

# The Maronite Voice

A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA



Volume VII

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November 2011

## All Souls Day: Let us Never Forget those Who Came before Us and Left Us a Tradition and Culture Second to None

Dear People of God,

November is a very special month in most parts of the world. Two special Feasts are celebrated. November first is the Feast of All Saints, which is similar to our Maronite Feast of the Righteous and Just. November second is the Feast of All Souls, similar to our Sunday of the Faithful Departed before Lent. In many places, and especially in Europe, cemeteries and the graves of the deceased are visited by the faithful on these days. This is a fine tradition.

In the United States, we usually do the same on Memorial Day. Let us never forget our beloved departed, relatives and friends, those who came before us and left us a beautiful tradition and culture second to none. May the good Lord grant eternal rest and happy memory to our beloved dead.

Here in the United States, on the Fourth Thursday of November, we celebrate the National Holiday of Thanksgiving. Although Thanksgiving is a civil celebration and not a holy day, many people attend the Divine Liturgy on this day. All of us should be thankful that we live in this great country and, despite its problems, it is the greatest country in the world. We should never forget to ask God to continue to bless this country and to let it be a sign of freedom and justice for the entire world. We must always take pride in this great land and daily thank God for our lives here.

May God continue to bless the United States of America.

Happy Thanksgiving to all.

+Robert J. Shaheen  
Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon



*The Faithful Departed by Fr. Abdo Badwi, University of the Holy Spirit, Kaslik, Lebanon (USEK), Department of Sacred Art.*

## Schedule of Bishop Robert Shaheen

### November 5 - 6, 2011

Deacon Ordination, Chicago, Illinois

### November 13, 2011

St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

### November 18, 2011

Feast of St. Raymond, Liturgy and Anointing of the Sick, St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

### November 20, 2011

Forty Day Liturgy, Chicago, Illinois

### November 22 -27, 2011

Thanksgiving Break

### December 3 - 4, 2011

100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Saint Maron Church, Youngstown, Ohio

### December 11, 2011

Annual Christmas Liturgy for young people, St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo. ☐

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### **Maronite Convention 2012**

St. George Maronite Church

**San Antonio, Texas**

**July 2 - 8, 2012**

For more information  
contact the NAM office  
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## **Eparchial Appointment**



His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai, at the request of His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, has granted the rank of *Periodeut* with the title of Monsignor to the Very Reverend James Root, Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn, New York. Patriarch Rai announced this during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral on Sunday, October 23, 2011. We congratulate Monsignor Root on his appointment. ☐

## **Eparchial Condolences**

**Elizabeth Michael** (nee Andary), age 92, the sister-in-law of Fr. Lawrence Michael, Pastor of Saint Maron Church in Torrington, Conn., died on October 23, 2011. she was the wife of the late Fred P. Michael, mother of Paul, Sister Marie Michael, O.P., Edward and Donald. Sister of Margaret Means and Paul Andary and the late Ann Migliorati, Louis, Joseph, Mary Prosser, John, Agnes Saigh and Peter. She was the grandmother of seven, and great-grandmother of ten.

Condolences may be sent to Fr. Lawrence P. Michael, c/o St. Maron Church, 613 Main St., Torrington, CT 06790.

Bishop Gregory Mansour, along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Fr. Larry and his family. May the Lord God grant Elizabeth eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to her family and loved ones.

**Helen Calabrese**, the mother of Deacon Robert Calabrese, passed away on October 24, 2011. In addition to Deacon Robert, she is survived by her husband, Rocco of 67 years, and a son Rocco, Jr., four cherished grandchildren, and three great grandchildren. She is also survived by her sister, Mildred Rhodes, and several nieces and nephews.

Condolences may be sent to Deacon & Mrs. Robert Calabrese, 6695 Cold Stream Drive, Cumming, GA 30040.

Bishop Gregory Mansour, along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Deacon Robert and his family. May the Lord God grant Helen eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to her family and loved ones. ☐

# *The Maronite Bishops of the Expansion Hold Their Meeting in Saint Louis, Missouri*

On October 5 - 7, 2011, Their Excellencies the Maronite Bishops of the countries of expansion convened for their second assembly at the See of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon in St. Louis, Missouri. His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai, presided at the meeting in the presence of: His Excellency Robert Shaheen, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon; His Excellency Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn; His Excellency Sharbel Merhi, Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Sharbel, Buenos Aires, Argentina; His Excellency Joseph Khoury, Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Maron, Montreal, Canada; His Excellency Edgard Madi, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, Sao Paulo, Brazil; His Excellency George Abi Younis, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of the Martyrs of Lebanon, Mexico, and the Apostolic Visitor for Central America and Venezuela.

His Excellency Archbishop Paul Sayah, Patriarchal Vicar General and His Excellency Hanna Alwan, Patriarchal Auxiliary for Legal Affairs accompanied the Patriarch. His Excellency Paul Mattar, Archbishop of Beirut, Lebanon, and His Excellency Stephen Hector Doueihi, Bishop Emeritus of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn also attended the meetings.

Abbott Daoud Reaidi, Superior General of the Maronite Antonine Order; Abbott Boutros Tarabey, Superior General of the Maronite Order of the Blessed Mother; Very Reverend Father Elie Madi, Superior General of the Congregation of Maronite Lebanese Missionaries; and The Counsel General, Father Nehmetallah Hachem, representing the Superior General of the Maronite Lebanese Order were also present for the meetings.

Joining them from the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon were: Chorbishop Faouzi Elia, Vicar General; Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Parish, Chicago; Father Abdallah Zaidan, Rector of Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral, Los Angeles, Calif.; and Father Gary George, Rector of St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo. Also participating in some meetings was Mr. Youssef Shaheed Doueihi, representing the Maronite Foundation in the World.

His Beatitude opened the meeting at nine o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, October 5, 2011, with a prayer. His Excellency Bishop Shaheen welcomed the attendees, pointing out specifically that this second assembly is presided over by His Beatitude, the Patriarch, after the first assembly of Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2009. Bishop Shaheen stressed the unity of the Maronite Church in Lebanon and in the countries of expansion. His Beatitude, in turn, gave his welcoming remarks, thanked Their Excellencies and the Superiors General, and considered that this gathering is tantamount to a new Pentecost for the entire Maronite Church. He desired to participate in the meetings in the context of his pastoral visit to the two eparchies of the United States of America, thus completing the pastoral visits he started in Lebanon. The Fathers seized this opportunity to express their appreciation of his pastoral visits, and their bountiful results which manifested the unity of the Lebanese and their accord around

the person of the Patriarch on whom they have high hopes and expectations. They confirmed their desire to work with His Beatitude to realize these hopes for the benefit of Lebanon and the Christians of the East.

After that, the Fathers moved on to discuss the subjects set forth in the agenda, whether ecclesial or national, and are of concern to the faithful in the countries of expansion, especially those recommendations which emanated from the Maronite Patriarchal Synod concerning the expansion: These include the strengthening of the links of collaboration between the Mother Church and the eparchies of expansion, as well as the importance of coordination among all Church institutions, and finding explicit ways of cooperation between them at the level of pastoral ministry, arriving at the perfect communion in love.

After deliberations and discussions, the assembly issued the following communiqué:

## *On the Ecclesial Level*

The Fathers stressed the importance of interconnection and its activation between the Patriarchate and the eparchies for the implementation of the motto, "Communion and Love," and its role in establishing this ecclesial relationship. The matter touched on vocations to the priesthood in the countries of expansion and ways of fostering them locally in order to fill the needs of the eparchies. They lauded the seminary in Washington, D. C. They agreed on the collaboration with the eparchies and seminaries in Lebanon for the purpose of finding and forming vocations for the benefit of the eparchies of expansion. The Fathers also stressed the importance of sending priests for specialization in Rome and residing at the Maronite Pontifical College where they have the opportunity to live together, to get acquainted and firmly establish spiritual bonds, and practice the Maronite Liturgical Celebrations.

- ★ The Fathers reviewed the current state of affairs of the missions and the difficulties that obstruct their functioning, especially regarding shortage in the number of priests and missionaries. They stressed the importance of collaborating with the monastic institutions, and they designed prototypes of agreements specifying the spheres of such collaboration;
- ★ They tackled the subject of the Liturgy, considering the fundamental role it has in the formation of the identity of our Church and its unity. They stressed unifying the translation of official texts and clerical adherence to the proper texts, rubrics and directives. They also stressed on the duty of the faithful in safeguarding religious observances and participating in ecclesial celebrations, as well as caring for their spiritual life.
- ★ The Fathers touched on the subject of Catechesis and its importance in faith formation among the children, the

youth and the adults as well as on the revival of their spirituality and the learning of their Antiochene Maronite heritage. They commended the move initiated by the two eparchies of the United States of America in publishing catechetical texts for all classes and ages (*Faith of the Mountain*). In addition to Catholic teaching, the series incorporated the characteristics of the spirituality of the Maronite Church, its heritage and its Liturgy. The Fathers recommended that these textbooks be adopted and translated to the languages of the countries of expansion, respecting the individuality of each eparchy.

### ***On the National Level***

- ★ On the national level, the Fathers dealt with the subject of connection with the Motherland and the strengthening of the bonds of cooperation and solidarity with its people. They listened to a presentation by Mr. Youssef Shaheed Doueihy from the Maronite Foundation in the World, concerning the personal registration of live events at the consulates and ways of following them in Lebanon. The assembly agreed on the need to activate the process of census and registration in the parishes and the eparchies, and commended the Maronite Foundation in the World for its work in this domain. They enjoyed the Lebanese State to expedite in ratifying the proposed law concerning the retrieval of the Lebanese Nationality for those entitled to it.
- ★ The Fathers praised the visits undertaken by communities, clubs and institutions to Lebanon. They emphasized the importance of the youth trips that they may return to their ecclesial and national roots.

