

Volume 18 | Issue 1 | February 2021

the Maronite **Voice**



Saint Maron

Intercede On Behalf of Those Who Bear Your Name



the Maronite Voice

BISHOP'S MESSAGE

- 4** **Three Pillars of Lent: Fasting, Almsgiving, and Prayer**
by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan

- 6** **Bishops Schedules**

- 8** **Saint Marina the Monk**
by Reverend Michael Shami

WORKER IN THE VINEYARD

- 12** **Subdeacon James Demers: Being a Christian isn't supposed to be easy**
by Brandon Shulleeta

LIVING CHURCH

- 14** **The National Apostolate of Maronites: A Living Legacy of Commitment and Leadership**
by Anna Salloum

COVER: Saint Maron was a fourth-century hermit and monk who lived in the open air next to a pagan temple that he had transformed into a church. Exposed to nature, he spent his life in prayer and meditation. This form of asceticism attracted other followers. St. Theodore of Cyr, in his Religious History, wrote that 15 men and three women (many guided by Maron), observed this form of ascetic life.

After Maron's death, his followers in this religious movement, founded a monastery, which was to be the birthplace of the Syriac Maronite Church.

17 Update: Maronite Eparchies Successfully Complete Seminarian Endowment Matching Gift Challenge!

18 National MYA 2020 Wrap-Up

20 MYO | A Night in Bethlehem *by Peter Harb*

22 Syriac Monasticism: Individualism, Asceticism, and Symbolism *by Father David A. Fisher*

26 Parish News

34 Going Deeper Into the Spiritual Life

35 From the Editor

THE MARONITE VOICE

A bi-monthly publication of Saint Maron Publications under the auspices of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles.
ISSN 1080-9880

Publishers

Most Reverend Gregory John Mansour
Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan

Editor

Chorbishop John D. Faris

Managing Editor

Rev. Aaron Sandbothe

Art and Design Director

Ms. Glory Rasi

Production Coordinator

Subdeacon Michael Maynes

Parish News Editors

Dr. Mabel George Howard
(Eparchy of Saint Maron)
mabelgeorgehoward@gmail.com

Rev. Pierre Bassil
(Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon)
ptbassil@aol.com

Feature Writers

Anna Salloum
Brandon Shulleeta

• In order to be considered for publication, all submissions must be in electronic format and signed by the author with contact information. Images must be of high resolution and quality (minimal 300 dpi, jpg format).

• Subscription rates are \$25.00/year.

• Paid Advertising
\$150 - Quarter page full color
\$250 - Half page full color
\$400 - Full page full color
Additional discounts for six editions (one year).
All ads must be submitted electronically. High resolution jpg or PDF with embedded fonts required. No bleeds. Contact TheMaroniteVoice@gmail.com

Contact Us

Phone: 804.346.1160
Email: MaroniteVoice@gmail.com
Mailing Address:
4611 Sadler Road
Glen Allen, VA 23060


Office Hours

Monday - Friday | 9 am - 1 pm

Printed in Richmond, Virginia



Three Pillars of Lent: Fasting, Almsgiving, and Prayer

 On Sunday, 14 February 2021, we enter into the Church Season of Great Lent — the Season of the Great Fast. This year our Lenten journey begins on Valentine's Day, the day when people exchange messages of love to their beloved. It is fitting as our Maronite Catholic traditions recall the first sign Jesus performed at the Wedding of Cana in

Galilee when he changed the water into wine. Lent is a journey of love which starts with a wedding and ends with a different type of wedding: Christ betrothing his bride, the Church, on the Cross on Good Friday, giving himself for the Church. It is a time for interior reflection, metanoia, and spiritual rejuvenation in preparation for the “Feast of Feasts,” the Resurrection of the Lord.

This past year has been especially difficult for all of us because of the Covid-19 pandemic. With all of the hardships and challenges, our Lenten journey is more important than ever as we have the opportunity to repent and change our lives. Lent is a time to be in love with the Lord, to find the inner peace only God can give us. This inner peace can be achieved through the three pillars of Lent: Fasting, Almsgiving, and Prayer.

— *Fasting* corresponds to the *I*, to the person. It is a way to discipline ourselves, to control our senses and sensuality, to give up certain pleasures in order to strengthen our will. We sacrifice, so that we can better understand the sacrifice made by Christ for us, and to stand in solidarity with people deprived of so many essentials.

— *Almsgiving* is our giving to *others*. It is an act of care and compassion towards the less fortunate and needy. We attend to their various needs by practicing corporal and spiritual acts of mercy. Thus, the poor feel supported and cared for.

— *Prayer*: It is our way to connect with *God*. Prayer is the way in which we converse with God, ask for His guidance, and thank Him for His mercy and love. Prayer takes different forms and shapes: private or communal, liturgical or devotional, praise or supplication.





Fasting and almsgiving are the two wings that fly us closer to God in prayer. It is a love story between us, God, and others as we care for others and pray to our merciful and loving Lord for guidance in our lives. Fasting, almsgiving, and prayer are types of spiritual vaccines to help us overcome temptation and avoid falling into sin. It's not just I and other people, but I, others, and God. Actually, I see God in every human person: "Whatever you do to my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me" (MATTHEW 25:40).

However, in order to live our Lenten journey in its three dimensions, we are called to change our ways of doing business as usual. In the Old Testament, the Prophet Joel pleads with us saying;

Even now, says the LORD,
return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God
(JOEL 2:12-18)

The Prophet speaks of a change of our hearts. He uses the word "rend" — to tear our hearts — to express this radical change. A change of heart is an interior thing but should be expressed outwardly in our lives. It must be a reflection of what is on the inside if it is to please God. What we do in public is only as worthy as what is within us. Our lives can only really change when our heart changes.

The Apostle Paul may be one of the most notable Christians who had experienced an inner change — an inner change that affected his whole life. In his Letter to the Romans (12:2), he writes: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." St. Paul knew of what he wrote. His conversion was from an enemy of Christ to one of his most ardent and zealous disciples. That came about because he had a true encounter with the risen Lord, and it changed him within.

Our human experiences in life help us understand the importance of the "inner" change. How many times do we hear someone close to us say, "I'm sorry," only to repeat the same conduct again and again? After a while, apologies get old and what we want to see is a change of heart.

Let us use this great opportunity that we call "Lent" to let those outward signs be a reflection of an inner change. Through the turmoil of the pandemic, turmoil at home, and abroad, let us make a special effort to change for the better. Find ways to increase your prayer life; remember those who do not have the material things that we have and share with them; learn to fast, and fast with joy.

