

# *the* Maronite **Voice**





# the Maronite Voice

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Lebanon, Beirut — 2025/12/2.  
Pope Leo XIV during a farewell ceremony at the  
Beirut International Airport in Beirut, Lebanon

*Photograph by VATICAN MEDIA / CATHOLICPRESSPHOTO  
Credit: Independent Photo Agency/Alamy Live News*

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#### **THE MARONITE VOICE**

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# The Sacred Scripture in Our Lives and the Life of the Church

H

ave you ever heard God's voice? How did you feel?  
Each individual hears God's voice within us in



various ways and through different channels. God has spoken to us throughout history in different ways; the total and perfect revelation came through the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sacred Scripture is the primary place where we find God, learn about Him, and encounter Him. "All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #134). Throughout the Bible, God has revealed His mystery of salvation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms, "In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to man in a human way. To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #109).

In Genesis, we see God create the world and humans in His image. We witness the call of Abraham when God promises, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (GEN 12:2). Abraham became the father of all believers. With Jacob, God said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying I will give to you, and your descendants (GEN 28:13). Jacob's name will be changed to Israel, with his children forming the 12 tribes. Moses would lead the Israelites out of Egypt in their



journey toward the promised land. In reading the Book of Exodus, we see the encounter of Moses with God in the burning bush. God calls him, “Moses! Moses! He answered ‘Here I am’” (Ex 3:4). After a vivid dialogue, God reveals to Moses His name, “I am who I am” and then added “This is what you should tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you” (Ex 3:4). God tells Moses, “Now, if you obey me completely and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession among all peoples, though all the earth is mine” (Ex 19:5). Moses received the Ten Commandments, which became the roadmap for living the covenant between God and His people.

While these moments each belong to one man at the dawn of our history, we hear them not as a distant story but as God’s Living Word, spoken to the faithful in every generation. For the Church as a whole, this is an ongoing journey. The Church listens to God’s Word. Sacred Scripture forms the Church’s identity and mission, calling her to remain rooted in Christ while responding to the needs of the world. The promise first spoken in Genesis that God’s blessing is meant to reach all continues in the Church’s call to evangelize, serve, and accompany. Each generation is invited to take responsibility for this mission, trusting that God who called His people in the past continues to call His people today. The Lord invites us to speak with him every day.

Sacred Scripture is not just a record and interpretation of the Lord’s words and what occurred; it is a living message where God continues to speak to us as He walks with us and guides us through every stage of life. When the Word of God is read at the Divine Liturgy, it is not merely remembered. It is addressed to us, here and now. The Bible reminds us of God’s closeness to us. This is why daily engagement with Sacred Scripture is so essential to Christian life. When we read, pray, and listen to God’s Word, we learn to recognize His voice amid the noise of the world.

Ultimately, Sacred Scripture reminds us of God’s presence in our lives from the moment of our birth to the end of our earthly existence. We trust and treasure the promise that once our earthly journey is complete, we will join our Heavenly Father. God does not promise a life without struggle, but He does promise His presence is with us always. We just have to reach out because He is always speaking to us. God is calling, guiding, and assuring us that wherever we are sent, He goes with us. Let us make a habit of listening to the voice of the Lord and implementing His guidance in our daily lives. We will reap great benefits here on earth and, after a long life, in eternity. ■

*Bishop A. Elias Zaidan*

## Schedule **BISHOP A. ELIAS ZAIDAN**

- 6-8 FEBRUARY** Cleveland, OH | St. Maron Church | Pastoral Visit
- 11 FEBRUARY** Maronite Catholic Foundation Virtual Board Meeting
- 22 FEBRUARY** Los Angeles, CA | Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral | St. Maron Celebration
- 28 FEB-2 MARCH** Lewisville, TX | Our Lady of Lebanon Church and Dallas, TX | St. Takla Mission | Pastoral Visits
- 10-11 MARCH** USCCB Administrative Committee Meeting
- 13-15 MARCH** Phoenix, AZ | St. Joseph Church | Pastoral Visit
- 16-18 MARCH** St. Louis, MO | The Chancery | Meeting of the Eastern Catholic Bishops Association
- 20-22 MARCH** Riverside, CA | St. Joseph Church | Pastoral Visit
- 26 MARCH** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | Consecration of the Chrism and Holy Oils
- 29 MARCH-4 APRIL** Houston, TX | Our Lady of the Cedars Church | Palm Sunday and Passion Week
- 5 APRIL** St. Louis, MO | St. Raymond Cathedral | Easter Celebrations

## Lenten Observances 2026

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

### Fasting and Abstinence

+ All Maronites who are physically capable are to **abstain** from meat on **Ash Monday** (16 February 2026) and all **Fridays of Lent**.

+ **Ash Monday** and **Great Friday of the Crucifixion** (3 April 2026) are also days of **fasting**. Fasting in the Maronite Church involves **eating and drinking nothing** at all (except water and medicine) from **midnight until noon**. The rest of the day normal meals can be taken, but without meat. All Maronites who are physically capable should fast on these two days.

### Distribution of Ashes

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

### Lenten Services

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

### Traditional Fasting Discipline

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

That practice is summarized in the following, taken from current **Maronite Particular Law**:

Every weekday of Lent (Monday through Friday) is a day of fasting and abstinence from meat and dairy products (eggs, butter, milk, etc.). Fasting involves eating and drinking nothing at all (except water and medicine) from midnight until noon. The rest of the day normal meals can be taken, but without meat or dairy products. Dairy products are excluded because they are animal byproducts. Saturdays and Sundays are exempt from fasting and abstaining, as are the following feast days: St. Joseph (19 March) and the Annunciation (25 March).

