

*the* Maronite **Voice**



*Christ is Risen!*



# the Maronite Voice

## BISHOP'S MESSAGE

- 4** **Happy Easter!**  
*by Bishop Gregory John Mansour*

## SCHEDULES

- 6** **Bishop Gregory J. Mansour  
Bishop A. Elias Zaidan**

- 8** **The Cross and Resurrection: A Revelation  
about God and Ourselves**  
*by Fr. David A. Fisher*

- 11** **Pope Appoints Secretary of Congregation  
for Eastern Churches**

- 12** **MYO/MYA Regional Lenten Retreat –  
Sleepy Hollow, NY**  
*by Andrew Ghaleb and Marie Salame*

- 13** **Order of St. Sharbel Reflection**  
*by Jim Abdo*

- 14** **Mother Clemence Helou**  
*by Sr. Samia Abou-Shakra, AS*

- 15** **National Maronite Convention 2020**

## WORKER IN THE VINEYARD

- 16** **Msgr James A. Root**  
*by Brandon Shulleeta*

Cover: Relief of Resurrected Christ on  
the tabernacle in Saint Willibrordus  
Church, Antwerp, Belgium

## LIVING CHURCH

- 18 St. George Maronite Catholic Church  
San Antonio, Texas**  
*by Anna Salloum*
- 20 National Maronite Young Adult (MYA)  
Leadership Conference, Chicago, IL**  
*by Maya Khoury and Hana Chemaly*
- 21 Successful – and fun! – Caritas Lebanon  
Fundraising Luncheon Held in New Brunswick**  
*by Tessa Kocan*
- 22 Mother Afdokia Zaidan**
- 23 Dialogue between the Catholic Church and  
the Oriental Orthodox Churches**
- 24 Praying at the Tombs of the Apostles**
- 26 Parish News**
- GOING DEEPER INTO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE...
- 34 The Eucharist and Pre-Cana Training**  
*by Vivian Akel*
- 35 From the Editor**

### THE MARONITE VOICE

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# Happy Easter!

by Bishop Gregory John Mansour

I want to say to all of you, “Happy Easter,” but being happy is overrated! What a Lent we had, difficult times we are living. Thus, rather than saying, “Happy Easter,” I would much prefer to be interiorly at peace than to be *happy*. Sometimes our lives are very difficult, and it is not easy to be *happy*. In fact, sometimes being sad about certain things in our life is good. It means that we see the world as it truly is and not as we want it to be. Moreover, in my opinion, people who have been sad or even depressed and have come back to tell about

it, are more trustworthy than those who have never been bothered by anything.

What does all this have to do with “Happy” Easter? I wonder if sometimes we pretend to be happy just because we are expected to be, and Easter is just one more occasion to raise such expectations. However, Easter is not about being happy—although we use that word in our greeting—but about interior peace, the peace that only Christ can give; and that peace comes from forgiveness.

Forgiveness means that I am forgiven by God, who reconciled us in Christ, and that I intentionally forgive others, no matter what they have done, whether or not they are sorry, worthy of forgiveness, or even aware of their transgression! When I live with much forgiveness, I live with much interior peace.

Jesus told us about the peace that only he gives (JOHN 14) and this truth is spelled out clearly in our “Maronite” Holy Week Services. The Rite for Holy Saturday in our Maronite Tradition is called the Rite



“... Easter is not about being happy—although we use that word in our greeting—but about interior peace, the peace that only Christ can give; and that peace comes from forgiveness.”

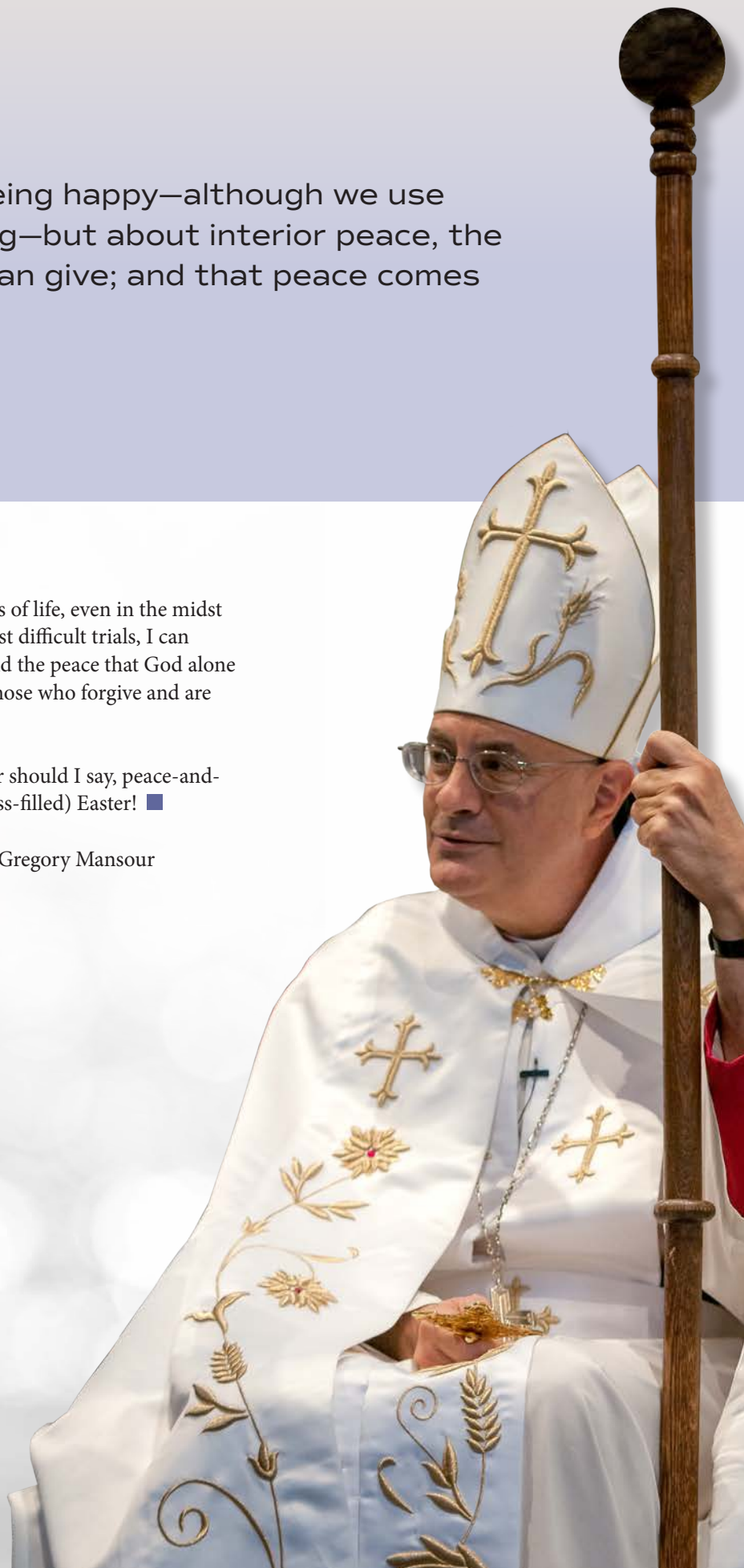
of Forgiveness. The Rite for Easter Sunday is called the Rite of Peace. This tells us that forgiveness, being reconciled to God, and as best as I can with others, brings peace.