As the vaccine's promise will help us get over the calamity of the pandemic, so our Lenten journey will find its jubilant victory on Easter Sunday, the great feast of the Resurrection of our Lord. ■

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan

Schedule BISHOP A. ELIAS ZAIDAN

- 5-6 FEBRUARY** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | St. Maron's Celebration
9 FEBRUARY Los Angeles, CA | St. Maron's Celebration at Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral
12 FEBRUARY Virtual | Family Life Office Conference
15 FEBRUARY Ash Monday | Our Lenten Journey Begins
16 FEBRUARY Family Life Office: Fully Alive Virtual Series
17 FEBRUARY Virtual | Lecture of Philip Forness on St. Jacob of Serugh
26-27 FEBRUARY Virtual | MYO Retreat
1 MARCH Virtual | Caritas Lebanon-USA Board Meeting
3 MARCH Virtual | Meeting of the Eastern Catholic Bishops
16 MARCH Family Life Office: Fully Alive Virtual Series
17 MARCH Virtual | Lecture of Jeffrey Wickes on St. Jacob of Serugh
19 MARCH Feast of St. Joseph
4 APRIL St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | Easter

Lenten Observances 2021

The Most Reverend Bishops Gregory J. Mansour and A. Elias Zaidan have issued the following Lenten guidelines for the Maronites of the United States.

- + All Maronites who are physically capable are to **abstain** from meat on **Ash Monday** (15 February 2021) and all **Fridays of Lent**.
- + **Ash Monday** and **Great Friday of the Crucifixion** (2 April 2021) are also days of **fasting**. Fasting in the Maronite Church involves **eating and drinking nothing** at all (except water and medicine) from **midnight until noon**. The rest of the day normal meals can be taken, but without meat. All Maronites who are physically capable should fast on these two days.

Distribution of Ashes

All parish priests are to bless and distribute ashes on **Ash Monday** during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy as indicated in our liturgical books. This ceremony may **not** be celebrated on the vigil of Ash Monday (Cana Sunday). For the convenience of some faithful of the Latin Church who may come to the Divine Liturgy at a Maronite Church on their Ash Wednesday, ashes that were blessed on Monday may be given to them after the Divine Liturgy. However, ashes are **not** to be blessed again on this day.

Lenten Services

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

Traditional Fasting Discipline

Clergy, religious and laity who wish to observe the more **traditional** Maronite practice of fasting and abstinence are **encouraged** to do so.

The practice is summarized in the following, taken from the Particular Law of the Maronite Church:

Ash Monday and Great Friday are not only days of abstinence, but also days of fast, whereby, no food or drink (except water or medication) is to be taken from midnight until noon, as long as one is physically able to do so.

Great Lent and Passion Week, beginning on Ash Monday and ending at 12:00 (noon) on Saturday of the Light, is a season of penitence. In our Maronite Church each day of this season is considered to be a day of fasting and abstinence from meat and dairy products, (with the exception of Sundays and Holy Days). Although highly encouraged, this fast is not obligatory. However, it is obligatory to abstain from meat on Ash Monday and all Fridays of Lent, and to fast on Ash Monday and Great Friday, as long as one is physically able to do so. ■

Schedule BISHOP GREGORY J. MANSOUR

- 7 FEBRUARY** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Feast of St. Maron
8 FEBRUARY Virtual | Rosary for Intentions of the Eparchy and World
10 FEBRUARY Meetings with Bishops Barres, Murphy, and Henning and CNEWA
15 FEBRUARY Somerset, NJ | St. Sharbel Church | Ash Monday
28 FEBRUARY Sleepy Hollow, NY | St. John Paul II Church | Parish Visit
1 MARCH Virtual | Caritas Lebanon-USA Board Meeting
3 MARCH St. Louis, MO | Meeting of the Eastern Catholic Bishops
8 MARCH Virtual | Eparchial Review Board Meeting
8 MARCH Virtual | Rosary for Intentions of the Eparchy and World
17 MARCH Virtual | Eparchial MYO Leader Webinar
19 MARCH Virtual | Eparchial MYO Lenten Retreat
23 MARCH Virtual | Maronite Servants of Christ the Light Seminar on Suffering
28 MARCH Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Hosanna Sunday
28 MARCH New York, NY | Manhattan Mission | Hosanna Sunday | 5:00pm
29 MARCH Somerset, NJ | St. Sharbel Church | Great Monday
30 MARCH Brooklyn, NY | St. James Cathedral Basilica | Chrism Mass
31 MARCH-4 APRIL Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Passion Week and Easter



ANNUAL LENTEN APPEAL 2021



The Maronite Bishops' Annual Appeal takes place during Lent each year.
Please be generous and help with the greatest needs of your Eparchy.

HOW DO YOU MAKE A GIFT?

YOU MAY MAKE A DONATION IN YOUR PARISH:

Please bring your gift to your Maronite Parish on any Sunday during Lent in a special envelope marked "Annual Appeal."

MAIL A GIFT OR MAKE A DONATION ONLINE:

Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn
109 Remsen Street
Brooklyn NY, 11201
www.stmaron.org

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles
1021 S. 10th Street
Saint Louis, MO 63104
www.eparchy.org

Saint Marina the Monk

by Reverend Michael Shami



The Maronite Church prides itself on its monastic origins, so naturally she takes great interest in her great monastic saints. Many of them have strange and amazing stories, such as St. Simeon who lived upon a column, St. Doumit who lived a solitary life in a cave for many decades, or St. Marina who lived most of her life in a monastery disguised as a man. The bizarre qualities of the lives of these saints can attract the curious. The more serious ask, “What do their odd lives have to do with them being holy and why is it relevant to me?” The answer to both is askesis or asceticism.



The Greek word *askesis* means exercise or training. These monastic saints spent their entire lives exercising, which led them to their unique routines. They took seriously St. Paul’s words, “Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training” (1 COR 9:24-25). The *askesis* of the saints and of which St. Paul speaks is not physical exercise, but an exercise of our spirits, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but ... against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil” (EPH. 6:12). As St. Paul explains, athletes compete for prizes that do not last, but we compete for the eternal prize — the Kingdom of Heaven. The substance of the life of an ascetic is to run the course and become champions of Christ, distancing themselves from vice, and constantly training their spirits in virtue. Their training was as extreme as sitting on a column for a lifetime not because this world is bad, but because what they sought was better.

St. Marina of Qannoubine, was a fifth-century ascetic who gives us an exceptional example of training to journey on the path to the Kingdom of God in the face of all adversity to have the pearl of great price (MT 13:45-46).



Even if we enjoy sports, most of us do not aspire to the accomplishments of Olympic gold medalists. Nevertheless, these champions draw our admiration and can inspire us. The same is true for the spiritual endurance of the saintly ascetics (those who practice *askesis*); perhaps we cannot envision ourselves in desert solitude but their zealous pursuit inspires us to push ourselves and seek the goal for which they strive. And more than Olympic gold medals or worldly acclaim that eventually fades away, ascetics such as St. Marina won the infinitely greater prize of eternal life with God precisely because they imitated God Who came and showed us the way before us. As the *Safro* (Morning Prayers) for the Feast of St. Marina says:

“...He came to us in the lowly depths,
clothed Himself with our body, and
became man like us. And He taught us the
disciplines and tread for us the true path
that leads to eternal life. He walked first
before us and entered His Kingdom so that
we too might walk in His saving footsteps
and enter His Kingdom ...”

