

# The Maronite Voice

*A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA*



Volume VIII

Issue No. V

May 2012

## A Tribute to Bishop John Chedid



*Dear Friends,*

Greetings and Peace!

With the passing away of Bishop John Chedid, we close a page in that special era of the history of our Maronite Church in the United States. A young priest at the age of thirty-three in 1956, Bishop John Chedid was sent to Los Angeles, Calif., to serve the parish community. When Archbishop Zayek became the bishop of the new diocese of Saint Maron - U.S.A. in 1971, he relied on Bishop Chedid to be the Judicial Vicar. Bishop Chedid was a proficient Canon lawyer who earned his Doctoral degree in Canon Law from the Lateran University in Rome. He served well in this capacity and helped many people handling many difficult and delicate cases. In 1980, he was nominated to be an Auxiliary Bishop. He put himself at the service of Archbishop Francis Zayek loyally for thirteen years without asking for recognition or demanding certain responsibilities.

In 1994, he became the first Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon. It was his responsibility to establish the new Eparchy on a solid foundation, and he passed the torch of leadership to me in 2001. While retiring, he never interfered in the management of the diocese but he always stood ready to give any advice, opinion or suggestion when asked. During all this time, he served the Maronite people with a great spirit of dedication and joy.

Bishop Chedid was wise and prudent in all of the choices and decisions he made. He never rushed his decisions but took time to deliberate and pray. He was a generous individual who would always open his heart to visiting clergy. He was always a loyal and faithful son to the Church's authority and a humble shepherd of the flock entrusted to him. He was so disciplined and faithfully followed his daily routine: celebrating the Divine Liturgy, walking and praying the

Rosary. He knew that his life was a total dedication to God and the Church.

Dear friends, let us all voice our prayers of praise and thanksgiving to the Almighty God for the life of leadership and service of Bishop Chedid. May the Lord reward him for all his faithful ministry on earth by welcoming him into His heavenly dwellings.

Sincerely yours in Christ,  
+Robert J. Shaheen, D.D.  
Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon

## Schedule of Bishop Robert Shaheen

### May 1- 3, 2012

Mexico City with Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai

### May 6, 2012

Forty-Day Liturgy for Bishop Chedid. St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

### May 13 - 15, 2012

Patriarch Rai's Visit to Saint Sharbel Church, Warren, Mich.

### May 17, 2012

Clergy Day With Patriarch Rai, Saint Louis, Mo.

### May 18 - 20, 2012

Saint Louis University Program with Patriarch Rai

### June 3, 2012

Thanksgiving Liturgy, St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo.

### June 6, 2012

Lebanon Visit

### June 11- 23, 2012

Maronite Bishops' Synod, *Bkerke*, Lebanon. □

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### Maronite Convention 2012

St. George Maronite Church

San Antonio, Texas

July 4 - 8, 2012

For more information  
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at (914) 964-3070  
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## Bishop Antoine Hamid Mourani Passes Away

Bishop Antoine Hamid Mourani, Bishop Emeritus of the Maronite Eparchy of Damascus, Syria, passed away in Lebanon on April 16, 2012. The Funeral Liturgy took place at the Patriarchal Chapel in *Bkerke*, Lebanon, on April 19, 2012.

He Mourani is survived by his brothers, Walid, Ameid, Mageid, Yazeid and Jabbour; his two sisters, Amal Elias and Nawal; as well as his sister-in-law Houaida, widow of his late brother Moufeid.

Bishop Mourani was born in *Minyarah, Akhar*, Lebanon, in 1930. He attended St. Maron Minor Seminary in *Ghazir*, and in 1949 he attended the Oriental Major Seminary in Beirut where he earned a degree in Philosophy. In 1953 he attended the College of the *Propaganda Fidei* in Rome, Italy, and earned a degree in Theology. In 1960 the late Bishop Antoine Abed ordained him a priest.

From 1960 -1963, Bishop Mourani taught Philosophy and Anthropology at the Faculty of Theology at St. Joseph University in Beirut. In 1974 he earned a Ph.D. from the University of Regensburg in Germany. From 1976 - 1979 he taught Greek and Modern Philosophy at the Lebanese University in Beirut.

Along with a group of priests he was instrumental in establishing the "Church for our World" movement in 1969.

Fluent in Arabic, French, Italian, German, Latin, Greek and Syriac and a prolific writer and philosopher, Bishop Mourani authored numerous books and articles on politics, religion, education and society. On July 24, 1989, the College of Maronite Bishops elected him Bishop of the Eparchy of Damascus, Syria, and he was ordained on September 16, 1989.

Bishop Gregory Mansour and Bishop Robert Shaheen, along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Bishop Mourani's family. May the Lord God grant his servant Antoine Hamid, eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to his family and loved ones. □



## Vocations Discernment Weekend at Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary



Fr. Tony Massad with the three potential seminarians in front of the Capitol.

On Friday, April 13, 2012, three men arrived at Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary in Washington, D.C., to spend the weekend learning and thinking about the priesthood. The men came from Ohio, New Jersey, and South Carolina. They were not sure what to expect. For many future priests, this is one of the hardest steps. It takes courage for them to publicly say they are considering living life as a priest. They are uncertain of the reaction of family and friends, and many are uncertain if they are worthy of such a life. Who am I to be a priest?

The Vocations Weekend can be an important step in the life of a man discerning whether or not he has a vocation to be a priest. The man may have his own thoughts about what it means to study for the priesthood and live the life of a seminarian. He may also have his own ideas about what it means to be a priest. The weekend may be his first chance to truly experience life in a seminary and to speak with and listen to priests who live the life each day. It may be his first encounter with the priesthood beyond his own parish priest.

As Msgr. Seely Beggiani, Rector of the Seminary, said in speaking about the weekend, "...It gives a man who has only an abstract idea of the priesthood a sense of reality about what it actually means to be a priest." It is only a weekend and only so much of the experience of the priesthood can be transmitted, but it is a beginning.

It is also a time for Msgr. Beggiani and others to meet and spend time with the men. This is important because they might be evaluating some of these men one day if they do apply to the Seminary. They get to know the potential

candidates better by observing and listening to them. They can better understand their desire to consider the priesthood. They can learn about backgrounds and family life. These men will be more than a name on a piece of paper if they do apply one day. The Vocations Weekend is a very worthwhile time for both the men considering the priesthood and those who may evaluate their application to enter the Seminary.

The weekend began on Friday afternoon as the potential candidates joined Msgr. Seely Beggiani, Msgr. Sharbel Maroun, Fr. Tony Massad, Msgr. Ignace Sadek, Fr. Armando Elkhoury, and the current seminarians for liturgy. After dinner together, everyone gathered for a time to discuss the priesthood and seminary life. They discussed the signs a man might encounter if he truly has a vocation to the priesthood, and the opportunities and challenges of being a priest. There was talk of what it means to live, pray, and study together in the same house for four years. They tried to understand what the structured life of the seminary means for someone who is used to his own freedom and schedule and if it is a loss of freedom or is it a new form of freedom in living one's life completely

for Christ.

On Saturday morning after breakfast and liturgy, Msgr. Beggiani gave his own reflections on the priesthood. He discussed what he saw as the signs that would indicate a possible vocation. He also pointed out that the priesthood and the call to celibacy required a generosity of spirit. He discussed the academic requirements of Catholic University of America where they would study. Catholic University of America is one of the premier institutions in the United States, and the study would be rigorous.

Saturday afternoon was spent sightseeing. They visited the Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception with its new Maronite Chapel. They toured the adjacent Catholic University of America where one day they might be students. There was also time to see the nation's capital with its many important buildings and monuments. The tour was followed by dinner and fellowship at a local restaurant.

Sunday morning was a time for them to attend the Divine Liturgy with Msgr. Dominic Ashkar and parishioners of Our Lady of Lebanon. Msgr. Ashkar recognized the men, who were warmly welcomed by the people. They had time after liturgy to meet and speak with many parishioners in the social hall. They learned that many people are praying for them and all men who are considering the priesthood. It was an opportunity for them to understand how the people long to have new vocations coming into the priesthood. The Church needs new and dedicated priests. The Vocations Weekend is an important time for men thinking about the priesthood and for those who manage the vocations program. □

# THE ORDER OF SAINT SHARBEL



## Annual Members

### ★ Kenneth Sledd

Saint Anthony Maronite Church,  
Glen Allen, Va..

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 or write

to

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Order of Saint Sharbel  
109 Remsen Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Or

Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon  
Order of Saint Sharbel  
1021 South 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
St. Louis, MO 63104

## Fostering Vocations



Sister Marla Marie, Bishop Gregory Mansour and Sister Teresa Touma with members of the MYO/MYA at their regional retreat in Brooklyn, N.Y.

by *The Maronite Servants*

Pope Benedict XVI, in his message for the 2012 World Day of Prayer for Vocations, emphasized the need for parish communities, organizations and especially families to play a vital role in fostering vocations. In his message, entitled "Vocations, the Gift of the Love of God," the Pope says, "It is important for the Church to create the conditions that will permit many young people to say "yes" in generous response to God's loving call. The task of fostering vocations will be to provide helpful guidance and direction along the way."

The family is especially highlighted in the Pope's message, and he challenges parents to be a "community of life and love." He writes, "Indeed families are not only the privileged place for human and Christian formation; they can also be the primary and most excellent seed-bed of vocations to a life of consecration to the Kingdom of God, by helping their member to see, precisely within the family, the beauty and the importance of the priesthood and the consecrated life."

Our Holy Father also stressed the need to help young people to grow in a life of prayer to help them discern their vocations in life whether it is to marriage, priesthood, or religious life. He explains, "Central to this should be love of God's Word nourished by a growing familiarity with Sacred Scripture, and attentive and unceasing prayer, both personal and in community; this will make it possible to hear God's call amid all the voices of daily life. But above all, the Eucharist should be the heart of every vocation journey."

### **Retreat Date**


As a response to the Pope's message, the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light will be facilitating an overnight retreat for women ages 18-30 to help deepen their life of prayer. The retreat is scheduled for June 1 - 2, 2012, at the convent in Dartmouth, Mass. Details are on Facebook or you may contact the Sisters at 508/996-1753 or sister@maroniteservants.org. Other dates can also be arranged. Please call. □

## Eparchial Appointment

**H**is Excellency Robert Shaheen, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, has made the following eparchial assignments:

- ★ **Msgr. Moussa Joseph** as Rector of Saint Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo., effective May 1, 2012
- ★ **Rev. Gary George, CSsR**, as full time Director of the Office of Youth Ministry, effective May 1, 2012. This assignment is in addition to his being the Director of the Maronite Heritage Institute in St. Louis, Mo. Fr. George leaves St. Raymond Cathedral where he served as Rector.
- ★ **Msgr. Bakhos Chidiac** as Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Wheeling, W.Va., effective June 1, 2012. Msgr. Chidiac leaves St. Rafka Church in Lakewood [Denver], Col.
- ★ **Msgr. William Bonczewski** as Pastor of Our Lady of the Cedars Church, Fairlawn [Akron], Ohio, effective June 1, 2012. Msgr. Bonczewski leaves Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Wheeling, W.Va.
- ★ **Chorbishop William Leser** as Temporary Administrator of St. Rafka Church, Lakewood [Denver], Col., effective April 23, 2012.
- ★ **Fr. Nabil Mouannes** as Pastor of Our Lady of the Rosary Mission in Carmichael, Calif., and as Administrator of St. Sharbel Mission in Stockton, Calif., effective June 1, 2012. Fr. Mouannes leaves St. Ephrem Church in San Diego, Calif.
- ★ **Fr. Toufic Nasr** as Pastor of St. Ephrem Church in El Cajon [San Diego], Calif., effective June 1, 2012. Fr. Nasr Leaves Our Lady of the Cedars in Akron, Ohio.
- ★ Also St. Anthony of the Desert Maronite Mission in El Paso, Tex., has changed its name to St. Sharbel Mission. □

## Eparchial Condolences

*Our Deepest Sympathy*  
**Roger Saad**, the brother of Chorbishop Richard Saad, Pastor of Saint Elias Maronite Church in Birmingham, Ala., passed away on April 19, 2012, in Southgate, Michigan. Bishop Robert Shaheen, along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Chorbishop Richard and his family.