Thus, I would much rather be interiorly at peace, than happy, for I know that even in the many

difficulties of life, even in the midst of the most difficult trials, I can always find the peace that God alone gives to those who forgive and are forgiven.

Happy (or should I say, peace-and-forgiveness-filled) Easter! ■

+ Bishop Gregory Mansour



## Schedule BISHOP GREGORY J. MANSOUR

- 3 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Consecration of the Chrism and Holy Oils
- 5 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral & Manhattan Mission (5:00PM) | Hosanna Sunday
- 7 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Diocese of Brooklyn | Chrism Mass
- 8-12 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Liturgies of Passion Week
- 17 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | The Chancery | Bethlehem University Board of Directors
- 21 APRIL** Englewood, NJ | CAMECT Meetings – Archdiocese of the Antiochian Orthodox Church
- 24 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | The Chancery | Eparchial Finance Council | Remote Meeting
- 25 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | The Chancery | Eparchial Pastoral Council | Remote Meeting
- 3 MAY** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral & Manhattan Mission (5:00PM)
- 23 MAY** Fall River, MA | St. Anthony of the Desert Church | Presbyteral Ordination of Deacon Adib Salameh
- 28 MAY** Lebanon | Synod of Maronite Bishops

### The Most Reverend Gregory J. Mansour has made the following appointments in the Eparchy of Saint Maron

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Reverend Samir Chebli – Temp Admin in Philadelphia, PA, effective 18 March 2020

Reverend Elbadaoui Habib – time for personal renewal effective 18 March 2020

Reverend Aaron Sandbothe – Pastor in Uniontown, PA effective 1 March 2020

Reverend Gary George – Administrator in Tequesta, FL effective 1 March 2020

Reverend Elias Khalil – leave of absence effective 1 February 2020



## Schedule BISHOP A. ELIAS ZAIDAN

- 12 APRIL** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | Feast of the Glorious Resurrection
- 24 APRIL** Los Angeles, CA | Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral | Diaconal Ordination of Subdeacon Chady El Jalkh
- 25 APRIL** Las Vegas, NV | St. Sharbel Church | Pastoral Visit and Subdiaconal Ordinations
- 2 MAY** Presbyteral Ordination of Deacon Michael A. Shami
- 9-10 MAY** Houston, TX | Our Lady of the Cedars Church | Pastoral Visit
- 15-16 MAY** Los Angeles, CA | Maronite Catholic Foundation Board Meeting
- 3-14 JUNE** Lebanon | Synod of Maronite Bishops



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# The Cross and Resurrection: A Revelation about God and Ourselves

by Fr. David A. Fisher

**Who is God?**

The Feast of the Glorious Resurrection of the Lord is the Church's celebration of Christ's victory over sin and death. It is the revelation in which we discover the who God is and who we are as re-born in Christ.

The God of Jesus Christ is the God who is love, who loves us, and made us to love him and our neighbor as ourselves (cf. MATTHEW 22:37-39). He is the only true God, as John proclaims: "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." (1 JOHN 4:16). Reflecting on this truth, St. Ephrem the Syrian writes: "Since God is love, ...let us not prefer anything, let us not hasten to obtain anything more than love. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, ... Because what

gain is there, my children, if someone has everything, but does not have love which saves?" (St. Ephrem the Syrian, *On Love*)

We were created by Love to be beings of love, as Saints Irenaeus, Athanasius, John of Damascus proclaimed God took on our nature, so we could take on His.

## "According to the Scriptures"

There are two realities that we should remind ourselves of when we approach Sacred Scripture, which is always an encounter that deepens the understanding and practice of our Christian faith. First of all, we should remember that to the Apostles and the New Testament/Apostolic Church, the Scriptures were the Jewish Scriptures or what Christians came to call





“Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live...”

(JOHN 11:25)

the Old Testament. Second, that the Sacred Scriptures are just that, sacred. The Sacred Scriptures are not ultimately about history, laws, or even ethics; they are about Jesus Christ.

The words that St. Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians are also intended for every generation of believers:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-8)

This passage from Saint Paul is an instruction in the very foundations of our Apostolic Faith. The followers of Jesus in his earthly ministry were Jews who knew their Scriptures and in experiencing the Risen Lord, came to realize that he was the fulfillment of their Scriptures. They realized that the Mosaic Law, the Davidic Kings, the Prophets, the Temple, the holy city of Jerusalem; that all the traditions and Scriptures of Judaism were about Jesus and fulfilled by him.

The Risen Christ “appeared” to the Twelve, and to St. Paul and other disciples, and by the power of the Holy Spirit they realized he was the long-awaited Messiah.

That he was the fulfillment of Israel, and more, he was the Savior of the world, the Lord of all.

### **The Cross and Resurrection**

Why did Jesus die? Let us examine three passages from the New Testament:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (ROMANS 6:23)

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 CORINTHIANS 5:21)

And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” (LUKE 23:42-43)

St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans speaks of the great mystery of sin and death. In doing so he reveals the limitations of being creatures, of knowing that we are going to die. The wage of sin is death, and the knowledge of death leads to sin. In the Old Testament, the oldest definition of sin was “missing the mark.” This being “missing the mark” of what God calls us to be, failing to love, failing to sacrifice self for others. Choosing rather, to feed our false self in the hopes that we can control life and death. Yet, as created beings we must suffer the fate of all created things, which is death; but as graced created beings, as beings created in the image and likeness of God, we discover that the gates of eternal life have been opened by Jesus Christ. He who knew no sin became sin for us as St. Paul says to

## The Cross and Resurrection

*Continued from page 9*

the Corinthians, so that by his death and victory over it, the abode of the dead can no longer lay hold on us.

Our Lord died on the Cross so that we might have life, by placing our total trust in him (faith) in which we cry out remember me, the words of the Prophet Isaiah are fulfilled (“I will never forget you” ISAIAH 49:15) in Christ’s response to the good thief and to us all: “today you will be with me in Paradise.” (LUKE 23:43)

### The Resurrection

Sin and death can only be fully understood from the perspective of our salvation; the Cross, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, and the Pentecost of the Holy Spirit. This is how we overcome our “flesh,” our nature of fear and rebellion due to our fear of death. Then we shall come to full stature as the children of God (Christ-like Love) this is our calling, what the early Church called *metanoia* (transformation) and *theosis* (becoming God-like). We were created not for eternal death, but for eternal life in the Kingdom of God. In Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father has exchanged our flesh for the robe of immortality.

At times in the history of Christianity, there has often been a tendency to dwell on our sinfulness, without viewing it in the light of our salvation. This especially happens when the Scriptures are understood as a salvation history presented from Genesis to Revelation, rather than seeing all of salvation history in the light of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, first and above all else. Christianity is a faith that celebrates redemption, newness of life (even in the midst of pain and suffering), as Jesus proclaimed, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” (JOHN 15:11)

### Conclusion

The Resurrection is the triumph of love over hate, peace over war, life over death. In our society, that is seemingly obsessed with its pursuit of self-identity, one need only to embrace in faith the Cross and Resurrection of the Lord, to discover who they are in Christ. Our false conception of “self” creates lives that look only inward, and seek only self-satisfaction. Yet, the message of truth given to us by the Resurrected Lord is this:

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another. (JOHN 15:11-17)

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is risen! ■

*Rev. David A. Fisher is a priest of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles and Adjunct Professor of Eastern Christian Thought at St. Charles Seminary, Philadelphia*

**Correction:** The Conclusion to Father Fisher’s article on page 11 of the February 2020 issue should have read: “We see how sin is manifested in our lives, in our relationships with others and, above all, in our need to see through the eyes of faith the Savior of the world who invites us to a new life in and through Him.”