# Schedule **BISHOP GREGORY J. MANSOUR**

- 1 FEBRUARY** Allentown, PA | Sts. Joachim and Anne Mission | Pastoral Visit
- 7-8 FEBRUARY** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Feast of St. Maron
- 10 FEBRUARY** Virtual | Talk on Monogamy for Couples
- 14-15 FEBRUARY** Utica, NY | St. Louis Gonzaga Church | Cana Sunday
- 16 FEBRUARY** Somerset, NJ | St. Sharbel Church | Ash Monday
- 19 FEBRUARY** Virtual | Eparchial Finance Council Meeting
- 21-22 FEBRUARY** Springfield, MA | St. Anthony Church | Pastoral Visit
- 27 FEB-1 MARCH** Fort Lauderdale, FL | Heart of Jesus Church | Pastoral Visit
- 2 MARCH** Washington, DC | Our Lady of Lebanon Seminary | Eparchial Review Board Meeting
- 7-8 MARCH** Tampa, FL | Sts. Peter and Paul Church | Pastoral Visit
- 9-13 MARCH** Lutz, FL | Bethany Center | Eparchial Clergy Retreat
- 14-15 MARCH** Easton, PA | Our Lady of Lebanon Church | MYO Retreat and Pastoral Visit
- 16-19 MARCH** St. Louis, MO | The Chancery | Meeting of the Eastern Catholic Bishops Association
- 21-22 MARCH** Atlanta, GA | St. Joseph Church | Pastoral Visit
- 28 MARCH** New York, NY | Gala for the University of the Holy Spirit
- 29 MARCH** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Hosanna Sunday
- 30 MARCH** Somerset, NJ | St. Sharbel Church | Great Monday
- 31 MARCH** Brooklyn, NY | St. James Cathedral Basilica | Chrism Mass
- 1 APRIL** Lawrence, MA | St. Anthony Church | Great Wednesday
- 2 APRIL** Dover, NH | St. George Church | Great Thursday
- 3 APRIL** Lawrence, MA | St. Anthony Church | Great Friday Morning
- 3-5 APRIL** Brooklyn, NY | Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral | Great Friday & Saturday & Easter



*Family of  
Saint Sharbel USA*

The Family of Saint Sharbel is a nonprofit that aims to evangelize by sharing the story and spirituality of St. Sharbel in prayer, media, and works of mercy.

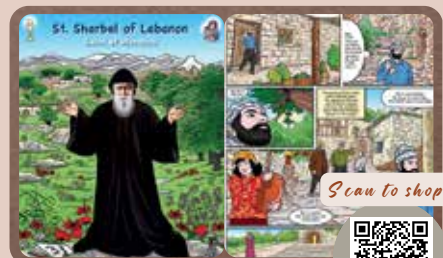
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- **Distributing Sacramentals**
- **Creating, Translating, Printing, and Distributing Religious Print Media** (Prayer Cards, Novena Booklets, an Illustrated Book on the life of St. Sharbel, and more)
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- **Much more!**

*We invite you to join us!*

**ONLINE SHOPS**

Producing and distributing digital and print media is an essential part of our mission! To **access prayer cards, novena booklets, articles, books** (including a graphic novel about St. Sharbel, pictured), and more about a variety of saints and religious topics, **view our website at [www.familyofsaintsharbel.org](http://www.familyofsaintsharbel.org) and click "shop"** or visit our Amazon storefront. Most items are currently available in **English, Arabic, and Spanish.**



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# The Word for Every Season: Letting Scripture Speak into Our Lives

The Bible is not a single book written in a single voice. It is a living conversation between God and His people, spoken across centuries in many forms: story and song, law and lament, warning and promise, vision and hope. Sometimes God speaks through a quiet call. Sometimes through poetry born of pain. Sometimes through words that unsettle us, and sometimes through images that lift our eyes beyond what we can see.

This year, *The Maronite Voice* invites you to encounter Scripture in this fuller way—not as a collection of isolated passages, but as a living word that speaks differently in different seasons of life. Our theme for 2026, “The Word for Every Season: Scripture in the Life of the Church,” is rooted in a simple conviction: God knows the human heart, and He speaks to it in more than one voice.

Too often, people approach the Bible with uncertainty. Some feel it is too complex, too distant, or too difficult to interpret. Others know certain passages well but struggle to see how Scripture speaks to the realities of modern life: uncertainty, suffering, moral confusion, hope, endurance, and renewal. This year’s focus seeks to meet those questions gently and honestly by paying attention to how Scripture speaks, not only what it says.

Each part of the Bible was born out of real human experience. Narrative emerges from journeys, beginnings, and moments of calling. Law grows from

the long work of formation and learning how to live in freedom. Lament rises from pain that refuses to be silent before God. Prophecy confronts complacency and calls God’s people back to integrity. The witness of the early Church reveals faith lived in weakness and courage. Apocalyptic vision lifts our eyes when suffering threatens to close them, reminding us that God has not abandoned His creation.

These are not ancient literary categories; they are spiritual realities we still live today. There are seasons when we are beginning something new without clear answers. Seasons when growth feels slow and faith feels demanding. Seasons of grief, disappointment, or unanswered prayer. Seasons when we are challenged to live our faith more honestly. Seasons when the Church itself feels fragile. And seasons when hope is all we have.

The Maronite tradition has always been attentive to this rhythm of faith. Shaped by endurance, prayer, and fidelity through history, our Church knows that faith is not lived on one emotional register. Our liturgy gives voice to sorrow and praise, repentance and joy, struggle and resurrection. Scripture functions in the same way: it gives us words when our own are insufficient, and it gives us silence when words must give way to trust.

Over the course of this year, *The Maronite Voice* will explore how different forms of Scripture meet us where we are. We will linger with specific passages

***“This year, The Maronite Voice invites you to encounter Scripture in this fuller way—not as a collection of isolated passages, but as a living word that speaks differently in different seasons of life.”***



rather than rush past them. We will allow difficult texts to remain difficult, and consoling texts to console. We will listen for the voice of God not only in moments of clarity, but also in moments of tension, waiting, and hope.

This approach is intentional. The goal is not to master Scripture, but to be formed by it. To learn how to pray with it. To recognize our own lives reflected in its pages. To trust that God’s word is not only ancient truth, but present guidance.

For families, this means discovering that Scripture can be read together, spoken simply, and lived concretely. For individuals, it means finding permission to bring real questions and real emotions


to God. For parishes and communities, it means grounding renewal not in programs alone, but in listening again to the Word that calls, forms, corrects, and heals.