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

## Saint Louis, Missouri Palm Sunday and Holy Week



Palm Sunday at St. Raymond Cathedral.

by Shelly Vitale

**T**he Saint Raymond Maronite Cathedral community in Saint Louis, Mo., celebrated Palm Sunday, April 1, 2012, with great enthusiasm and participation. Parishioners and clergy were honored with the presence of their Bishop, Robert J. Shaheen, assisted by Monsignor Moussa Joseph. Following the Liturgy, the annual Palm Sunday luncheon was held in the Cedars Hall offering traditional Lebanese cuisine prepared by volunteers who gave their time to make the day a huge success.

Bishop Shaheen and Monsignor Joseph led the parishioners in reflection and celebration during Holy Week. Services included: Liturgies, Benediction of the Cross, Blessing of the Sick, the Chrism Mass, Washing of the Feet, Adoration, Burial of Christ, the First Liturgy of Easter and the Sunday of the Glorious Resurrection. It was so gratifying to see worshipers (parishioners and visitors) inspired by the traditions and rituals of the Maronite Church.

The Cathedral was decorated with a multitude of beautiful flowers, and the choir led everyone in song with pride and passion. The entire experience was deeply meaningful and uplifting.

The Saint Raymond Cathedral community would like to thank everyone who volunteered their time to make Palm Sunday and Holy Week special. We thank Bishop Shaheen and all the clergy, our Maronite ancestors who inspired us, but most of all, big thank you to Our Heavenly Father for sacrificing His only Son for our salvation. □

## Food For Thought

*The one triune God is an ocean that cannot be crossed or explored. High is the heaven, broad the earth, deep the sea and long the ages; but higher and broader and deeper and longer is [God's] knowledge. For [God] has been adorned by nature, [God] who created it from nothing.*

St. Columban, Irish Monk and Missionary, 6<sup>th</sup> century

## Greenville, South Carolina *Feast of Saint Rafka and Lenten Parish Mission*



Bishop Doueih with Fr. Bartholomew and Altar servers.

*by Aaron Sandbothe*

**S**aint Rafka Maronite Mission, Greenville, S.C., celebrated its patronal feast and the last Sunday of Great Lent with a mission preached by His Excellency Stephen Hector Doueih, Bishop Emeritus of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. Bishop Doueih founded St. Rafka Mission, the first church outside Lebanon entrusted to the patronage of Saint Rafka, and the parish community enjoyed being able to celebrate her feast day with our founding bishop. Bishop Doueih preached the first night on a general introduction to the life of Saint Rafka. Friday night featured a Pontifical Divine Liturgy and Parish Potluck Dinner in celebration of the Feast of Saint Rafka and a Mission Sermon detailing the spirituality of Saint Rafka and a challenge to the members of the parish to bring that unique spirituality and message of redemptive suffering to the people of South Carolina. Saturday and Sunday's messages stressed the unique Syriac liturgical patrimony of Maronite Great Lent. Sunday's concluding Mission Sermon was offered in the course of another Divine Liturgy served entirely in Arabic and Syriac, a rare event for the members of St. Rafka and the greater Greenville area. Many recent immigrants and older members of the parish speak little English and Bishop Doueih graciously offered to serve the Liturgy in Arabic for our diverse community. Many from the greater Catholic and Orthodox community of Greenville attended all the Mission events and offered many thanks for being able to experience the Maronite Liturgy and hear a scholarly and deeply profound exposition of authentic Antiochene Syriac spirituality to inspire prayerful reflection during Passion Week and Pascha. The members of Saint Rafka Mission deeply thank Bishop Doueih for his gracious and moving commitment to the people of Saint Rafka and hope to make a Lenten Mission a recurring feature of our parish life. □

## New Bedford, Massachusetts *Youth Chorus*



Some of the members of the OLOP Youth Chorus join in at the annual Easter Egg Coloring. The eggs are then distributed to parishioners after the Easter Sunday Liturgy.

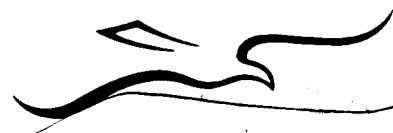
**F**or the past two years, the Youth Chorus at Our Lady of Purgatory Church [OLOP] in New Bedford, Mass., has served the Liturgy on Holy Thursday during which they have sung hymns in Syriac, Arabic and English.

This year they continued this tradition and added a new twist; they also provided the majority of the musical accompaniment on the organ, cello and violins. During the Liturgy on Holy Thursday, the children sang many of the new hymns that have been prepared by the Maronite Inter-Eparchial Music Commission to coincide with the introduction of the new translation of the Maronite Liturgy. They also sang a hymn on Hosanna Sunday and led the congregation and OLOP Choir in singing the entrance hymn on Easter Sunday.

The fourteen members of the Youth Chorus range from five years to fifteen years old. The children rehearsed on Saturday Mornings with Fr. Jack Morrison, Pastor, and Matt Thomas, who has served as coordinator of youth music at OLOP for most of the last ten years.

The children have worked very hard since September. In addition to serving during the Holy Week and Easter Liturgies, they performed the play "Who's Joe Budd?" (a short play highlighting parish history) at the annual parish Holiday Market in November and then presented the annual Christmas Pageant and Concert in December.

During the past ten years over fifty youth at Our Lady of Purgatory Church have participated in the youth music program and some of the alums still come back to work and sing with the children. The children will now take a break and will start rehearsing once again in September. □



## Brooklyn, New York *Sacred Sites Open House and Tour*



The main entrance of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral facing Henry Street in Brooklyn, N.Y.

by *Salma Vahdat*

May 20, 2012, will mark the Second Annual Sacred Sites Open House and Tour, between 1 and 4 p.m., sponsored by the New York Landmarks Conservancy. It is the country's oldest and largest statewide program providing financial and technical assistance to help historic religious properties. Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral is a historic landmark in New York's first suburb, Brooklyn Heights.

Our Lady of Lebanon's first birth was as the Church of the Pilgrims, constructed in 1844. Conceived by Richard Upjohn, a noted architect of the day, it was a departure from his usual Gothic style of building as evidenced by Trinity Church in Manhattan and Grace Church in the Heights. It was the first Romanesque Revival Church built in the United States, one which was termed a medieval equivalent of a New England meetinghouse. The cornerstone was laid on the 224<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. Construction continued until May, 1846, when its first service was conducted. Its pastor, Richard Storrs, Jr., was a notable American clergyman who was the keynote speaker at the dedication of the Brooklyn Bridge and founder of the Long Island Historical Society, now the Brooklyn Historical Society.

In 1934, as the population of the Heights changed and membership declined, the congregants merged with the nearby Plymouth Church which was also in decline. Coincidentally the Maronite community was searching for larger quarters and, finally, in 1944 the Church of the Pilgrims was reborn as Our Lady of Lebanon Church and designated in 1977 as the Cathedral of the Diocese of Saint Maron-U.S.A.

Aside from the historical significance of the edifice many artifacts contained in the Cathedral are of historic value. Our

first pastor, Chorbishop Mansour Stephen, had the foresight and elegant taste to acquire, at auction, priceless pieces of history. The Cathedral doors were reclaimed from the French liner Normandy, which sunk at its dock in N.Y. Depicted on the doors are ten medallions of the most famous cathedrals of France and a panel of the liner, Normandy. The interior doors were bought at an auction from the famous Schwab mansion in N.Y. The bronze gates at the baptistery are 17<sup>th</sup> century Italo/German in origin. The giant mural of Our Lady of Harissa above and behind the Sanctuary was painted by the famed Lebanese artist, Saliba Douaihy. The windows were the first in the U.S.A. made in the "Gemmaux" process which featured superimposing colors of glass atop one another and fusing them to create the images. There is so much more to discover in the Cathedral.

We are delighted to be included among the 675 religious sites selected in New York State for this annual tour. The Conservancy approved a grant to the Cathedral last year for repairs to the edifice which will commence shortly. It is our responsibility to be good stewards to the beautiful building which has been entrusted to us. We share in the history of our environs and are a part of the mosaic which is Brooklyn Heights. Come visit us on Sunday, May 20, 2012. You will leave richer for the experience. □

## Houston, Texas *Palm Sunday*



Palm Sunday Procession at Our Lady of the Cedars Church in Houston, Texas.

On April 1, 2012, the Catholic Church celebrated Palm Sunday. This Feast commemorates Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem and leads us into Holy Week. Our Lady of the Cedars, Houston, Tex., celebrated Palm Sunday with the Divine Liturgy, followed by a Procession led by Fr. Malek Abou Tanos, M.L.M., who was the retreat leader during Holy Week. Following the procession the Knights of the Cedars prepared a lunch for the community.

The parish would like to thank all who attended the Liturgy and took part in the procession and would especially like to thank the Knights of the Cedars for their hard work in preparing the meal. □

## Danbury, Connecticut *Holy Week Celebration*



Bishop Mansour, assisted by Fr. Jean Younes, performs the Washing of the Feet Ceremony at St. Anthony Church in Danbury, Conn.

**S**t. Anthony Maronite Church in Danbury, Conn., celebrated the Holy Wednesday with Fr. Jean Younes' visiting and anointing all the sick who were at home, hospital or in nursing facilities.

On Holy Thursday, St. Anthony Maronite parish was blessed by the presence of His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour to celebrate this special evening. Twelve young men played the roles of the disciples who accompanied Jesus on the night before His death. It was an emotional and memorable night filled with reverence and prayers as the Bishop washed the feet of each young man as Jesus did.

On Good Friday, the youth of St. Anthony re-enacted the final days of Jesus on earth. Their moving performance made the parishioners and community feel they were actually there. The Passion Play has become an annual Easter tradition of the church and is a way to reach the youth, parishioners and community in a very dramatic atmosphere. There were approximately twenty-five youth ranging from eleven to twenty-three years old who prepared for this honor. The Passion Play started with the Last Supper in which Jesus tells his disciples that His life must end and then progressed to the Crucifixion.

