody knew about it except the Bishop and some priests in my parish. However, the moment I knew I passed the official high school exam, I proclaimed openly, "I want to become a priest."

The six years at the seminary were an



*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
6025 Glenridge Drive
Sandy Springs, GA 30328

or

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

amazing experience, though certainly not trouble free. I was overwhelmed by the scope, breadth, and depth of theological studies. I never liked to study. Yet, the dream of becoming a priest was worthwhile. It required stamina and sacrifice and strength. Everyone in this world studies and works hard to get promoted in their job; we, priests, are an exception; we study and work hard to become servants to others. What an amazing mystery!

My Priesthood

April 4, 2010, was the best day of my life. The Lord accepted me as servant in His house. I chose this verse of Saint Paul as a theme for my priesthood mission: *"We preach ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus"* (2 Cor. 4: 5). And the story started.

Since day one of my service, I put my new life under the protection of the Blessed Mother of God. Every day, I ask her: *"Love me the same way you loved your Son. Accompany me the same way you accompanied your Son. Educate me the same way you educated your Son."*

My story with the Eucharistic Adoration continued. When I studied in Italy, I founded a Maronite Church in Milan. The first thing I established was a Eucharistic Adoration. That's what priests love to do wherever we go. Saving souls is our job. I believe it is our moral responsibility, as Christians, to live our lives with the faith and determination of saving at least one soul. After all, we are supposed to be the light of the world? The Priesthood is my honor. The Altar is my kingdom. The Holy Cross is my shield. The Rosary is my weapon. I was called to save souls, not to neglect them. Faithfulness is my aim. This is what the Lord says: *"However, you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; they will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy"* (Rev 3:4). This verse vivifies and strengthens me. It greatly consoles me. Hence, when I feel despondent, I remember the Lord's words: *"You are my servant; I chose you, I have not rejected you. Do not fear. I am with you. Do not be anxious, I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand"* (Isaiah 41: 9-10).

Now, you, who are reading this story, if you hear the Lord's voice, do not harden your heart. Be like Mary. God chose her. She said "Yes" once for all. She is our example. She never stopped telling her Son's followers: *"Do whatever He tells you"* (Jn 2:5). How awesome is it to answer the Lord's call to the priesthood. It is amazing... and Awe-inspiring! Can you imagine yourself distributing communion to the sick in their homes, in the hospices and the hospitals... Can you imagine yourself standing at the podium in the Church educating people and upbuilding and strengthening their souls? How humbling it is to spend hours listening to confessions, bringing back the lost sheep, consoling those who need consolation, and forgiving those who went astray. Think of the sublime moments when you come back home, and sit down to pray, and to offer the Lord your busy day. Basically you are telling Him how powerful and effective His right hand is. See how the Lord Jesus answered his disciples when they preached the Word of Life, and came back overwhelmed with joy: *"Rejoice that your names are written in Heaven"*

(Luke 10:20). As you find yourself fruitful and productive and living according to His Word, you are going to ask Him again and again: *"Lord, here I am, send me. Make me a good ambassador. Let me help you save souls."* Ask Him to treat you as He treated Aeneas when He said to him: *"Aeneas, get up and go..."* (Acts 9:34). Brother, if Sanctity is not your target, you misunderstood me. Now, it's your call. □

Fall River, Massachusetts Perpetual Vows



by Mother Marla Marie

Sister Therese Maria Touma professed her perpetual vows as a Maronite Servant of Christ the Light on December 8, 2017, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception at St. Anthony of the Desert in Fall River, Mass. Sister Therese Maria knelt before the altar and the Holy Mysteries, and in the presence of Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, many clergy, religious, family members and faithful, she vowed for life to live the Gospel counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty in service to God and his Church. Sister Marla Marie, Superior, received her vows and welcomed Sister as a full member of the Congregation. □



Deadline for next month's issue of The Maronite Voice is January 22, 2018.