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## Pope Appoints Secretary of Congregation for Eastern Churches

Pope Francis has appointed secretary of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches Bishop Giorgio Demetrio Gallaro, bishop of the Eparchy of Piana degli Albanesi di Sicilia, one of the two dioceses of the Eastern rite in Italy. He replaces the Jesuit Archbishop Cyril Vasil, who was recently appointed by the pope as apostolic administrator of the Eparchy of Kosice for Byzantine rite Catholics in Slovakia.



Gallaro comes from a family of immigrants and had studied to prepare to become a priest of the Latin Church. After studying at the seminary in Noto, in 1968 he moved to Los Angeles where he was ordained a priest in 1972. He later discovered his relationship to the Eastern tradition. He

carried out the activity of parish priest in various Eastern Catholic parishes in the United States. In 1987 he was incardinated in the Melkite Greek Catholic Eparchy of Newton. He also served as a professor in the Ruthenian Archeparchy of Pittsburgh and the Ukrainian Eparchy of Stamford.

On March 31, 2015, he was appointed by Pope Francis as eparch of Piana degli Albanesi. Archbishop Gallaro is fluent in Italian and English, while liturgically he uses Greek, Albanian and Arabic, used in the Melkite Church.

In his most recent pastoral letter he asserted that, “We will never cease to announce the folly of the cross and the unexpected novelty of the Resurrection of Jesus, to pray and sing His name, to deepen the unfathomable riches of His Mystery, to witness the new life that the Spirit of the Risen Lord generates in us.” ■

# MYO/MYA Regional Lenten Retreat – Sleepy Hollow, NY

by Andrew Ghaleb and Marie Salame

*The MYO/MYA Regional Lenten Retreat was hosted by Saint John Paul II Parish in Sleepy Hollow, NY, and directed by Sister Therese Maria, Maronite Servant of Christ the Light. His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour was present along with youth and young adults from six other parishes and some of their clergy. Here is a reflection from two of the MYO members from Saint John Paul II, Sleepy Hollow, NY:*

The Lenten retreat was an opportunity to meet Maronite teenagers from five other regional parishes and to build new friendships through our bonds of faith. It was one of the most fun experiences that we've had in the MYO. First, we sang beautiful religious songs to place ourselves in God's presence. Everyone was clapping and singing along enthusiastically, giving us the sense of community that we had hoped to achieve going into the retreat. Kelly Colangelo, a National Youth speaker, spoke to us about her journey of faith and how she found God even in the trials and falls, and how we can stay connected to God through prayer, the sacraments and the Liturgy. Afterwards, we broke up into seven small groups to talk about similar experiences in which we saw God or developed a stronger faith in Him. Not only were these small groups helpful in getting to know one another,

but they also enabled us to learn more deeply about those who were part of our own parishes. After coming back together for lunch, we had some free time. There was ping-pong, foosball, and arcade basketball downstairs, and outside, there was the local park. We were able to play full-court basketball, play football, and use the swings and slides. In addition, we had the opportunity to engage in rosary making as well as writing cards to patients at Rosary Hill, a hospice in Hawthorne, NY. Following our free time, we gathered in the church for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. During this time, we were given the opportunity to reflect and go to confession as we all listened and sang along to live music by Christian singer, Gilbert Rodriguez. It was truly a unique experience and a highlight of the day as it not only gave us the opportunity to connect with God and each other through music

but also opened our hearts to the Lord and cleansed our souls as we journey through Great Lent. Another highlight was our philosophical discussion with Bishop Gregory; we examined why God does certain things in the Bible and how to be in the state of heaven here on earth. We were also given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the difficulty of preserving our faith while being teenagers in a society of secularism and moral relativism. Our retreat concluded with Divine Liturgy, served by our MYO, and in which members of every parish participated in the choir. Finally, we had dinner and time to socialize once more, with music, especially a spontaneous performance of "Oceans" from Fouad Nammour and Raneen Rahani from the Pleasantville, NJ, parish bringing this special day to a phenomenal end. ■

## Order of St. Sharbel Reflection

by Jim Abdo

President of the Order of Saint Sharbel

My dad, Joe Abdo, was 89 years young. He walked three miles each day and prayed his intentions while he walked. Our whole family descended on Naples, FL, at Thanksgiving to spend time with my parents, which was a tradition they loved. My dad decided to skip golf on 25 November and instead go for his morning walk. When my brothers and I got the phone call we were on the first hole of the golf course. Dad had passed away suddenly while walking and praying. It was a poetic and beautiful and painless way to pass and we all thank God every day for that gift, yet the pain of losing him so suddenly is still with all of us. He was truly amazing.

The reason I tell you this story is that at his funeral Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun walked over to my father's urn and placed the cross of the Order of Saint Sharbel on it. I had no idea that my dad had joined the Order. He never had a chance to attend a Maronite church because he did not have one near him, but he knew of Saint Sharbel through me and through Chorbishop Sharbel whom he admired greatly. My dad loved his Lebanese heritage and he especially enjoyed spending time with Abouna Sharbel to talk about Lebanon and learn as much as he could about the Maronite Church and culture.

I came to find out that dad had joined the Order of Saint Sharbel just a month earlier and was going to receive his medal. So, Abouna Sharbel decided to bestow the medal on him at his funeral. I thought it was a beautiful gesture and I know my dad would have been proud to wear the medal.

All best wishes to the members of Order of Saint Sharbel and to those who are thinking of joining the Order. ■

## The Order of Saint Sharbel New Members

### ANNUAL

**MARIE AWAD-ALEXANDER** | *St. Maron, Youngstown, OH*  
**JOSEPH AND TONIA KHOURI** | *Our Lady of Lebanon, Lombard, IL*  
**NANCY MAZZOCCA**  
**DANY SAYAD** | *Saints Peter & Paul, Tampa, FL*

### PERPETUAL

**ADEL CHEMALY** | *St. Anthony of Padua, Cincinnati, OH*  
**STACY COVINGTON** | *Saint Rafka, Greer, SC*  
**MADELAINE HANNA** | *Our Lady of the Cedars, Houston, TX*  
**SAMI AND REDA KHOUEIRI** | *Saint John Paul II, Sleepy Hollow, NY*  
**FADI MAKHOUL** | *St. Anthony of Padua, Cincinnati, OH*  
**SAINTE GEORGE HOLY ROSARY SOCIETY** | *Saint George, Cranston, RI*  
**MAGDA TAWIL** | *St. Raymond, St. Louis, MO*  
**JOSEPH ZISCHKAU** | *Our Lady of Victory, Carnegie, PA*

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](http://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

## Mother Clemence Helou *by Sr. Samia Abou-Shakra, AS*

**M**other Clemence Helou was born in 1931 in Bfarwa in the South of Lebanon. She joined the Antonine Sisters' Congregation in 1946 and entered the novitiate that year. She professed her temporary vows two years later and her permanent vows on the Feast of the Holy Cross in 1953 at Mar Doumith, Roumieh, El-Metn.

Mother Clemence studied philosophy and theology in L'Institut Catholique de Paris, the Catholic University in Washington, and the University of the Holy Spirit in Lebanon. A great thinker and scholar, she wrote several books on topics such as the Book of Revelation, Syriac Spirituality, and the Qadisha Valley (Holy Valley). A member of the Biblical Association of Lebanon, she made scholarly contributions to various biblical journals. She taught in different universities in Lebanon, the novices and sisters of her own Congregation, as well as priest, seminarians, and lay people.