The youth in their performance were able to learn about the sacrifice Jesus made, and how deeply God loves them to send His only son to die for our sins. The youth that took part in the play built a community among themselves and truly shared a special bond.

A handful of adults and the youth worked tirelessly two nights a week for eight weeks throughout the Lenten season to create this moving event for all to experience. The youths took turns saying prayers after each rehearsal and prayed that God would touch their performance so people would receive the message implied.

Finally, the Parish celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on Saturday evening and Sunday morning, followed by a children's egg hunt in the church hall and a meal for parents and children.

We are blessed to have our youth active in helping to continue to build on the foundation that Jesus gave us. We pray that this tradition will continue for many years to come, and that God will continue to bless us in our Maronite tradition. □

## Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania *The Oil Blessing Liturgy*



Left to right: Mrs. Renee Andrews, Mrs. Theresa Shiner, Emily Collins, Leanne Tabit, Maria Khoudary, Mrs. Malak Khoudary, Olivia Richards, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Father Hanna Karem, Teri Andrews, Deangelo Aboutanous, Carol Brewster, Mrs. Anne Kasper and Mr. Leo Ziegler.

*by Anne Kasper*

**O**n March 27, 2012, a group of parishioners and the Maronite Youth Group of St. Anthony/ St. George Church, Wilkes Barre, Penn., traveled to Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, N.Y., to attend the Oil Blessing Liturgy. Prior to the Liturgy, the MYO students met with Bishop Gregory Mansour and Chorbishop Michael Thomas. The students discussed with Bishop Gregory what they liked about their church, expressing their love for the Liturgy, the sense of community and the Maronite tradition. The attendees at the Oil Blessing Liturgy had a special opportunity to be present when Bishop Gregory for the first time, blessed not only the Holy Oils used for Catechumens and for the healing of the sick, but also the Holy Chrism, which usually is only blessed by the Patriarch and then shipped to the Maronite Church throughout the world. Bishop Gregory explained at the dinner that followed the Liturgy that FedEx and DHL have refused to ship the oil from Lebanon, and other attempts to transport the oil to the United States have failed. Thus, with special permission from His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai, Bishop Gregory blessed the Holy Chrism. The students were deeply moved by the beauty of the Cathedral, humbled by the reality of the Holy Spirit descending upon the Holy Oil during the blessing and awed by the reality that they are part of a "Universal" Church Community. □



# Bishop John Chedid

## A True Man of the Church

by Bishop Gregory Mansour

When I think of Bishop John Chedid, I think of a true man of the Church. He lived for the Church, and he died in the Church's embrace. His brother, Salim, prevailed upon him to spend his last years in Lebanon by saying, "Khayee, you gave your whole life to the service of the Church in Rome, in America, please give us, your family, the twilight of your life." So Bishop John left his home in Los Angeles and journeyed home to Lebanon where he grew up. There he spent his last years.



Bishop John Chedid

When Bishop John returned to his beloved Lebanon, Salim and his family took good care of him. In fact, Salim used to sleep on the floor next to his bed when Bishop John needed him. At a certain time when the family could no longer care for him, Bishop John was welcomed by the Sisters of the Cross, the Congregation founded by Blessed Jacques Haddad. With the loving care of the Sisters, especially Sister Nouhad, he ended the last few years of his life. Bishop John was one of twenty priests and bishops whom the sisters have served along with hundreds of others in need.

Bishop John used to say that the Church is everything to us, the Church is Christ Himself. When the Church teaches or guides us, it is Christ himself teaching and guiding. He often spoke of St. Francis, saying, "If there is an angel or a priest, choose the priest, for you can be sure that Christ is there." Such faith in the Church was beautiful to observe, especially in a man who also knew, quite well, man's fallen nature present everywhere, even in the clergy. Yet he still firmly believed and respected clergy and laity alike. He told us that his mother used to say, "Some people believe crows are bad luck, but I don't. When I see a crow all dressed in black, I think of my son dressed in his black cassock so far away. When I think of him, I feel good."

Bishop John Chedid was not a man of many words. He said what he meant and meant what he said. He wrote the most beautiful letters, homilies and reflections. His listeners and readers knew that he personally reflected before speaking and his words touched the heart. He used to read to himself his homily in advance, just to be sure he said what he wanted to say. Bishop John also had an uncanny ability to distract (me and others) during liturgy or solemn occasions. At the most unpredictable time he would give a funny comment or make a statement, which I hoped no one else noticed! He was not always saintly!

Bishop John took seriously the Lord's call to remain in good relationship with God. He went to confession often. He would get in the car and I knew where he was going. At times, he questioned the ways of God, especially during the suffering of others, and was not afraid to voice his doubt to me. I felt fortunate to have known this human side of him.

Retirement was difficult for him. His whole life was

about giving to others, and in retirement he felt that no one needed him anymore. He sometimes found it hard to keep his usual routine of daily Mass and prayer, and he was honest about his failures, indeed he had a beautiful honesty. He was loyal to his friends and family. Those who got close to him felt blessed. His funeral was held in *Bkerke*, Lebanon, and Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai could not have been more gracious, hosting the wake and funeral and all the visitors who came to show respect.

Although Bishop John died in human imperfection, as most of us will, his faith, love, and hope lives on in the Church and in all who loved him. I will miss him. We will miss him; we have much for which to be thankful.

Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord, and may the perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the soul of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

### Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

**May 2, 2012**

Rockville Center, New York, Talk to Legatus

**May 4, 2012**

University of Saint Joseph (USJ) in Lebanon  
Dinner, Manhattan, N.Y.

**May 5 - 6, 2012**

Pastoral Visit to the Maronite Community of  
Pleasantville, N.J.

**May 13, 2012**

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

**May 14 - 21, 2012**

*Ad Limina* visit with Pope Benedict along with the  
other Eastern Catholic Bishops of the U.S., Rome,  
Italy.

**May 26, 2012**

Ordination of Norbert Vogel and Brother Youssef  
Mariam Hanna to Subdiaconate, Our Lady of  
Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

**May 27, 2012**

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

**May 28 - June 4, 2012**

Family Visit

**June 6 - 20, 2012**

Maronite Bishops' Synod, *Bkerke*, Lebanon

**June 24, 2012**

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Father Ed Nedder, Providence,  
Rhode Island. □

# Why Do Catholics Leave, and What Can Be Done About It?

by Father Robert Barron

I saw an advance copy of a survey by William J. Byron and Charles Zech, which appeared in the April 30, 2012, edition of "America" magazine. It was conducted at the request of David O'Connell, the Bishop of Trenton, and its focus was very simple: It endeavored to discover why Catholics have left the church. No one denies that a rather substantive number of Catholics has taken leave during the past twenty years, and Byron and Zech wanted to find out why. They did so in the most direct way possible and asked those who had quit.

The answers they got were, in many ways, predictable. Lots of people cited the church's teachings on divorce and re-marriage, gay marriage, contraception, and the ordination of women. These matters, of course, have been exhaustively discussed in the years following Vatican II, and I'd be willing to bet that anyone, even those vaguely connected to the Church, could rehearse the arguments on both sides of those issues. But there just isn't a lot that the church can do about them. No bishop or pastor could make a policy adjustment and announce that divorced and re-married people can receive communion or that a gay couple can come to the altar to be married or a woman present herself for ordination.

What struck me about the survey, however, was that many of the issues that led people to leave the church are indeed matters that can be addressed. Many of the respondents commented that they left because of "bad customer relations." One woman said that she felt "undervalued by the church" and found "no mentors." Many more said that their pastors were "arrogant, distant, aloof, and insensitive," and still others said that their experiences over the phone with parish staffers were distinctly negative. Now I fully understand that parish priests and lay ministers are on the front lines and hence are the ones who often have to say "no" when a parishioner asks for something that just can't be granted. Sometimes the recipient of that "no" can all too readily accuse the one who

says it as arrogant or indifferent. Nevertheless, the survey can and should be a wake-up call to church leaders - both clerical and non-clerical - that simple kindness, compassion, and attention go a rather long way. I distinctly remember the advice that my first pastor - a wonderful and pastorally skillful priest - gave to the parish secretary: "For many people, you are the first contact they have with the Catholic Church; you exercise, therefore, an indispensable ministry." One respondent to the survey observed that whenever he asked a priest about a controversial issue, he "got rules, and not an invitation to sit down and talk." Unfair? Perhaps. But every priest, even when ultimately he has to say "no," can do so in the context of a relationship predicated upon love and respect.

A second major concern that can and should be addressed is that of bad preaching. Again and again, people said that they left the church because homilies were "boring, irrelevant, poorly prepared," or "delivered in an impenetrable accent." Again, speaking as someone who is called upon to give sermons all the time, I realize how terribly difficult it is to preach, how it involves skill in public speaking, attention to the culture, expertise in biblical interpretation, and sensitivity to the needs and interests of an incredibly diverse audience. That said, homilists can make a great leap forward by being attentive to one fact: sermons become boring in the measure that they don't propose something like answers to real questions. All of the biblical exegesis and oratorical skill in the world will be met with a massive "So what?" if the preacher has not endeavored to correlate the "answers" he provides with the "questions" that beguile the hearts of the people to whom he speaks. Practically every Gospel involves an encounter between Jesus and a person - Peter, Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, etc. - who is questioning, wondering, suffering, or seeking. An interesting homily identifies that longing and demonstrates, concretely, how Jesus fulfills it. When the homily both reminds people how thirsty they are and provides water to quench the

thirst, people will listen.

A third eminently correctable problem is one that I will admit I had never thought about before reading this survey. Many of the respondents commented that, after they left the church, no one from the parish contacted them or reached out to them in any way. Now again, I can anticipate and fully understand the objections from pastoral people: many Catholic parishes are huge - upwards of three or four thousand families - and staffs are small. Yet, just as major corporations, serving millions of people, attend carefully to lost customers, so Catholic parishes should prioritize an outreach to those who have drifted (or stormed) away. A phone call, a note, an e-mail, a pastoral visit - anything that would say, "We've noticed you're not coming to Mass anymore. Can we help? Can you tell us what, if anything, we've done wrong? We'd love to see you back with us."

The problem of Catholics leaving the church is, obviously, serious and complex, and anyone who would suggest an easy solution is naïve. However, having listened to a representative sample of those who have left, parishes, priests, and church administrators might take some relatively simple and direct steps that would go a long way toward ameliorating the situation. □

## About the Author

Father Robert Barron is the founder of the global ministry, *Word on Fire*, and the Francis Cardinal George Professor of Faith and Culture at University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, [Mich]. He is the creator of the documentary series, "Catholicism," airing on PBS stations and EWTN. The series has just been awarded an esteemed Christopher Award for excellence. Learn more about the series at [www.CatholicismSeries.com](http://www.CatholicismSeries.com).



# The Reawakening of the Laity

by Fr. David A. Fisher

**I**n the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission. Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. But the laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world. - Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*), The Second Vatican Council.

One of the major gifts to the Church emerging from the Second Vatican Council was the renewed emphasis placed on the role and mission of the laity. In the reflections of the Council Fathers concerning the Laity, we can see why some have referred to the Second Vatican Council as Newman's Council, for it is the theology of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, whose life and thought in the 19th century eventually took root in the official teachings of the Church in the 20th century. Newman was a great defender of the laity, and their importance throughout the history of the Church in defending the *truths* of the faith.