(MS. QANNOUBINE 25)

The ascetics, in their own way, follow the path that Christ tread before us, showing us that it is possible to be holy and arrive to the Kingdom. Jesus gave us His example of *askesis* when He fasted and prayed in the desert, defeating Satan by refusing his offers (Mt 4:1-11). The ascetics followed His example in going into the desert, real or metaphorical, to focus on God and deny Satan.

St. Marina of Qannoubine, was a fifth-century ascetic who gives us an exceptional example of training to journey on the path to the Kingdom of God in the face of all adversity to have the pearl of great price (Mt 13:45-46). St. Marina's mother died when she was young; she was left with her father who wished to become a monk. St. Marina, having suffered the premature death of her mother, could not bear to be separated from her father.

She shaved her head, disguised herself as a man, changed her name to Marino, and joined the same monastery as her father. She excelled in all the monastic works, fasting, praying, and doing all her chores as an example to the other monks. But the great challenge of her life, for which she was training, would come when she was sent on a task outside the monastery and the guest of a local family. The father of the family discovered his daughter was pregnant and went to the monastery to accuse “Marino” of assaulting his daughter. He left the baby with the monks.

Falsely accused, St. Marina never defended herself, but accepted the circumstances of her suffering just as Christ suffered without deserving His punishment on the cross. St. Marina was cast out of the monastery to raise the baby on her own. In the face of injustice, St. Marina continued an ascetic life of prayer and fasting. When she died, the abbot ordered her body to be prepared for the funeral, at which point the monks discovered she was a woman and realized that they had wronged her all these years. Her holiness was an example to all of them,

“Saint Marina the Monk”

Continued from page 9

inspiring repentance on the part of the monks and even the natural father of the baby.

In the prayers for her feast, the *sooghito*, “a debate hymn” whose genre is common to our Syriac tradition, portrays St. Marina’s askesis in the wilderness, fighting against Satan as Christ did in the desert. Satan tries to convince her she can just give up and vindicate herself, and go live a life of comfort, but she refuses, keeping her eye on her prize:

[Satan] Double woe to you for if you do not listen to my words, you will die in the wilderness and be devoured by wild beasts and birds of prey.

[Marina] Then I shall sing praise [to the Lord] with my life while I still have time to sing, and, if I should live or die, I am the Lord’s at every moment.

Throughout the hymn Satan tries to offer St. Marina an escape just as he tries to do with Christ in the

desert. But St. Marina endures because of her training — she knows wherever she is, however long, and whatever circumstances, her task is to serve the Lord. Whether in a man’s world as a woman or as a lonely person in the wilderness, without her mother or without her community, wrongfully accused or tempted, St. Marina is not diverted from the Lord’s path: Whatever happens on the way, God is at the end, where she belongs.

St. Marina is an extraordinary example of the power of faith and hope in God in extraordinary deprivation. If her askesis could overcome the obstacles set before her, it should assure us that we can run the course of Christ in our ordinary lives if we only seek it.

May the prayers of St. Marina be a rampart for us. ■

Fr. Michael A. Shami is the Director of Liturgy for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and currently pursuing doctoral studies in Syriac Liturgy at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome.





Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord.

NAN L. FARHAT

Nan L. Farhat, the sister of Father Vince Farhat, passed away on 26 December 2020 in Bradenton, Florida.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Leo and Virginia Farhat, and her sister, Ann Farhat.

She is survived by her siblings, Ida Rose Farhat, David Farhat, Leo Farhat, Jr., Mark Farhat, Mary Catherine Moriarity, Matthew Farhat, James Farhat, and Father Vincent Farhat, along with her step daughter Sarah (Cornelius) McGilloway, and her many nieces and nephews.

The Funeral Liturgy was celebrated on 2 January by Father Vincent Farhat at Saint Mary Cathedral in Lansing, Michigan.

TANIOS EL-KHALLI

Bishop Gregory received the sad news of the passing of Tanios El-Khalli, the brother of Monsignor Georges El-Khalli.

Tanios, the oldest of seven children to Youssef and Mariam El-Khalli, passed away on 13 January 2021. He was buried in the family cemetery in Chebanieh on 14 January.

He was preceded to eternal life by his parents and his brother Boutros. He is survived by his wife Randa, four children, Graziella, Mariam, Elias and Joe and his siblings: Maurice and (Vera) El-Khalli, Malaky and (Salim) El-Khalli, Sister Chantal El-Khalli, Monsignor Georges, and Georgette and (Joseph) El-Kareh.

Sympathies can be sent to Monsignor Georges El-Khalli at: Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon Church, 61 Rockwood Street, Jamaica Plain, MA, 02130



Appointments

EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON

Bishop A. Elias Zaidan has made the following appointments for the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles:

Fr. Etienne Hanna appointed as Associate Rector of Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral, Los Angeles, CA

Fr. Patrick Kassab appointed as Associate Rector of St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis MO and Associate Pastor of St. Raymond-St. Elizabeth Church, Crestwood, MO

Fr. John Paul Khoury appointed as Associate Pastor of St. Maron Church, Youngstown, OH

Subdeacon James Demers: Being a Christian isn't supposed to be easy *by Brandon Shulleeta*

“If you think being a Christian is easy, you’re doing it wrong.” So says James “Jim” Demers, a longtime subdeacon in Massachusetts. He shares a first name with St. James, but more than that, he’s a strong believer in the apostle’s words: “Faith without works is dead.” (JAMES 2:14-26)

“I take that to heart,” said Subdeacon Jim Demers, 51, of St. Anthony Maronite Catholic Church in Lawrence, Mass. For more than a decade, Jim has been a subdeacon. For him, it’s about serving God and giving back to the Lord for all of the blessings he’s received.

Being a subdeacon is an unpaid service. He’s a computer programmer, husband and father of three young adults, and he half-jokingly likens a subdeacon to a restaurant server.

“I’m a glorified waiter,” he laughed. It’s not the first time he’s made the comparison; he said folks think he’s pulling their legs when he says it, but he insisted that it’s a fitting analogy, considering that being a good subdeacon — just like being a good Christian — requires service and humility. “Yeah, I get to serve,” he said.



Growing up, Demers wanted to be a priest or a scientist. He ultimately decided priesthood wasn't for him, but he saw that being a subdeacon was a way to serve. His role in the church has been vast, helping Father Elie Mikhael with liturgy and virtually everything else that he's asked to do in his parish, composed largely of Lebanese parishioners, many of whom are related and form a family-like community.

He heads up the Knights of Altar, overseeing altar boy training. He's been a Sunday School teacher for nearly 20 years, and he helps oversee the religious education program. He was also a leader for the Maronite Youth Organization and the Knights of Mary, among a long list of service — so much that youth in the church are surprised to learn he doesn't live there and actually has a full-time job away from church.

"Yes, I'm busy, but it's a good busy. What better thing could I be doing with my time?" Demers said. "I wanted to use my talents to the fullest and give them back to God."

Demers said it was also important to show his children the importance of having faith in God, loving Him, and loving people. "There's no greater way to impart that to them than to do it."

After repeating that his service to the church was a way to repay God for his blessings, Demers was asked to specify those blessings, to which he said without hesitation: "my wonderful wife ... and wonderful kids," adding that his family has also had "pretty good health." "My wife's been very supportive," Demers said.