Above all, this year is an invitation to slow down. To let Scripture speak in its own way, at its own pace. To trust that God knows which voice we need to hear, and when.

The Word of God is not limited to one season of life or one way of speaking. It is living, patient, and faithful—just as God is. As we begin this year together, may we rediscover the Scriptures not as distant texts, but as companions on the journey of faith, speaking a word for every season of our lives. ■

# Genesis: Calling, Trust, Uncertainty

by Rev. A. David Fisher

 As Maronite Catholic Christians, how do we read the Sacred Scriptures, indeed how do we experience them as the “living” Word of God? First, we must remember they are “books;” *Ta Biblia* in Greek means, “the books.” Secondly, being that they were compiled over many centuries, the original languages of Hebrew and Greek developed over time: from the archaic Hebrew of Job, to the almost classical Greek of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Thirdly, and most importantly, they are the “inspired Word of God.” The Word of God that inspired the Chosen People, who over time were given law, ritual, and written text by inspired writers; and the “Word became Flesh!” Scripture, as narrative, tells the story of God’s faithful love reaching toward humanity and humanity’s unfolding response of trust. It reveals a relationship formed through calling, promise, struggle, and hope—God seeking His people, and people learning, step by step, to trust Him.

CALLING: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” [GENESIS 1:26, 27]

Our calling as human beings is rooted in the uniqueness of being created in the image and likeness

of God. Also, we were given dominion over the rest of God’s creation; meaning if God is a “Just Ruler” over us, we must act in a just way in our administration over God’s creation. What does this further mean? It means that God in creating us, gave us the capacity to be “moral beings,” to be God’s living images to creation, to be beings of “love.”

TRUST: “Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.’ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” [GENESIS 2:23,24]

Love involves trust, at possibly the highest level. The Genesis story of the creation of man and woman; Adam and Eve is a revelation that love is realized in trust.

God trusted Adam enough to give him dominion over his creation; God trusted that his love for Adam would be realized in his stewardship over the rest of his creation. Ultimately, his love and trust for Adam became embodied, indeed, in-fleshed in Eve; one who was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

The loving trust between the Man and the Woman; Adam and Eve, would allow them to love like their Creator, and not only have dominion over Creation, but actually to participate in the creation of other human beings.

# GENESIS



UNCERTAINTY: But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” [GENESIS 3:9-11]

The Fall of Adam and Eve is a revelation of the nature of sin. That in its core, sin arises from disobedience toward God, a disobedience that is rooted in the temptation to be god-like, to the point of seeking to be the author of what is right and wrong, instead of trusting in God’s word of truth, justice, and what is morally right.

Due to this disobedience human beings must live in the midst of the rest of creation, therefore, making their divine intended mastering of creation a difficulty and a challenge.

This Fall is given even deeper meaning in the story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve.

“The LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.’ Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out to the field.’ And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’

He said, ‘I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?’ And the LORD said, ‘What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.’” [GENESIS 4:6-12]

Fratricide (*fratricidium*, the act of killing a brother), exposes the depth of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. The disobedience of the parents, leading them to be exiled into the world, therefore, their children come to behave like other animals, to the point of killing the brother for one’s own selfish motives.

CONCLUSION: “When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God.” [GENESIS 5:1]

We know even in the midst of our sometime uncertainty, that the promises of God are irrevocable. We human beings are still and will always be “images and likenesses of God,” meaning we have the capacity to “love one another” as God has loved us. This is our calling, to be images of God, people of love. This is why we exalt those who most closely mirror our Lord Jesus, the “Word made Flesh.” Why we exalt the Mother of God, the martyrs, and the saints. ■

*Fr. David A. Fisher, a priest of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, is a regular contributor.*

# Abraham Left at Night: Genesis 12 Without the Comfort

by Rev. Aaron J. Sandbothe

The opening words of Genesis tell us of creation, of blessing and fracture, of humanity's first steps with God and its first estrangements. They tell us of gardens and floods, of dispersion and scattered peoples. Yet with Genesis 12, something decisively new begins. The Scripture narrows its gaze. Sacred history, in the strict sense, begins not with a spectacle but with a summons—quiet, personal, and unresolved.

*“Go forth from your land, your kindred, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”*

This is the moment when God binds His promise to a particular person, in a particular time, with a future that will now move through human history rather than hover over it. From this point forward, the story of salvation will not unfold in general terms, but through the fragile obedience of one man and the generations that will follow him. The text does not announce this turning point with grandeur. It simply places us there and moves on.

The language is restrained. God speaks. Abram goes. Everything else is left unsaid.

The simplicity of the scene is part of its gravity. Genesis does not describe Abram as searching for God or longing for a new life. There is no indication that he was dissatisfied with where he was. Sacred history does not begin because Abram was exceptional or restless; it begins because God speaks and Abram responds. The future of blessing enters the world through a word and a departure.

What God asks Abram to leave is named with care: land, kindred, father's house. These are not interchangeable terms. Together they describe a whole world—economic security, social belonging, inherited identity. In the ancient world, to leave these was to step outside the structures that made life intelligible and survivable. Genesis does not soften this cost. It allows the weight of it to stand, unembellished.

Equally striking is what God does not provide. The destination remains unnamed. The promise is expansive but distant. “To the land that I will show you.” Not yet. Not now. Sacred history begins not with a revealed plan but with an open future. God binds Himself to Abram without explaining how that bond will unfold.

And Abram goes.

The text offers no psychological portrait. It does not tell us whether Abram was afraid or resolved, conflicted or confident. Sacred history is not interested in resolving the interior tension of this moment. It records an act of obedience and allows the silence to speak. Faith enters the biblical story here not as an emotion but as a movement—an act that carries uncertainty within it.

From this point forward, the entire history of Israel, the covenant, the prophets, and ultimately the Incarnation will trace their lineage back to this step. Yet Abram does not know that. He does not stand at the beginning of sacred history with the awareness that he is beginning it. He stands only at the edge of what he must leave and what he cannot yet see.