Throughout his long life, from its beginnings in the Church of England and the influence he exerted there, particularly in Oxford, to its close as a cardinal of the Roman Church, it is possible to see in Newman's thought on the laity a continuing, harmonious pattern. In Newman, wherever we look, we see a concern to create of the laity an active force that would be at work both in the Church and in the world at large. For this task the laity needed to be properly educated and equipped, and Newman saw this work of education as one to which he was particularly called: "From first to last education, in the large sense of the word, has been my line." After 1845, when Newman became a Catholic, this call to educate the laity inspired a whole host of his undertakings; more than ever he felt called to take up arms in order to awaken in the Catholic Church the slumbering significance of the laity. An

educated laity could capture and transform the public mind and in so doing make it that much more receptive to Catholic truth.<sup>1</sup>

Newman's keen sense of the importance of all the baptized as concerns the mission of the Church came not so much from his Anglican beginnings, as from his study and knowledge of the Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine and also the Eastern Fathers. It was this same knowledge and love of the Fathers which lead him to the begin the Oxford or Tractarian Movement in the Anglican Church and eventually convinced him of the truth of the Catholic Faith.

Newman was always deeply conscious of the importance of history in the Church and of how it was ever a determining factor for both its present and its future. Newman noted the importance the laity had in halting the growth of the Reformation, and his earlier studies of the Arian crisis and St. Athanasius had already planted firmly in his mind the indisputable fact that the laity not only might be but actually had been, the champions and preservers of the orthodox Faith in the dark days of the fourth century.<sup>2</sup>

In the earliest age it was simply the living spirit of the myriads of the faithful, none of them known to fame, who received from the disciples of the Lord, and husbanded so well and circulated so widely and transmitted so faithfully, generation after generation, the once-delivered apostolic faith; who held it with such sharpness of outline and explicitness of detail, as enabled even the unlearned instinctively to discriminate between truth and error, spontaneously to reject the very shadow of heresy and to be proof against the fascination of the most brilliant intellects, when they would lead them

out of the narrow way.<sup>3</sup>

Eastern Christian thought the dignity of the laity indeed of all the Baptized is rooted in Chrismation. In Chrismation the Holy Spirit ushers us into the Trinitarian life and therefore make us people of the end-time, eschatological beings.

The anointing formerly reserved for kings, priests, and prophets, is extended in the Church to all believers. It is Christ who unites in Himself all those baptized "into the people of God" where everyone belongs to "the priestly people." It is not a question of "priest" in the sense of "a presbyter" and of his sacramental power. A priest of the royal priesthood, that is every believer, is one who participates in the Priesthood of Christ, not through his sacred functions but by virtue of his sanctified being. It is in view of this *ontological sacerdotal dignity* that each baptized person is sealed with the gifts, "anointed by the Spirit" in their very being. The believer offers the totality of his life and being as a sacrifice, that he makes of his life a liturgy. Every layperson is the priest of their existence.<sup>4</sup>

Eastern Christian thought the life of all believers is a liturgy in which one's life is sacrificed to God. In doing so the believer is freed from the idols of this world, so that the "One Who Is Holy" may be worshiped in "Spirit and in Truth." The *Trisagion* of the Eucharistic Liturgy is the common proclamation of all believers, that unites us with the praises of the Angels who stand before God, "*Qadeeshat aloho...*"

Unfortunately, the separation of Baptism and Chrismation (Confirmation), often by years in the Latin Church (which would have been unthinkable in the first centuries of the

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<sup>3</sup> Historical Sketches (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1970), Vol. I, pp. 209-10.

<sup>4</sup> Evdokimov, Paul, *The Sacrament of Love*, SVS Press, Crestwood, New York, 1985, p. 85.

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<sup>1</sup> Chavasse, Paul "Newman and the Laity", *The Catholic Education Resource Center*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Church, East and West), leaves the Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) without its proper theology in relation to Baptism. The Gospel tell us to “go and teach all nations.” These words are addressed to all who have received Initiation into the Church and the life of Grace. “This call means that alongside the missionaries specifically accredited by the Church every anointed person is a missionary in his or her own way. It is through his entire life as an interiorized liturgy and a Trinitarian dwelling, it is through his entire being that every layperson is called to give unceasing testimony.”<sup>5</sup> It is even to this end that all are consecrated.

The reawakening of the laity, in mission and in theology has been central to the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council. While many aspects of the Council have gone unnoticed and other aspects misunderstood; the recapturing of the ancient tradition as concerns the life and dignity of the laity has been a bright light in the Church. □

### About the Author

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

## Maronite Bishops in the United States at the Service of Communion in the Universal Church



the Oriental Orthodox/Catholic Dialogue. Likewise, I serve on the Board of Trustees for the Catholic University of America. I also attend the meetings of the New York State Catholic Conference of Bishops with Timothy Cardinal Dolan.

A few years ago, we helped to start an ecumenical group of Middle Eastern Bishops called CAMECT (Christian Arab and Middle Eastern Churches Together). We mirror here in the United States the Churches and ecclesial communities of the Middle East. We meet twice a year and have sponsored Ecumenical Symposiums along with *Telelumiere/Noursat*. I presently serve as Secretary.

Bishop Shaheen and I, in addition to the roles we play here in the United States, also play an international role in our own Maronite Church. We serve on the Board of Directors in the U.S. for *Telelumiere/Noursat*, Catholic Schools in Lebanon, and soon to be Caritas Liban. Last year Bishop Shaheen hosted in Saint Louis all the Maronite Bishops outside Lebanon along with the Superiors General of the Religious Orders and Communities of Lebanon, where we had a productive three-day meeting with our Maronite Patriarch [Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai]. Each year Bishop Shaheen and I also attend our Annual Maronite Bishops' Synod in June held in Lebanon. All forty-five Maronite Bishops throughout the world are required to attend.

The role of the bishop within and outside his eparchy is to promote, protect and foster the communion we share in Christ Jesus, under the jurisdiction of our Maronite Patriarch and the Holy Father. These are some of the ways we do just that. □

+Gregory John Mansour  
Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron

**B**ishop Robert Shaheen and I, in addition to our pastoral responsibilities in each of our eparchies, and beyond all that we do together in both eparchies, also make every effort to connect our Churches to the greater Catholic Church worldwide. We attend the annual meetings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Bishop Shaheen hosts every year at the Pastoral Center in St. Louis the thirty Eastern Catholic Bishops who come for a two-day meeting to discuss common needs. He serves as Treasurer for this group. He and I also spent three weeks in Rome for the Synod on the Middle East, convoked by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict, in October of 2010.

We also maintain a good rapport with the Bishops of the Latin Church, as well as the other Eastern Catholic Churches. Bishop Shaheen is an active member of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre and serves as Bishop Consultant on the USCCB Committee on Vocations and Religious Life. I serve as a member of the USCCB Committee on Catechesis, the Committee on Pro-Life, and as a Consultor for the Ecumenical and Interreligious Committee, as well as on

*the Deadline is...* **Deadline for next month's issue** of *The Maronite Voice* is May 25, 2012.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 87.

# ***Bishops Issue Call To Action To defend Religious Liberty***

## ***Urge Strong Lay Involvement***

### ***Outline Threats to First Freedom at all Levels of Government and Abroad Call upon Dioceses to Pursue Religious Liberty Fortnight, June 21- July 4***

*by Sister Mary Ann Walsh  
Director of Media Relations  
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops*

The U.S. bishops have issued a call to action to defend religious liberty and urged laity to work to protect the First Freedom of the Bill of Rights. They outlined their position in "Our First, Most Cherished Freedom." The document was developed by the Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), approved for publication by the USCCB Administrative Committee March 13, 2012, and published in English and Spanish April 12. The document can be found at [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/our-first-most-cherished-liberty.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/our-first-most-cherished-liberty.cfm).

"We have been staunch defenders of religious liberty in the past. We have a solemn duty to discharge that duty today," the bishops said in the document, "... for religious liberty is under attack, both at home and abroad."

The document lists concerns that prompt the bishops to act now. Among concerns are:

- ◆ The Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate forcing all employers, including religious organizations, to provide and pay for coverage of employees' contraception, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs even when they have moral objections to them. Another concern is HHS's defining which religious institutions are "religious enough" to merit protection of their religious liberty,
- ◆ Driving Catholic foster care and adoption services out of business. Boston, San Francisco, the District of Columbia and Illinois have driven local Catholic Charities adoption or foster care services out of business by revoking their licenses, by ending their government contracts, or both-because those Charities refused to place children with same-sex couples or unmarried opposite-sex couples who cohabit.
- ◆ Discrimination against Catholic humanitarian services. Despite years of excellent performance by the USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services in administering contract services for victims of human trafficking, the federal government changed its contract specifications to require USCCB to provide or refer for contraceptive and abortion services in violation of Catholic teaching. Religious institutions should not be disqualified from a government contract based on religious belief, and they do not lose their religious identity or liberty upon entering such contracts. Recently a federal court judge in Massachusetts turned religious liberty on its head when he declared that such a disqualification is required by the First Amendment-that the government violates religious liberty

by allowing Catholic organizations to participate in contracts in a manner consistent with their beliefs on contraception and abortion.

The statement lists other examples such as laws punishing charity to undocumented immigrants; a proposal to restructure Catholic parish corporations to limit the bishop's role; and a state university's excluding a religious student group because it limits leadership positions to those who share the group's religion.

Other topics include the history and deep resonance of Catholic and American visions of religious freedom, the recent tactic of reducing freedom of religion to freedom of worship, the distinction between conscientious objection to a just law, and civil disobedience of an unjust law, the primacy of religious freedom among civil liberties, the need for active vigilance in protecting that freedom, and concern for religious liberty among interfaith and ecumenical groups and across partisan lines.

The bishops decry limiting religious freedom to the sanctuary.

"Religious liberty is not only about our ability to go to Mass on Sunday or pray the Rosary at home. It is about whether we can make our contribution to the common good of all Americans," they said. "Can we do the good works our faith calls us to do, without having to compromise that very same faith?"

"This is not a Catholic issue. This is not a Jewish issue. This is not an Orthodox, Mormon, or Muslim issue. It is an American issue," they said.

The bishops highlighted religious freedom abroad. "Our obligation at home is to defend religious liberty robustly, but we cannot overlook the much graver plight that religious believers, most of them Christian, face around the world," they said. "The age of martyrdom has not passed. Assassinations, bombings of churches, torching of orphanages-these are only the most violent attacks Christians have suffered because of their faith in Jesus Christ. More systematic denials of basic human rights are found in the laws of several countries, and also in acts of persecution by adherents of other faiths."

The document ends with a call to action.

"What we ask is nothing more than that our God-given right to religious liberty be respected. We ask nothing less than that the Constitution and laws of the United States, which recognize that right, be respected." They specifically addressed several groups: the laity, those in public office,

heads of Catholic charitable agencies, priests, experts in communication, and urged each to employ the gifts and talents of its members for religious liberty.