### ***Epilogue***

In closing, the Fathers thanked His Excellency Robert Shaheen, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, along with the members of the St. Raymond Cathedral Parish for accommodating the Conference. The assembly saluted the Synod of Bishops in Lebanon and they thanked the Media that accompanied His Beatitude on his pastoral visit to the United States of America, especially *Tele Lumière* and *Noursat*, which accompanied the Conference and covered its events. They agreed on convening their next conference in April of 2013, in the Eparchy of St. Sharbel in Argentina. □



## ***Benefit Dinner for the Eparchy of Saint Maron Features Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai***

Over 250 people attended the Second Annual Benefit Dinner in Manhattan, N.Y., for the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn at the Roosevelt Hotel on October 21, 2011. The keynote speaker was the Patriarch of the Maronite Church, His Beatitude Bechara Peter Rai, who delivered an



From left: Archbishop Paul Sayah, Patriarchal Vicar General, Patriarch Bechara Rai and Bishop Gregory Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn at the Second Eparchial Benefit Dinner in Manhattan, N.Y.

inspirational address to the crowd.

After an introduction by Bishop Gregory Mansour, Patriarch Rai discussed the most significant issues facing Lebanon and was interrupted multiple times by applause. Archbishop Paul Sayah, the Patriarch's Vicar General, translated the Patriarch's remarks into flawless English.

Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Vicar General, was Master of Ceremonies. The opening prayer was given by Archbishop Sayah, and the closing prayer was offered by Very Reverend James Root, Rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn.

Among the distinguished guests in attendance were Antoine Chedid, Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States; Nawaf Salam, Ambassador of Lebanon to the United Nations; Antoine Azzam, Consul General of Lebanon in New York; Caroline Ziade, Deputy Permanent Representative in the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United States; and over twenty members of the clergy.

John F. Kurey, the Eparchy's Stewardship Director, described the Eparchy's accomplishments over the past year that include the completion of the new Chapel of Our Lady of Lebanon at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.; the celebration of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Washington, D.C.; the opening of new missions and providing a better pension for retired priests. Many attendees made additional donations that evening. Bishop Gregory expressed his gratitude to everyone who attended the Benefit Dinner or made a contribution.

Proceeds from the Benefit Dinner will be applied to the needs of the Eparchy. Donations in connection with the Dinner are being accepted until November 21. Checks may be made payable to "Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn" and sent to 109 Remsen Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201. □



# ***His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai Makes His Inaugural Pastoral Visit to the Church in the U.S.***

*His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, made his inaugural pastoral visit to the Maronite Church in the U.S. from October 1 -23, 2011. He began his visit in Saint Louis, Missouri, Seat of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon.*

## **Saint Louis, Missouri**



Bishop Robert Shaheen of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai and Fr. Gary George, Rector of Saint Raymond Cathedral.

*by Shelly Vitale*

**H**is Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai has begun his official visit to the United States and the Diocese of Our Lady of Lebanon in St. Louis. The family of St. Raymond Maronite Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo., was honored to receive the Patriarch, his Vicar General Archbishop Paul Sayah and the newly ordained Bishop Hanna Alwan, Patriarchal Auxiliary for canonical affairs. The Most Reverend Robert J. Shaheen, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, and Father Gary George, C.Ss.R., Rector of St. Raymond Cathedral welcomed the Patriarch along with clergy from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina as well as Lebanon.

The Patriarch joined in meetings with the Maronite Bishops who live outside of Lebanon and celebrated the Liturgy each day. On Wednesday, October 5, a large crowd of parishioners assembled outside at noon and welcomed the Patriarch with grand applause as he entered the Cathedral to prepare for the Liturgy. It was awe inspiring for everyone to witness his arrival. His message "Communion and Love," which is also the motto he has chosen for his ministry and mission as Patriarch, is what he wishes to implement during his Pastoral visit.

The Patriarch and the Bishops had the opportunity to visit some historic and important sites in St. Louis including: the first Catholic Cathedral built on the west side of the Mississippi River, the beautiful and historical St. Louis Arch and the magnificent St. Louis Basilica where Bishop Shaheen

was first consecrated as a Bishop. The Basilica houses the largest number of mosaic art pieces outside of the Vatican.

On Friday, October 7, the Maronite Divine Liturgy was celebrated by His Beatitude. Hundreds were in attendance, and the media covered the event. Applause, in appreciation of the Patriarch, roared through the Cathedral. The Patriarch celebrated the Liturgy surrounded by his fellow clergy, and the magnitude of warmth and spirituality was electrifying. The Choir, under the guidance of John LeCuyer, sang beautifully with the accompaniment of organist, Michael Vitale.

A Grand Banquet, held at The Cedars of Lebanon Banquet Hall in honor of His Beatitude, was attended by hundreds including many clergy, dignitaries and officials. An inspiring video was shown capturing the journey of His Beatitude since his consecration as Patriarch. Speakers included: His Eminence Cardinal Justin Rigali; Bishop Gregory Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron; Archbishop Robert Carlson of the Diocese of St. Louis; Bishop Rice, Auxiliary Bishop; Bishop Stika, Bishop of the Diocese of Tennessee; Dr. Maged Haikal; Father Gary George, Rector of St. Raymond Cathedral; The Honorable Francis G. Slay, Mayor of the City of St. Louis, who presented the Patriarch with a key to the City and a proclamation and declared October 7 "His Beatitude Bechara Peter Rai Day." The Honorable Lewis Reed, President of the Board of Alderman of the City of Saint Louis, who also presented the Patriarch with a Resolution; The Honorable Antoine Chedid, Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States; and Bishop Robert J. Shaheen. Patriarch Rai then gave an inspiring speech on the role of the Patriarch and his relationship and importance to the Christians of the Middle East and throughout the world. His message is for Christians and non-Christians to coexist. He commended the community of St. Raymond, under the leadership of Bishop Robert Shaheen and Father Gary George, for continuing to deepen their Maronite identity in St. Louis. He thanked everyone for their warm greetings, kindness and generosity. □

## **Peoria, Illinois Two Patriarchal Visits**

*by Laurice Joseph*

**O**n October 2, 2011, the newly ordained Bishop Hanna Alwan was joined by His Beatitude for his first Thanksgiving Liturgy in his home Parish of Peoria, where his family resides after immigrating from *Ito*, Lebanon. Bishop Alwan was ordained by His Beatitude on September 16, 2011, in *Diman*, Lebanon (summer residence of the Patriarch), and appointed as Vicar for Canonical Affairs.



He was joined in the celebration by members of his Order (Maronite Lebanese Missionaries), represented by Fr. Elie Madi, Superior General of the MLM, Fr. Abdallah Zaidan, and Fr. Jean Younes. Also present were Bishop Robert Shaheen; Archbishop Paul Sayah, Patriarchal Vicar General; Bishop Sharbel Merhi of Argentina; Chorbishop Faouzi Elia, Pastor of St. Sharbel Church; Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon in Chicago; Abbot Daoud Raidi, Superior General of the Antonine Monks; Fr. Bechara Awada, Associate Pastor of St. Sharbel Church; Deacons Joe LaHood, Jim Siedlecki, George Geagea, and Subdeacon Dr. Bill Nijm.

Following the Liturgy, a reception was held in Bishop Hanna's honor at the *Itoo* Society (the local Lebanese Club), with His Beatitude, clergy, family, parishioners, and friends.

Sunday evening, an informal question-answer program was held at St. Sharbel Community Hall, with His Beatitude presiding. This was followed by a live taping of the Patriarch's weekly-scheduled Christian Formation (El Tansheat Masseheyat), which was broadcast by *Telemiere/Noursat*.

Monday, October 3, before departing for St. Louis, Mo., to meet with the U.S. Maronite Bishops and the Bishops of the Diaspora, Superior General of four Lebanese Orders and clergy, a Divine Liturgy was celebrated by His Beatitude at St. Sharbel Church.

The following weekend, the Patriarch returned to Peoria for a Liturgy and a Banquet of Honor, held at St. Sharbel Banquet Hall. Among the guest speakers who paid tribute to the Patriarch were U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood, U.S. Congressman Aaron Schock, and Ambassador Antoine Chedid, who, in turn, spoke to those attending this affair.

Sunday, October 9, 2011, His Beatitude was the main Liturgical celebrant, joined by Archbishop Sayah, Bishop Madi of Brazil, Bishop Khoury of Canada, Bishop Hanna, the Peoria Latin Catholic Bishop, Bishop Jenky, CSC, Chorbishop Elia, Abbot Tarabay, Super General of the Mariamite Order, Msgr. Deptula of Peoria, Fr. Awada of St. Sharbel, and Deacons.

Joining in honoring His Beatitude was The *Itoo* Society of Peoria, which served a grand Brunch at their Club Hall. Entertainment included guest speakers, followed by several

Lebanese youth who sang songs, recited poetry, and read heart-filled essays.

From the Parish of St. Sharbel and the *Itoo* Society in Peoria, we bid Patriarch Bechara Rai God's Blessings and Peace as he continued his visits in America through October 23, 2011. □

## Chicago, Illinois



Bishop Hanna Alwan, Patriarchal Vicar for Canonical Affairs, Archbishop Paul Sayah, Patriarchal Vicar General, His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Rai and Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church.

by Cathy Awad

On Sunday, October 10, 2011, the parishioners of Our Lady of Lebanon waited outside the Church in anticipation of the arrival of the car that would bring Patriarch Rai to Lombard [Chicago]. The Church was decorated with banners with the motto "Communion and Love." Patriarch Rai arrived amidst clapping and cheers, and a large crowd followed him into the Church for the benediction of the Blessed Mother. He celebrated Liturgy along with the many Maronite and non-Marionites, Maronite Bishops, Roman Catholic bishops and priests that came for this event. Immediately following was a banquet that gave an opportunity for all to hear his wisdom and grace. Our parish was blessed by His Beatitude's Pastoral visit. The Chicago Maronite Community, and other Christians of Eastern heritage are energized in following this Shepherd (Rai in Arabic means Shepherd). □

## Cleveland, Ohio

Anticipation was high as the Patriarch's plane landed for the first Maronite Patriarchal visit to St. Maron Church in Cleveland, Ohio. He, along with Bishop Sayah, Bishop Edgar Mady of Brazil, and Chorbishop Faouzi Elia, were greeted by our Pastor, Fr. Peter Karam, and his associate, Fr. Tony Massad, together with Samir Farah, Council President, the deacon, the subdeacons, and others.