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

Send all news, pictures and personal correspondence to:

The Maronite Voice

4611 Sadler Road

Glen Allen, Virginia 23060

Phone: (804) 270-7234; Fax: (804) 273-9914;

Email: Gmsebaali@aol.com

Digital pictures must be in "JPG" format and in high resolution (300dpi). The Maronite Voice is also available online, in PDF format, at www.stmaron.org. □



Maronite Vigil For Life & March For Life 2018



Join us as we pray, march and send a peaceful message to the world!!
ALL LIFE IS SACRED and WORTHY OF RESPECT !!!

The Office of Family and Sanctity of Life of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn is pleased to host the Fifth Maronite Vigil For Life on Thursday January 18, 2018 at Our Lady Of Lebanon Maronite Church in Washington DC.



All Maronite parishes are invited to join us for an evening of prayer, worship and fun. Please arrive around 6 pm. Our evening will include dinner, Eucharistic Adoration, music, fellowship and movie. For those who want to attend the Vigil For Life at the National Shrine at 5:30pm, you are welcome to join us after.

Bring your sleeping bags.

On Friday January 19, 2018, we will have Maronite Divine Liturgy at 8:30am followed by breakfast, then we will meet at 11:00 am at the Starbucks at the corner of Indiana Ave. and 7th St. at 11:00am to join the March For Life.

Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church

7142 Alaska Avenue N.W. Washington D.C. 20012

Sponsored by
Office of Family and Sanctity of Life
Marise Frangie, FCEI, Director
914-393-8907
sanctityoflife@live.com

Please RSVP with number of people attending by no later than Monday January 15
Contact Simona Hallal
540-798-8450
jhallal@verizon.net

Free will donation of \$20 per person to cover the cost of the meals



San Diego, California *Patriarch's Pastoral Visit*



Divine Liturgy. Bishop Zaidan, Archbishop Paul Sayah and Fr. Toufic Nasr concelebrated. Many dignitaries were present for the Liturgy as well.

During his homily, the Patriarch reiterated the need for the support of America for combatting the threat to Christians in the Middle East. He asked for prayer and our constant vigilance to that cause. Following the Liturgy, a luncheon reception took place in the church courtyard, and parishioners took advantage of the opportunity to mingle with the Patriarch and take photos. It was so special to be in his midst and to find him humble and approachable as he happily greeted each person and thanked them for coming. St. Ephrem Church was proud and privileged to host our beloved Patriarch. Such a visit will be recorded in the parish chronicles to remain forever a memorable occasion. □

by Mary Ghosn

The community of Saint Ephrem Maronite Church in San Diego, Calif., welcomed His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai on October 21 - 22, 2017. This was Patriarch Rai's first visit to Saint Ephrem Church since he was elected as the 77th Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and All the East.

Patriarch Rai arrived on a warm sunny day in San Diego to be greeted at the airport by numerous jubilant parishioners. In the evening, he was honored by the community at a grand banquet. Many parishioners attended with clergy from both the Maronite Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Bishop Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon; Archbishop Paul Sayah accompanying the Patriarch; the Bishop of San Diego, the Most Reverend Robert McElroy with his Auxiliary, the Most Reverend John Dolan; Msgr. Peter Karam; Fr. Milad Yaghi; Fr. Elias Sleiman; Fr. Canon Thomas Thompson; Fr. Toufic Nasr, Pastor, and Deacon Georges Ghosn attended. Additionally, we welcomed Mr. Walid Ghayad, head of media and communications at the Maronite Patriarchate in Lebanon and Mr. Phillip Zaide, a significant contributor and friend of the Parish. The Patriarch was treated to a special concert by local vocalist, Miss Mariam Mouawad. Following the recital, Bishop Elias Zaidan formally welcomed and introduced the Patriarch, who began his remarks by expressing his gratitude for the event and his trip to the United States and then discussed a few topics related to security and stability in Lebanon and the refugee crises that has impacted Lebanon because of the Syrian civil war.