The bishops called for "A Fortnight for Freedom," the two-week period from June 21 to July 4- beginning with the feasts of St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher and ending with Independence Day - to focus "all the energies the Catholic community can muster" for religious liberty. They also asked that, later in the year, the feast of Christ the King be "a day specifically employed by bishops and priests to preach about religious liberty, both here and abroad."

Members of the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty include Archbishop-designate William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman; and Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington; Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap, of Philadelphia; Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Atlanta; Archbishop John C. Nienstedt of St. Paul-Minneapolis; Archbishop Thomas J. Rodi, of Mobile, Alabama; Archbishop J. Peter Sartain of Seattle; Bishop John O. Barres of Allentown, Pennsylvania; Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas; Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of Phoenix; Bishop Thomas J. Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois. Consultants include Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, California; Bishop Joseph P. McFadden of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, Iowa and Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana. □

## ***Let Women Speak for Themselves***

*by Bishop Gregory Mansour*

**W**omen are a unique gift to the world. No government agency can speak for all of them. In the last few weeks, two prominent women, Helen Alvare, J.D. and Kim Daniels, J.D., and to date 25,000 other like-minded women, have asked that their voices be heard (for more information see [www.womenspeakforthemselves.com](http://www.womenspeakforthemselves.com)).

Here below is their open letter to the President and the Secretary of Health and Human Services:

"We are women who support the competing voice offered by Catholic institutions on matters of sex, marriage and family life. Most of us are Catholic, but some are not. We are Democrats, Republicans and Independents. Many, at some point in our careers, have worked for a Catholic institution. We are proud to have been part of the religious mission of that school, or hospital, or social service organization. We are proud to have been associated not only with the work Catholic institutions perform in the community - particularly for the most vulnerable -- but also with the shared sense of purpose found among colleagues who chose their job because, in a religious institution, a job is always also a vocation.

Those currently invoking "women's health" in an attempt to shout down anyone who disagrees with forcing religious institutions or individuals to violate deeply held beliefs are more than a little mistaken, and more than a little dishonest. Even setting aside their simplistic equation of "costless" birth

control with "equality," note that they have never responded to the large body of scholarly research indicating that many forms of contraception have serious side effects, or that some forms act at some times to destroy embryos, or that government contraceptive programs inevitably change the sex, dating and marriage markets in ways that lead to more empty sex, more non-marital births and more abortions. It is women who suffer disproportionately when these things happen.

No one speaks for all women on these issues. Those who purport to do so are simply attempting to deflect attention from the serious religious liberty issues currently at stake. Each of us, Catholic or not, is proud to stand with the Catholic Church and its rich, life-affirming teachings on sex, marriage and family life. We call on President Obama and our Representatives in Congress to allow religious institutions and individuals to continue to witness to their faiths in all their fullness."

The true dignity of women is at stake. What is being called "women's health" by the current Administration and the inconsistent way of defining religious freedom should be a serious concern to all Americans. Our responsibility is to speak the truth with love, to persuade and propose, we have no need to dominate or impose. As Catholics we should be free to continue our noble service to whoever comes to us and should not be forced to violate our deeply held and reasonable convictions about the dignity of women's health.

I urge every person of good will to listen to the voices of these women with regards to the fundamentally flawed and unjust Health and Human Services Mandate. Please go to [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org) to seek ways in which you too can let your voice be heard. □

## ***Letter to a Young Girl***

*by Dr. Alice Von Hildebrand*

*How beautiful when a bride can say to her husband on their wedding night, "I have kept this garden virginal for you, and now, with God's permission I am giving you its key, knowing that you will enter into it with reverence."*

This touching piece of writing would be a lovely gift of truth for a young girl or even for a young boy to read in the proper context.

*My dear young friend:*

**I** know that young girls like secrets, and I am going to share one with you. God has chosen your sex for you; He made you to be a girl. You know that girls today are often told by feminists that the Church is "sexist" and has "discriminated" against them from the very beginning. She is accused of having treated them as "inferior," less talented, less gifted, made to be man's servants. She has denied them power in the Church, and prohibited them from receiving the highest honor, to be ordained to the priesthood and so on.

No doubt, you have heard this siren song, because the media are good when it comes to spreading this negative message. And this is why, to rebut these false claims, I would like to make you realize that women - far from being

discriminated against - have been granted a unique place by God in the work of redemption. The beauty of their mission is already hinted at in the Old Testament, but it finds its fulfillment only in the New, that is in the sweet Mother of our Savior; in Mary, the gentle Maid of Nazareth who was chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of the Redeemer.

Let us take off our "secular" eye glasses, and then we shall be able to see that women, far from being "discriminated" against, are in many ways privileged. And this is the "secret" I wish to share with you. The body of every little girl born into this world is mysteriously sealed by what is properly called "the veil of virginity". That is to say, a "secret" is entrusted to her body, and a secret is always "veiled." According to Christian teaching, this veil closes the entrance to a mysterious garden which belongs to God in a special way, and for this reason cannot be entered into except with His express permission, the permission that God grants spouses in the Sacrament of Matrimony. Any little girl aware of this "mystery" will feel that her body is to be modestly clothed, so that its secret will be hidden from lewd looks.

Little girls, of course, grow up. How beautiful when a bride can say to her husband on their wedding night, "I have kept this garden virginal for you, and now, with God's permission I am giving you its key, knowing that you will enter into it with reverence."

Moreover, when a wife conceives a few hours after her husband has embraced her, God creates the child's soul in her body, (as you certainly know, neither husband nor wife can produce the human soul; God alone can create it.) In other words, there is a personal "contact" between God and the woman which, once again, gives to the female body a note of sacredness. Don't forget that He whom the whole universe cannot contain, was "hidden" in the womb of the Holy Virgin for nine months. Once you realize this, you will be awe-filled for the double mystery that God has confided to you: to conceive a human being made to God's image and likeness, and to give birth to it in pain and anguish. Do not forget that it was also in pain and anguish that Christ re-opened for us the gates of paradise - which had been shut by sin. To women has been granted the awesome privilege of nobly suffering so that a new human being, made to God's image and likeness, might come into the world. Meditate upon this for a moment, and you will feel a deep reverence for your body. It belongs to God, and is not a "play thing" that you can dispose of as you please.

If you ever study pagan art, you will discover that it pays tribute to the male reproductive organ, representing it in various sculptures and paintings as a symbol of strength, virility, creativity, power. But from the very moment that the Catholic Church became a recognized religion, she fought relentlessly against this pagan cult. But the Church introduced a prayer uttered millions of times every single day in which the female organ par excellence, the "womb" is mentioned. "Blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus." I am sure, my dear young friend, that if you meditate on this, you will understand that it is a privilege to be born a woman, and will respect the mystery that God has put in the female body. Thank God that He has made you to be born a woman; I am sure now that you understand that it is a great privilege. □

## About The Author

Alice von Hildebrand was married to the great philosopher, spiritual writer, and anti-Nazi crusader, Dietrich von

Hildebrand, who passed to his reward in 1977. She is Professor Emeritus at Hunter College (CUNY). Alice von Hildebrand is on the Advisory Board of the Catholic Educator's Resource Center.

## *Day For Vocations To Be Free is To Respond To The Love of God*

At midday on April 29, 2012, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, the Holy Father asked people to pray "that all young people may be attentive to the inner voice of God, which speaks to their hearts and calls them to abandon everything in order to serve Him." Addressing faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square for the *Regina Coeli* Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that "the Lord calls always, but often we are not listening.

"We are distracted by many things, by other more superficial voices", he added. "We are afraid to listen to the voice of the Lord because we believe it can detract from our freedom. The truth is that each of us is the fruit of love; the love of our parents, of course, but also and more profoundly the love of God. ... When we become aware of this our lives change; they become a response to that love which is greater than any other, and thus our freedom is fully realised".

The Pope then mentioned the new priests he had ordained that morning during Mass in the Vatican Basilica. "They are no different than other young men", he affirmed, "But they have been profoundly touched by the beauty and love of God, and could not but respond with the whole of their lives." They discovered the love of God in Jesus Christ, in His Gospel, in the Eucharist and in the community of the Church. "In the Church we discover that the life of each human being is a story of love", he said.

To conclude Pope Benedict XVI exhorted the faithful to pray that "the seeds of vocation which God so generously scatters" may germinate and come to fruit in all areas of the Church, "in the joy of having been called and in the variety of gifts. Families in particular must be the first place in which to 'breathe' the love of God, which gives inner strength even in the midst of the difficulties and trials of life. People who experience the love of God in their family, receive a priceless gift which, in time, will come to bear fruit. □

*(Vatican Information Services, April 29, 2012)*

## *Priests Need to Be Saints Clergy Congregation Addresses Priests Before World Prayer Day*

The Congregation for Clergy is encouraging priests to remember their duty to sanctity in a letter for the World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Clergy, which falls this year on June 15. The letter, signed by the Prefect and Secretary of the Congregation, includes reading material and a prayer.

"The expression found in Scripture 'This is the will of God: your holiness!' (1Thessalonians 4:3), though addressed

to all Christians, refers to us priests in particular, for we have accepted the invitation to 'sanctify ourselves' and to become 'ministers of sanctification' for our brothers," the letter explained. "In our case, this 'will of God' is, so to speak, doubled and multiplied to infinity, and we must obey it in everything we do.

"This is our wonderful destiny: we cannot be sanctified without working on the holiness of our brothers, and we cannot work on the holiness of our brothers unless we have first worked on and continue to work on our own holiness."

The letter speaks of the sex abuse scandal before turning to the celebration of the Year of Faith, which the Holy Father has convoked and will begin in October.

"Today it is especially priests, in their daily worship and ministry, who must refer everything to the Trinitarian Communion: only by starting from it and by immersing oneself in it can the faithful really discover the face of the Son of God and of His contemporariness, and really reach the heart of every man and the homeland they are all called to," the letter states. "Only this way can us priests restore contemporary man's dignity, the sense of human relationships and social life, and the purpose of the whole of creation."

The Vatican officials proposed that the new evangelization can only be possible if "Christians are able to surprise and move the world again by proclaiming the Nature of Our God who is Love, in the Three Divine Persons that express it and that involve us in their own life."

"Today's world, with its ever more painful and preoccupying lacerations, needs God -- The Trinity -- and the Church has the task to proclaim Him," the letter concludes. "In order to fulfill this task, the Church must remain indissolubly embraced with Christ and never part from Him; it needs Saints who dwell 'in the heart of Jesus' and are happy witnesses of God's Trinitarian Love. And in order to serve the Church and the World, Priests need to be Saints!" □

*(Zenit.org, April 26, 2012)*

## ***Prayer Gives Essential Meaning to Our Daily Activities***

If prayer and the Word of God do not nourish our spiritual life, we run the risk of being suffocated by the many cares and concerns of daily existence. Prayer makes us see reality with new eyes and helps us to find our way in the midst of adversity. These words were pronounced by Pope Benedict XVI in his catechesis during the April 25, 2012, general audience, held in St. Peter's Square in the presence of more than 20,000 faithful.