There is something profoundly fitting about this. God's decisive action in history does not begin with human comprehension, but with human trust. Sacred history does not start once everything is clear; it starts when obedience makes room for God to act over time.

Genesis 12 resists the temptation to turn this into a heroic moment. Abram is not presented as triumphant or enlightened. He is simply faithful enough to move. The promise spoken over him—of blessing, descendants, and a future that will touch all nations—extends far beyond his lifetime. Sacred history begins with a promise that cannot be completed by the one who receives it.

This, too, is part of the discomfort of the passage. Abram is asked to invest his life in something whose fullness he will never see. He carries the beginning, not the conclusion. God's covenantal work will unfold slowly, through generations, through failures and renewals, through exile and return. None of that is visible here. Only the first step is required.

Genesis allows the beginning to remain exposed. It does not rush to reassure us that everything will work out. It does not explain how God's fidelity will persist through human weakness. Sacred history is entrusted, at its outset, to a man who must walk without guarantees.

This has consequences for how we understand our own place within God's story. We often imagine that meaningful faith requires clarity, confirmation, or visible results. Genesis 12 suggests otherwise. God's most consequential work in history begins in obscurity, in a movement that looks, from the outside, like loss.

To leave one's father's house is to loosen one's grip on inherited meaning. To leave one's land is to surrender control over the future. Abram's obedience creates space for God to act, but it does so by accepting vulnerability. Sacred history begins with a relinquishment.

The text does not ask us to admire Abram from a distance. It asks us to stand with him in the moment of leaving, before the road has become familiar, before the promise has taken shape. It invites us to recognize that many of the most significant movements of God in history—and in our own lives—begin in ways that feel incomplete and unsettled.

Abram's departure is not framed as a solution. It is framed as a beginning. The Scripture does not resolve the tension of that beginning because sacred history itself will unfold within that tension. Faith will be tested, renewed, corrected, and sustained across centuries, all because one man trusted God's word enough to go.

And Abram went.

With that quiet movement, sacred history enters the world—not through certainty, but through trust; not through spectacle, but through obedience that leaves much behind and carries little forward except a promise. The road opens, the future remains unseen, and God's work begins its long journey through human time. ■

*Fr. Aaron J. Sandbothe is the Managing Editor of The Maronite Voice, the Pastor of St. George Church in Uniontown, PA, and a regular contributor to the magazine*

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**ALEX HOUSEY** | *St. Sharbel Church* | Clinton Township, MI  
**FANIA NACCOUR** | *Our Lady of the Cedars* | Jamaica Plain, MA  
**DR. LINA NASR** | *Our Lady of the Cedars Church* | Houston, TX  
**JOHN SCHLAGETER** | *Our Lady of Lebanon* | Washington, DC  
**GINA THOMAS** | *St. Joseph* | Atlanta, GA

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

For more information about the Order ask your Pastor, visit [www.orderstsharbel.org](http://www.orderstsharbel.org) or write to:  
Eparchy of Saint Maron | 109 Remsen Street | Brooklyn, NY 11201 or  
Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon | 1021 South 10th Street | St. Louis, MO 63104



## Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord.

### PASSING OF ELIAS YOUSSEF ELIA

It is our sad duty to announce the passing of Elias Youssef Elia, brother of Chorbishop Faouzi Elia, in Lebanon on 12 December 2025. The funeral service took place at Saint Anthony the Great Church in Fouara, Lebanon, on 14 December 2025.

Elias is survived by his wife, Selma, and his children, Charbel, Camille, Gina, Simona, Sabbat, Souad and their families, along with siblings and many nephews, nieces, and grandchildren.

If you would like to send your condolences to Chorbishop Faouzi, you may send them to the parish at:

Saint Sharbel Church  
2920 W. Scenic Dr.  
Peoria, IL 61615

On behalf of the clergy, the religious, and the laity of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, we offer our sincere condolences to Chorbishop Faouzi and to the family, along with the assurance of our prayers. May Elias rest in peace.

### IN MEMORIAM: FATHER HAICKEL PAUL BOACKLE

Reverend Haickel Paul Boackle entered peacefully into eternal life on 9 December 2025. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, on 27 November 1944, he was the son of the late Louis and Angelle Boackle.

On 30 September 1989, Father Boackle was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Francis M. Zayek at Saint Elias Maronite Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

Father Boackle's first assignment was in 1989 serving as Parochial Vicar at Our Lady of the Cedars of Mount Lebanon Church in Akron, Ohio. He remained there until 1990 when he was appointed to serve Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Wheeling, West Virginia. From there, after a brief time at Saint Louis Gonzaga Maronite Church in Utica, New York, he served as Pastor of Saint George Maronite Church in Dover, New Hampshire, from 1992 until he retired in October 2000.

Visitation for Father Boackle was held on 16 December with the Ginnaz for Priests at Saint George Church, Dover, New Hampshire.

On 17 December, visitation was held at the parish, followed by the Divine Liturgy at 10 a.m., the Burial, and a Mercy Meal at the Parish Hall.

Please remember Father Boackle in the Divine Liturgy. On behalf of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, Clergy, Religious, and Lay Faithful, Bishop Gregory offers heartfelt condolences to his family and to all who cared about him.

May God grant eternal rest to his servant and priest.

### PASSING OF SUZANNE WAKIM

Suzanne Wakim, the mother of Reverend Rodolph Wakim of Saint Stephen Mission in Charlotte, North Carolina, passed away in Lebanon on 3 January 2026. She was preceded in death by her husband, Wakim el-Khoury Boutros Wakim, and her son, Oscar Wakim Wakim.

Funeral services were held at Saint Sassine Church in Beit-Mery, Lebanon, on 6 January 2026.

Father Rodolph provided extraordinary and loving care for both of his parents and his brother throughout their illnesses. His devotion to his family, even while serving his parish community, stands as a testament to his faith and commitment.

On behalf of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, clergy, religious, and laity, we extend our heartfelt condolences to Father Rodolph and his family. May Suzanne rest in God's peace.

Those wishing to offer condolences may write to Father Rodolph Wakim at Saint Stephen Mission: P.O. Box 49021, Charlotte, NC 28277.