On Sunday morning, Patriarch Rai was escorted to Saint Ephrem Church, where he was met at the gate by joyous parishioners including many of our children. Rose petals were strewn in his path, and two dozen white doves were released to symbolize the parish's great happiness over this historic pastoral visit. The entrance of the church was lined with members of the Knights of Columbus and members of the Order of Saint Sharbel. The Patriarch celebrated the

Tequesta, Florida *Veterans Honored*



by Pierre Azzi

On Sunday, November 12, 2017, Mary, Mother of the Light Church in Tequesta (Palm Beach), Florida celebrated Veteran's Day by honoring its veterans. Ronald Reagan once said, "Those who say that we live in a time when there are no heroes just don't know where to look." Indeed, Mary, Mother of the Light Church is blessed to have four real American heroes as parishioners:

- **Lt. Bob Connors**, who served as a naval officer aboard a battleship during the Korean War;

- **Master Sgt. Peter Ferris**, who served in the Army training soldiers during the Korean War, then was in the Army Reserve for a decade and came back and trained soldiers again during the Vietnam War;
- **Sgt. Jim McCormick**, who also served in the Army with honor during the Korean War; and finally
- **Chief Warrant Officer Raymond Mabarak**, who served in the 97th Infantry (Trident division) during World War II. Raymond fought in the Battle of the Bulge as part of George S. Patton's legendary Third Army. Raymond's division fired the last shot in the European Campaign just before V Day. He then went on to serve in Japan as part of the reconstruction effort. After leaving the Army following World War II, Raymond served for thirty-five years in the Michigan Army National Guard, recently becoming the National Guardsman with the earliest enlistment date.

We are tremendously blessed by our freedoms in the United States and we thank all of our veterans for preserving our freedoms. ☐

Clinton Township, Michigan Altar Society Christmas Luncheon



On Wednesday, December 13, 2017, the Ladies Altar Society (LAS) of St. Sharbel Church in Clinton Township, Mich., held its annual Christmas luncheon. Despite the snowy weather, the event was very well attended. Prior to lunch, Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at St. Matthias Roman Catholic Church (St. Sharbel Church's temporary location). Following the Divine Liturgy, the attendees enjoyed their time eating and listening to an amazing medley of English and Arabic Christmas Carols played on the piano by Chorbishop Badawi and accompanied by Soloist Kristin Glasgow. A heartfelt thank you was offered by Chorbishop Badawi to all LAS members for their prayers, time, talents, and commitments,

and to all attendees who were able to come and celebrate together.

Children Christmas Party



On Sunday, December 17, 2017, following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy offered by Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, and assisted by Subdeacon Michael Magyar, the community of St. Sharbel Church in Clinton Township, Mich., held its annual Children's Christmas Party. The children enjoyed a wonderful time with their families and friends. The program was filled with food, Christmas songs, fun activities, and memorable moments and pictures with Santa Claus! May Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of Peace, bring peace to our children and to all children throughout the world. ☐

Let us Pray For World Peace

Continued from page 1

Thus, at the beginning of this New Year when we commemorate both the World Day of Peace and the Commemoration of the Circumcision of the One who made the whole world his flock if we only believe, let us redouble our support of such efforts as Caritas Lebanon and Catholic Relief Services. Let us pray for world peace. Let us each do something with our lives to make this world a little better, and let us follow the lead of Pope Francis to bring to our tired and broken world a little more love and mercy. ☐

Sincerely yours in Christ,
+Gregory John Mansour
Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn



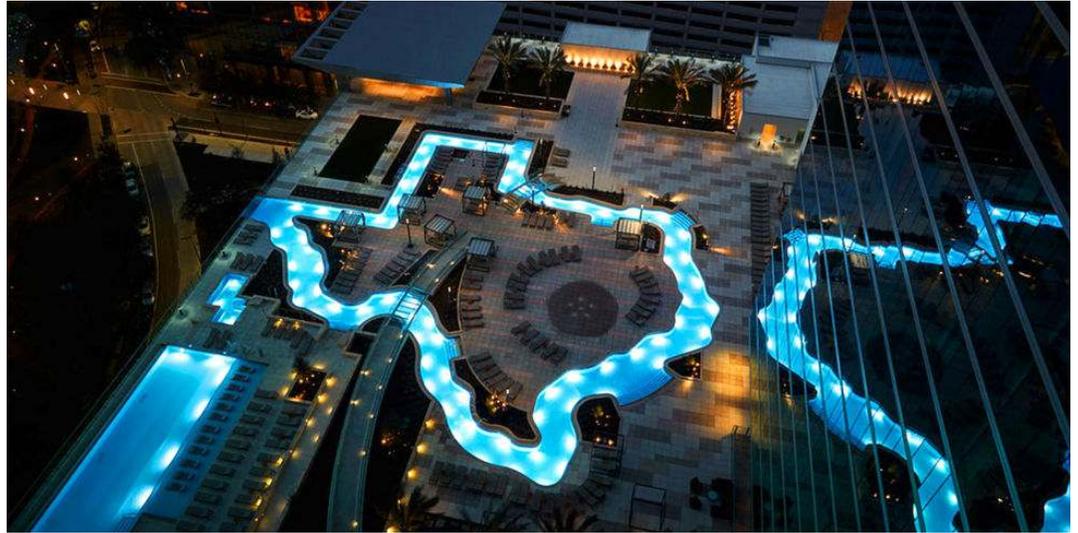
Preparations For 2018 NAM Convention Are Well Underway

The NAM Hotel for the 2018 Convention is in the heart of downtown Houston, across from Minute Maid Park, the home of the World Series Champion Houston Astros.

The Marriott Marquis is a brand-new property that opened in time for Super Bowl 51 that took place in Houston last February. The outdoor infinity pool and Texas-shaped lazy river are the perfect setting to relax and cool off when taking a break from the workshops. Many Downtown attractions are within walking distance of the hotel, including Minute Maid Park, Toyota Center (home of the Houston Rockets), BBVA Compass Field (Home of the Houston Dynamo), and Discovery Green, a beautiful, vibrant 12-acre park in the heart of downtown Houston that opened to the public in April 2008. The park was envisioned by several committed Houston philanthropists, who saw the space as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create an urban park that would redefine the landscape of downtown. The site that became Discovery Green was transformed from an undeveloped, concrete eyesore into a beautiful and vibrant destination adjacent to the George R. Brown Convention Center.

As for Houston food, with 10,000 restaurants and food trucks representing cuisine from more than 70 countries and American regions, Houston's restaurant scene is as ethnically diverse as its 6-million residents. With so many options, it's not surprising that visitors leave the city with plenty of good things to say about dining in Houston. In fact, Houston was named the "newest capital of great food" by Food & Wine and the country's most exciting food city by Tasting Table magazine.

For those to whom the location and city attractions don't appeal, here's what the convention program has in store for them: great workshops by international



presenters that will tackle issues from struggles of the Christians in the Middle East, Marriage, and Catholic-Orthodox Relations, to contemporary topics attractive to the youths and young adults. A more detailed list of workshops and interesting programs will be published in upcoming issues of *The Maronite Voice*.

The entertainment schedule promises to be exciting and refreshing, with all new faces and new twists. Coming all the way from Lebanon to headline the main Saturday night banquet will be Nader Khoury, and to inspire conventioners at the religious concert on Thursday night, Ghada Chbeir. Add to the mix Country and Western segments, traditional Mexican Mariachi, and comedy with famous Showtime performer Nemr -- all new additions to NAM that should appeal to a variety of audiences.

Special programs are also planned for the seniors and the young children, in addition to the excursions planned for everyone to NASA's Johnson Space Center and the Museum District, which is packed with nineteen different museums for people of all ages. The young adults will even hold one of their events at nearby St. Arnold's Brewery, a local craft brewery and a Houston favorite.

Shopping attractions are within walking distance from the Marriott, or for more diverse options, visitors can take a short car ride to the Galleria area

in Uptown Houston.