Subdeacon Jim has been a parishioner at St. Anthony's since 1998 and said he loves being among parishioners who are caring and anxious to serve. He noted that "people trip over themselves trying to help out" during the church's annual Lebanese festival, also known in Arabic as a "mahrajan." Having a great relationship with the church's pastor, Father Elie Mikhael, makes his service as subdeacon that much more seamless.

Demers has been studying for the past few years to become a deacon and anticipates being ordained in 2022.

Brandon Shulleeta is a journalist and parishioner of St. Anthony's Maronite Catholic Church in Glen Allen, VA.

“ ‘I’m a glorified waiter’ ... he insisted that it’s a fitting analogy, considering that being a good subdeacon — just like being a good Christian — requires service and humility. ”



The National Apostolate of Maronites: A Living Legacy of Commitment and Leadership *by Anna Salloum*

*M*any are familiar with the African proverb, “It takes a village,” which is about raising children. But preserving culture and history also takes a village. The National Apostolate of Maronites (NAM) is the village that preserves the culture and history of the Maronite community.

The first convention of the National Association of Maronites (later changed to the National Apostolate of Maronites), which took place in Washington, D.C., in 1964, set the precedent for these annual gatherings. This initial gathering of the Maronites of America had Bishop Francis M. Zayek (at the time serving the Maronite community in Brazil) as a special guest with Danny Thomas (the founder of St. Jude Hospital) as the guest speaker. Unfortunately, the pattern was broken in 2020 because of the pandemic. Over 50 years young and strong, NAM is a group that unites Maronites of all walks of life.

The face of NAM is Ms. Rose Sahyoun, who believes, “It’s about keeping people together and flourishing their roots. We need it now, we don’t have much of

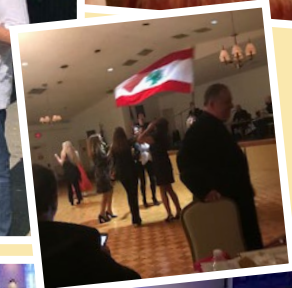
anything else.” Rose is not only president but also interim executive director; she has learned a lot in a short time. It has become something that she loves to do. She is based in Youngstown, OH, and is a parishioner of St. Maron Church and Our Lady of Lebanon Basilica Shrine.

Rose had already been on board for some time as a delegate and regional Vice President, and other positions of increasing responsibility. Rose won the election this time through a unanimous vote, and has served for two years. Unfortunately, the pandemic of 2020 put a halt to many events, including the annual NAM convention. As a result, Rose’s tenure was extended one more year. The pandemic has negatively impacted NAM’s goal to create a vital network of fellowship for our Maronite faithful. Although there has been a good online response for people paying dues, the pandemic has proven to separate not just friends and families, but fellow Maronites who enjoy one another’s company. “Everything is online,” Rose said. “The idea is to be together and united.” she continued. “There has been no companionship, and no camaraderie.”

As things return to normal, the first activity that will hopefully reunite the Maronite community will be a retreat the weekend before Palm Sunday at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon. Maronites from the local community as well as from afar will start the day with breakfast, followed by a prayer service, then a first talk. After lunch, a second talk will lead into confessions and liturgy, followed by dinner with the Antonine Sisters. Father Tony Massad, the Pastor of St. Maron, will be involved; it is sure to be a beautiful event with his young energy.

Plans for this year’s NAM Convention are not solidified because of the unsure future; of course, safety is a priority. Conventions are not intended to be only a vacation, but a celebration of our common faith heritage and an opportunity to deepen our understanding of and commitment to the Maronite Church.

Rose observed that, “You can’t look forward to the future without the past. You must know what came before you.”



“ Whether we are at home or at a convention, it is important to preserve our Maronite roots ... ”

Whether we are at home or at a convention, it is important to protect and preserve our Maronite roots — even talking about it with friends over Zoom or FaceTime is a way to start. Our young Maronites are definitely encouraged to start something new. Be on the lookout for a digital directory of businesses that NAM is putting together. If we

can't be together in person, at least we can bring the camaraderie back by supporting one another's businesses. This initiative will be one more way to foster bonds within the Maronite community. ■

Anna Salloum is a parishioner of Our Lady of Lebanon in Miami, Florida.

SPRING FORMATION 2021

GREAT LENT

Learn more about the Maronite Faith and Traditions.

VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS

- **FEB. 25: GREAT LENT: FASTING, PRAYER, & ALMSGIVING**
FR. RUDY WAKIM
- **MAR. 4: OVERVIEW OF THE MARONITE LITURGICAL YEAR**
FR. NAJI KIWAN
- **MAR. 11: MARONITE RITUALS FOR GREAT LENT**
MSGR. JIM ROOT
- **MAR. 18: SYRIAC THEMES IN PASSION WEEK**
FR. AARON SANDBOTHE
- **MAR. 25: MARY IN OUR MARONITE TRADITION**
FR. KEVIN BEATON

Via Zoom on Thursdays 8:00-9:15PM

HOSTED BY THE MARONITE SERVANTS OF CHRIST THE LIGHT

UPDATE: Maronite Eparchies Successfully Complete Seminarian Endowment Matching Gift Challenge!

In an inspiring display of generosity under difficult circumstances, members of the Order of Saint Sharbel helped the Maronite Eparchies earn \$50,000 in matching grants in 2020 from Catholic Extension Society for their Seminarian Endowment funds.

Catholic Extension Society announced in January 2020 that it would make a \$25,000 grant to each Maronite Eparchy if each Eparchy enrolled at least 15 new Perpetual Members in the Order by 31 December.

Despite the impact of COVID-19 and other challenges of 2020, 15 new Perpetual Members joined the Order in the Eparchy of Saint Maron, and 20 new Perpetual Members joined the Order in the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon!

Order of Saint Sharbel President, Jim Abdo, helped lead the effort, along with Vice Presidents Mary Milton and Charlene Hiffa, Secretary Debbie Fernandez, and several local members and leaders. Parishes in Alabama, California, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas registered the most new Perpetual Members.

This marked the fifth time the two Eparchies earned matching grants from Catholic Extension: 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 and now 2020. The Eparchies were selected after a competitive application process each time.

Several other dioceses were unable to complete the challenge in 2020 and postponed their participation to 2021.

Bishops Gregory J. Mansour and A. Elias Zaidan thanked members of the Order, stating "Your gifts help form Maronite seminarians today, that they may serve as Maronite priests in the future. May God bless you!"

Annual Membership in the Order requires a donation of \$500 each year; Perpetual Membership is a one-time donation of \$5,000. Information on enrolling in the Order can be found on the Order's website, www.orderstsharbel.org, or by contacting:

- **James Abdo**, President of the Order (jabdo@abdobooks.com)
- **Mary Milton**, Vice President, Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles (marymiltonremax@gmail.com)
- **Charlene Hiffa**, Vice President, Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn (mchiffa@bellsouth.net)
- **John Kurey**, Stewardship Director, Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon (718-237-9913/314-231-1021; or saintmaron@yahoo.com/maroniteswest@yahoo.com).