Due to a very tight schedule, they were taken to the Renaissance Hotel for a luncheon with the presidents and directors of the various organizations of the Parish. After the

# Houston, Texas



From left to right: Bishop Massoud Youssef, Bishop Paul Sayah, Patriarch Bechara Rai, Bishop Edgar Mady, Fr. Peter Karam, Pastor of St. Maron Church.



Patriarch Rai, Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop Fiorenza, Bishops Shaheen, Sayah, Abi Younes, Madi, and Alwan, Superior General Madi, and Chorbishop Elia are surrounded by the clergy at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy.

luncheon, they were brought to the Church for the Divine Liturgy.

The processional was led by nine priests who came from as far as Chicago, including priests representing the Latin Diocese of Cleveland, the Melkite Church, and the Orthodox Church, and three Bishops: retired Archbishop of Syria Massoud Youssef, Bishop Edgar Mady of Brazil, and Bishop Paul Sayah. Eight hundred parishioners and friends greeted the Patriarch with an ovation that lasted until he reached the doors of the Church and was incensed by Fr. Peter.

Following the liturgy, they returned to the Renaissance Hotel for a grand banquet. MC Henry Hilow introduced the head table, which included city, state, and federal representation. Mr. Blaine Griffin representing the Mayor of Cleveland, Congresswoman Marcia Fudge, Congressman Dennis Kucinich, former Congresswoman Mary Rose Oakar, Acting General Consul of Lebanon Hussam Diab, Consul of Lebanon Bachir Tawk, and Sr. Marie Madeleine Iskandar presented various honors. Council President Samir Farah, prefaced his welcoming address with a poem in Arabic which reads in English:

*From the land of Saints you came  
The flame of unity you carried  
In God's path you walked  
And the prayer of love you prayed  
To far places you went  
Communion and Love you talked  
The Shepherd word you preached  
And the light of the Lord you shined*

The following day, after a breakfast with fifty-two guests, the Patriarch and his delegation were taken to the airport.

Many thanks are in order for the committee who organized the Patriarch's visit. They worked diligently and with love to make this a beautiful event. It was a memorable, historical visit that will remain with the parishioners for years to come. □

Our Lady of the Cedars Parish was honored by the visit of his Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai October 11 -13, 2011. It was an event that will be carved in the hearts and minds of every parishioner for a lifetime. When Our Lady of the Cedars consisted of a handful of families, nobody would have ever dreamed that a parish of over 600 families would, one day, be greeting its spiritual leader. Only twenty years later, the Parish can now boast of having welcomed two Patriarchs in our midst. In 2008, His Beatitude Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir's Pastoral visit to Houston marked the first time a Maronite Patriarch had ever visited the city. Then a short three years later, His Beatitude Patriarch Rai has blessed the parish again with his visit.

Patriarch Rai was accompanied by his Vicar General Archbishop Paul Sayah, Maronite Bishops Georges Abi Younes of the Eparchy of Our Lady of the Martyrs of Lebanon in Mexico, Central America, and Venezuela; Edgard Madi of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon in Brazil; and the newly elected Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop Hanna Alwan, along with the Superior General of the Maronite Lebanese Missionaries, Father Elie Madi. Bishop Robert Shaheen of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, His Eparchial Vicar General Chorbishop Faouzi Elia, the Superior of the Maronite Lebanese Missionaries in the U.S., Father Abdallah Zaidan, and Our Lady of the Cedars Pastor and Associates, Fathers Milad Yaghi, Andre Estephan, and Pierre El-Khoury, welcomed a number of Bishops, priests, and fellow Maronites who flocked from places as far as England and Florida and as close as Louisiana, to greet the Patriarch. A strong participation of local Catholic and non-Catholic clergy and laity helped make the Patriarch's visit very special and certainly memorable.

In honor of His Beatitude, several public events were held during the short visit, along with private opportunities for the clergy and parish organizations to meet with the Patriarch.

Upon the Patriarch's arrival, over two hundred people were invited to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Nijad Issam Fares for a luncheon, during which U.S. Congressman Ruben

Hinojosa presented a U.S. Flag flown on the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., in honor of the Patriarch. That same afternoon, Patriarch Rai met with the Maronite Young Adults (MYA) and the Maronite Youth Organization (MYO). Later in the evening, His Beatitude celebrated the Pontifical Divine Liturgy in the presence of Daniel Cardinal DiNardo and Archbishop Emeritus Joseph Fiorenza, both of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. A total of twenty-five Bishops, Monsignors and priests, Roman Catholic, Maronite, Melkite, and Orthodox, also participated in the Divine Liturgy. Following the Liturgy, Patriarch Rai welcomed the faithful in the Church hall where a special reception was held in honor of all visiting clergy.

On Wednesday morning, His Beatitude celebrated the Divine Liturgy with members of the Parish Organizations, who joined the Patriarch for a breakfast. His Beatitude then taped his weekly television show, *Bushra Al-Rahi*, from the Church in front of a local audience of parishioners. A visit and tour of the Catholic co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Downtown Houston took place in mid-afternoon. Then in the evening, close to 700 people honored the Patriarch at a dinner banquet held at the Westin Galleria Hotel. A special folkloric Lebanese song, written especially for the Patriarch, was performed by the parish choir, and a video documentary about His Beatitude was shown on the large projection screens. A slideshow presentation on the history of Our Lady of the Cedars Parish ran during dinner. After two brief speeches by Bishop Shaheen and Father Yaghi, welcoming His Beatitude to Houston on behalf of the Eparchy and the parish, respectively, plaques commemorating the visit were presented by parishioners to all distinguished visiting clergy. Harris County Sheriff Adrian Garcia then presented the Patriarch with a Proclamation designating October 12 of every year as "Patriarch Rai Day" in the City of Houston. Next, Mr. Nijad Issam Fares welcomed Patriarch Rai on behalf of the Lebanese and at-large Arab communities in Houston. Mr. Fares also presented His Beatitude with a rare book written in the mid-1600s about the Maronites. At the end of the evening, His Beatitude delivered his powerful address, urging all the faithful living outside of the Middle East to get registered in the vital records of their respective countries of origin, especially in Lebanon, where the Maronite Patriarchate is fully engaged in a drive to register Lebanese emigrants through Maronite Outreach and Project Roots. Patriarch Rai also encouraged Lebanese Americans to set the example for the people of Lebanon in promoting the values of good citizenry and efficient public service.

The short visit to Houston ended on Thursday morning, October 13, when the Patriarch and his accompanying delegation of clergy and media personnel left for San Antonio, Texas, after a breakfast with the parish family. □

## San Antonio, Texas

On October 13, 2011, the Maronites of St. George Maronite Church were blessed and inspired by a pastoral visit by His Beatitude Bechara Peter Rai to the city of San Antonio, Tex. It had been thirty years since then Maronite Patriarch Antonios Peter Cardinal Khoriach had graced the Church with his presence. The opening event began as the Patriarch led the faithful in the praying of the



From left: Bishop Hanna Alwan, Bishop Robert Shaheen, Patriarch Rai, Bishop Paul Sayah, Bishop Edgar Madi and Fr. Ghassan Mattar.

Angelus and concluded with a blessing using the icon of Our Lady of *Ilige*. The leader of the Maronite Church was then treated to a special luncheon where officials from the city, county, and state presented him with special awards and tributes.

Due to the anticipated number of worshipers, almost 700, the Divine Liturgy, broadcasted by Catholic Television of San Antonio and filmed by *Noursat*, was celebrated in the gym, spectacularly decorated to look like a church building.

Following the Liturgy, a reception followed in which His Beatitude stressed how impressed he was by the continued effort to educate and teach all about the richness of the Maronite tradition and heritage. It became apparent to him that St. George is even more committed to meeting the challenges of defining and preserving the faith and traditions of *Beit Maron*, the house of prayer, love, and holiness. He also emphasized that one of our responsibilities is to hand the torch to the children to learn and grow in wisdom and grace. In closing Patriarch Rai noted how gratifying it was to see such a strong Maronite community in communion with him and how much history was preserved and archived. He said, "There is no future without history. Well done, San Antonio." □

## Los Angeles, California

by Tommy Tedros

The Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral community of Los Angeles, California, was honored to have His Beatitude Bechara Peter Rai, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, visit from Friday, October 14 to Monday, October 17, 2011. His schedule was non-stop, yet he always took time to meet and greet and pose for pictures, which all of the Los Angeles Maronites and friends of the community appreciated.

He arrived Friday morning at Van Nuys regional airport, where many well-wishers were there to greet and welcome him. A luncheon was held in his honor in Downtown Los Angeles, where he gave a presentation to the Board members of the Los Angeles World Affairs Council. Following this event, The Patriarch and his entourage of bishops, priests and





Patriarch Rai meets with the youth of Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon Cathedral in Los Angeles, Calif.

media took a tour of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) located in Pasadena. JPL is a federally funded research and development center and NASA field center that conducts major programs in space-based earth sciences and robotic exploration of the solar system. Later that day, the acting Consul General of Lebanon in Los Angeles, the Honorable Madonna Aoun Ghazal, and her husband, Dr. Joseph Ghazal, hosted the Patriarch and other dignitaries for a reception. There he received a couple of certificates from officials, such as the one from the Honorable Eric Garcetti, City Council President, welcoming him to the city. A great crowd of Lebanese, from all walks of life and representatives of different groups were also present.