# Saints in the Maronite Calendar

by Rev. Claude W. Franklin, Jr.

22 August

## Saints Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Old Testament Patriarchs

The accounts of the Old Testament Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are found throughout chapters 11–50 of the *Book of Genesis*. Abraham, originally named Abram, lived in Ur of the Chaldees and was married to Sarah, originally named Sarai. When Abram was 75 years old, God told him to take his wife and go to a land promised to him, and God would make of him a great nation. After 10 years of living in Canaan and having no children, Sarai offered her Egyptian slave Hagar to Abram to bear him a child, which she did, and he was named Ishmael. Thirteen years later, when Abram was 99 years old, God renamed him Abraham, meaning “a father of many nations,” and his wife was renamed Sarah, and God established the covenant of Circumcision. Soon after, three visitors came to Abraham, who showed them great hospitality. One of the visitors promised Abraham that in the next year Sarah would bear a son. When Abraham was 100 years old a son Isaac was born to him and Sarah and he circumcised him on the eighth day.

During Isaac’s youth, Abraham was commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac in the land of Moriah. Isaac himself carried the wood upon which he would be sacrificed. He asked his father along the way, where the animal to be sacrificed was, to which Abraham replied: “God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” After Abraham had bound Isaac and

was about to sacrifice him, an Angel of the Lord stopped the knife, and God provided a ram in a thicket bush for the sacrifice.

Later, Sarah died and Abraham buried her in the cave of Machpelah. Years later, at age 175, Abraham died, and Isaac and Ishmael buried him next to Sarah in the cave of Machpelah.

Isaac was arranged in marriage with Rebecca, and after 20 years of marriage, she gave birth to two sons, Esau and Jacob, when Isaac was 60 years old. Isaac favored Esau and Rebecca favored Jacob. One day, Esau returned from the fields famished and begged Jacob to give him some of the stew he had just made. Jacob made Esau promise his birthright in exchange for the stew, and Esau agreed. Soon after, Isaac, who had become aged and blind, decided to bestow upon Esau the birthright blessing. He asked Esau to kill some venison and prepare a meal for him, so he could then bless Esau. Rebecca overheard this and ordered Jacob to bring her some goats from the flock so she could prepare a meal for Isaac so that Jacob could serve his father and receive the blessing. Esau was a hairy man, so Jacob disguised himself with fur on his arms and entered Isaac’s room. Isaac ate the food served by Jacob and blessed him. Later, when Esau came in, Isaac realized the deception, but stated: “he will remain blessed” (GEN 27:33). Esau vowed to kill Jacob as soon as Isaac died. Rebecca, learning of Esau’s murderous plot, encouraged Jacob to depart for her brother Laban’s house in Haran. Enroute to Haran, Jacob experienced a vision one night of angels going up and down a ladder and God sending blessings upon him.



When Jacob arrived in Haran, he met Laban's youngest daughter Rachel by a well. Jacob, who was 77 years old, asked Laban to marry her. Laban agreed that if Jacob worked for him for seven years, then he could marry Rachel. After seven years of labor, he was prepared to marry Rachel, however, Laban deceived him by veiling Leah, Rachel's oldest sister, and presenting her for marriage. Laban agreed to give Rachel in marriage to Jacob if he agreed to work for another seven years, which Jacob did.

Between Leah and Rachel, and their handmaidens, Jacob had 12 sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin, who would become the 12 tribes of Israel.

After Joseph was born, Jacob decided to return home. As he was nearing the land of Canaan, he sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau. Meanwhile, Jacob that night had an encounter with a mysterious being, in which Jacob wrestled with throughout the night, from whom Jacob demanded a blessing, and was told that from now on he would be known as "Israel". The next morning, he encountered his brother Esau, whose murderous intent had subsided, and the two brothers had an emotional reunion.

When Isaac died at 180 years of age, Jacob and Esau buried him in the cave of Machpelah, next to Abraham.

Jacob loved Rachel's firstborn son, Joseph, the most of his 12 sons, and Joseph's brothers were jealous of him. One day they plotted against him and sold him into slavery with a caravan that was headed to Egypt, but they told Jacob that Joseph had died in an attack.

Twenty years later, when Jacob was 130 years old, there was a great famine throughout the Middle East, except in Egypt. Jacob sent 10 of his sons, except Benjamin, to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. After they paid for the grain, Joseph had the money placed back in their sacks, then accused them of stealing. He kept Simeon as a prisoner and sent the other nine back to Jacob. They were to return with Benjamin to prove that they were honest men. When they returned, Joseph revealed himself to them. When Joseph's brothers returned from their second trip, they informed their father Jacob that Joseph was still alive, and he was the governor of all of Egypt. Jacob and his entire household moved to Egypt and Jacob and Joseph were reunited. Jacob was 147 years old when he died, but before his death he pleaded with Jacob to not bury him in Egypt, but to bury him in the cave of Machpelah, next to Abraham and Isaac. Joseph swore and did as his father requested. ■

*Fr. Claude Franklin is the pastor of St. Joseph Maronite Church in Olean, NY, a member of the Maronite Patriarchal Liturgical Committee, and a feature writer of The Maronite Voice*

# What Does the Church Teach About Vocation and God's Will?

by *TMV Staff*

Questions about vocation and God's will are among the most common—and most anxiety-producing—questions Christians carry. What does God want from my life? Is there one right path and many wrong ones? What if I make a mistake? These questions often surface most strongly in moments of change or uncertainty, precisely the moments reflected in the call of Abraham at the beginning of sacred history. The Church's teaching offers clarity here, though not always in the way people expect.

At its heart, the Church teaches that every person has one fundamental vocation: the call to holiness. The Catechism states plainly, "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (CCC 2013). Before vocation is about what we do, it is about who we are becoming. God's will is first and foremost that we live in communion with Him.

Within this universal call to holiness, God invites each person to live out their life in a particular way—through marriage, priesthood, religious life, or committed single life, and through concrete responsibilities such as family life, work, service, and community. These are often called "states of life," but they are not rigid molds. The Church does not teach that God hides a single, fragile plan that we must discover perfectly or risk failure. Rather, God works through our freedom, our circumstances, and our sincere desire to follow Him.