She held different positions in the Congregation such as secretary general and councilor (which is similar to the superior of a convent). She also served in different Antonine Sisters' Schools (in Zghorta, Nabatieh, Zahle, Roumieh), in the Providence Home in France, and Our Lady of Qannoubine. She was elected a Superior General for two terms (1977-1989) and was instrumental in opening new convents in the United States, Canada, France, Cyprus, Australia, and the Holy Land.

- Mother Clemence was elected in December of 1979, for a term of three years, to be an advisor for the Middle East in the Council of Major Superiors of Women in Rome.

- On September 1984, she was elected as a President of the Council of Superior Generals in Lebanon.
- She was appointed a member of the Executive Body for the Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of Lebanon and in the joint commission for the Propagation of Christian Thought in the Arabic language, on behalf of the Congregation for Oriental Churches.
- She was appointed by the Congregation for the Oriental Churches in January 2006 to be an Advisor for the Basilian Aleppian Sisters of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, in cooperation with the Apostolic Visitor, up until 15 December 2014.

She renovated the convent and the pilgrimage Shrine of Our Lady of Qannoubine in the Valley of Qadisha and was an advocate for living a monastic spirituality within any ministry or active apostolate. She had a passion for the way our Syriac and Maronite Fathers, as well as monks and hermits, lived in union with the Creator, in simplicity yet with a very deep spirituality. She cared for the poor and needy and lived to the best of her ability the evangelical counsels of poverty, obedience, and chastity.

Mother Clemence passed on to eternal life on 16 February 2020. May her soul rest in peace with all the righteous and the just. ■





**NATIONAL APOSTOLATE OF MARONITES**  
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**EPARCHY OF ST. MARON OF BROOKLYN**  
**EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON**

**NATIONAL MARONITE CONVENTION 2020**

The world is faced with many fears and worries. Everyone handles stress in different ways and wonders how to make it through. At this moment, we worry about our health, our families, jobs, and future. The COVID-19 virus has turned the world upside down and inside out. What is worse than this pandemic virus is pandemic fear. Obey the rules and **Trust in the Lord!**

I myself have struggled and worried about what to do with the Maronite Convention in Cincinnati on several levels. After doing our due diligence and assessing the state of the unpredictable status of the virus, federal government regulations and mandates from the State of Ohio, we have decided that the safety of our attendees is paramount. It is with sadness, that both of our Bishops, the NAM Board, and the community of St. Anthony of Padua, have decided that the NAM/Maronite convention in Cincinnati, July 8-12, 2020 **has been cancelled**. We feel that we have no concrete date of recovery, if people will be able to afford to attend the convention, or if they will have the time to come a convention.

Although this is not a priority in the scheme of things, this is a spiritual and financial blow to the NAM organization. We will not be able to enjoy each other's company, have meaningful gatherings, and be able to conduct our necessary business. The board will discuss what alternatives might be available in making financial decisions for the future of NAM. At this point all reservation monies that have been processed will be refunded. As a reminder, don't forget to cancel your airline and hotel reservations if you made any.

After we have time as a board to review the situation, we will let you know our needs and what programs we move forward on. Please be assured that we are all in the same predicament and that we should all be praying for each other. Please invoke St. Maron, St. Charbel, St. Hardini, St. Rafka, the Massabki Brothers, and all the saints to intercede for us to Our Lord to protect us and to find a solution for the world.

Rose Sahyoun  
NAM President

## WORKER IN THE VINEYARD

### Msgr. James A. Root *by Brandon Shulleeta*

Msgr. James “Jim” Root wasn’t exactly a typical kid.

While many other third-graders might have been playing outside, young Jimmy regularly attended daily Mass at his family’s church in Cleveland, Ohio, which was within walking distance from his childhood home.

“I guess I wasn’t a normal kid,” Root laughed.

From an early age, Root felt a close connection with God, and he adored the Catholic Church, particularly the Maronite faith.

“I always felt a great attraction to the Church, and honestly, a great love for the Lord,” Root said.

As a young boy, he remembers telling his mother that he wanted to be a priest.

“My mother, being very Lebanese, said: ‘Whaaat? Whaaat?’” he recalled.

Root’s parents were active in the church, and Root quickly became very active himself at a young age. He went to Catholic school growing up, and he and his family, and many of their Lebanese cousins, went to Saint Maron Church in Cleveland.

His mother was supportive of his interest in becoming a priest but also wanted him to live the teenager experience in high school, such as going to dances, attending sports games and dating.

As his school years became numbered, he presented to his mother the idea of going to seminary school.

“My mother, God rest her soul, said, “You should try college instead,” Root recalled, as she wanted him to experience the more typical young adulthood.

“She’d say this, that and the other thing, but would say to her lady friends: ‘You know, I think Jimmy will one day be a priest.’”

She would prove to be right.

His mother died at just 56 years old, while Root was early-on in college, which he finished, earning a business degree. His senior year of college, he officially decided to attend seminary school.

Throughout all of his school, ever since third grade, he had continued to regularly attend daily Mass, and he often thought about the idea of becoming a priest.

Along the way, he played a heavy role in the Church, from being an altar boy and a member of the choir to serving on the parish council when he was just a high-schooler.

Root said his mother could often be seen with a rosary and that she would have been proud that her son became a priest.

Growing up, Root said he spent a lot of time around priests and was drawn to the priesthood — their holiness but also their humanity. They were priests, he said, but they were also “regular guys.”

Over the course of decades, the priesthood has taken Root to Connecticut, Brooklyn, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh, for example. In addition to being a priest, Msgr. James has held administrative roles in the Church and even helped establish churches.

He’s been the pastor of St. Anthony of the Desert in Fall River, Massachusetts, since June of 2018. It’s a Church community that Root described as tight-knit, where most know him as “Abouna Jim.” “Abouna” is the religious title of “father” in Arabic.



“Somebody dies or is in pain, they’re there. ... Same thing when someone is baptized; they’re ready to rejoice,” he said.

Root said the Church’s membership has been built up as other nearby churches broke up and consolidated. He said many joined the church out of convenience but stayed because of their love of the community and the Divine Liturgy.

As for his approach to sermons, Root said he prays over the course of the week and ultimately delivers his homily without notes.

“I don’t sit there and talk at them. I speak with them,” Root said, explaining that he speaks to their hearts and their minds. “I try to make everything relative to today.”

“They’re very good at saying, Abouna, we liked this, but can you clarify this?” he said, noting his appreciation of feedback.



One advantage of being a close, relatively small parish is that he’s been able to build relationships with parishioners and speak with them in a way that is personalized and resonates with them, able to empathize with their struggles.

While his mother’s death was untimely at just 56 years old, his father lived to be 99, and died just two years ago. He was formerly a Protestant and converted to Catholicism prior to marriage, not from having been pressured but on his own accord, Root said.

And even decades after his wife died, he continued, without fail, to attend Mass as a Maronite Catholic throughout his life. He was a white man among a Lebanese family, and he embraced the Lebanese culture.

“I tease that I think my father was more Lebanese than my mother at times,” Root said.

Root said many people might believe there are far fewer young people interested in becoming priests nowadays, but he’s unconvinced that the interest in priesthood has faded and that young people with the potential calling should be encouraged.