On Saturday morning, the Patriarch met with the various church organizations and committees of the Cathedral and the surrounding Maronite parishes for a breakfast reception in the Cathedral hall. His Beatitude met the Armenian Orthodox Catholicos Aram I and his entourage, whose visit coincided with his visit to the city. They exchanged greetings and discussed the importance of the unity between their Churches.

Following a small church service, His Beatitude attended a luncheon at the Montage Hotel in Beverly Hills. The focus of this event was to encourage stewardship in the Eparchy and the importance of our assistance and involvement in the Maronite church throughout the Eparchy. The remainder of the day was spent at receptions hosted by members of the community throughout town. Among those in attendance at the reception was the Mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa, who provided remarks welcoming him to the city and a special certificate for His Beatitude Rai. The Sheriff of Los Angeles County, the Honorable Lee Baca, presented him with a certificate as well.

On Sunday morning, a breakfast reception was held at the Century Plaza. Many local Lebanese, members of political and non-political, benevolent organizations attended this function. There was time for a question-answer session with the Patriarch, and he fielded every question with grace that captivated the crowd. The Pontifical Liturgy was held later

that morning at the Cathedral. Members of the Order of Saint Sharbel were in honor guard formation as the clergy processed outside and into the Church. The Church was filled beyond capacity, and closed-circuit television was set up for viewing in the hall. Following the Liturgy, a luncheon was held in the Century Plaza Hotel grand ballroom which was filled to capacity.

Among other clergy in attendance were Bishop Robert Shaheen; Archbishop Paul Sayah, Patriarchal Vicar General; Bishop George Abi-Younes, of Mexico; Bishop Edgard Madi, of Brazil; Bishop Hanna Alwan, Patriarchal Auxiliary for Canonical Affairs; Father Elie Madi, Superior General of the Congregation of Maronite Lebanese Missionaries; Chorbishop Faouzi Elia, Eparchial Vicar General; and a host of local and regional priests in addition to Father Abdallah Zaidan, Pastor, and his associate, Father Elias Sleiman.

Dr. Elias Ayoub, President of the Parish Council and the Honorable Madonna Aoun Ghazal, acting Consul General of Lebanon in Los Angeles, provided remarks at the luncheon. Los Angeles City Councilman Dennis Zine, the first American-Lebanese representative in local city government, issued a city declaration to the Patriarch on behalf of the City Council. Bishop Shaheen emphasized the importance of Patriarch Rai's visit and welcomed him into our midst.

During His Beatitude's keynote address he reiterated the importance of supporting the Catholic communities in the Middle East, "On this occasion, I want to tell you that the Christian presence in the Middle East is essential for the Church and for the human culture. The Christians are an inseparable part of the Universal Church, the Body of Christ. They continue the spread of the gospel of salvation in their Middle Eastern environment that is the gospel of communion and love; the gospel of brotherhood, dialogue and conviviality; the gospel of truth, justice and peace; the gospel of freedom and dignity of the human person. We call on the international community, especially the United States of America, and you are loyal citizens, to know the reality of the Christian presence in the Middle East, their role and their mission, and the importance to safeguard that presence." A video display was shown marking the Patriarch's previous historic visits in the United States that coincided with his current visit to Los Angeles.

That afternoon, His Beatitude met with the Antiochian Orthodox Bishop Joseph Al-Zehlaoui, where they shared views on the presence of the Christians in the Middle East and the importance of collaboration among the different Churches. Sunday night, at the invitation of His Holiness Catholicos Aram I, His Beatitude attended a special Banquet where he addressed the people with his message of gratitude and friendship urging them to support their brothers and sisters in Lebanon and the Middle East and to register their life events at the Consulate.

The Patriarch departed Monday morning to visit various parishes in the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. It was a historic time in Los Angeles, and we were honored to host His Beatitude for three days. □

# ***The Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn is the Final Stop in Patriarch Rai's Inaugural Visit to the U.S.***

*On his second stage of his inaugural visit to the U.S., His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai visited the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn October 17 - 23, 2011. His first stop was in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, before moving on to Massachusetts and New York.*

## ***Bishop Mansour Welcomes Patriarch Rai***

**H**is Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour welcomed His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai to the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn when he said: "The Maronite Church is led by an extraordinary man, Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai. Patriarch Rai is a man of prayer, but he does not hide behind prayer and he is not shy. He is 'strong, loving and wise' as Saint Paul encourages his disciple Timothy to be. He is practical, intelligent, faithful and relies completely on God. He represents the best of what the Maronite Church, her prayer and way of life have to offer.

"He is a religious leader who is unafraid of speaking the truth, to say what is not politically correct, as long as it promotes 'communion and love' between all people. He has stood before the most powerful and has been a friend to the lowly. He is strong with the strong, meek with the humble, and astute with the crooked.

"The Lebanon in which he lives is divided into colors - symbolic of the political parties. When asked what color are you, he says Color me 'Lebanon.' He is on no one's side, beholden to no one, and yet is on everyone's side. That's hard to do!

"In the midst of his fellow Christians in the Middle East, his beloved country of Lebanon and his world-wide Maronite flock comes a father, a Patriarch, a man who prays and dreams of 'communion and love' among all people.

"I hope and pray that the Maronite Church throughout the world, as well as every citizen and friend of Lebanon, will come to respect and love the wisdom of our Patriarch."

## **Uniontown, Pennsylvania**

*by Dr. Mabel Howard*

**S**t. George Maronite Catholic Church of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, honored His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai, 77<sup>th</sup> Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, on his pastoral visit to the United States. According to Reverend Nadim Helou, Pastor of St. George, church archives show that the Maronite Lebanese community of Uniontown was assembled in 1903. After petitioning the Pittsburgh diocese, St. George Maronite Catholic Church established a formal Uniontown parish in 1927 consisting of about a hundred families. Today, the St. George congregation has grown to approximately 280 to 300 families but, until now, had never been visited by a Patriarch. Reverend Helou emphasized the importance of this historic event. "The congregation is very excited about His Beatitude's visit," Helou commented. "Our parishioners have worked together for the success of this memorable and reverent event."



His Beatitude Patriarch Rai celebrates the Divine Liturgy at St. George Church in Uniontown, Penn., on October 17.

Bishop Gregory Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, served as Pastor of St. George for eleven years. Bishop Gregory was instrumental in choosing parishes, like St. George, that Patriarchs had not yet graced.

Accompanied by Bishop Gregory Mansour and Archbishop Paul Sayyah and an entourage of clergy, His Beatitude Patriarch Rai arrived at St. George and celebrated the Divine Liturgy on October 17. Feelings of reverence, excitement and happiness permeated the church as His Beatitude, flanked by the local Knights of Columbus draped in full ceremonial regalia, processed down the main aisle and greeted over 500 worshippers. His Beatitude's presence overwhelmed the parishioners and drew smiles, cheers, celebratory chants, applause, tears, and reverent bows. St. George Church holds approximately 275 people; however, to accommodate the overflow of 250 more visitors in attendance, an enclosed tent was connected to the front of the church equipped with two large screen television monitors. The liturgy was celebrated in English, Arabic, and Syriac. The newly revised book of the Divine Liturgy was provided for parishioners to follow.

During the liturgy, Patriarch Rai spoke in both Arabic and English. Throughout the homily, his message of "Communion and Love" preached global mercy and forgiveness among Christians, Muslims, and Jews. He expressed concern for the plight of all Christians in the Middle East and supported cultural movements directed at unity, peace and brotherhood. His Beatitude clearly stated that a world without forgiveness would be a "harsh and unbearable" place to live. During the liturgy, the Patriarch was accompanied by Bishop Gregory Mansour, Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Reverend Nadim Helou, and several other

members of the clergy. The St. George Youth Choir guided the congregation in Eastern Maronite hymns and chants.

Following the Liturgy, His Beatitude's words of wisdom continued at a Uniontown Country Club reception, which served 250 participants. In addition to the banquet hall dinner, Ladies Guild members of St. George Church prepared ethnic Lebanese hors d'oeuvres. Each guest received a homemade sugar cookie favor in the shape of a cedar tree with a decorated Antiochian Cross. Patriarch Rai exhibited elation and offered his approval of the church volunteers, parish organizations and functionality of the entire affair. He also demonstrated great levity and interacted with individuals on a personal level. The Patriarch's warm eye contact and soothing voice demonstrated his attentiveness to their prayers, questions and concerns. His Beatitude displayed a comfortable sense of humor and down-to-earth qualities that helped create an interpersonal connection with St. George patrons. It was evident that the Patriarch appeared very pleased to be among his parishioners, and they felt extremely privileged to be a part of his audience.

At the Uniontown Country Club, the Patriarch enjoyed breakfast the next morning with a large group of people anxious to meet him and request a special blessing. Following the meal, His Beatitude entertained questions and welcomed an open discussion concerning Arabic language education, proposed changes in our liturgy, customs of the Maronite Church, and the Lebanese Expansion. St. George Maronite Catholic Church of Uniontown is truly fortunate and blessed to have been honored with the Patriarch's visit. Subdeacon Tom George stated, "This is considered a once-in-a-lifetime experience." St. George parishioners are forever grateful to His Beatitude for allowing their small congregation the opportunity to share in his graces. Patriarch Rai is a religious leader of great piety, compassion, understanding, humility, and vision. □

## Fall River, Mass.



by Chorbishop Joseph F. *Kaddo*

On Tuesday and Wednesday, October 18 - 19, 2011, the Parish Community of St. Anthony of the Desert Church, Fall River, Mass., was honored to welcome His Beatitude Bechara Peter Rai, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, during his first Patriarchal Pastoral Visit to the United States of America. Our parish community

was elated when asked by Bishop Gregory J. Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn to represent the Northern Region of the Eparchy to host His Beatitude's visit. Upon confirmation of his visit, the parish immediately began preparations for the solemn and social festivities associated with this historical event.