Houston's two airports are equally accessible from downtown and offer visitors a choice of all major airlines that fly to Houston from all over the United States (and the world). Making airline reservations in advance will guarantee visitors very reasonable airfares, and the excellent convention group rate at the hotel makes attending this convention affordable for families while still offering a first-class experience all around.

We hope that you are planning to come and be part of the NAM Convention on July 11 - 15, 2018. Come as a family or come alone and enjoy the Houston area, all liturgical services, cultural and educational workshops, excursions, entertainment, and much, much more.

To make your reservations, please call in via Marriott Group Reservations (877-622-3056) or through a personalized Passkey website (<https://aws.passkey.com/go/NAMConvention2018>). Use the code "NAM Convention."

The cut-off date to make reservations at the discounted rate is June 18, 2018, but it is always good to reserve early, and once the hotel is booked, make travel arrangements early to take advantage of reasonable airfares. Book now and stay tuned for more information. □

Christmas Message and Blessing of Pope Francis

On Christmas Day, December 25, 2017, Pope Francis prayed for world peace and gave his "Urbi et Orbi" blessing. Pope Francis has appealed for peace and for a world in which children across the globe may be able to hope for a future of justice, security and joy.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In Bethlehem, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. He was born, not by the will of man, but by the gift of the love of God Our Father, who "so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

This event is renewed today in the Church, a pilgrim in time. For the faith of the Christian people relives in the Christmas liturgy the mystery of the God who comes, who assumes our mortal human flesh, and who becomes lowly and poor in order to save us. And this moves us deeply, for great is the tenderness of our Father.

The first people to see the humble glory of the Savior, after Mary and Joseph, were the shepherds of Bethlehem. They recognized the sign proclaimed to them by the angels and adored the Child. Those humble and watchful men are an example for believers of every age who, before the mystery of Jesus, are not scandalized by his poverty. Rather, like Mary, they trust in God's word and contemplate his glory with simple eyes. Before the mystery of the Word made flesh, Christians in every place confess with the words of the Evangelist John: "We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

Today, as the winds of war are blowing in our world and an outdated model of development continues to produce human, societal and environmental decline, Christmas invites us to focus on the sign of the Child and to recognize him in the faces of little children, especially those for whom, like Jesus, "there is no place in the inn" (Lk 2:7).

We see Jesus in the children of the Middle East who continue to suffer because of growing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. On this festive day, let us ask the Lord for peace for Jerusalem and for all the Holy Land. Let us pray that the will to resume dialogue may prevail between the parties and that a negotiated

solution can finally be reached, one that would allow the peaceful coexistence of two States within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders. May the Lord also sustain the efforts of all those in the international community inspired by good will to help that afflicted land to find, despite grave obstacles, the harmony, justice and security that it has long awaited.

We see Jesus in the faces of Syrian children still marked by the war that, in these years, has caused such bloodshed in that country. May beloved Syria at last recover respect for the dignity of every person through a shared commitment to rebuild the fabric of society, without regard for ethnic and religious membership. We see Jesus in the children of Iraq, wounded and torn by the conflicts that country has experienced in the last fifteen years, and in the children of Yemen, where there is an ongoing conflict that has been largely forgotten, with serious humanitarian implications for its people, who suffer from hunger and the spread of diseases.

We see Jesus in the children of Africa, especially those who are suffering in South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Nigeria.

We see Jesus in the children worldwide wherever peace and security are threatened by the danger of tensions and new conflicts. Let us pray that confrontation may be overcome on the Korean peninsula and that mutual trust may increase in the interest of the world as a whole. To the Baby Jesus we entrust Venezuela that it may resume a serene dialogue among the various elements of society for the benefit of all the beloved Venezuelan people. We see Jesus in children who, together with their families, suffer from the violence of the conflict in Ukraine and its grave humanitarian repercussions; we pray that the Lord may soon grant peace to this dear country.

We see Jesus in the children of unemployed parents who struggle to offer their children a secure and peaceful future. And in those whose

childhood has been robbed and who, from a very young age, have been forced to work or to be enrolled as soldiers by unscrupulous mercenaries.