The Pope explained how prayer encouraged the early Church, though beset by difficulties, and how it can help man to live a better life today. "Ever since the beginning of her journey the Church has had to face unexpected situations, new questions and emergencies, to which she has sought to respond in the light of the faith, allowing herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit", he said.

This was already evident at the time of the Apostles. In the Acts, Luke the Evangelist recounts "a serious problem which the first Christian community in Jerusalem had to face and resolve, ... concerning the pastoral care of charity

towards the isolated and the needy. It was not an unimportant issue and risked creating divisions within the Church. ... What stands out is that, at that moment of pastoral emergency, the Apostles made a distinction. Their primary duty was to announce the Word of God according to the Lord's mandate, but they considered as equally serious the task of ... making loving provision for their brothers and sisters in situations of need, in order to respond to Jesus' command: love one another as I have loved you".

The Apostles made a clear decision: it was not right for them to neglect prayer and preaching, therefore "seven men of good standing were chosen, the Apostles prayed for the strength of the Holy Spirit, then laid their hands upon them that they might dedicate themselves to the diaconate of charity". This decision, the Pope explained, "shows the priority we must give to God and to our relationship with Him in prayer, both as individuals and in the community. If we do not have the capacity to pause and listen to the Lord, to enter into dialogue with Him, we risk becoming ineffectually agitated by problems, difficulties and needs, even those of an ecclesial and pastoral nature."

The saints, Pope Benedict said, "experienced profound unity between prayer and action, between total love of God and love for their fellows". St. Bernard, a model of harmony between these two aspects, "affirmed that too many concerns ... often end up by hardening our heart and causing our spirit to suffer. This is an important reminder for us today, accustomed as we are to evaluating everything with the criterion of productivity and efficiency. That passage from the Acts of the Apostles reminds us of the importance of work and commitment in daily activity, which must be carried out with responsibility and dedication, but also of our need for God, for His guidance and His light which give us strength and hope. If we do not pray trustingly every day, our activities become empty, they lose all profundity and are reduced to mere activism which, in the final analysis, leaves us unsatisfied. ... Every step, every action in our lives, even in the Church, must be done before God, in prayer and in the light of His Word."

When prayer is nourished with the Word of God "we see reality with new eyes, with the eyes of the faith and the Lord, Who speaks to the mind and to the heart, gives new light for the journey in all times and situations. We believe in the power of the Word of God and of prayer. ... If the lungs of prayer and of the Word of God do not nourish the breath of spiritual life, we risk suffocating in the midst of a thousand daily cares. Prayer is the breath of the soul and of life".

In conclusion, Pope Benedict XVI noted that when we pray, "in the silence of a church or in our room, we are united in the Lord to our brothers and sisters in the faith, like so many instruments which, each in its own individuality, raise a single great symphony of intercession, thanksgiving and praise." □

*(VIS, April 25, 2012)*





## Brooklyn, New York Holy Week Celebrations



Bishop Gregory Mansour and Msgr. James Root perform the Rite of the Lamp at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral.

by Salma T. Vahdat

The solemn observance of Holy Week at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lebanon began on Wednesday evening [April 4, 2012]. Officiating at the Divine Liturgy and "The Rite of the Lamp" were Bishop Gregory J. Mansour and Msgr. James A. Root, Rector of the Cathedral.

For the ancient ritual a vessel was prepared that contained dough infused with olive oil which was then pierced with seven slim tapers. The blessing of the mixture and lighting of the tapers by Bishop Gregory and Msgr. James was followed by the Divine Liturgy. It is originally a monastic ritual with seven priests' each lighting a taper and saying a prayer. The community was invited to receive the blessing, "for the forgiveness of your sins and the healing of your body and soul," in the form of a cross of holy oil administered to each forehead. We were encouraged to take a portion of the dough and oil to our homes to be used with prayers in healing the mind, body and spirit of family and friends.

Thursday evening the Cathedral community came to witness the Washing of the Feet ceremony. Twelve men of the parish processed with Msgr. Root and servers to the Sanctuary in anticipation of the solemn service. Monsignor returned to the center aisle where a chair had been set up for him and from whence he would rise to the altar to wash the feet of those assembled with the assistance of seminarian Elias Khalil. The entire ritual was narrated by Rev. Geoffrey Abdallah, Director of Music for the Eparchy. It added another dimension to the ceremony. The dialogue between Jesus and St. Peter was enacted by Paul Sayegh as St. Peter. It is a special honor to portray St. Peter and one Paul will remember, as did my late father and late brother who were so honored in their time but had to recite the responses in Arabic. No problem for Dad but my brother was coached *ad infinitum* and we held our collective breaths when he began and finished successfully!

The conclusion of the service was followed by the

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the St. Rafka Chapel until midnight.

On Great Friday of the Crucifixion the Cathedral was filled to standing-room only. The church was enveloped in dim light, already in mourning for the crucified Christ. Fr. Geoffrey began the service with the narration of the crucifixion to a hushed congregation. When complete, the entry by Bishop Gregory, Msgr. Root, Seminarian Khalil, and the altar servers, which included our candidates for subdeacon, Norbert Vogel and Peter Frangieh, processed to the sanctuary. Jesus was removed from the cross and laid to rest in a casket. The entire community followed the casket and clergy outside the Cathedral chanting hymns and returning to the main entry to pass under the bier and kiss the cross. When the Liturgy was concluded a quiet, solemn community exited the Cathedral to contemplate Christ's Passion in the solitude of their homes.

Midnight Liturgy on Saturday again brought a full house to the Cathedral. Sleeping children aside, no one would miss the celebration of the Great Resurrection! Once again, Msgr. Root outdid himself in preparing the Cathedral to reflect the joy of our salvation by the Resurrection. Hurricane lamps entwined with fern and white orchids lined the pews in the center aisle. The sanctuary was adorned with white lilies and hydrangeas of different colors...all heralding the happiness of our redemption! Again, Bishop Gregory, Msgr. Root and company led us in proclaiming the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by processing with the Cross swathed in a white banner denoting the Risen Christ. The choir was in top form guided by Fr. Geoffrey. We also had the good fortune to have a guest soloist, Ms. Nabiha Yazbeck, who was visiting the greater New York area to sing a spiritual concert at the Mission Parish of Blessed John Paul II. It was a week to remember and to reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus.

The Easter breakfast (as is the Christmas repast), following the Divine Liturgy was offered to the Parish, as it has been for almost forty years, by Mr. and Mrs. Antoine Tabet. □

## Tulsa, Oklahoma Lenten Retreats

As part of the observance of Great Lent, parishioners of St. Thérèse Parish in Tulsa, Oklahoma, participated in retreats. On Saturday, March 3, 2012, eleven women of the parish were hosted by the Religious Sisters of Mercy at their convent at St. Francis Hospital. They attended Mass, had the opportunity for confession, were hosted at lunch by the Sisters, and heard two talks by Rev. Paul Kodakarakaran on the theme of "Suffering."

On Saturday, March 10, twelve men attended a retreat at the parish site. They heard two talks by Rev. Denis Casey on the themes of "Mercy" and "Forgiveness," attended Liturgy, had the opportunity for confession, were hosted at lunch by the pastor, Fr. Elias Abi Sarkis, and saw a movie on the life of St. Charbel.

Parishioners gather on Friday evenings in Lent for a soup and bread meal, followed by the Stations of the Cross. □

## Newtown Square, Pennsylvania *Appreciation Dinner*



Najwa and Basem Dow and Fr. Paul Mouawad.

by *Lillian Shahade*

In childhood there was a story that talked about "the little engine that could." By itself, against all odds and doubt that little engine pulled an extremely heavy load uphill ... and though a lot of work, succeeded in doing so. Why? Because he knew he could. This is likened to the parish of St. Sharbel Church, Newtown Square, Penn., as the engine that drove the NAM 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention to the very top of all the conventions thus far. Why? Because they worked together, and driven by God and St. Sharbel, strove for a successful convention.

Many onlookers doubted that such a small parish and a small number of working parishioners were even contenders for such a feat. When Fr. Paul Mouawad, Pastor, from the very beginning started making plans to accept the offer to hold the 48<sup>th</sup> NAM Convention some of the parishioners said, "Oh no," and some outsiders said, "Oh no, you can't handle it." Fr. Paul has hosted several conventions in the past and he was quite confident and knew what it takes for a successful convention. He kept telling his parishioners, "Don't worry about it, I know you can do it." Under Fr. Paul's guidance and with the Co-Chairs Basem and Najwa Dow, the little parish in Newtown Square made big history in the Spirit of Identity and Evangelization in the Spirit of St. Maron in the year two thousand and eleven.

Before St. Sharbel Parish knew of the final tally of results from the NAM 48<sup>th</sup> Convention, Fr. Paul knew he wanted to reward his workers with an Appreciation Dinner and made plans to follow through. How sweet to actually be able to tell everyone the night of the dinner that their hard work and double duty really paid off and made St. Sharbel Parish No. 1 in the NAM Convention ranking over the past forty-eight years.

The dinner was held at the Al-Dar Restaurant in Bala Cynwyd, a suburb of Philadelphia, Penn. Fr. Paul thanked all who helped to make the convention the success it was and also expressed thanks to all the attendees of the convention, without whom it would not have achieved the level of success it did. He gave thanks to Stephanie Mattera, of the Sheraton Philadelphia who was unable to attend, for doing an

excellent job in co-coordinating, at all levels, between the hotel and the St. Sharbel committees.

To Basem and Najwa, the Co-Chairs, he read his letter of appreciation to them and told them: "You have taken time from the "busyness" of your own schedules to participate in a ministry opportunity here at Saint Sharbel Church. While the church has greatly benefitted from your services, please understand that God Himself sees and rewards those who diligently work for Him with little or no regard for earthly recognition. You both have done an excellent job in coordinating and spearheading the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual NAM Convention "Of Identity and Evangelization in the Spirit of Saint Maron," so well that you and your teams brought St. Sharbel Church to the top of the NAM chart. That in itself is no small feat, considering the fact that you had a limited number of workers and most took on several tasks. Your leadership and organization skills were well rewarded.

He presented them with a very special one-of-a-kind antiquity gift from Lebanon. They thanked Fr. Paul for believing in them and also thanked the guests for all their hard work and jokingly said that since everyone worked so well together that we are hosting next year's convention. You could hear everyone say...."Oh no." □

## Chicago, Illinois *Lent, Passion and Easter Recital*



by *Julie Mouannes Kozaili*

On Friday, March 30, 2012, the choir of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church in Lombard [Chicago], Illinois, presented a recital inspired by the Lenten and Resurrection seasons. The evening debuted with the Stations of the Cross, celebrated by Father Charles Khachan, M.L.M. assisted by deacons John Sfire and Willim Nijm. Following that, the parishioners and numerous guests enjoyed a performance by the choir that went on for about an hour; the program consisted of a collection of hymns covering Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. The choir presented both classic and modern hymns from the Maronite tradition, taking the audience on what some termed a "roller coaster" ride. The youth of Our Lady of Lebanon Church also took part in the evening by reading several reflections put together by Father Charles, that everyone found very inspiring. The evening concluded with a reception. □

## Denver, Colorado *We're Proud of Every Speck of Dust in our Church!*

by Father Armando El-Khoury

On March 18-19, 2012, the community of St. Rafka Maronite Church in Lakewood [Denver], Colorado, celebrated its fifth anniversary as the first Maronite parish in Colorado. Bishop Robert Shaheen, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, visited the parish to commemorate this milestone in the life of this Maronite family. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend in person. However, my spirit and prayers were with the parishioners.