The Order of Saint Sharbel New Members

ANNUAL

TONI BOUTROS | *Our Lady of the Cedars* | Houston, TX
ROY CHEMALY | *Our Lady of the Cedars* | Houston, TX
GEORGE SALEMIE | *Our Lady's Parish* | Austin, TX
CHRISTOPHER WYDER | *St. Joseph* | Waterville, ME

PERPETUAL

DR. NAJI ELKHOURY | *St. Louis Gonzaga* | Utica, NY
CAMILLE FARHAT | *St. Maron* | Minneapolis, MN
MICHAEL KHALIFE | *St. Anthony/St. George* | Wilkes-Barre, PA
JOHN JESSER | *Our Lady of the Cedars* | Fairlawn, OH
ERNEST KARAM | *St. George* | San Antonio, TX
KENNETH RAFFOL | *Our Lady of the Cedars* | Jamaica Plain, MA
NAYLA RAFFOL | *Our Lady of the Cedars* | Jamaica Plain, MA
FRED SIMON | *St. George* | Cranston, RI
REGINA BLANDE WYNNE | *Mary, Mother of the Light* | Tequesta, FL

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

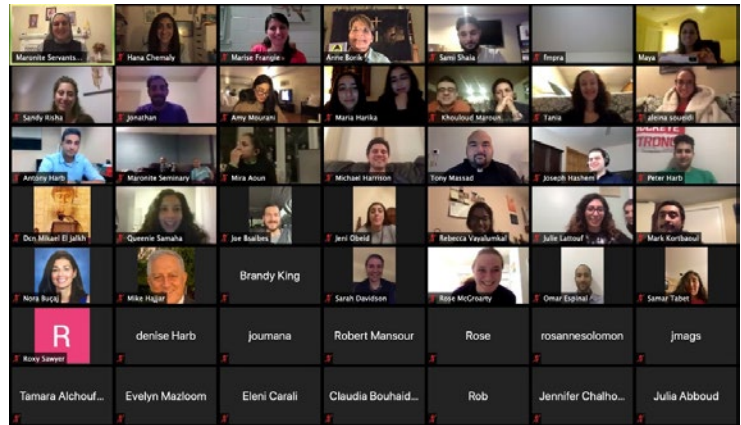
National MYA 2020 Wrap-Up

The National Maronite Young Adults rounded out 2020 with a series of virtual events bringing Maronites from across the United States together for holiday celebrations, prayer, and study:

4 October

History and Significance of the Rosary

The Worship team hosted a Zoom event discussing the history and significance of the Rosary. Early origins, the visions of Mary at Fatima, and the mysteries were mentioned within the presentation. At the end of the presentation, an intentional rosary for Holy Rosary Sunday was led by the members of the National MYA board.



1 November

The Process of Becoming a Saint & Halloween Highlighting Saint Barbara

The Worship team hosted a Zoom event discussing the process of becoming a saint and the history of the Western feast of All Saints Day. The event featured St. Barbara and included a discussion of Eid El Barbara. All the MYA members talked about their favorite saint and their baptismal name.

19 November | Friendsgiving

The Activities Team hosted a social event where all the attendees were shuffled into breakout sessions to meet one another and talk before being shuffled into a new group. This gave everyone the opportunity to meet each other and exchange contact information and fun stories about their thanksgiving traditions.





15 December

O Come Emmanuel

The Worship team hosted a Zoom event, with the Bishops as guest speakers, to talk about how to prepare ourselves for the birth of Jesus Christ and the Maronite perspective of Christmas. Throughout the presentation, we highlighted St. Nicholas, the Holy Family, angels and fun facts about Christmas. The participating MYA members were put into breakout sessions to discuss how they prepare themselves for the birth of Jesus Christ and their favorite Christmas traditions.



22 December

Ugly Christmas Sweater Party Game Night

The last MYA event of the year was held by the Activities team. They organized and hosted a competition to see who wore the “Ugliest” Christmas sweater amongst the attendees. The winner won a custom MYA mug. Then, everyone voted for their favorite board member’s Christmas sweater. The event ended with a round of Christmas Trivia before wishing everyone a Merry Christmas! 🍷



MYO | A Night in Bethlehem

by Peter Harb

The other day, I decided that it was time for a mass cleanup of the clutter in my house. I got rid of anything broken or no longer working, along with items that have piled up over the years that did not have any value and were just gathering dust. My end goal was to make room for the items that are of value that provide a sense of comfort, security, and benefit.

Now, don't get too excited. I'm not advertising my great skills for a home cleaning service. Rather, this reminded me of what we are called to do each and every Christmas season, and what we did with our Maronite Youth Organization members from around the country.

On 18 December 2020, the National Maronite Youth Organization hosted "A Night in Bethlehem: Make Room in your Hearts," which was an evening of prayer and hope as we celebrated and prepared for the birth of our Lord. We were joined by both Bishop Elias Zaidan and Bishop Gregory Mansour, along with a special message of hope and courage from our Maronite Patriarch Mar Bechara Peter Rai. Throughout this special evening, we were able to come together and learn about the significance of Bethlehem as the "House of Bread," and the selfless love and example of the Holy Family, as well as inspiring scripture reflections given by some of our youth leaders. We were blessed to have the Our Lady Star of the East Church in Pleasantville, NJ, host



adoration, where we were able to pray together and prepare our hearts for the coming of our Lord. And of course, we closed our night with a fun Christmas movie.

You must be wondering, “What does your cleaning your house have to do with this beautiful season of Christmas?” Well, it actually relates to one of the most critical and important messages from our evening. Just like when we clean our homes to make room for those items of value, so also are we called to make room in our hearts for the coming of our Lord and Savior. This evening opened our eyes to see that with the birth of Jesus, all despair, hatred, sadness, and chaos ceases to exist. All of our doubts and

burdens are taken up by Him as he welcomes hope, love, peace, and unity. The birth of our Lord provides us with a sense of comfort and an overwhelming joy that pushes out that dust and brokenness that is inside of us. When we truly welcome our Lord with open arms, when we are truly ready to live out our lives as His disciples, we truly make room in our hearts for Him.

Together, during this joyful season and as we begin a new year, let us always aim to serve others, be the light amidst the darkness, and strive to live our lives pleasing to the one who gave them to us. And when we go astray, Jesus will always be there to help us clear the dust and make room in our hearts. ■



He said to them, “Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”
At once they left their nets and followed him. (MT 4:19-20)

Syriac Monasticism: Individualism, Asceticism, and Symbolism

by Fr. David A. Fisher

Three Types of Monasticism

Every man and woman who has committed their lives to the monastic life, have heard the *apostolic calling*, “Come, follow me.” (MT 4:19). As the pagan stadiums drenched with the blood of the first Christian martyrs began to recede into the memory of the Church, the next generation of those filled with Christian zeal and the desire to die to self, embraced their share of the cross in the monastic life.