The Catechism emphasizes this cooperation between divine guidance and human freedom. God "calls man to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him with all his strength" (CCC 1), but He does not bypass human decision-making. Discernment is not fortune-telling. It is a process of prayer, reflection, counsel, and trust, lived over time.

This understanding is deeply consistent with the biblical witness. Abraham is not given a detailed roadmap. He is given a direction and a promise. God's will is revealed gradually, step by step, through obedience and relationship. The Church recognizes that this is often how God works: not by overwhelming clarity, but by sufficient light for the next faithful step.

The Church also teaches that God's will is not opposed to our true good. As *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us, God's plan respects the dignity of the human person and the reality of human development. Struggle, uncertainty, and even detours do not mean God has withdrawn His call. God remains faithful even when our discernment is imperfect, working patiently within our choices to draw us toward holiness.

This is especially important for those who fear "getting it wrong." The Church does not teach that a sincere, prayerful decision made in good conscience can permanently derail God's plan. God's providence

***“...God invites each person to live out their life in a particular way—through marriage, priesthood, religious life, or committed single life, and through concrete responsibilities such as family life, work, service, and community.”***



is not fragile. As St. Paul writes, “All things work together for good for those who love God” (ROMANS 8:28). This does not mean every choice is equal, but it does mean that God is always capable of bringing fruit from lives lived in trust.

Ultimately, vocation is not a puzzle to solve but a relationship to live. God’s will unfolds not only in major life decisions, but in daily faithfulness: prayer, love of neighbor, perseverance in difficulty, and

openness to growth. Like Abraham, we are often called to move forward without seeing the whole picture, trusting that God will show the way as we walk.

The Church’s teaching offers reassurance here. God’s call is real, but it is also merciful. It invites us not to anxiety, but to trust—trust that God walks with us, speaks to us over time, and remains faithful long after we have taken our first uncertain steps. ■

# Ordinations

## Subdeacon Ordination of Mark Farah and Deacon Ordination of Jakob Wyder

On November 16, 2025 the Maronite Church celebrated the ordination of Mark Farah to the Order of Subdeacons, and Jakob Wyder to the Order of Deacons.

Both Mark and Jakob were ordained at St. Anthony of the Desert in Fall River, MA, through the imposition of hands by Bishop Gregory J. Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn.

Local clergy, friends and families were present for the celebration. ■



## Clergy Assignments

### Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles

The Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, has made the following appointments, effective 1 February 2026:

**Reverend Charles Khachan**, M.L.M., Rector of Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral, Los Angeles, CA

**Reverend Piere Elkhoury**, M.L.M., Pastor of St. George Maronite Church, San Antonio, TX

**Reverend Jad Chlouk**, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church, Lombard, IL

**Reverend Joseph Kallas**, M.L.M., Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church, Lewisville, TX

**Reverend Jean-Paul Khoury**, Pastor of Our Lady of the Rosary Maronite Mission, Sacramento, CA

**Reverend Elbadaoui Habib**, M.L.M., Pastor of St. Therese Maronite Church, Tulsa, OK

**Reverend Joe Daccache**, Pastor of St. Rafka Maronite Church, Lakewood, CO

**Reverend Marwan Abi Nader**, M.L.M., Pastor of St. Ignatius Maronite Church, Dayton, OH

**Reverend Gilbert Walker**, Pastor of Holy Trinity Maronite Mission, New Orleans, Louisiana and Pastor of the Maronite Community of Mobile, AL

**Reverend Youssef Barakat**, Administrator of St. Sharbel Maronite Mission, Milwaukee, WI

**Reverend Chris Pond**, Associate Pastor, Our Lady's Maronite Church, Austin, TX

**Reverend Tony Zgheib**, M.L.M., Associate Pastor, St. Jude Maronite Church, West Covina, CA

### Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn

The Most Reverend Gregory John Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, has made the following appointments, effective 1 February 2026:

**Reverend Elias Adwan** from Administrator at Saint Anthony Church in Danbury, CT, to Pastor of the same.

**Reverend Peter Frangie** from Administrator at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Worcester, MA, to Pastor of the same.

**Reverend Christian Hbaiter** from Administrator at Saint Theresa Church in Brockton, MA, to Pastor of the same.

**Reverend Joseph Nayef Taouk** from Administrator at Our Lady Star of the East Church, Pleasantville, NJ, to Pastor of the same.

**Reverend Charles Van Heusen** to be Protopresbyter of the Mid-Atlantic West Region of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn.

## Subdeacon Ordination of Claude Karam

Saint Naamtallah Maronite Mission in Seattle, Washington, celebrated a historic and grace-filled day with the ordination of Subdeacon Claude Karam on 2 November 2025. The church overflowed as the faithful gathered to witness this sacred moment. Bishop Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles presided over the ordination. He was joined by Father Tony Karam, pastor of the mission, Father Peter Zogbi, Abbot Jonathan Decker of the Maronite Monks of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph Sacred Heart Monastery in Castle Rock, Washington, Father Theodore Lange, Deacon Paul Bolus, and Subdeacon Gibran Zogbi.

The ordination marked two significant firsts: it was the first subdiaconate ordination for a layperson in the state of Washington, and it took place within the first Maronite mission in the world dedicated to Saint Naamtallah outside of Lebanon. These

milestones highlight the growing Maronite presence in the Pacific Northwest and the Holy Spirit's work in building this vibrant community.

The faithful were deeply moved by the solemn beauty of the liturgy and by Bishop Zaidan's pastoral care as he explained each step of the ceremony with clarity and reverence. The Maronite subdiaconate ordination encompasses three sacred orders: Lector, Cantor, and Subdeacon. The newly ordained is entrusted with proclaiming the Word of God, leading chants and prayers, and serving at the altar.