His Beatitude Patriarch Rai, Archbishop Paul Sayah, Patriarchal Vicar General, Bishop Gregory J. Mansour, Chorbishop Michael G. Thomas, Msgr. George Sebaali, Deacon Simon Abi-Nader along with the entourage traveling with the Patriarch including members of Noursat Television Station and Lebanese Broadcasting Company arrived at New Bedford Massachusetts Airport about 1 P.M. Tuesday afternoon. They were met by Chorbishop Joseph F. Kaddo, Father John Morrison, Msgr. David M. George, Msgr. Peter Azar, Father George El-Khalli, Sister Marla Marie, Sister Therese Maria and the parishioners of Our Lady of Purgatory Maronite Church, New Bedford and of St. Anthony of the Desert Church, Fall River. After receiving an official welcoming citation from the City of New Bedford officials, a luncheon was hosted by Father Morrison at the New Bedford Country Club. Following the luncheon, police escorts led us to the Quality Inn and then to St. Anthony's Church in Fall River. At the Church awaiting the Patriarch's arrival were many Priests, Deacons and Subdeacons from the Eparchy of Saint Maron and the Diocese of Fall River along with many parishioners from our parishes in the Northern Region of the Eparchy. From 4:30 - 5:30 P.M. His Beatitude met with Bishop George W. Coleman of the Diocese of Fall River, Bishop Gregory J. Mansour, Archbishop Paul Sayah and all the priests, deacons and subdeacons. This informal gathering was truly a wonderful experience giving us the opportunity to ask questions and hear the Patriarch's message firsthand. At 6:00 P.M. the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the newly renovated Church. The Patriarch, Archbishop, Bishops and Sixty-five priests, deacons and subdeacons were seated in the Sanctuary. The church was filled to overflowing capacity. A grand banquet of about Five Hundred People following the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries, was held at the Venus de Milo Banquet Facility, Swansea, Mass. At this banquet the key to the city of Fall River was presented to the Patriarch by Mayor William Flanagan. Words of welcome were also presented by Bishop George Coleman, Bishop of the Diocese of Fall River and the formal introduction of the Patriarch was given by Bishop Gregory Mansour. The next morning, in an effort to raise funds for the Patriarchate and the Eparchy, a breakfast was held at the St. Sharbel Center to honor the Patriarch and to thank him for his blessings to the community. From here, the Patriarch and his entourage left for the Most Holy Trinity Monastery, Petersham for Liturgy and meeting with the Monks.

We, here, at St. Anthony's are extremely grateful to Bishop Gregory for giving us this opportunity to receive our Patriarch and his Blessings. □

Patriarch Rai's speeches, homilies and talks in the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn are available online at [www.stmaron.org](http://www.stmaron.org).

## Petersham, Mass. *Most Holy Trinity Monastery*



From Left: Abbott William Driscoll, Archbishop Paul Sayah, Patriarch Rai and Bishop Gregory Mansour.

On October 19, Patriarch Bechara Rai made a pastoral visit to the Maronite Monks of Adoration at Most Holy Trinity Monastery in Petersham, Massachusetts. He was accompanied by Archbishop Paul Sayah, Patriarchal Vicar General and Bishop Gregory Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron. After arrival at the Monastery from the Worcester Airport, Patriarch Rai was the principal celebrant at the offering of the Divine Mysteries. Also joining the monks in the celebration of the liturgy were Msgr. Michael Thomas, Msgr. Joseph Lahoud, Msgr. George Sebaali, Fr. Kamil Al-Chouefati and Deacon Simon Abi Nader.

During his homily the Patriarch stressed the foundational importance of monasticism for the life of the Maronite Church and his great desire to see a new flourishing of the monastic life in the Church. He emphasized that the spirituality that characterizes the life of the monks - the life of withdrawal from the world and its distractions, the life of silence and the life of prayer - is a spirituality not only for monks but one that should be lived by all the faithful of the Church according to their state in life.

During the meal that followed the Divine Liturgy, the Patriarch, in response to some of the questions of the monks, shared some of his own experience in his life as a religious. He mentioned how he entered a monastery at the age of twelve and that during all his years as a religious, in the many different assignments and challenges that he faced, he never once had regrets about his vocation and has always found great happiness in a life dedicated to the service of the Lord. The Patriarch gave a powerful witness to the happiness that comes with fidelity to the call of the Lord and His grace. The Patriarch also confirmed and encouraged the monks in their life of Eucharistic adoration, making the point that all the Maronite saints drew their strength from the Eucharist for their life of consecration. St. Nimtallah Hardini, St. Sharbel, St. Rafka, Blessed Estfan Nehme and Blessed Yaqoob [Jacques] Haddad all manifested an extraordinary love and devotion towards the Eucharistic Lord.

The visit of the Patriarch was a great honor and privilege for the monks of Most Holy Trinity Monastery. The monks found in Patriarch Rai a true spiritual father and leader. May the Lord grant him many years and a fruitful ministry in the vineyard of the Church! □

## Brooklyn, New York *Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral*

by Salma Besheer Vahdat

Sunday, October 23, 2011, was a momentous day in the lives of the Community of Faith at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn Heights, New York.

A day that dawned overcast, a day that had been anticipated for months by the clergy and parish, had finally arrived. The Cathedral was filled to overflowing capacity well before the start of the Divine Liturgy. Cameras and cell phones were in hand to record the event, Maronites from the parish and several states in the Eparchy had arrived to witness the first pastoral visit by the new Patriarch. The atmosphere in the Cathedral was electrifying! Everyone was waiting with such anticipation for the entrance of His Beatitude to the Cathedral.



At eleven a.m. the Cathedral bells tolled, the sun came out and the choir, directed by Fr. Geoffrey Abdallah, Director of Music for the Eparchy of Saint Maron, began the beautiful entrance hymns for the procession into the Cathedral. Members of the Order of Saint Sharbel, an honor guard, lined the central aisle as the church's banners entered along with the visiting guest clergy. Then, the sublime moment when our Patriarch entered, blessing the congregation and having the children kiss the cross as he processed to the altar. He received a standing ovation from all present and was received with great affection. It was apparent that he was visibly moved by the reception he was given.

The Divine Liturgy commenced with the concelebrating clergy, Bishop Emeritus Stephen H. Doueihy; Patriarchal Vicar, Archbishop Paul Sayah; The Patriarch, His Beatitude Bechara Peter Rai; Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, Gregory J. Mansour; and the Rector of the Cathedral, Very Reverend James A. Root. Also in attendance was Chorbishop Michael Thomas, Vicar General of the Eparchy.

Among the representatives of the various Roman and Eastern Churches were the Apostolic Nuncio to the United Nations, Archbishop Francis Chullikatt; the Bishop of Brooklyn, Nicholas DiMarzio; Retired Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn, Joseph Sullivan; the Primate of the Antiochean Orthodox Church of North America, Philip Saliba; the Bishop of the Antiochean Orthodox Church, Bishop Antoun; Retired Armenian Catholic Bishop Batakian; Syriac Archbishop, Cyril Ashram Karim; the Very Rev. Thomas Zain of St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral. Many of the Maronite clergy from the Eparchy of Saint Maron also attended.

The Diplomatic Corps was represented by the Lebanese Ambassador to the Permanent Mission of the United Nations, Ambassador Nawaf Salam, and the Consul General of Lebanon in New York, the Honorable Antoine Azzam. They were joined by their families.

The community waited in anticipation of the homily to be presented by His Beatitude and he did not disappoint. As he has done from the outset of his elevation to Patriarch he has espoused his commitment to a dialogue of "communion and love." He stressed the need for all faiths to unite as Lebanese for the good of their country, and in this union demonstrate a dignity, freedom and respect for the human rights of all. He expressed the opinion of all moving forward together or moving backward and sinking together. It was a sobering remark absorbed by all. He also thanked the community for its warm and affectionate welcome and was delighted to see us the unity of purpose. He was presented with two bouquets of flowers by the Heritage children, and the consecration gifts were carried to the altar by the youth of the parish.

It was on this very special occasion that the Patriarch granted the request of Bishop Gregory to elevate the Rector of the Cathedral, Fr. James Root, to the rank of Monsignor. The Cathedral erupted in applause and joy at the announcement!

After the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, a reception for the community was held in the Cathedral's Social Hall. All were invited to meet the Patriarch, who graciously posed for photos with members of the parish. The various organizations of the Cathedral: the Choir, the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, the Knights of St. Maron, the MYO, MYA and Heritage did a magnificent job of ushering, crowd control, serving and welcoming. The community was very grateful for the opportunity to welcome the Patriarch to the seat of the Eparchy and to showcase the historic Cathedral, so aptly shepherded by Monsignor James Root, a tireless servant of the Lord. □

## **New York**

### ***Press Conference at Catholic Near East Welfare Association***

On Thursday, October 20, 2011, at the invitation of Archbishop Timothy Dolan of the Archdiocese of New York, His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai visited the headquarters of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, where he was welcomed by Monsignor Kozar, Director, and staff. Following his visit with Msgr. Kozar, Patriarch Rai held a press conference attended by religious

and secular press. At the beginning of the press conference, Patriarch Rai read the following prepared statements:



Patriarch Rai addresses the press at CNEWA.