We see Jesus in the many children forced to leave their countries to travel alone in inhuman conditions and who become an easy target for human traffickers. Through their eyes we see the drama of all those forced to emigrate and risk their lives to face exhausting journeys that end at times in tragedy. I see Jesus again in the children I met during my recent visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh, and it is my hope that the international community will not cease to work to ensure that the dignity of the minority groups present in the region are adequately protected. Jesus knows well the pain of not being welcomed and how hard it is not to have a place to lay one's head. May our hearts not be closed as they were in the homes of Bethlehem.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The sign of Christmas has also been revealed to us: "a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes" (Lk 2:12). Like the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, like the shepherds of Bethlehem, may we welcome in the Baby Jesus the love of God made man for us. And may we commit ourselves, with the help of his grace, to making our world more human and more worthy for the children of today and of the future. Happy Christmas!

(Vatican News, December 25, 2017)



Pope Paul VI, Prophet

by
Bishop Robert Barron

This coming July, we will mark the 50th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's deeply controversial encyclical letter *Humanae vitae*. I won't bore you with the details of the innumerable battles, disagreements, and ecclesial crises that followed upon this text. Suffice it to say that this short, pithily argued letter became a watershed in the post-conciliar Catholic Church and one of the most significant points of contention between liberals and conservatives. Its fundamental contention is that the moral integrity of the sexual act is a function of the coming together of its "procreative and unitive" dimensions. That is to say, sexual intercourse is ethically upright only in the measure that it is expressive of love between married partners and remains open to the conception of a child. When, through a conscious choice, the partners introduce an artificial block to procreation—when, in a word, they separate the unitive and procreative finalities of the sexual act—they do something which is contrary to God's will.

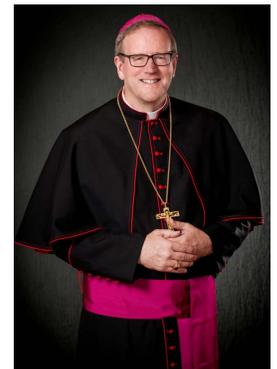
Again, within the context of this brief article I won't detail the arguments for and against this position. But I would like to draw particular attention to a remarkable passage in *Humanae vitae*, namely section 17, in which Paul VI plays the prophet and lays out, clearly and succinctly, what he foresees as consequences of turning away from the Church's classic teaching on sex. Though he is convinced that artificial contraception is morally bad in itself, he's also persuaded that it would, in the long run, adversely affect general societal attitudes regarding sex. Here is a first observation: "Let them consider how easily this course of action could open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards. Not much experience is needed to be fully aware of human weakness and to understand that human beings—and especially the young, who are so exposed to temptation—need incentives to keep the moral law, and it is an evil thing to make it easy for them to break that law." Does anyone doubt that, in the last fifty years, we have seen

a profound attenuation of marital fidelity? Could anyone possibly contest that the last half century has witnessed a significant breakdown of the institution of marriage? Is anyone so blind as not to see that during the last five decades "a lowering of moral standards" has taken place? To be sure, there are multiple causes of these declines, and certainly not all the blame can be ascribed to artificial contraception. However, Paul VI was intuiting something of great moment, namely, that once we commenced to redefine the nature of the sexual act, we placed ourselves on a very steep and slippery slope toward a complete voluntarism, whereby we utterly determine the meaning of sexuality, of marriage, and even of gender. And the rapid rise in pornography use, the sexual exploitation of children, and human trafficking are functions of this same arbitrariness. What was only vaguely envisioned and feared fifty years ago is now accepted more or less as a matter of course.