“Unless you plant the seed and you nurture it, how do you know if it’s going to grow or not?” he said. ■

*Brandon Shuleeta is a journalist and journalism professor from Glen Allen, VA. (Cynthi said “yes” so we wish her and Brandon and blessed life together.)*



## LIVING CHURCH

# St. George Maronite Catholic Church

San Antonio, Texas *by Anna Salloum*

**W**e've all heard the saying that everything is bigger in Texas. It should be of no surprise then to find out that the Maronite church of St. George occupies a 21-acre campus. Not only is this church blessed to sit on a lush parcel of land, but it also proudly embraces parishioners from many different backgrounds.

According to its very lively and enthusiastic Pastor, Abouna Charles Khachan, MLM, "all our doors are open."

Part of Abouna Charles' secret to those open doors and welcoming the parishioners is being extremely organized. He has an Associate

Pastor, Abouna Mhanna Joseph Kallas, MLM, who came on board in 2020, and is responsible for pastoral work, as well as confession, and visiting the sick. The church is also fortunate to have Deacon Tom Billinek, of the Roman Catholic Rite, who has served for over ten years, and three Subdeacons, Ray Dustin,





Ernest Karam, and Joseph Harb. The parish maintains a website for the convenience of the parishioners. It not only informs, but also educates. The bulletin is also very thorough, thus inviting parishioners to the church's various ministries.

The property has an activity center and small hall for the parishioners' use, where they can enjoy bingo, social gatherings, and athletics. The autumn season is a time where the church's biggest socials take place, and their Easter Picnic is a popular tradition among the parishioners. Because there is constant remodeling and beautification happening on the church grounds, many of these activities benefit the church. The Youth Ministries also benefit from

them, especially the MYO, whose presence is strong thanks to its Youth Minister. One of the challenges with Youth Ministry is the MYA. It is not an uncommon challenge for our parishes because many of the young adults are off to college, so they are not as active. Nevertheless, Abouna Charles has a message for these students and young adults, "Church is home."

This "home" belongs to approximately 400 families, with diversity that includes Hispanic, African American, Caucasian, as well as parishioners who have come over from other Eastern Churches. In fact, one of those parishioners changed rites and ended up becoming a subdeacon.

To Abouna Charles, it doesn't matter whether his parishioners are "new or old." He simply wishes that this community keeps on growing. ■

*We welcome Anna Salloum as a feature writer of The Maronite Voice. Anna became a member of the Maronite Church in December 2015 and is a parishioner of Our Lady of Lebanon in Miami, Florida.*



# National Maronite Young Adult (MYA) Leadership Conference, Chicago IL

by Maya Khoury & Hana Chemaly

This year, the National Maronite Young Adult (MYA) Leadership Conference is in Chicago, Illinois, during the Labor Day weekend, 4-7 September. We are hoping that by having it on a holiday weekend and over three days, it will encourage more MYA members to attend. The theme for this year's conference is leadership and the formation of effective disciples in

our Maronite communities. As a National Board, we strive to strengthen and support MYA groups on the local, regional, and national level.

The flyer for the National Maronite Young Adult (MYA) Leadership Conference has been posted on our social media pages and on our newly designed website [www.maroniteyoungadults.org](http://www.maroniteyoungadults.org). Please check out our new website, which contains helpful links and resources to nourish one's faith. We encourage parishes to send at least two young adults to attend this year's conference. We have also opened this conference up for MYO advisors who are in leadership in youth ministry and seeking to grow in their journey with the Lord. During the conference, we will be providing tools and resources to equip young adult leaders to confidently evangelize and lead others to Christ.

At the Conference, MYA leaders will be facilitating a workshop to discuss and share tips to forming and maintaining vibrant MYA groups on a local level. Along with that workshop, there will be a guest speaker from FOCUS, Kelsey Skoch, sharing on Identity, Accompaniment, Purity, and Discipleship. We will also be blessed to have both of our Maronite Bishops present for the weekend. Our goal is to ignite the passion in our young leaders to share their experience from the conference when they go back to their parish communities.

Stay tuned: registration for the National MYA Conference will be opening soon! ■



# Successful – and fun! – Caritas Lebanon Fundraising Luncheon Held in New Brunswick

by Tessa Kocan

A successful fundraising event for Caritas Lebanon was held on Sunday, 16 February, at Evelyn's Restaurant, located in the Barça City restaurant complex in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Over 100 people attended, contributing over \$6,000 for a great cause!

Gus Sleiman, a Board Member of Caritas Lebanon USA, explained that the purpose of the event was to help Caritas Lebanon address the immediate and basic needs of people, such as food. "I think it is so important to help our brothers and sisters in Lebanon during these horrible times," he remarked.

Many parishioners from St. Sharbel Church in Somerset attended the event, along with Father Simon El Hajj and Deacon Joseph Chebli. The parishioners of St. Sharbel and the neighboring Latin Rite parish, Holy Family in New Brunswick, have been active in volunteering and supporting Caritas Lebanon over the years. Also in attendance was Brian Wahler, Mayor of Piscataway, NJ.

Bishop Gregory Mansour expressed his thanks for the outpouring of support from the local parishioners. The crisis in Lebanon has resulted in 45% of the Lebanese living under the poverty line. "I greatly appreciate the support from the Somerset and New Brunswick community for the needy in Lebanon. I pray that more people will feel encouraged to be more involved and support Caritas Lebanon USA. Events like these give people the opportunity to support such a great cause." ■



Caritas Lebanon is the official arm of the Catholic Church in Lebanon that serves the poor and refugees. It provides health care, emergency aid, education and humanitarian relief. Tax-deductible donations may be made online with a credit card at [www.caritaslebanon.org](http://www.caritaslebanon.org), or by mailing a check payable to "Caritas Lebanon USA" to: Father John Nahal, Caritas Lebanon USA, 931 Lebanon Drive, St. Louis, MO, 63104. Volunteers and donors interested in helping Caritas Lebanon may contact Father John Nahal at [rector@straymond-mc.org](mailto:rector@straymond-mc.org) or 314-621-0056.

## Mother Afdokia Zaidan

M

other Afdokia Zaidan was born in Qosaibe in September 1922. She entered the Congregation of the Antonine Sisters as a postulant in September 1940 and novitiate on 15 October 1940, at Mar Doumith, Roumieh, El-Metn. She professed her temporary vows after two years and her permanent vows on 22 December 1946, also at Mar Doumith. She celebrated her Diamond jubilee on 28 March 2016, at Dar El-Rahme, Ain Saade, where she lived from 1998 up until her death on 15 February 2020.

Mother Afdokia was the Secretary General of the Congregation from 1946 until 1952 and the Novice of Mistress for one year for then Vicar General Mother, Isabelle Khoury. After the death of Mother Isabelle, Mother Afdokia was elected as Superior General of the Congregation, a position she accepted at the request of Mother Isabelle and for the common good of the sisters. Mother Afdokia served in this position for 18 years (1953-1971), leading both with firmness and tenderness, carrying in her mind and soul the best interests of the Congregation and of every sister that belongs to it. The Congregation of the Antonine Sisters would not have continued and grown without her leadership, care, and love of the Lord. She endeavored to educate all the sisters and encouraged them to specialize and acquire degrees only to be able to serve better and continue the education ministry as well as ministry for the disadvantaged, the less fortunate, and the needy. She was open to improvement and built many schools, convents, and dispensaries and imparted various ministries to different sisters.