"Monsignor Kozar, members and staff of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), members of the religious and secular press, distinguished guests:

"I am grateful to be invited by Archbishop Dolan to the headquarters of CNEWA, an association dedicated to charitable outreach among Catholic and Orthodox communities of the East. I am grateful to the Archbishop for the fine work that he and his collaborators do. It makes a tremendous difference in the lives of so many in lands where being Christian is sometimes difficult. I thank all who work for CNEWA and all who donate through their sacrificial gifts; your efforts are reaching those in need.

"This afternoon, I will have the joy to be welcomed in an Ecumenical gathering of Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelical Christian leaders. Christians share a common faith in the Crucified Lord, a respect for human rights and dignity and an appreciation of the enduring value of Christian marriage. I am also grateful for the religious and secular press that have gathered here today to allow the world to know what this religious man from a far off land called Lebanon has to say.

"I ask that the world community keep her promises to Lebanon and continue to stand by her. In Lebanon Christians and Muslims have been living together for hundreds of years, with some difficulties from time to time admittedly, but also with constant and ever renewed determination to remain, as Blessed John Paul II put it, 'more than a country; a message of cooperation to the whole world, and an example of dialogue among religions'.

"The 'Arab Spring' sweeping the Middle East holds much promise, yet we must remain vigilant. The Church abhors the use of violence to meet any goal. It can never be justified. We want to see a Middle East renewed in its value of human rights and dignity, especially of her minorities. I want to thank all at CNEWA who have made this visit special.

The Maronites have always in history been bridge builders. I hope that this visit has built yet another bridge for the good of the United States of America and for Lebanon."

## *Unofficial Transcript of the News Conference*

*During the question and answer period, Patriarch Rai listened to the questions in English, answered in Arabic, which was translated into English by his Vicar General, Archbishop Paul Sayah. The transcript was made and published by Tom Gallagher, a reporter for the National Catholic Reporter on October 21, 2011. In his article Mr. Gallagher says, "Any mistakes with the transcription are entirely mine and NCR's." He granted The Maronite Voice permission to republish his remarks.*

Patriarch Rai expanded on his opening remarks about the Arab Spring. "We wish the Arab Spring to be really a[n] Arab Spring. We wish the countries to adopt this separation between religion and state, the system which Lebanon has adopted which respects all religions and all values of each religion. We wish to see freedom practiced in those. We wish to see all those values of human rights and democracy implemented in those countries. It is not easy to talk about democracy in the Western sense in countries that have a theocratic system. "Christianity divides politics and religion and we wish Islam and other religions to do the same.

"We wish to see that the troubles do not lead to civil war. If we really want this movement to be a real spring, we wish not to see happening in those countries what happened in Iraq where the country is now in the middle of a civil war. In such a situation, this will not be spring.

"We are concerned about this situation leading to regimes that are even more fundamentalist because this is something that would be to the detriment of everybody.

"We would, with the international community, look forward to a real spring but we just wanted to voice our concerns."

*In response to Tom Gallagher's question about his impressions of Syrian President Bashar Assad's track record on defending Christians, Patriarch Rai said:*

"What we know in Syria is that Christians are living like everybody else and they feel secure and they have not suffered any attacks as has been happening in some other countries. We are sorry to see in some other countries Christians have been targeted. They have difficulties building churches or recognizing their worship and so on. In Syria, this is not the case.

In all the Arab countries the regimes tend to have a rather dictatorial slant. Everybody agrees that Syria is in need of reform for freedoms, human rights and so on. It is up to the Syrians, the people and authority, to find the best way to run the country. We wish to see this process being done in a peaceful way, through dialogue."

*As a follow-up Gallagher asked whether uncritical Western support of Israel is actually making life more difficult for Christians in the region.*

"It's not because the world is supporting Israel that this is impacting negatively the Christians in the region. The problem is that there are two conflicts in the Middle East: Israel and the Arab countries and Israel and the Palestinians.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is a conflict at the level of religion and culture.

"The conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis is a conflict between a people whose sovereignty, whose land was taken away, who were displaced and for sixty-four years has been promised by the U.N., through U.N. resolutions, a right of return, but this situation has never happened. In Lebanon, we have half a million persons or refugees. The war in Lebanon in 1975 started with the Palestinians. This Jewish conflict led to injustice, oppression, it led also to the development of more fundamentalist movements in the region.

"This atmosphere that was created by those conflicts has impacted the Christian presence in the Middle East. Of course, some of them left because of economic and security reasons. Some of them are still living there, but this is what really impacted the Christians in the region. There will be no peace in that part of the world unless both Judaism, Christianity and Islam separate religion and state.

*With respect to the Coptic community in Egypt, Patriarch Rai said:*

"In the Middle East, it is not the same in all countries. In some countries, you may not have a right to have a church or any Christian presence. In other countries Christians exist there, they have their churches, they have their worship, but life is very, very difficult for them. For example, to build a church or repair a church, this is extremely difficult. There is a third category where Christians are living, accepted, but of course they don't have freedom of conscience. It does not exist. You cannot change your religion.

"It's important to note that when we are talking about the Christians, we are not talking about some people who came from the outside. In that part of the world Christians were there 600 years before Islam and they impacted their countries with their values.

"In Lebanon what we are doing is that each religion has full rights and each religion respects the others fully in order to minimize any possible religious strife.

"In Lebanon we held two religious summits where all the heads of the religions in Lebanon came together and we came out with statements with our common convictions and common values that we shared and we asked the politicians to abide by those directives.

"We are in daily contact with Holiness Pope Shenouda III [the Coptic pope] and we have been discussing the matter with all the religious heads of religious communities in the Middle East and we are in the process of preparing a summit for the religious leaders in order to try to promote the atmosphere that exists in Lebanon, where all religious communities live together in freedom and in mutual respect.

*Maronite Bishop Gregory Mansour of Brooklyn asked Patriarch Rai to share with the Western press his experience of visiting various communities in Lebanon after his enthronement this past March.*

"Since I was elected March 15, I have started visiting the various regions of Lebanon, and after my election, I took as a motto for my patriarchal ministry, "Communion and Love"

and am going around all those areas trying to implement this motto.

"As the patriarch I have to visit my people once every five years and I wanted very quickly after my election to start visiting our people in order to listen to them, to find out about their concerns, their vision and in order for all of us, myself and the [Maronite] Synod of Bishops to prepare a strategy for our work.

"In Lebanon we have eighteen religious communities and those communities are not living in ghettos. We are all living together.

"Of course, I went to visit my own people, the Maronites, but as it turns out, I found that the people don't want me to visit the Maronites only. Everybody came out to meet me, the Catholic community, the Orthodox community and all the Muslim communities...all of them came out to meet me because they wanted this visit to be for them, not only our own people.

"This was a spontaneous mass movement. People came out, young, old, children, anybody and everybody, politicians, heads of religious communities. They all came out to meet the Patriarch. This was spontaneous.

"I want to note that especially in the Muslim areas how they put big posters of the Patriarch on their mosques, wrote a lot of very positive messages on big placards. They really showed that and voiced their opinions saying 'You're not only the patriarch of the Maronites, you are the 'patriarch of Lebanon, the 'patriarch of communion and love', the 'patriarch of national unity,' the 'patriarch of political reconciliation' and so on.

"I listened and I read and I concluded that in Lebanon Christians and Muslims really are very eager to live in peace.

"I really touched first-hand and realized how true what Blessed John Paul II said about Lebanon in his message to the Lebanese: 'Lebanon is more than a country. Lebanon is a message of reconciliation and dialogue and conviviality for both East and West.' This is a huge responsibility and I hope that myself with all the bishops do not disappoint.

"All the parties of Lebanon, all came out to meet me. I want to use this new opportunity to try to create true dialogue among all those factions. In Lebanon, you cannot exclude anybody. We want this dialogue to touch the points of conflict.

"Of course, we started this process of reconciliation in our own communities so we have had several meetings with the Maronite leaders and Maronite representatives in the [Lebanese] parliament in order to come out with some consensus. Of course, we respect peoples' differences. We are in a democracy. People are different. We respect that, but we want to reach a consensus and from there on start branching out to the other people.

*On the topic of the possible ascension to power by the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Patriarch Rai said:*

"First, the U.S. does not have a problem if the Muslim Brotherhood takes over Egypt. Second, as a Church we do not side with any government or any regime. If the Egyptian people want the Muslim Brotherhood to govern Egypt, this is a matter for the Egyptian people. The Church is neither with the regime nor is it against the regime.

"Independently of who is in government, we ask for as a church, respect for the person and respect for basic human rights. If the Muslim Brotherhood do reach government in Egypt or anywhere else, what we will ask of them is really to protect the rights of people and respect freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of conscience.

"As a Church all we ask for is respect for human rights and respect for international law.

"We ask for justice. We ask for peace. We ask for equality among all people independently of their color, their religion, their race or anything on the basis of citizenship.

"If what you [the questioner] said about the [Egyptian army killing innocent Coptic people], we feel very bad about it. We have said that there are countries where Christians are subjected to persecution.

"We have 11 million Coptics in Egypt and they are the original Egyptians. The name itself indicates this. We feel really, really bad about seeing those people being targeted in such a way.

"Of course, if Muslims or anybody reaches government in Egypt or anywhere else, we will ask them for the same thing. And we have to realize that the very large majority of Islam is moderate. It's not as if there is a Muslim government, it's going to be fundamentalist. In every case, we will ask the government to respect the rights of people and treat citizens as equal on all bases.

"The Islam community has an important role to play there. They have to make sure to as much as possible to prevent the spread of fundamentalism and to encourage the moderate people to be able to take the lead in those countries.