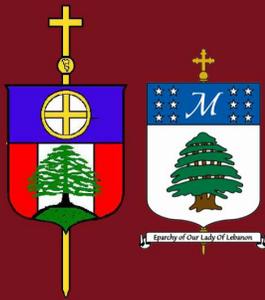
In that same section, Paul VI continues to prophesy: "Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection." In the post-Weinstein era, we hear practically every day of another celebrity who has treated women with disrespect, turning them indeed into objects for his own use and manipulation. The entire society is rightly outraged at this behavior, but precious few cultural commentators have noted the link between this kind of objectification and the conscious disassociation of the twin ends of the sexual act. When we are permitted casually to separate love from procreation—or as one analyst had it, to sever the link between sex and diapers—we place ourselves on a short road to reducing sexual intercourse to a form of self-indulgent recreation.

Section 17 of *Humanae vitae* concludes with a startling act of prescience regarding the political implications of countenancing artificial contraception: "Finally, careful consideration should be given to the danger of this power passing into the hands of those public authorities who care little for the precepts of the moral law. Who will blame a government which in its attempt to resolve the problems affecting an entire country resorts to the same measures as are regarded as lawful by married people in the solution of a particular family difficulty? Who will prevent public authorities from favoring those contraceptive methods which they consider more effective? Should they regard this as necessary, they may even impose their use on everyone." What might have seemed exaggerated, perhaps even slightly paranoid, in 1968 is now commonplace. The HHS Mandate, which would require even Catholic institutions to provide insurance coverage for contraception and abortifacients, has been so aggressively pursued that even the Little Sisters of the Poor found themselves battling for their rights in court. Pope Francis, an ardent admirer of Paul VI, has picked up on this theme, bemoaning the "ideological colonization" that takes place when the Western powers attempt, through threat of economic sanctions, to impose their sexual program on the underdeveloped world. This coming 50th anniversary year would be a good time to take another look at *Humanae vitae*. I might suggest we commence with section 17. □

Bishop Robert Barron is an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries



Bishop Robert Barron



Effective Ways You Can Help Your Eparchy!

Please consider the following ways in which you can help the Maronite Church!

Legacy Giving

This is a creative way to support the Church. Legacy Giving can involve contributing through your *will, insurance policy, or retirement assets.*

You can get a tax deduction today and provide yourself with a steady source of income in future years through a *charitable trust.*

How to Remember Your Church in Your Will

Suggested wording for a bequest to the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn:

"I give and bequeath to the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn _____% of the residue of my estate [or: the sum of \$_____]."

Suggested wording for a bequest to the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles:

"I give and bequeath to the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles _____% of the residue of my estate [or: the sum of \$_____]."

Tax-Smart Giving of Appreciated Stock or other Assets

The gift of an asset such as *common stock or mutual fund shares* that have increased in value can be a smart way to make a contribution and receive maximum tax benefits based on the value of the asset.

Gifts of other *appreciated assets* such as land, antiques, and homes, can also be utilized as potential gifts with valuable tax benefits.

Gifts of these assets should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

For more information on any of these options, please contact:

Stewardship Director
John F. Kurey, Esq., MBA
718-237-9913 or 314-231-1021
saintmaron@yahoo.com or
maroniteswest@yahoo.com

Boston, Massachusetts *Feast Of St. Barbara*



by Mrs. Randa Yazbeck

On Sunday, December 17, 2017, the Religious Education Program Children at Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Jamaica Plain [Boston], Mass., presented the life of Saint Barbara followed by activities organized by the parents and the teachers in the presence of Msgr. Georges El-Khalli, Pastor. The traditional boiled oat was served followed by a surprise visit with Santa Claus. The Children finished stuffing stockings to be donated to the residents at the local nursing home. □



New Bedford, Massachusetts *Pilgrimage to St. Sharbel Shrine*



by Jacques Barbour

The parishioners of Our Lady of Purgatory Maronite Catholic Church in New Bedford, Mass., made a pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York to visit the newly dedicated St. Sharbel Shrine. Thank you to Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, and Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Vicar General, for arranging the Divine Liturgy that was celebrated by Fr. Fadi Rouhana at St. Mary's Chapel in St. Patrick's Cathedral. More than fifty parishioners and other members from the local Maronite parishes attended. □