This joyful milestone strengthened the mission's roots and inspired hope for future generations under the

protection of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Mother of God, and through the intercession of Saint Naamtallah and Saint Sharbel. ■



# Ordinations

## Subdeacon Ordination of Jacques Bou Abdo

On December 21, 2025, the parish community of Saint Anthony of Padua in Cincinnati, Ohio, rejoiced as one of their own, Jacques Bou Abdo, was ordained to the Order of Subdeacon. He was ordained by Chorbishop Anthony Spinosa, representing Bishop A Elias Zaidan. The Ordination followed the reception of Holy Communion by Chorbishop Spinosa and Father George Hajj, pastor of St. Anthony. This was a powerful reminder that all ministry flows from Christ present in the Eucharist.

A parishioner of Saint Anthony since 2023, Jacques was accompanied by his wife, Esther, who held the scissors for his tonsure. His parents, Elias and Carmen, assisted with his vestments as he was clothed with the alb and stole of the Order of Subdeacons. Serving the Liturgy

were Benjamin Smith and Jacques's two eldest children, Angela and Charbel, while his youngest daughter, Jacintha looked on in awe.

Jacques served the parish as a catechist for two years working to educate the youth in the faith. Members of the local Byzantine Catholic Mission and Father Matthew Joyner and his family joined the Maronite Family for this joyful celebration. A festive brunch followed the Ordination.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, Subdeacon Jacques faithfully serves the Holy Mysteries of the Maronite Church in Cincinnati offering his ministry with devotion and reverence in the House of the Lord. ■



# NAM Board Gathers in Preparation for the 2026 Convention



The Fall NAM Board Meeting was held the weekend of 3-5 October 2025 and was graciously hosted by St. Ephrem Catholic Maronite Church in El Cajon, California. Under the leadership of Pastor Toufic Nasr and the NAM 2026 Convention Committee, the gathering provided a wonderful opportunity for board members to share ideas, discuss plans, and build momentum for the upcoming NAM Convention, which will take place 1-5 July 2026 at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina.

## A Preview of the NAM 2026 Convention Site

On Friday afternoon, the NAM Board, together with Convention Chair Eva Bsaiibes and members of the Convention Committee, enjoyed a guided tour of the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina—the beautiful host hotel for the upcoming convention. The hotel's layout and facilities promise an exceptionally welcoming and inspiring atmosphere for what is sure to be a memorable gathering.

Eva and her committee have thoughtfully pre-planned the layout for every part of the convention: a warm and inviting hospitality room, convenient breakout rooms for workshops, elegant banquet and dining spaces, and—most importantly—a dedicated area for our daily prayers and Divine Liturgies. It is evident that the theme “One Body, One Spirit in Christ” is already shining brightly through the committee's efforts and insight.

The committee has already mapped out the registration process, signage, and hotel logistics to make sure the experience is smooth and accessible for all. One of the most exciting aspects is that everything will be in one place, allowing plenty of opportunities for socializing, fellowship, and personal time to explore beautiful San Diego with family and friends of Beit Maron.



The Marriott offers a family-friendly pool area and convenient access to the city's many attractions. As an added highlight, on Saturday evening, guests will be treated to a spectacular fireworks display, easily viewed from the hotel—part of San Diego's celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the United States. It's shaping up to be an unforgettable experience for all who attend!

## Saturday's Board Meeting: Energized and Forward-Focused

On Saturday, the NAM Board gathered for its quarterly meeting to further advance NAM's mission and prepare for the next phase of growth. The atmosphere was filled with positive energy and collaboration, as members shared ideas and strengthened their commitment to the organization's goals.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Patty Boulos, President Diana Ayoub, and NAM Spiritual Director Msgr. Albert Constantine, the meeting stayed focused and productive, guiding discussions that encouraged unity and a shared vision across the Board. Among the topics addressed were the future direction of NAM, strategies for increasing membership, and plans for the upcoming Spring Raffle.

The Board also explored updates to the NAM Scholarship Program, aiming to make it more engaging and appealing for youth and high-school students. Another lively discussion centered on the young adult involvement, highlighting the importance of creating dedicated events and meaningful opportunities for participation, leadership, and community building within NAM.

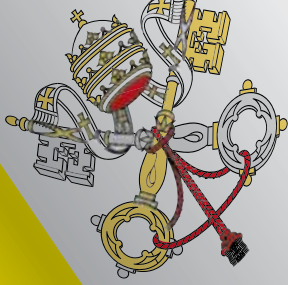
After a full and fruitful day of planning, the Board enjoyed a wonderful dinner hosted by the Bsaiibes family at their residence—a perfect setting to continue the spirit of fellowship and gratitude that defines NAM.

## Sunday Liturgy and Fellowship

The weekend concluded on a beautiful note as the Board joined the parish community of St. Ephrem Catholic Maronite Church for Sunday Divine Liturgy, celebrated by Fr. Toufic Nasr and Msgr. Albert Constantine. The liturgy was a time of thanksgiving for a productive weekend, uniting everyone in prayer for the continued success of NAM and the upcoming convention.

Following Mass, the parish graciously hosted a coffee hour in the church hall, where Board members and parishioners shared warm conversation and fellowship. It was a fitting end to a weekend filled with faith, planning, and renewed commitment to the NAM mission.

For more information, please visit the NAM 2026 Convention website, which includes details on registration, schedules, accommodations, and other convention updates. ■



# A Historic Pilgrimage: Pope Leo XIV Visits Lebanon

*American Maronites Join the Faithful in  
Welcoming the Holy Father* by Margaret Shibley Gray

When His Holiness Pope Leo XIV touched down in Lebanon on 30 November 2025, he made history. While previous pontiffs had visited the Land of the Cedars—Pope Paul VI stopped briefly at the Beirut airport in 1964 en route to India, and both Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI made pastoral visits—Pope Leo’s journey was singular in its significance: he chose visits to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and to Lebanon as the destinations for his first apostolic voyage abroad.

The Holy Father accepted the formal invitation of Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, extended in June 2025. His Holiness announced the visit on 7 October, the anniversary of the Hamas attacks on Israel, underscoring his commitment to peace in the region. The three-day visit, from 30 November through 2 December, required extensive preparation: heightened security measures, logistical coordination, and the organization of large public gatherings in cooperation with local religious and civil authorities.