*Q: What will be the reaction of the world if Israel is accepted as a country for Jews?*

"Some say Israel wants to be a country for the Jews and some say it wants to be a Jewish country in order to protect democracy.

"In this day and age with globalization and what not, it is strange to see a nation wanting to be for one religion or one race because you are excluding the others.

"If there is a Jewish state declared or a state for the Jews, this is getting us back to the war of gods. This is going to be somewhat of a big challenge to Islam.

"For Israel didn't tell us what they are going to do with 1.5 million non-Jews who hold Israeli passports. What is going to happen to them? This is up to the Israelis to tell the world.

"If you really specify in a country the race or the religion of that country, automatically you are excluding the others who are not of that religion or a part of that race.

"I'm afraid that this is going to be more and more fundamentalist for Christianity, Judaism and Islam itself. This fundamentalism is motivated by the fact that some people are being excluded.

*Q: Where does the Middle East religious summit planning stand at this point in time.?*

"We are still at an initial stage of initial contacts with religious heads. Some have responded positively. We are awaiting the response from Al-Azhar University because it has a special status in Islam.

*Q: With respect to recent violence in Egypt, does he think that Christians will flee the country?*

"We are afraid that this may lead to some kind of civil strife in Egypt. Christians don't want to engage in a civil war.

"Persecution will definitely lead to immigration. Some of the older generation will stay, but young people need a future and to be able to something worthwhile with their lives, so those people may not be able to accept the persecution or the injustice. They have to build a future for themselves.

"There is no justification whatsoever for Muslims to persecute those Christians or to hate them because they haven't done anything to anybody or to harm anybody. First of all those people [the Christians] go back to the time of Christ and the apostles, 600 years before Islam. Those people have impacted the Egyptian society and other societies with their values. Those people are pioneers in the renaissance culturally, social, political, educational, those people have contributed greatly to the renaissance in those countries. The Egyptian press was started by a Christian Lebanese.

"All the heads of state say and believe that Christians are people who are contributing positively to their countries and they are faithful to their countries and they never tried to do anything that would harm their countries. Why should they be scapegoats in Egypt or anywhere else?" □

## **New York Patriarch Meets Head of the United Nations Assembly**

**O**n Saturday, October 22, 2011, the Honorable Antoine Azzam, Consul General of Lebanon, and his wife, Danielle, held a luncheon for Patriarch Rai at the Lebanese Consulate in New York. A number of diplomats and dignitaries, including His Excellency Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, Vatican Permanent Observer to the U.N.;

the Dean of Foreign Consuls General, Consul General of Cyprus; and Ambassador Nasser Abul Aziz Nasser, Head of the United Nations General Assembly, and his wife attended.

Patriarch Bechara Rai briefed Ambassador Nasser on the content of the letter he recently submitted to the United Nations. Ambassador Nasser told the Patriarch "the letter underscored the valuable role and future of Christians in the Middle East region."

In his remarks at the Luncheon, after voicing a stern warning against "shifting Arab Spring developments to an Autumn of Civil wars," Patriarch Rai hailed the role UNIFIL plays in preserving Lebanon's borderline stability.



Patriarch Rai with Ambassador Nasser Abul Azziz Nasser, Head of the United Nations General Assembly.

Consul Azzam emphasized the importance of His Beatitude's visit to New York and to the U.N. He thanked Archbishop Chullikatt for attending the luncheon and presented him, on behalf of the Patriarch and the Lebanese community, with a sculpture by Roody Rahme to thank him for his love and concern which "reflect the concern of the Holy Father towards Lebanon and its people." We feel that "Lebanon is still a priority to the Holy See" Azzam said. At the end Ambassador Nasser thank the Patriarch and promised to visit Lebanon in the near future. □

## **Patriarch Rai Meets With United Nations' Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon**

**O**n Friday October 21, 2011, His Beatitude Bechara Peter Rai, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, accompanied by his Vicar General, Archbishop Paul Sayah, Bishop Gregory Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, along with a Maronite delegation, met with United Nations' Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon. The meeting was arranged by Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, Holy See Permanent Observer to the United Nations.



Patriarch Bechara Rai, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, and Archbishop Paul Sayah.

The Patriarch expressed the following points:

- After thanking the Secretary General he expressed hope that Lebanon and the Middle East will benefit from their joint efforts.
- The Patriarch expressed that the issues facing Lebanon and the Middle East are many. The Arab Spring holds much promise of greater freedom, democracy and human rights in the countries concerned, but it also brings about some real concerns. The Church supports wholeheartedly freedom, human rights, and democratic rule for all, but she is against violence wherever it may come from, be it from the people or the authorities. The Church is concerned about the regional demonstrations. We fear that the strife may degenerate into civil wars along sectarian lines.
- While the Church neither supports nor opposes any government per se she makes moral judgments about social, economic and political matters based on respect for



human dignity and rights. We also fear that the changes that may take place would lead to fundamentalist regimes. In such situations, all factions pay a heavy price, and the heaviest price is usually paid by minorities. The example of Iraq stands in the forefront where the conflict led to the mass exodus of one million Christians, out of one million and a half, and led to their persecution. Change should be brought about through dialogue and not with force or violence. We pray for a spiritual, social, and political renewal in the Middle East that will include all members of society - Christian and Muslim alike.

- With regard to Lebanon, it has to be said that there is a vital difference between Lebanon and the Arab countries: while all the Arab countries have adopted theocratic systems of government, the Lebanese, Christians and Muslims, agreed in a "National Pact" of conviviality to found a secular country separating religion and state, based on consensual democracy, in which civil liberties and fundamental human rights are guaranteed. This "National Pact" was translated into what came to be called the "Lebanese formula" based on equal participation of Christians and Muslims in public administration of the state. This special character of Lebanon should be safeguarded and never lost because it constitutes a model for both East and West, as Blessed John Paul II stated in New Hope for Lebanon.
- Lebanon is a sign of hope for the people of the Middle East as well as a guarantee for the Christian presence there. Arab rulers consider Lebanon to be a necessity for them. In reality, the sons and daughters of Lebanon were pioneers in the Arab Renaissance, in culture, economy, trade and politics, and Lebanon is considered to be a factor of stability and peace in the region.
- Lebanon and a son of Lebanon, Mr. Charles Malek, were among the founders of the United Nations and contributors to the writing of the "Charter of Human Rights". The Maronite Patriarchate values greatly the role that the present Lebanese delegation to the United Nations is playing, headed by His Excellency Ambassador Nawaf Salam, under whose presidency the Security Council was convened this past month. We wish to also mention two prominent Lebanese who played a significant role in the history of the United Nations, Ambassadors Ghassan Tueni and Edward Ghorra.
- For all the above reasons and in order to keep Lebanon as an oasis of peace and stability in the region and a venue for the dialogue of civilizations and religions, a meeting point between East and West on the Mediterranean shore, we wish to ask the United Nations to do what is necessary to declare Lebanon a neutral country. The neutrality of Lebanon allows it to remain open to all nations in a spirit of friendship, cooperation and mutual respect, and a good advocate for the concerns of the region and the world in all matters related to peace, justice, human rights, and progress of peoples.
- The Patriarch said that he hopes to see a just and lasting peace take place in the region and the Palestinian people

have their independent homeland on the basis of UN Resolution 191. Their refugees in Lebanon should not be forgotten by the international community. They should be assisted to guarantee their right of return, in accordance with UN Resolution 194. Lebanon cannot assume the burden of half a million Palestinian Refugees. An Israeli-Palestinian peace must be proactively pursued with every effort. It is essential to all the concerns of the region. Likewise, the safety and security of the state of Israel should be honored by all people.

The Patriarch also placed before the Secretary General with a sense of urgency the concerns of our Maronite Community in Cyprus. The Maronite Representative in the Cypriot Parliament, and we as well, wish to respectfully communicate to Your Excellency the following in his own words: "As members of a minority community that has been caught in the middle of the unresolved conflict, we are asking Your Excellency for help and support in securing our culture and traditions and our very existence. Being Cypriots and European citizens, such sustained abuse of human rights cannot be accepted, particularly in light of Turkey's candidacy for membership in the European Union. These objectives are not only in the interest of our community, but are also of vital importance as they will be considered as an indication of the sensitivity of the two major communities to the protection of all ethnic minorities in Cyprus. They are also in line with human rights principles recognized and promoted by international conventions and which form part of the policy of the European Union"

Lastly the Patriarch expressed a special word of thanks for the United Nation's Peace Keeping Force [UNIFIL] in Lebanon serving in complete cooperation and coordination with the Lebanese Army. They have made and continue to make an important contribution for the security and stability of the region. He concluded with a personal word to the Honorable Secretary General, his Associates, and friends, of deepest gratitude for their role in defending Lebanon's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

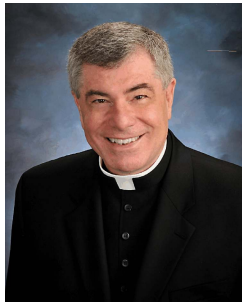
Immediately following the meeting, the Patriarch and his delegation paid a visit to the Lebanese Permanent Mission to the United Nations where he met with Ambassador Nawaf Salam and his staff. Patriarch Rai and his delegation also visited the Residence of the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations where many ambassadors and diplomats were present. □



*The Cedar of Lebanon*

## Canon Law Society of America Honors Chorbishop Faris

The Canon Law Society of America, during its annual meeting in Jacksonville, Florida, on October 10 - 13, 2011, recognized Maronite Chorbishop John D. Faris, with its most prestigious honor, the Role of Law award. The Canon Law Society was founded in 1939 by a group of canonists as a professional association dedicated to the study and application of canon law in the Catholic Church. Today the Society's membership includes over thirteen hundred men and women from thirty-five countries.



The Role of Law award was established in 1973 to recognize canonists who exemplify the Society's ideals of pastoral service to the Church, research and the advancement of canon law.