These few lines are long overdue. I am writing them to thank the children, young people, and women and men of St. Rafka's community for their commendable efforts and generous offerings. With faith and determination, they forged a new chapter into the history books of Colorado and added a beautiful Maronite church to the landscape of the majestic rocky mountains. What this community has accomplished is similar to the achievements of the many Maronite communities in the United States. Therefore, the homage I am paying to the community I served for seven years is also a homage I would like to extend to the many Maronites in the United States whose sacrifices and efforts may have gone unnoticed.

Many people have given me credit for establishing in two years a spiritual home for the Maronites of Denver. Shamefully, I accepted these compliments with a grin from ear to ear. Joy and pride entered my heart as if I were the dynamo that made the impossible possible. Nothing could have contained my arrogance. Today, however, I am writing these words while my heart is full of regrets for not having receded all the way to the back and put forward the true heroes who relied on God and worked against all odds to establish a Maronite church. Their story is similar to yours, my reader. They, like you, also believed that nothing is impossible with God.

With unbounded love and generosity they took care of their church, eparchy, bishop, priest, and the poor. Although they disagreed with me on many issues, not even once did they disrespect me as a human being or as a priest. Their support was unconditional! In addition, their regular attendance at the Divine Liturgies and the many activities they led made the spiritual and social lives of the church vibrant and wonderful. Due to their generosity, neither the church nor the priest were ever in need. Our Maronite communities are undoubtedly alike. They are wonderful for their sacrifices, hospitality and generosity make them so.

St. Rafka's community was my first parish. The parishioners welcomed an inexperienced rookie and helped him strengthen his priestly calling. Last August, my spiritual family proudly sent me away to college. As a child going to college with one eye toward the future and the other toward the family he is leaving behind, I left my spiritual family. St. Rafka's parishioners and you, my beloved unknown Maronite, make me happy to be a priest. I am privileged and honored to serve you.

At the end of his pastoral visit to St. Rafka, Bishop

Robert Shaheen visited my friend who has been fighting with lung cancer for a while now. My Bishop's visit made him very happy for it made him feel an integral part of the community and allowed him to take part in the 5th anniversary celebrations. My friend once told me, "Father, We are very proud of every speck of dust in our church."

One must give credit where credit is due. This is exactly what I tried to do with these brief words. I praise God and thank Him for you, my beloved Maronites, who work faithfully, diligently, relentlessly, humbly and unselfishly for the glory of God and the good of His Church. You are the columns of our Maronite churches built on Christ Who is the foundation. No wonder you are very proud of every speck of dust in your church! ☐

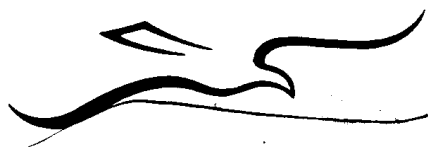
## Flint, Michigan *Eight New Converts*



Left to right (back row): Kristal Smith, Morgan Boyer, Holly Bowles, Ryan Takacs, Fr. Paul Tarabay, James Mortiere and Robert Potts. Front row: Destinee Smith, Isaac Robinson.

by Michelle Tennis

Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Flint, Mich. celebrated the Easter Season with four newly baptized converts and four individuals who made professions of faith in the Catholic Church. These eight individuals spent several weeks studying and learning about the Maronite Faith. They gathered together with their sponsors on March 31, 2012, to be baptized, confirmed and to make their First Holy Communion. Our Lady of Lebanon Parish is excited to welcome them and to have the opportunity to share its faith with them. ☐



## Brockton, Massachusetts Second Pastoral Visit



Front row: Kevin Al Mussquaoui, Sarah El Hayek, Peter Souaidan, Abraham Souaidan, Charlie Saade, Lucy Saade, Adjwawie Yaacoub, Michael Issa. Second row: Karen Al Mussquaoui, Eve Saade, Celine Souaidan, Ronnie Saab. Third row: Charbel El Helou, Gabriel El Helou, Elias Matta, Christine Matta, Melissa Issa, Danielle Axsom, Anthony Massoud, Michael Haikal, Christian Haikal, Stephanie Badran, Theresa Saade, Georgina Younes, Alexandra Younes. Back row: Nadalee Samia, Paul Saab, John Saab, George Massoud, Sarah Souaidan, Mariah Walsh, Victoria Bert, Tania Badran, Diane Saab, Jamie Saade, Charbel Lattouf, Bishop Mansour and Fr. Mouanes.

by Michelle A. Nessralla

"Christianity is not for wimps ... Christianity is not for the faint of heart ... Christianity is bold ... it is powerful ... it is strong ... and it is for those who are faith-filled and devout ... it is not meant to be easy...Christianity is sacrifice, and it is love; it is that love represented by Jesus on the cross which gives our life a greater purpose and deeper meaning ... it is meant to make life joyful." And so was the poignant message that Bishop Gregory Mansour delivered to the parish of Saint Theresa Church, Brockton, Mass., during his second pastoral visit on March 23 - 25, 2012.

Fr. Tony Mouanes, Administrator of Saint Theresa Church, and hundreds of parishioners welcomed Bishop Mansour throughout his three-day visit. Bishop Mansour, with his trademark quiet grace, reflective intelligence, and warm and gentle demeanor, addressed various groups and organizations throughout his weekend visit. He thanked members of the Choir, Religious Education, Ladies Altar Society, Parish and Stewardship Councils, MYO, and MYA for their ongoing ministries to the church; nd reminded them of the important role that the church plays in their lives; he encouraged everyone to continue to upbuild and strengthen the parish community. He especially acknowledged the importance and contributions of "the young people," who are the future of the parish, our faith, and our traditions. He

shared stories and memories from his own childhood, of his beloved parents, and of growing up within the community of his home parish. He also disclosed to the youth and young adults that "You make all of us feel young again ..."

The weekend culminated on Sunday, when Bishop Mansour celebrated a Children's Liturgy with the youth of Saint Theresa Church. Students in the Religious Education Program recited an opening prayer, delivered the readings and intercessions in English and Arabic, sang hymns with the choir, handled the weekly collections, and shared the greeting of peace; one student read a poem in memory of her father, for whom the liturgy was celebrated.

Before gathering in the church hall for a Harvest Brunch, the Bishop once again thanked the parish family and shared one final sentiment with us: he told us that we have "a beautiful priest," one who is humble, one who has accomplished much thus far, one who is bringing together the Lebanese and the Americans, the English and the Arabic with a satisfying and balanced blend, one who needs our support and prayers, just as we need his. The congregation wholeheartedly responded with enthusiastic applause, because Fr. Tony is such a priest. □

## Pleasantville, New Jersey Lectures on Islam



Attendees at the conference on Islam in Pleasantville, N.J.

by Fr. Elie Saady

The community of Our Lady Star of the East, Pleasantville, N.J., welcomed Father Maroun Audi, LMO, during the month of March. Fr. Audi has a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies and he is a teacher at the Holy Spirit University of *Kaslik*-Lebanon. Fr. Audi gave us a series of three lectures on Islam, every Friday on the 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of March. The three lectures were very well attended by the parishioners who were interested to learn what do Muslims believe about Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, Moses, and other Biblical figures. In addition, Fr. Audi gave an introduction to the history and origin of Islam and the historical relation between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. □



# Philadelphia, Pennsylvania *Through the Eyes of the Children*

by Amal Kouyoumdji

The last few weeks at St. Maron Church, in Philadelphia, Penn., have been busy, to say the least. With Holy Week schedule, Communion pamphlets almost ready for print, and the Lebanese Festival merely nine weeks away, many committees are meeting, discussing, agreeing, disagreeing, only to agree again...

Watching it all take place, I have been wondering how does Father Vincent Farhat, Administrator, do it?

How do all these people do it? How does a mother of two break away from her busy life to spend an entire day serving on several committees, helping out at the Church and in the Hall, and manage to look after her children and a few others, all at the same time? How does a busy physician spend two hours on a Saturday morning hanging up children's artwork? Then it dawned on me. These parishioners are proud! They are proud of their Church and of their contributions to keep it a home for themselves and their families. Judging by the smiles on their faces as they race back and forth between the Church and the Hall, under the watchful eye of their Pastor, I believe they also feel lucky to be part of it all, maybe none luckier than those of us who get to work with our youngest parishioners.

When we shared with the children enrolled in the Catechism Program that they will be hosting an Art Show for the whole community to enjoy, I admit it was hard to contain the excitement on the second floor of the Hall. As busy as bees, they were determined to have everything ready by Palm Sunday, their day, and they did. Part of their preparations was a letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict the XVI written by the third level children, ages nine to eleven. I will let you, the reader, savor the sweetness, the innocence, and the authenticity of their words. However, I will share with you the joy of having been part of the writing process.

I sat across the table from them as they all piled up in what is usually my seat. Talk about reversed roles! After listening to me for the last few months, it was my turn to listen to them, and that I did with great pleasure. I could not write fast enough as their ideas were pouring onto the paper in front of me. No prompting was necessary, no corrections either. In a few short minutes their letter to the Leader of the Church was finished. "Make sure you include pictures of the Art Gallery," they cautioned. And all I could do was smile at these free thinkers, tomorrow's leaders. But then again, when it comes to our children, I could be a little biased.

"Childhood knows no limits, nor formalities," I thought to myself. For the last few months, I thought I had been teaching them. Little that I knew, they have been the teachers all along.

## **Letter to the Pope**

Philadelphia, April 1, 2012

Dear Pope Benedict the XVI,

We are writing you today from St. Maron Maronite Catholic Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We wanted to tell you about our Church, and what it's like.

Our Church was built in 1901. There are so many great people in our Church. The priests are very nice, especially Father Vincent and Father Michael.

We also wanted to tell you about our beloved pastor who passed away last August, Monsignor Charbel Lischaa. He was a kind and wise man. He always let the children do whatever they please in Church because he loved the Children. He had a lovely garden, and always let us pick something from it. He is like an angel to us. He watches over us from above, and he will never forget us.

Father Vincent is always helping us make good decisions. He is learning Arabic, or at least trying to. Father Vincent is always organizing gatherings for our community. He is planning a Lebanese Festival in June. Even though he is an adult, Father Vincent is a lot of fun. Deacon Regan helps him out a lot.

Sister Nahida started CCD classes for us where we get to learn about Jesus. She also helped us with our Holy Communion last year, and we thank her for that. Sister Nahida is ill. Can you please pray for her so she feels better?

Sylvia and Giovanna Shoukri are teaching us how to dance *Dabke*, which is a traditional Lebanese dance. Maybe you can look it up on YouTube sometime.

Today, we are hosting a special Art show around the themes of Lent, Palm Sunday and Easter. It is prepared by children from preschool to fifth grade.