She later held the positions of Secretary General for six years and of Treasurer General for 12 years. Afterwards, she served as local Superior in



several convents, such as the novitiate convent at Ain Alak and Dar El-Rahme, Ain Saade, where she also served as a treasurer and was later responsible for the elderly and infirmed sisters for nine years. Throughout her life, she relied on Divine Providence, spending much time in prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and spiritual readings while serving in humility, wisdom, dedication, and zeal.

Mother Afdokia was an authentic nun; she lived her life in a very ascetic way, offering a true example of poverty, obedience, and chastity. Her example of committed service, patience, and continuous prayer, even when working, was an inspiration to many other sisters who witnessed that religious life is really worth living. She lived as a true daughter of Mother Isabelle in her love for the poor, her generosity, her attention and affection toward others, and in her courage and strong faith. Mother Afdokia was always ready to listen to any sister and to give advice and some light for the journey. She was a very generous person in every perspective.

Mother Afdokia Zaidan was a true icon of religious life in the Church of Christ. We know that by her departure to the Father's Kingdom we have gained a powerful intercessor for the Congregation and for her relatives, loved ones, and for Lebanon. ■

*“The Congregation of the Antonine Sisters would not have continued and grown without her leadership, care, and love of the Lord.”*

# Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches



The 17th meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches took place in Atchaneh, Lebanon, from 26 January to 1 February 2020, hosted by the Antiochian Syrian Orthodox Church in the patriarchal residence. The Commission was chaired jointly by Cardinal Kurt Koch and by Bishop Kyrillos, Coptic Orthodox Auxiliary Bishop in the Diocese of Los Angeles, California, USA. Representatives came from the Catholic Church and from the Antiochian Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians and Catholicosate of the Holy See of Cilicia), the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

In keeping with the program of the dialogue, this session was devoted to fundamental aspects of sacramental theology. The report of the meeting states in particular that “In all of our traditions, the seven sacraments (Baptism, Chrismation/ Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Holy Orders, Matrimony and Anointing of the Sick) are believed to be instituted by Christ, established by the Apostles, preserved and handed down by the Holy Fathers and faithfully celebrated in the Church. Among these seven, the Eucharist is understood as the Sacrament of Sacraments”. The members discussed various aspects of sacramental discipline, including the question of who ministers the sacrament, who can receive a sacrament, and other canonical issues related to matrimony.

On 27 January, the members were received in audience by His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. On 28 January, His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius Youssef III Younan hosted a dinner for the members at the Syriac Catholic Patriarchate in Beirut. On 30 January, Cardinal Koch and Bishop Kyrillos, along with a small delegation, were received by His Excellency Michel Aoun, President of the Lebanese Republic, in Baabda. In the afternoon of the same day, all the members were received by the Maronite Patriarch, Cardinal Bechara Boutros al-Rai, OMM, in his residence in Bkerke.

The Commission has already published two documents, the first in 2009 on the “Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church”, and the second in 2015 on “The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for Our Search for Communion Today.” ■

## Praying at the Tombs of the Apostles

The practice was already an ancient Church tradition when, in 1585, Pope Sixtus V established a set of norms that called for all bishops to make a visit to Rome and pray at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. These visits, now required every five years, have come to be known as *Ad limina Apostolorum* (“at the Threshold of the Apostles”).

In addition to a eucharistic celebration at the tombs, the bishops also meet with the pope and his collaborators.

On 20 February, 15 bishops representing eight different Eastern Catholic Churches with jurisdictions in the United States met with Pope Francis for nearly

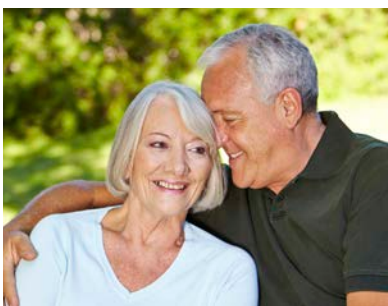
three hours to discuss the needs of their churches. Bishop A. Elias Zaidan was a member of the group. Bishop Gregory Mansour previously made an *ad limina* visit lead by Maronite Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai and other bishops. ■







*The Eastern Catholic Bishops in the United States gathered for their annual meeting on 2-4 March at the Pastoral Center of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon in St. Louis. The meetings are an opportunity for the bishops to discuss matters of common concern and an occasion of fellowship.*



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# Parish News

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN

## Knights of Columbus Ceremony Exemplification at St. Sharbel Church

by Edward O'Brien

The Monsignor Michael Abdo Council of the Knights of Columbus at St. Sharbel Church in Clinton Township, Michigan, inducted five new members along with the three existing members of the Knights of Columbus, utilizing the new degree exemplification program. This was the first time these ceremonials, which were approved as of 1 January 2020, were held in the church. This council is the oldest Maronite Council of the Knights of Columbus. ■



NORMAN, OKLAHOMA

## Celebrating Our Heritage

by Pascale Abou-Nassar

On 1 March, Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Norman, Oklahoma, celebrated the Divine Liturgy followed by a procession for all those who are affected and for those who are unable to pray, to eradicate the world of disease.

Preparations are in full swing for the 9th Annual Lebanese Heritage and Food Festival, which will be held on Saturday, 25 April. At the spryly age of 94, Eim George, our parish matriarch, is leading the charge as the ladies

prepare stuffed grape leaves, kafta, kibbeh, falafel, and other Lebanese staples. This year's festival will feature our children, youth, and young adults, showcasing the traditional dabke. In addition, there will be live music courtesy of Maya Nehme with the accompaniment of Maroun Azar on the Bozoq and Joyce Kareh on violin. There is plenty of fun to be had for kids as well. We will have a bounce house, henna tattoos, face painting, and balloon animals all courtesy of our hard working and dedicated parishioners. The festival will conclude with a raffle drawing featuring many great prizes with the grand prize being a trip to Las Vegas. We encourage all to join us as we continue to celebrate our heritage. ■



LAWRENCE, MASSACHUSETTS

## Feast of Saint Anthony the Great

On 16 January 2020, a vigil liturgy was celebrated at Saint Anthony Church in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in honor of the Feast of Saint Anthony the Great. The diaconate formation group (Latin Rite) from the Diocese of Manchester in New Hampshire, was invited to participate in the liturgy. The faithful of the diaconate formation group recited the rosary and sang hymns with members of St. Anthony's Family of Saint Sharbel. The Family of St. Sharbel is a group of parishioners who meet monthly and serve the church spiritually in many capacities. They attend liturgy together, pray the rosary, practice Christian values, and discuss religious topics including St. Sharbel's humility, faith, prayerful life, and devotion to God.

Participating in his first Maronite Liturgy, Fr. Shawn Therrien, concelebrated the liturgy with the celebrant, Fr. Andrawos El Tabchi. Fr. Therrien, vicar general of the Diocese of Manchester and director of the diaconate

formation program, delivered a homily about St. Anthony the Great. Known as the "Father of Monks and Monasticism," St. Anthony led a solitary monastic life of humility and obedience to God. As an ascetic, he revoked all luxuries and conformed to a life of prayer and strict spiritual discipline.