Eventually the *three pillars of monasticism* emerged, each embraced by men and women. First was the hermit or solitary, called the *eremitic*. Second was the formal monastery life, living in common under a rule and directed by an Abbot or Abbess, and this was called *cenobitic*. Third was the life of many individual hermitages, living in close proximity thus allowing for some common times of prayer, and this was called the *skete*.

Three Characteristics of Syriac Monasticism

Individualism was the first characteristic of Syriac monasticism; playing a greater role in the shaping of a monk's spirituality, as compared to the Roman/Latin or Byzantine/Greek traditions.

While exact historical information on the formation of the Syriac Christian world that emerged from Edessa and Adiabene is scant until the fourth century, from the writings of Saint Ephrem (306-373) and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (ca. 393 - ca. 466), we see a somewhat fractured and contentious religious environment due to the extreme individualism of its members.

The hermit (anchorite/solitary) monk seems to have dominated in the Syriac Church as the preferred way of life until the fourth century. Monks like Jacob of Nisibis were known to live in the wilderness, far from others, living with very few material goods. During the fourth century, there emerges the other forms of monasticism but still with the characteristic

Christian monasticism began in the ancient Near East of Egypt, Greater Syria, and Greater Persia. Saint Anthony the Great, of Egypt (251-356) who was himself a disciple of Saint Paul of Thebes († 339), began a spiritual movement that later became known collectively as that of the *Desert Fathers*; remembering that women were also part of this vast movement. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 296-373), in writing about the life of Anthony, tells us that so many men and women followed him into the monastic life that *the desert became a city*.





individualism playing a central role. Even by the time of the great mystic Saint Isaac of Nineveh (ca. 613-ca. 700) in the seventh century, he was known to have lived at times alone for many years, and at times in a monastic community.

This individualism in some areas reached an extreme form of spirituality called Messalianism, a term taken from the Syriac language that expressed the emphasis on personal prayer over sacramental/liturgical prayer. Stephen bar Sudaili (late 5th century), typified this extreme interiorized, personalized approach to spiritual life, as he came to influence many monastic communities with his spiritual approach.

What is unique and challenging about the individualism of Syriac monasticism is that it was also a missionary spirituality. We see in the writings of John of Ephesus (6th c.), a leader of the early Syriac Orthodox Church in the sixth century and one of the earliest and the most important historians to write in Syriac, that these monks were teachers, missionaries, healers, settlers of disputes; while at the same time living in the world but not being of it.

Asceticism is a life of simplicity, poverty, self-denial, a life of rigorism. One fascinating fact for the origins of the ascetical approach in Syriac spirituality was the use of the *Diatessaron*. This was a harmonizing of the Four Gospels into a single Gospel, done by Tatian of Adiabene (120-180), an Assyrian who studied and lived in Rome. He returned to Assyria in 772 because he sought the rigorism of the East over what he felt



was the laxity of the West. Tatian kept revising the *Diatessaron* for the purpose of making it more ascetical. He changed passages to support his views that most should seek celibacy, and Christians should abstain from meat, owning property, and drinking wine.

There were many Syriac writings from monastic theologians that stressed the asceticism that should be attached to baptism. The *Acts of Judas Thomas* and the *Odes of Solomon* stress that one should seek

“Syriac Monasticism: Individualism, Asceticism, and Symbolism”

Continued from page 23

perpetual virginity, chastity in marriage and perhaps that all baptized Christians should seek to live like monks and nuns.

Within this context of asceticism there began a unique religious community called the *Sons of the Covenant*. These were men and women (the great Syriac writer Aphrahat (ca. 270-ca. 345) seems to have been a member) who did not marry, sometimes lived in small communities, sometimes with their parents, sometimes in their own homes. They were unique to the Syriac tradition and represent a merger of individualism and asceticism in a loose communal context.

The long tradition of extreme asceticism and disdain for the world, lead to a reformation with the Syriac monastic world, with Ephrem in the fourth century, Philoxenus of Mabbug (449-532) in fifth century, and John of Ephesus in the sixth century, a reformation that combined asceticism with an affirmation that God created all things, and therefore creation is good.

The Syriac ascetic, like Aphrahat, Ephrem and others came to realize that the goal of asceticism was to control the body that leads to sin, so that the mind will rise to the contemplation of higher things, the things of God; an approach that will be promoted in Latin Christianity by Saint Bonaventure in the thirteenth century.

Symbolism is the third characteristic of Syriac monasticism. The spirituality of symbolism expressed itself in poetry and music. It is not by chance for example that the founder of Byzantine hymnology was Saint Romanos the Melodist (ca. 490-ca. 566), a native of Beirut, who lived a monastic life in Constantinople.

Saint Ephrem is known as the “Harp of the Holy Spirit,” and Jacob of Serug (451-521) “the flute of the Holy Spirit and the harp of the believing church.” Using the images supplied by Sacred Scripture and



with firm faith in the epiphany of God in the Incarnation of Christ, poetry became their vehicle of expressing the inexhaustible truths of the Christian faith.

Conclusion

Syriac Christianity formed the “Light of the East.” Its dynamic monasticism was stifled in its expansive missionary activity by the rise of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries; there was given the witness of countless men and women who followed the call of the Lord to come and follow him. Through lives of simplicity, prayer, theological reflection, and missionary activity, they carried the gospel to the ends of the earth. ■

A handful of sand, thrown into the sea, is what sinning is, when compared to God’s Providence and mercy. Just like an abundant source of water is not impeded by a handful of dust, so is the Creator’s mercy not defeated by the sins of His creatures.

— SAINT ISAAC OF NINEVEH

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



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

Parish News

DANBURY, CONNECTICUT

St. Anthony MYO Fall Activities

By Judge Dianne Yamin

Despite the COVID pandemic, the MYO of St. Anthony Church in Danbury, CT, gathered together wearing masks and socially distancing. With the spiritual guidance of Fr. Naji Kiwan, pastor, and the assistance of three advisors, Pascale Tawk, Cheri Jowdy, and Dianne Yamin, several MYO members met monthly to discuss church projects, elect officers, review scripture readings, and pray to God for strength during this health crisis.

The MYO church activities: created affirmation boards (posters of positive affirmations and thoughts), read about the newly beatified youth, Carlo Acutis, discussed Corinthians Chapter 13 (Love is Patient...), watched the movie "Pray," and attended the national youth retreat A Night in Bethlehem provided by the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light.

The MYO community projects: conducted a food drive and delivery to families in need, donated food to the Jericho Pantry (nonprofit collaboration of ministry organizations and congregations serving the at-risk Danbury community for the glory of God and the benefit of the people), and purchased gifts listed on ornaments from the parish MYO Giving Tree for five local families identified by the Department of Children and Families. ■



FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

St. Michael the Archangel MYO Events

The young people of St. Michael the Archangel, Fayetteville, NC, have been busy serving others this fall.

In October, they prepared and delivered 27 boxed spaghetti dinners and 30 snack bags for the homeless of Fayetteville. Teens and adults carved four pumpkins at the Annual Parish Pumpkin Carving Party. The Halloween pumpkins were delivered to St. Michael's parishioners who were homebound during these difficult times.