The Society President, Rev. Michael Joyce, described Faris as a "pastor, teacher and author." He informed the convention participants at the closing banquet that Chorbishop Faris had served the Society as President, Consultor, Chair of the Committee for the Translation of the 1990 Code of Canons of the Eastern Church, Chair of the Committee on Eastern Churches of Law and currently serves as the Chair of the Research and Development Committee and is a member of the Governance Committee and Publications Advisory Board.

Holding a doctorate from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, Chorbishop Faris teaches Eastern canon law at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He is also active in ecumenical affairs and serves on several national and international dialogues and is involved in the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, a group under the auspices of the Pope to provide assistance to the Christians in the Holy Land.

Chorbishop Faris is the second Eastern Catholic canonist to receive the award. The late Ukrainian Catholic Victor J. Pospishil received the award in 1994. In his acceptance speech, Chorbishop Faris thanked the Society for its services to the Eastern Catholic Churches and urged canonists to engage more actively in the initiatives of the Catholic Church to foster the unity of Christians.

Chorbishop Faris, a native of Uniontown, Penn., has served as Pastor of Saint Louis Gonzaga Church in Utica, New York, since 2009. He served for many years in the Chancery of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn and in the Catholic Near East Welfare Association. □

### Eparchial Condolences

Philanthropist, father and faithful Maronite, Anthony Abraham, passed into eternal life October 21, 2011; the previous February 25th he celebrated his 100th birthday. He was born in 1911 in Youngstown, Ohio, the fourth of seven children of Lebanese parents and became the only one of his siblings to attend college.

Mr. Abraham and his wife, Genevieve, moved to South Florida in 1951, relocating because the eldest of the couple's

five adopted children, was asthmatic. Mr. Abraham launched a Chevrolet dealership in Miami that brought him great success.

Throughout his long life, he was devoted to numerous causes involving faith and philanthropy. As a child he had vowed, "If, by the grace of God I ever could, I would feed the poor and help the sick." He more than made good on that promise.

In 1976, Mr. Abraham and his wife founded the Anthony R. Abraham Foundation, which has given millions to such organizations as Camillus House, Habitat for Humanity, Miami Children's Hospital, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, Miami Rescue Mission, St. Jude Children's Hospital, the Maronite Church, and Boystown Catholic Charities. The foundation has also supported schools and hospitals in Lebanon and Haiti.

Mr. Abraham's passing is a great loss to all who loved him. He is survived by his five children, George, Thomas, Norma Jean, Judith, and Marion; his sister, Helen Shaker of Chicago, Illinois; eleven grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Bishop Gregory Mansour, along with the clergy and faithful of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, extend their heartfelt sympathy and the promise of our prayers to Mr. Abraham's family and to all those who knew him. May the Lord God grant Anthony eternal rest in His Kingdom and consolation to his family and loved ones □



## Eparchy of Saint Maron Christmas Directives

### Christmas Novena

His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour has asked that the Maronite Christmas Novena be celebrated in all the parishes of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn from December 15 to December 23, 2011, inclusive.

### Christmas Eve Liturgy

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



**Deadline for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is November 25, 2011.**

*The Maronite Voice* is the official Newsletter of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and of the Eparchy of Saint Maron

of Brooklyn.

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# *A Bottle of Water*

by Msgr. David George

In June of 2011, while serving a short-term assignment at a parish in Maine, a devastating tornado hit the retired priests' residence (my temporary home) in Springfield, Mass., and left a 39-mile path of destruction in its wake. Four days later, I returned to Springfield to gather whatever belongings might be salvageable. As I pulled into the driveway, overwhelmed by the widespread destruction before me, I was waved into the parking lot by a slight, Latino-looking security guard. Upon meeting the Recovery Manager, I was given a hard hat and allowed a view of all the inside damage to my residence. Emotional and still reeling from the sight of the chapel completely flattened, a member of the recovery crew kindly gave me a cold bottle of water to help combat the summer heat. I then proceeded to my car with the few items I could carry.

Once at my car, I noticed the security guard still standing at his post in the 90-degree heat with no available shade, since every tree in the entire area had been ripped out of the ground by the violence of the storm. I greeted him and asked if he wanted some cold water. He nodded vigorously, so I went back inside to retrieve two bottles and brought them to him. His eyes were so grateful, as I handed him this cool refreshment.

As we introduced ourselves, I realized his accent was not Hispanic. I asked where he was from; he cast his eyes downward and in a softer voice said, "I'm from Iraq." So in Arabic, I told him, "My family is from Lebanon." He looked up brightly and said, "Really? Then we are like cousins!"

Our conversation continued for an hour. Henceforth, with each day, I arrived at the site of my former home and brought him a bottle of cold water; we discussed family, countries of origin, the tornado, and its ramifications for me and thousands of others. In the midst of our conversations, he asked me if I believed in "Holy Mariam." I said, "Yes, of course." He told me that since coming to the U.S.A. two years ago, no one he met believed. I discovered that most of his friends were evangelical Christians; I explained that they did not have the same reverence for Mary that we do. He said it was important to his family that they visit "Holy Mariam." Since I had to leave the next morning to go back to my two-month assignment in Maine, I promised I would keep in touch and follow up on our conversations and visit his family upon my return.

Two weeks later, I made the four-hour trip back to Springfield for a myriad of doctors' appointments. In an attempt to salvage anything else I could, I once again returned to my former residence and found this same young man at his guard post. This time, though, the whole property was surrounded by fencing to keep out the looters who preyed on all those suffering from the tornado's effects. My newfound friend greeted me warmly, as I gave him a bottle of water. I noticed that the security company had now supplied the guards with a canopy to block out the harsh rays of the sweltering sun, but the water I shared still helped to quench the thirst brought on by heat.

While in Springfield, I visited the site each day. One evening, while dining with my friend at a Turkish restaurant, I learned that he and his family were Sunni Muslim. I asked

him why they had such a deep devotion to the Blessed Mother, and he said that the Koran dedicates seven pages to "Holy Mariam."

My friend invited me to his home where I met his mom, dad, and two of his brothers, ages 12 and 16. His oldest brother is still in Iraq and trying to join his family in the U.S. As we visited, his mom asked if I believed in "Holy Mariam." I said "Yes, of course." She then shared her special story.

During all the turmoil and dangerous days before leaving Iraq, she went to a shrine of the Blessed Mother and lit a candle asking "Holy Mariam" to protect her family and bring them safely to the United States. She then said to me, "Abouna [Father], I must go to thank her. For the two years I am here, I have asked 'Where can I go to thank Holy Mariam?' No one knows!" Since I had to go back to Maine the next morning, I told her "When I return in three weeks, I will take you to her shrine." She was elated and, in turn, I was declared a member of their family.

*(Continues on page 20)*

## **Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour**

### **November 5, 2011**

Blessed John Paul II Maronite Mission, Concert with Joumana Medawar, Westchester, N.Y.

### **November 6, 2011**

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

### **November 7 - 8, 2011**

St. Jude Maronite Church, Orlando, Fla.

### **November 9, 2011**

Presbyteral Council Meeting, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### **November 10, 2011**

Eparchial Finance Council Meeting, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### **November 11 - 16, 2011**

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Meeting, Baltimore, Md.

### **November 20, 2011**

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

### **November 22 - 29, 2011**

Family Visit, Flint, Mich.

### **December 3, 2011**

Ordination of Msgr. James Root to the Rank of *Periodout*, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### **December 4, 2011**

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

### **December 10 - 11, 2011**

Pastoral Visit to St. Elias Church, Roanoke, Va.

### **December 17, 2011**

Youth and Family Day, St. Sharbel Church, Somerset, N.J.

### **December 18, 2011**

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

## *Austin, Texas, Third Order Oblates*



On September 18, 2011, Phyllis Adkison, Liz Morgan, and Lillian Langston were accepted as members of the Third Order of Oblates of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph by Bishop Robert Shaheen. They are committing themselves to deeper prayer and serving God at Our Lady's Maronite Catholic Parish in Austin, Texas. They are pictured with Msgr. Don Sawyer, Pastor. □

## *A Bottle of Water*

*Continued from page 19*

As promised, on my next visit home, we made the brief pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima located in the adjacent town. The mom and her three willing sons piled into my car, ecstatic that they were making this short journey.

As we entered the shrine, the graceful yet powerful image of Our Lady stood surrounded by over two hundred candles. The mom gasped and raised her arms upward in prayer, praise and thanksgiving. She approached Holy Mariam, lit a candle

and prayed in the Islamic way. Meanwhile, her son, the security guard, took each of his younger brothers, one at a time, explained the promise that their mom had made and why they should thank "Holy Mariam" for bringing them safely to the U.S. Each son lit a candle as they prayed in thanksgiving. I stood back, watching them with a tear in my eye, thanking God and our Holy Mother for bringing this family into my life. I also lit a candle, and prayed in thanksgiving for blessings born out of tragedy and destruction and for faith realized.

We left the shrine that night, and again, I was off to Maine with a promise to return and share a meal at their home during Ramadan. A promise was fulfilled, prayers of thanksgiving declared, and bridges built ... all because of a simple bottle of water. "Thank you Lord, God; thank you Holy Mariam!" □

## *Cleveland, Ohio Parish Picnic*

On August 21, 2011, St. Maron Church in Cleveland, Ohio, celebrated its annual parish picnic. The day began with an outdoor Liturgy celebrating the Assumption of Our Lady followed by a procession with the icon of the Blessed Mother. Over 400 people attended. The



picnic featured games for the children, raffles, music, dancing, and, of course, food. It was a beautiful day of fellowship for the St. Maron community and also with our neighbors in the surrounding area. About a thousand people came throughout the day to enjoy the festivities. □