Throughout the liturgy, it was interesting to witness the blend of Arabic and English and the Eastern and Latin Catholic Church clergy serving together. This brought to mind the words of Pope St. John Paul II: "The Church must breathe with her two lungs." Following the liturgy, a wonderful repast of delicious Lebanese foods prepared by several parishioners was held in the church rectory for everyone to enjoy. This was truly a time for camaraderie among parishioners and visitors. ■



*Pictured left to right – (Front): Shawn Magee, Cyndi Magee (Christ the King Parish - Concord, NH); Brian Lester, Andrea Lester (St. John Neumann Parish - Merrimack, NH); Maureen Demers, Subdeacon Jim Demers (St. Anthony Church)*

*(Back): Jason Demers and Anthony Sadek (St. Anthony Church); Fr. Shawn Therrien (St. Mary Parish – Claremont, NH); Fr. Andrawos El Tabchi, Anthony Merheb, Subdeacon Tony Nammour, Elias Azzi, and Thomas Demers (St. Anthony Church)*

# Parish News

FAIRLAWN, OHIO

## Feast of St. Maron | A Special Tribute to Our Senior Members

by Heather Smith

The Family of St. Maron at Our Lady of the Cedars of Mt. Lebanon Parish in Fairlawn, Ohio, took the opportunity to respectfully honor a group of our members who are by now in their 80's and 90's.

By this time in their lives, they have become more than just Senior. We affectionately choose to call them *Senior Seniors*. These amazing Parishioners have been totally loyal to our Parish all these years by their presence in Church on Sundays, volunteering to serve at church-sponsored feasts, and donating countless hours of their time for almost every parish meal and fundraiser served here.

At the Divine Liturgy, our *Senior Seniors* were invited to take their places in the front row. After Holy Communion, Father Bill presented them with a badge of St. Maron with ribbons attached that read, *Very Appreciated and Much Loved*.

Immediately after Liturgy, this group of honored guests were arranged for a photo. The photographer, Heather Smith, immediately forwarded the negative to the developer then returned back with a copy for each *Senior Senior*. The photos were placed attractive frames and delivered to each honored guest before they left at the end of the St. Maron's Day banquet.

Included in this day of honor for our *Senior Seniors*, were those who were unable to attend because of health reasons and those who were out of town for the weekend. One more worthy honor includes the many good men and women who served our parish all the way to their golden years and are now at home with the Lord. It is impossible to forget them at this time.

I certainly thank God for all our parish family, from the very youngest to the very Senior. ■



HOUSTON, TEXAS

## A Fun-Filled February

by Marcella Georges

February is the shortest month of the year, but that doesn't slow down our events. In addition to our regularly scheduled proceedings, we kept it as busy as possible. From our bi-annual Couples' Encounter to our first-ever Knights of the Cedars Retreat, our organizations didn't miss a beat.

The Parish Council kicked off the first Friday of the month with a Parish-wide BINGO Night. The following day, the Knights held their first-Annual Retreat discussing the topic: Gifts of the Holy Spirit, with an awesome turnout of 30-35 men! To end the weekend, after liturgy on Sunday, our Young Adults discussed Theology on Tap at Houston's local 8th Wonder Brewery.

The very next Friday, the Spiritual Ministry held their bi-annual Couples' Encounter. This Valentine's-Day-themed event sold-out with a record of 60 attendees. The Valentine's Day trend continued through the weekend with the MYO's Valentine's Day social being held in our Church Hall on Saturday.

In Lebanon and other eastern countries, "Fat Tuesday" is referred to as "Drunkard's Thursday". On 20 February, all of the church organizations came together to bring the tradition to our Parish for our second-Annual "Fat Thursday". With a turnout of over 380 people, parishioners and non-parishioners gathered as we ate and drank the night away in preparation for Ash Monday. The Friday to follow, the MYKids held a movie night in the Church Hall, where they ate dinner and popcorn while watching *The Incredibles*.



On Sunday, 23 February, we dedicated the Divine Liturgy to the celebration of St. Sharbel, as well as the Miracle at Cana in Galilee, by blessing the couples of our Parish. Our Spiritual Ministry also kick-started the season of Lent that Sunday with the annual Lenten Drive, which carries on until Easter Sunday. To take advantage of this leap-year, the Daughters of Mary held their first-ever Ladies' Luncheon on 29 February. Having sold out of seats completely, we had a beautiful attendance of over 300 women who gathered amongst each other for lunch, mimosas, and a wide variety of raffle prizes.

We hope everyone has a blessed season of Lent! ■



# Parish News

UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

## Preparing for the Holy Season

by Dr. Mabel George Howard

On 9 February 2020, the parish community of Saint George Church in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, attended liturgy celebrated by Father Andrawos Fadi El Tabchi (*administrator pro temp*) honoring St. Maron's Feast Day. St. Maron, priest and hermit, is the patron saint and spiritual Father of the Maronite Church. He lived a quiet life of solitude in the mountainous region of Syria. Known for his missionary work, healings, and miracles, St. Maron's followers spread his religious teachings throughout Syria and Lebanon. In his homily, Fr. Andrawos spoke about the reverent and humble St. Maron and his devotion to God. He commented that St. Maron's inner strength, prayer, and faithfulness to God led him to shine as a light of hope in the darkness and as a sign of God's love to the world. Fr. Andrawos stated that as Christians, God wants us to live good and righteous lives. He said that through the power of prayer, God will not disappoint us. St. Maron is living proof that all who believe in Jesus will carry on his work and do even greater things by leading others to God. Fr. Andrawos quoted, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). Following liturgy, a light reception was held in the church hall for everyone to enjoy.

The Lenten and Holy Season is typically a special time for prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and honoring tradition and religious rituals of the Maronite Catholic Church. Prayer during the Holy Season can lead to a personal uplifting in one's life. It provides a vehicle for inner soul searching, spiritual introspection, a renewal of the heart, and the incentive to help others. In preparing for the Lenten and Holy Season, St. George parishioners strive to

make a difference in the lives of those in need by participating in the (CRS) Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl during Lent. Over 14,000 Catholic parishes and schools across the United States participate in the CRS

Rice Bowl. Through monetary donations, the CRS *Rice Bowl* program offers resources to families and communities locally and globally experiencing challenging issues with hunger, migration, poverty, homelessness, etc. Since its inception in 1975, CRS *Rice Bowl* has raised nearly 300 million dollars. The Most Reverend Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn and former pastor of St. George Church in Uniontown, is the Chairman Emeritus of the CRS Board of Directors. Bishop Gregory encourages all Catholic Churches in the U.S. to join in prayer and become involved in this rewarding international humanitarian effort that reaches more than 120 million lives in 112 countries worldwide. Bishop Gregory comments that this is a work of compassion. With prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we can continue Jesus' mission to care for all in need. ■



SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

## Award Presentations at St. George Church

*by Regina Aune*

The feast of St. Maron's is always a time of great celebration for St. George Church in San Antonio, and the weekend of 8-9 February was no exception. The festal liturgy was concelebrated by Father Charles Khachan, MLM, pastor, and Father Mhanna Joseph Kallas, MLM, associate pastor, on Sunday, 9 February. At the liturgy, Father Khachan presented the Silver Massabki Award to Candy and Larry Monsour, the Faith of the Mountain Award to Edmond Karam, the

Bishop's Award to Magda Rodriguez, the St. George Appreciation Award to Jo Ann Reed, and the Altar Server Award to Christopher Geha, honoring these individuals for their selfless service to the parish and the continuous giving of their time and talents to support the parish and the larger community of Maronites. A reception in the parish hall followed the liturgy and continued the celebration of St. Maron's feast day. ■



# Parish News

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

## St. Maron Feast Day

by Father Roby Zibara

The Maronite Church was born as a family of St. Maron or *Beit Maroun*. Saturday, 8 February, was a big day for the community of *Beit Maroun* in Detroit, as we celebrated the feast of our Patron, Saint Maron. Bishop Elias Zaidan celebrated the Liturgy at St. Maron Church in Detroit, as he has done annually for the past several years, and inspired us with his reflection during the homily.