In November, at the MYO meeting, the MYO filled 37 Thanksgiving "Blessing Bags" for the residents in the Fayetteville Veterans Home. "Pilgrim Hat" potted plants were also given to six homebound parishioners.

Finally, in early December, the youths assisted Subdeacon Ron and Wanda Foster with fall foliage clean-up on church grounds, the rectory, and for parishioners in need of assistance. Many thanks are extended to Subdeacon Ron and his wife Wanda for their donation to the youths in gratitude for their hard work. ■



Parish News

GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA

Christmas Charities

This year at St. Anthony Church, charity began at home, but did not start there. Under the direction of Theresa Shibley, the parishioners conducted a Christmas Star program. It works like this: In collaboration with local charities, children write what they want for Christmas on an ornament for the Christmas tree in the church lobby. Parishioners then take one or more stars and fulfill the Christmas wishes of the child. There were a hundred stars and all were taken. A Christmas tree empty of ornaments makes us happy! Hundreds of gifts were distributed to local children.

St. Anthony has a tradition of having a Christmas benefit dinner to help needy children in Lebanon. This year the need was greater than ever. The pandemic would not permit a traditional dinner, but that did not stop Melanie Meadows, Mary Cole, Gus Harika and others. This year, everything was “takeout.” Those who were disappointed at not having the fellowship were consoled by the delicious kibbee that was in each dinner. The delicious dinners were distributed in an organized and safe manner. Parishioners bought the dinners, but some also gave generously in support of the good cause. The parish sent \$27,386.33 to Bishop Gregory J. Mansour for distribution to Lebanese childcare institutions. ■



HOUSTON, TEXAS

Christmas Season

by Marcella Georges



Following the month of October, as COVID numbers were increasing rapidly, we began to decrease our in-person events one-by-one. With Thanksgiving approaching, the decision to cancel all remaining activities for the rest of 2020 was made. But have no fear; Our Lady of the Cedars always has a solution to keep our parishioners engaged.

Adult Bible Study was led by Abouna Edward on Zoom every Wednesday evening during the month of November. To keep our MYA involved from home, Bible Study was held on 3 December via Zoom. MYO's Regional Night in Bethlehem was an awesome way to get in touch with members from across the region and allow them to come together virtually for an evening of prayer.

Like many of our events, the annual Christmas Novena was held online this year. All nine days of prayer were beautifully written and sent out every day to keep the spirit of Christmas alive. Our amazing Choir held the annual

Christmas Concert on Saturday, 12 December, led by choir director Joseph Rouhana. As Jacob Karam played the piano, five members, Michel Youssef, Mona Daniel, Mirielle Kreiche, Tiffany Rouhana, and Vanessa Kmeid sang their hearts out to some classic Christmas songs!

On Thursday, 17 December, our very own Fr. Edward held an in-person and virtual Christmas Spiritual Retreat and Eucharistic Adoration. The retreat began with silent adoration for one hour, followed by two talks and reflections, a closing prayer and procession, and ended with Liturgy and the Christmas Novena. Many parishioners were able to live-stream through our social media outlets, making the retreat a huge success.

Our four Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Divine Liturgies were celebrated by our joyous parishioners as the season came to an end and we began to prepare for the upcoming year. ■

Parish News

UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Christmas During COVID

by Dr. Mabel George Howard and Fr. Aaron J. Sandbothe

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020 was a difficult year affecting those far and near. Many St. George families were quarantined and unable to celebrate Christmas together. They looked forward to the Christmas Season as a time for showing kindness and praying for family and friends. During the Christmas holiday, the faithful of St. George Church found ways (both old and new) to connect and celebrate Christmas as a parish family.

Fr. Aaron continued his ongoing adult faith formation series *What is the Church?* — focusing on the different ecclesial traditions in Christianity. Attending in person or through live stream, participants studied the Latin and West Syriac traditions, examining their history, liturgies, spiritual writers, and distinctive features. The class will turn towards the East Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian traditions in the new year.

The traditional Christmas novena was chanted each evening leading up to Christmas. Many parishioners and Catholics from across the region came to pray and took advantage of the opportunity to make a confession before the feast day. The novena was live-streamed for those at home, and the text of the novena was emailed from the parish each day so that everyone could participate.

Facing rising cases in the region and an unexpected winter storm on Christmas Eve, parishioners and friends remained undaunted and gathered together (in person and virtually) to celebrate the Birth of Our Lord. They prayed Evening Prayer and Night Prayer on Christmas Eve which included a beautiful candlelit Liturgy for the feast of Christmas.



Parishioners paid tribute to their loved ones (living and/or deceased) by donating Christmas poinsettia flowers that adorned the altar and sanctuary. Those honored and memorialized by the poinsettias were commemorated during the Christmas liturgies. Symbolically, the star-shaped poinsettia flower recalls the star that led the Magi to Bethlehem and the Holy Infant. ■

UTICA, NEW YORK

St. Louis Gonzaga Parish Bell Recovered

by Rick Blank

I think we all can agree that 2020 was one of the most challenging, frustrating, and heartbreaking years in our lifetimes. Here at Saint Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, New York, we had a similarly trying year but had a beautiful intervention that was able to lift our spirits immensely.

Our original church in Utica was built in 1910 and was a modest structure built and financed literally with the pennies of the immigrants that came to Utica with a dream and what little they had in their pockets.

While quarantining from travel in April, I was looking at advertisements on Craigslist when I found an ad for a Church bell. Obviously, I had no need for a church bell but was drawn to see what it was. To my shock, it was the bell from Saint Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, New York dated May 15, 1912. Given the exciting news and afraid that someone would purchase the bell to sell for scrap, I set out on a mission to secure the money to bring the bell back to Saint Louis Gonzaga Church. Within 24 hours, I had secured enough money from our current Holy Name Society and generous parishioners, local and distant, to not only reacquire the bell but to have a beautiful display made for this treasure.

On 20 December, we celebrated our 110th anniversary by rededicating and blessing the newly recovered bell. Father Boutros El-Hachem thanked the Holy Name Society and the many donors who helped return the church bell and restore it to its original glory. Father Boutros added, "May its presence be a reminder of all those who have gone before us and sacrificed so much for this church and our people and may this symbol lift the hearts of Saint Louis Church, their families, and loved ones today and all the days to come."

We are still a modest church but are emboldened by this small miracle to move forward into 2021 with our heads up and looking forward to our next miracle. ■



Parish News

YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO

Vacation Bible School



This summer, St. Maron Church in Youngstown, OH, took on the challenge of holding Vacation Bible School (VBS) during the pandemic. It was a great success thanks to all the volunteers and helpers who assisted us in keeping everyone

that embraced the theme of faith, hope and love.

Fr. Tony Massad led the charge in bringing this large endeavor to life during such an unprecedented time. Subdeacon Chris Nahra

safe. We had over 25 children attend this year. The theme was *Faith, Hope, and Love*. Each day, the children participated in a bible lesson, a craft, learned Christian songs with hand movements, and played games

brought his amazing energy to VBS with his songs and dances that kept the children entertained. Each day focused on one theme: The children made a cross to represent faith, a sun to represent hope, and a heart to represent love. The crosses, suns, and hearts were then displayed on fabric behind the altar. The children also made tie-dye shirts that were folded to form a cross when it was unraveled. On the last day of VBS, the children decorated the sidewalk and entry way with chalk to display all the things they learned about Jesus and the virtues of faith, hope, and love.