Thank you for all your hard work to keep all the Catholics around the world together. These are the news from our Church that is very special to us. Please pray for us, and we will always keep you in our prayers. All your Maronite Catholic friends at St. Maron Church in Philadelphia. ☐

## San Francisco, California *Spring Hafli*



Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church Youth Organization in San Francisco Bay area, Calif., organized a Spring *Hafli* on Saturday, March 17, 2012. The Youth group, forty members strong, performed different *dabke* dances and sang beautifully. The surprise of the party were the mothers of our youth (seen in the photo). With their beautiful *Aabaya* outfits, the ladies performed a *dabke* dance. ☐

## White Plains (Westchester) N.Y. *MYO Lenten Soup Lecture*



MYO members with Frances Mourani (Moderator), Fr. Nagi Kiwan, Pastor, and Fr. Justin Cinnante.

by Frances J. Mourani, MYO Moderator

In what is hoped will become an annual event at the Blessed John Paul II Maronite Catholic Mission in Westchester, New York, the MYO group hosted a Friday night Way of the Cross service on March 30, 2012 followed by a "Soup Lecture," to highlight the themes of sacrifice and reflection during the season of Great Lent.

The evening began with the combined participation of the Mission's MYO and Heritage members in reading the fourteen stations. Marwan Bishtawi, MYO Co-President, led the readers along with other MYO members: Marc Najjar, Antoine-Hameed Mourani, Tatiana Minanssian, and Jude Bato, as well as Nadia Makhraz and Christopher Rached, who both read their stations in Arabic.

Afterwards, there was an open invitation for everyone to join the MYO in the new Mission Hall for a simple Lenten meal prepared by MYO members and their families. Zaatar and spinach pies, accompanied by two huge steaming pots of delicious lentil soup (shourbet adas- a Lenten favorite) and vegetable and pasta soup (enough to feed an army!) were brought to the serving table with the help of two strong-armed MYO members. It was then the job of Donna Mourani, Marc Antonios and Jude Bato to quickly fill bowls for the hungry guests.

Fr. Naji Kiwan, the Mission's recently-appointed full-time Pastor, invited a special guest for the evening, Father Justin Cinnante, from Archbishop Stepinac High School in White Plains, to speak, appropriately, about the role of youth in today's church. Father Cinnante shared many personal stories, but his main point was that the Mission should be a place where the young people feel at home with each other, bonded by a common culture and life values. He also recalled how the Mission's patron, Blessed John Paul II, loved young people and always went out of his way to meet with them and celebrate Mass with them.

As a gesture of thanks to Father Cinnante, Westchester MYO members presented him with one of their brand new

"MYO Supporter" t-shirts which he immediately put on to pose for a group picture alongside the regular MYO members, all of whom were wearing their new group t-shirts for the first time that night. The leftover soup was poured into take-out cups and then graciously transported to a local soup kitchen in White Plains by MYO member, Marc Najjar and his family, bringing this gathering to a perfect close.

## *Easter Eve Concert*

by Janine A. Wakim

Internationally known Nabihah Yazbeck was the headline performer at an Easter Eve concert held at the Blessed John Paul II Maronite Mission in White Plains, New York, on April 7, 2012. Ms. Yazbeck was born in *Jdeidet-el-Maten* [Lebanon], on the day of the feast of St. Therese (to whom she later sang *Yassouh Anta Ilahi*). She is a Teacher and Director of the Elementary Cycle at the School of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, run by the Italian Sisters of St. Therese. Her musical journey started in 1980 when she joined the famous *Kaslik* University Choir (USEK). She left it in 1990 to help create and be the main singer of a new choir, AGAPEE, that became extremely famous in Lebanon and beyond with its new style of music. Nabihah is also a member in two other choirs: the "Chorale Orientale" run by Mr. Fouad Awad, who was her solfège teacher, as well as the *Yassouh Farahi* choir (Jesus is my Joy).

Nabihah performs in countless religious concerts in Lebanon, individually and as part of the choirs, all through the year. She has also performed internationally in multiple countries: Michigan, U.S.A., and Syria in 2006; Montreal, Canada in 2007; Jordan, Halifax, Canada, Michigan and New Jersey, U.S.A., in 2008; Jordan and Kuwait in 2009 and Montreal and Ottawa, Canada, in 2011.

Her musical journey led her to work with famous composers like Joseph Khalife, Kamal Saykaleh, Charles Chelala and others. Also, the lyrics of her songs are from famous Lebanese poets and priests: Henry Zgheib, Younes El Eben, Mireille Bou Damess, Fr. Michel Abboud, Fr. Fadi Jandah and others.

The concert on April 7 at the Blessed John Paul II Maronite Mission featured selections from her previously released CDs: *Yassouh Anta Ilahi*, *Ayouha Al Ilahou Al Kalima*, *Ya Khoubza El Hayat* and *Al Houbou Houwa Al Jawab*; as well as favorites such as *Nantasirou Bika*, *Ouridou Kalban*, and *Ya Mariam El Bikrou*. A highlight of the evening was Ms. Yazbeck's rendition of *Al Massih Kama* sung in the church illuminated by only candlelight.

At the conclusion of her performance, Ms. Yazbeck graciously accepted a gift of a t-shirt from the Westchester Maronite Youth Organization and surprised the delighted crowd by wearing it for the remainder of the evening. She also accepted an elegant arrangement of flowers by the choir and then stayed to pose for photos and sign autographs.

The Blessed John Paul II Mission was thrilled to host Ms. Yazbeck, who performed not only on Easter Eve, but also with our choir during all Holy Week services. We hope she will be a frequent visitor. □



## San Antonio, Texas, Final Preparations for the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Maronite Convention

by Julie Mery

As the convention date approaches, our committees are continuously working hard and finalizing the last details. You can feel the excitement in the air and we are all anxious to share the convention's schedule with fellow attendees. The true success comes from your support and we are all looking forward to seeing you in San Antonio.

The annual convention is noted for many activities, not the least of which is its workshops. Remember Nam's mission is to preserve our religious heritage and the workshops offer a way in which we can accomplish this goal. Our workshops will embrace the Maronite way with topics that deal with spirituality, community growth and development and San Antonio will offer new and exciting vehicles for learning and growth.

### Workshops

**Fundraising and Stewardship:** Mr. John F. Kurey, Esq., MBA, will offer tips for helping your parish or organization raise money (With a special focus on creating successful fundraising events.) Fundraising is both an art and a science and how often we have events with this particular goal, yet we just don't really know where to start or how to accomplish this. This year we are privileged to have Mr. John Kurey, Stewardship Director for both eparchies, share his expertise with us. This is a perfect opportunity for pastors and parish leaders to learn also about the various grants that are given by various charitable institutions and how to apply for them.

**Maronite Antiochene Spirituality:** No convention would be complete without the Rector of our Maronite Seminary, Chorbishop Seely Beggiani, imparting his vast knowledge of Eastern Spirituality. This year he will discuss "deification," a concept central to Eastern and Maronite Spirituality, the role of the Holy Spirit, and some of the major differences between the Latin and Maronite (Eastern) Spirituality.

**Effective Church Leadership by the Laity:** Many times we are elected or appointed to positions of leadership within our parish without knowing what our specific responsibilities and legal abilities are. Church (Canon) law defines the role of the laity in parish leadership and offers workable guidelines that aid the pastor and the laity. Fr. Abdallah Zaidan, M.L.M. and noted clerics from both eparchies will conduct a panel discussion and explain what is expected from both sides.

**Catechesis and Religious Education and the Maronite Church in America:** Deacon Louis Peters (Director of Religious Education, Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, will present a two-session workshop for catechists and parents on the religious formation of both adults and children. The workshop will explore the following topics:

- Foundational principals of religious education
- A review of the basic tenets of the Catholic Faith
- A review and overview of basic concepts of Christian education
- A review of the documents of the recent Maronite Patriarchal Synod on Christian education
- An overview of the recently revised Maronite religious education series *Faith of the Mountains*
- Using the Liturgy and liturgical calendar in catechesis.

**Property in Lebanon:** Rev. Fadi Tabet, M.L.M. has made a film "*End of a Dream*" discussing the purchase of property by foreigners. This movie expresses the fear that many have of how the sale of property in Lebanon to non-Lebanese will change the future demographics of the country.

**Single Adult Maronites (SAM):** Our newest group, Single Adult Maronites (SAM), ages 36 and older, is going to have several opportunities to meet and socialize while discussing the reason for this group and how they are a very important part of NAM. Jackie Mery Hull, Chairman, is working very hard to develop this group during the Convention.

Thursday, July 5, 2012: Ice Breakers 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.  
Friday, July 6, 2012: Surprise Activity 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.  
Saturday, July 7, 2012: Chat with SAMs 4:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Look for more details on the NAM Facebook page.

### Raffle

We have some amazing prizes this year and you do not need to be present to win. The tickets are \$5.00 per ticket or a book of five for \$20.00. Sell the tickets to friends, family, church parishioners and businesses or buy a couple of books for yourself. Drawing will take place at the Grand Banquet on Saturday, July 7, 2012.

- 1<sup>st</sup> Prize: Vacation Choice (Vegas/ Cancun/ Cruise) for 2 - \$1200 value  
2<sup>nd</sup> Prize : 42" Flat Screen Television set  
3<sup>rd</sup> Prize: Visa Card \$500 value  
4<sup>th</sup> Prize: Visa Card \$250 value

Help make the 2012 convention a success by being a part of NAM this July. Information about registration, the hotel, buying an ad for the journal, donating to the silent auction, exhibits, excursions, workshops, evening events, entertainment and the city of San Antonio can be found at [www.namnews.org](http://www.namnews.org). ☐

## Saint Louis, Missouri Championship Winners



Jacob and Maya Abrahamian

Congratulations to Maya and Jacob Abrahamian, parishioners of St. Raymond Cathedral, Saint Louis, Mo., who won first and second place in the 2011 Missouri State Junior Varsity (JV) racquetball championships. Maya is on the JV3 racquetball team at Nerinx Hall, and Jacob is on the JV1-1 racquetball team at Saint Louis University High (SLUH). SLUH won the 2012 National High School Championships in Portland, Oregon. □

## Lawrence, Massachusetts Knights of the Altar

St. Anthony Maronite Parish, Lawrence, Mass., recognized the members of Knights of the Altar at a promotional ceremony on April 15, 2012. Twenty-two young men were promoted to new ranks, recognizing their



Msgr. Peter Fahed Azar blesses the Knights of the Altar.

accomplishments. They have served respectfully at their assigned Liturgies, often volunteering to serve even when not assigned. They have learned prayers, served at the Stations of the Cross during the Lenten season, volunteered at parish events, mentored new altar servers, and learned the names for the parts of the church, liturgical vestments, and items used during the Divine Liturgy. By attending monthly meetings, they extend their knowledge, their faith, and their bond with one another.

During each year of service, more is expected of each of them, and the parish community recognized their service. This year, Elias Azzi received the rank of Grand Knight for his many years of service, knowledge of Maronite liturgies, and his on-going ability to act as a role model for the younger members. Truly, God has blessed St. Anthony's Parish with the families who support their children in such activities. The dedication and service of the Knights of the Altar are truly expressions of their faith in action. □