Father Roby Zibara, Pastor of St. Maron Church, Father Hanna Tayyar and Father Joseph Khalil, from the Maronite Monks of the Blessed Virgin, Father Milad Yaghi and Deacon Michael Shami, Administrator of St. Raffka in Livonia, also assisted in the liturgy. This year, we celebrated the feast with the participation of His Excellency Wassim Ibrahim, the Consul General of Lebanon in Michigan, and his wife.

Following our liturgy, was the annual dinner party that hosted 450 people at our church hall. May God continue to bless us at *Beit Maron* in Detroit, as we live united as one family, with one heart and as true disciples of love. In living this way, we will then deserve to be called Maronite, the people of *Beit Maron*. ■





WATERVILLE, MAINE

## Entrance into the Great Fast

by Larry Grard

Over the span of 25 years, the parishioners of St. Joseph Maronite Church in Waterville, Maine, have begun the fasting season of Great Lent with their annual Mejadra Luncheon. Following liturgy on 23 February, church members gathered in the church hall to enjoy a vegetarian repast of lentils, macaroni and cheese, salad, pita bread, and desserts in preparation for the weeks of the Great Fast. Fr. Samuel Najjar began this tradition celebrated on Cana Sunday. He asked Carol (Nale) Levine and the Nale family to plan the luncheon event for the congregation. Also, available before the devotions to the Cross, the participants may enjoy a fish and chowder meal every Friday during Lent prepared by the Knights of Columbus (Council 1753) in the church hall. Additionally, Fr. James Doran, accompanied by Subdeacon Steve Crate, leads the parishioners in the Stations and Benediction of the Cross. Parishioner, Dame Marie Fefa Deeb, is the choir director, and Inductee in the Order of St. Gregory. She leads the ancient chants in Arabic and Syriac, the Lamentations on Good Friday, and the Adoration of the Holy Cross. ■

Dame Marie Deeb sings and directs the choir.



Parishioners Carol and Caroline Levine plan the annual luncheon.



Parishioner Paula Mitchell presented a photo album to Nemtallah and Stephen Michaud who were blessed with their Baptism and Confirmation ceremony.

## THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL

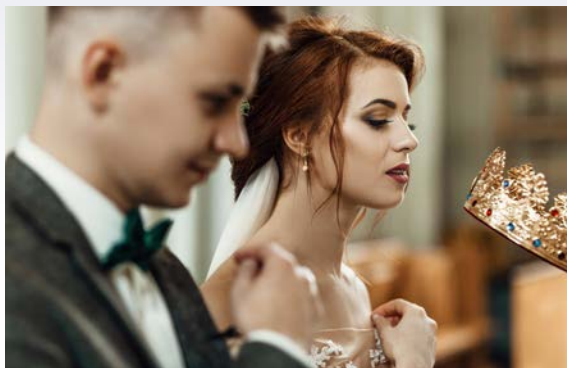
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## The Eucharist and Pre-Cana Training

by Vivian Akel

Marriage in the Catholic Church is a covenant between a man, a woman, and God, and is one of the seven Sacraments, having been blessed by Jesus at the Wedding Feast of Cana. Catholic marriage is modeled after Christ's love for his beloved Church, perfectly self-giving in every way. His plan for every Catholic marriage is that it mirrors and lives up to this model of Christ's love and self-giving. For this reason, the Church is committed to helping each betrothed couple live this self-giving love through a program of Pre-Cana training.

Pre-Cana training is unique to Catholic marriage as it is not a requirement of non-Catholic marriage preparation. Some of the topics addressed during the Pre-Cana sessions include bonding with one's fiancée, communication skills, problem solving, managing finances as a couple, natural family planning, spirituality, prayer, and preparing for the Marriage ceremony itself.

According to St. Pope John Paul II (*Familiaris Consortio*), "the Eucharist represents Christ's Covenant of love with the Church" and provides a model for the couple's marriage preparation and spousal covenant.

The Holy Father further teaches:

*"The Eucharist is the very Source of Christian Marriage. The Eucharistic sacrifice, in fact represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church sealed with His blood on the Cross. In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, spouses encounter the source from which their own covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed.... In the Eucharistic gift of*

*charity, the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its communion and its mission."*

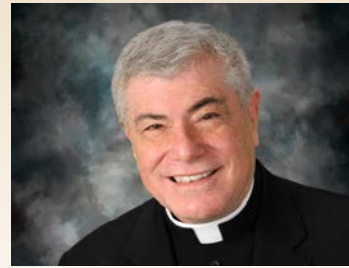
What a beautiful expression of Christ's love and continuous gift to all of us. It is no wonder the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (c.1324) has described the Eucharist as the "source and summit of the Christian life," where we receive nourishment and are united with the family of Christ to help and support us throughout our lives and to help young couples in their new life together.

The Eucharist brings God and young couples together in a reciprocal relationship where their spirituality flows from the Eucharist as "source," and back to the Eucharist as "summit." This is the essence of Christian spirituality and one of the most important aspects of Pre-Cana training where young couples are encouraged to establish and nurture a spiritual life together, especially praying together.

Young couples can start by offering gratitude for the blessings and graces they have received while also asking for forgiveness and mercy from God, and from each other when necessary. As they become more comfortable praying together, they might choose to read a Scripture passage together and reflect upon it.

Couples are also encouraged to spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament to encourage them to listen to God's voice as they build a new family life anchored in faith. And by participating together regularly in Divine Liturgy, the Eucharist will truly be the source and summit of Christian life. ■

## From the Editor



### To see things differently

After struggling with night driving and difficulty reading, I eventually—it took some time—came to the decision that I may have cataracts. My doctor confirmed my instincts and arranged my procedure. The doctors, aides, and facilities could not have been better. They were competent, efficient, and kind. It took two Wednesday mornings and it was done!

#### The world was brighter.

After surgery on the first eye, I was amazed. The world was saturated with vivid colors. The only comparison I can make is the moment the 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*, changed from black and white to color. Like the Land of Oz, the world was bright, colorful, and inviting.

As I was enjoying this bright colorful world, I realized how I had sometimes seen the world: the sky appeared as if bad weather was on the way; colors were bland; the world was too often dark and gloomy.

This year as the Church began Lent, our thoughts focused on the need to change our lives. I reflected that there have been times when I, like so many others, needed to get rid of the “spiritual cataracts” that distorted my view of the world. I needed to more greatly appreciate how beautiful and bright creation really is.

#### It’s not just a visual thing.

Removal of spiritual cataracts is more challenging than the replacement of lenses in our eyes. It takes stopping and working to see things as they really are and not through our own distorted lenses.

Sometimes, we need to step back and see people, situations—indeed our own lives—in a brighter light. People are interesting and enjoyable. Storms are not always on the horizon. My life is not dark, but bright; and the same is true for your life. We just have to make an effort to see things without the negativity and to truly open our eyes to God’s blessings.

**Easter is a time of New Light. Christ is risen. Indeed, He is risen! ■**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John D. Faris".

Chorbishop John D. Faris

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