Overall, in this scary time for children, and the uncertainty that lies ahead, St. Maron of Youngstown made its children feel like they were safe in God's house. They even got to perform the songs they learned at church that Sunday. We are looking forward to next year. ■

WATERVILLE, MAINE

Teaching the Maronite Faith

by Gayle Misner-Elias

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Joseph Church in Waterville, ME, has been host to numerous families who previously had little exposure to the Maronite Church. Many of these families were homeschooling their children, and some of the new parishioners felt that this was the perfect opportunity to set up a home school CO-OP. Fr. Doran taught the older children about the history and beauty of the Maronite people. In the meantime, Subdeacon Crate prepared the younger children for their First Holy Communion.

Word spread quickly about the lessons in Maronite identity, and many parishioners (young and old) attended Friday sessions, which included the history of the region, the

catechism, and an exposure to the Syriac language. With Fr. Doran's vast knowledge and love for the Maronite tradition, the group grew to nearly 40 participants by winter break. The congregation looks forward to resuming classes in the 2021 New Year. Fr. Doran continues to instruct and provide information for each part of the Divine Liturgy. ■



PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Christmas Novena Tree

by Suzanne Tavani

Each year, the Maronite Christmas Novena (15-23 December) provides the faithful of St. Maron's Church in Philadelphia, PA, with a rich and meaningful way of preparing for the birth of Our Lord. It gives parishioners the opportunity to adore Our Lord and to reflect upon His humility, love, and divinity. What better way to prepare for the coming of Our Savior than by recognizing the good deeds of individuals locally and globally. On each evening of the Novena, Fr. Andrewos El-Tabchi, acknowledged the contributions and needs of nine distinct groups. Traditional hymns and prayers were chanted in Syriac, and special prayer intentions were offered for each group listed.

- Day One — First Responders
- Day Two — Health Care Workers
- Day Three — People Enduring Sickness
- Day Four — World Peace
- Day Five — Consecrated Vocations (Priests, Nuns, Monks, Seminarians)
- Day Six — Special Intentions
- Day Seven — Education (Teachers and Students)
- Day Eight — Youth of the Parish
- Day Nine — The Parish

Father Andrewos hung one ornament each night on the parish Christmas tree. Every ornament, made by the Christmas committee, was specifically designed to represent the members of each group. The Novena and weekly liturgies were live-streamed on Facebook allowing parishioners and community members to participate as everyone continues to face challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. ■





Maronite Jewelry As unique as it is Beautiful!

- A. Large Antiochene Cross
- B. Small Antiochene Cross
- C. Rubbula Cross
- D. Saint Sharbel in Circle Cross
- E. Saint Sharbel Medal
- F. Large Saint Sharbel Medal
- G. Solid Rope Chain
- H. Solid Heavy Rope Chain
- I. Camel
- J. Gents Cedar Tree Ring
- K. Cedar Tree Cuff Links
- L. Small Circle Cedar
- M. Large Cedar Tree
- N. Serpent Bracelet
- O. Bangle Bracelet
- P. Antiochene Cross Ring

All available in Gold & Silver
Due to the fluctuation in gold & silver
please call for daily pricing

Available only at

cappiellojewelers.com



Going Deeper

INTO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE...

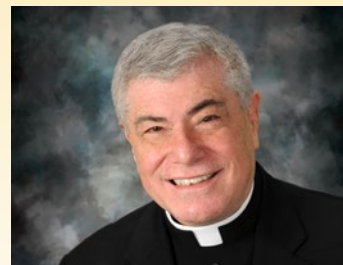
This “Going Deeper” column has been our attempt to help readers of *The Maronite Voice* to go deeper in their spiritual life and to find God. This year we have chosen the theme of our own personal witness. Although we may think we’re doing well in our faith lives, we may be unpleasantly surprised by something we’ve missed, by our own shortcomings that we have been unwilling to face, or by our own vulnerabilities that we don’t want to admit.

In 2021, I have asked a few people from different walks of life: lay, clergy and religious, to reflect on their own experience of personal conversion, and their own successes and failures, consolations and desolations in their witness to Christ.

It is my hope that by reflecting in an honest way on our own need for God and for his saving help, we will each find a way to live with ourselves and others with more love, more integrity and yes, more ease with our vulnerabilities. Thank you. ■

+Bishop Gregory Mansour

From the Editor



Who is my neighbor?

Dealing with neighbors has always been a challenge. North America was colonized because Europeans could not get along with their neighbors. Our nation expanded at the tragic expense of new neighbors, Native Americans. Legend tells us that Abraham Lincoln's father moved his family away whenever he could see the smoke from a neighbor's chimney — he didn't want neighbors. But rugged individualism could not last because most of us began to live in towns and cities.

Living in neighborhoods became inevitable.

People who were different in terms of race, religion, politics, wealth or social standing were brought together and challenged to figure out how to create a neighborhood. Our efforts have met with varying degrees of success.

During the second half of the twentieth century, "Mister Rogers," praised neighborhoods and encouraged children to have healthy relationships with their neighbors with the song

I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you
I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you . . .
Would you be mine? Could you be mine?
Won't you be my neighbor?

The internet, with its social media has radically changed our neighborhood. We now have millions of "neighbors."

Never in history have people been challenged to live in such a difficult and dangerous neighborhood.

Our daily interactions have become addictive behavior filled with too much information, silly images, frivolous anecdotes, unwanted news, false information, angry attacks and defenses. Privacy has almost disappeared. The neighborhood has become loud, cluttered with information and void of communication.

Our neighbor is not only someone dear to our hearts. **Our real life neighborhood needs to expand to include anyone who needs our love and compassion.**

Our social media neighborhood needs to get smaller — we are not built to interact with thousands of people on a daily basis. As a consequence, social media is filled with anger and disrespect. Good fences make good neighbors. Set boundaries and be careful of the neighborhoods you enter. Even in cyberspace, there is a need for social distancing and to treat others with politeness and respect.

In both neighborhoods, it's back to basics: Jesus *commands* us, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ■

John D. Faris

Chorbishop John D. Faris

THE MARONITE VOICE
ST. ANTHONY'S MARONITE CATHOLIC CHURCH
4611 SADLER ROAD
GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA 23060-6108

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 1370
GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA

THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL

MAKE A DIFFERENCE OF A LIFETIME AND GIVE A GIFT THIS SPRING
ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A SPECIAL GRADUATION DAY GIFT? A FIRST
COMMUNION GIFT? ANY KIND OF GIFT?

Do you wish your child, grandchild, godchild, family member or anyone special to you
would remain close to their faith and the Maronite Church?

Considering enrolling them in the Order of Saint Sharbel.

GO TO: www.orderstsharbel.org



Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn
109 Remsen Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201
saintmaron@yahoo.com

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