## **American Maronites Answer the Call**

As soon as the papal visit was announced, Maronite faithful throughout the United States began planning their own pilgrimage. Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles led a delegation of approximately one hundred American pilgrims to witness this historic occasion.

Among them was Subdeacon Douglas Leonard of St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church in Nashville, TN. “When I learned that Bishop Elias was leading the pilgrimage, I knew I had to go,” he shared. “Getting to see the Holy Father was an added blessing.”

## **A Lifelong Dream Fulfilled**

For Julie and Bruce Nasser of St. Maron Parish in St. Paul, MN, the pilgrimage represented the fulfillment of a cherished aspiration. “We had always talked about visiting Lebanon,” Julie explained. “Members of our parish would share stories of visiting the homeland, and we always wanted to experience it ourselves. This was the perfect opportunity.”

The Nassers felt a particular connection to Pope Leo XIV, who had studied and worked in the neighboring Minneapolis–St. Paul area before his election to the Chair of Peter.

## **Encountering the Holy Father at Harissa**

“Our feet were lifting off the floor!” That is how the Nassers described their experience when they first saw the Holy Father at the Basilica of Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa on the second day of the papal visit. Initially uncertain whether they would obtain tickets—the event was originally reserved for bishops, priests, consecrated religious, and the press—the American delegation was ultimately granted admission.



Bruce Nasser positioned himself along a side aisle and came within arm's reach of the Vicar of Christ. "It was exhilarating!" the couple recalled. "A full orchestra, flags waving, a magnificent choir—the atmosphere was utterly uplifting."

### **Joy, Peace, and the Presence of the Successor of Peter**

Subdeacon Douglas first glimpsed the Holy Father on video screens while awaiting his arrival at the Basilica in Harissa. He watched the papal motorcade's journey from the tomb of St. Sharbel to the Basilica. "When he entered, we all cheered with joy," he recounted. He heard the Pontiff speak twice: once at the Basilica, and again before an estimated 150,000 faithful gathered at the Beirut City Centre Waterfront.

"The entire crowd radiated joy and peace," Subdeacon Douglas observed. "It was beautiful to stand among so many people waving their flags, singing and praising God in the presence of the Vicar of Christ."

### **The Young Church Gathers at Bkerké**

Angelina Khouri-Sader, a parishioner of Our Lady of Lebanon in Washington, DC, and St. Jude Maronite Church in Orlando, FL, attended the youth gathering in the square before the Maronite Patriarchate at Bkerké. "As a first-generation Lebanese American, this was something I never dreamed of experiencing," she reflected.

Approximately 10,000 young people assembled to greet the Holy Father. "It was truly magical to witness so many young adults eagerly awaiting the opportunity to see him," Angelina said. "The scene was filled with energy and pure joy. It was so crowded that the 19 young adults from the United States had to link arms as a human chain to stay together through the throngs of faithful."

The venue had reached capacity four hours before the event began, and it appeared the American youth delegation might be denied entry. "But God was on our side," Angelina recalled. "Bishop Elias truly led us as a good shepherd that day. He told the officials that he would not enter if his young people could not also enter—all 19 of us. He would not leave his sheep. Without Sayidna's leadership, our group would not have been able to attend."

The Holy Father addressed the young people primarily in English. Angelina believed he touched every heart present and was himself moved by the love and enthusiasm of the crowd. "I was in awe, truly mesmerized by each and every word," she shared. Pope Leo XIV's message of hope for the Middle East resonated deeply with the young pilgrims. He encouraged the youth to remain in Lebanon, to resist the temptation to emigrate, and to work toward making their homeland a better place. "You are the future of the Church," he told them.

*Continued on p. 16*



## A Historic Pilgrimage

*Continued from p. 25*

### At the Tomb of St. Sharbel

A highlight of the pilgrimage for Julie, Bruce, Subdeacon Douglas, and Angelina alike was the Holy Father's visit to the tomb of St. Sharbel Makhlūf at the Monastery of St. Maron in Annaya. They described the solemnity of the occasion, set against the breathtaking beauty of the Lebanese mountains—a moment of profound spiritual significance.

### A Message of Peace and Unity

Throughout his visit, Pope Leo XIV demonstrated a deep understanding of the hardships Lebanon has endured: civil war, economic devastation, political upheaval, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the recent conflict. The Holy Father called for peace and unity while praising the Lebanese people for their remarkable resilience. He proclaimed that there is hope for all religious communities to work in concert, and that Lebanon can serve as a model of coexistence for the world. He called upon all people to forgive, to show mercy, and to seek new paths toward lasting peace—to bring the peace of Christ to the Levant.

### Filled with the Spirit, Returning Home

The American pilgrims returned home transformed by their experience. For Subdeacon Douglas, the

journey deepened his appreciation for the challenges facing Lebanon and strengthened his resolve to be an instrument of peace. “By experiencing Lebanon firsthand, I gained insight into what life is like there—insight that will enable me to better serve the Maronite community of Nashville,” he explained.

Julie and Bruce Nasser continue to process the profound grace of the pilgrimage. Having heard countless stories of Lebanon from their fellow parishioners over the years, they now understand those stories in a new way. “Now we have seen for ourselves that these stories are true,” they said. Prior to their departure, friends had expressed concern about traveling to Lebanon, but the Nassers were pleasantly surprised by how safe they felt throughout their journey—not only during papal events with heightened security, but even in small villages far from the official itinerary. The Holy Father himself shared this confidence; when Queen Rania of Jordan expressed concern for his safety, he reportedly replied with characteristic simplicity: “Well, we’re going.” Angelina returned with a message of hope and an abiding sense of the Holy Father’s love for the Lebanese people. “He truly understands what the Lebanese have been through,” she reflected. “For me, this was a journey of unification—a reminder that the Levant is where our faith began.”



All four pilgrims expressed their profound gratitude to Chorbishop Sharbel Maroun, Bishop Elias, and Bishop Izen for making the pilgrimage possible. It was, they agreed, a life-changing experience they will treasure forever. ■

*Margaret Shibley Gray, feature writer, is a retired educator and parishioner of St. Anthony Maronite Church*



# Parish News

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

## Christmas Season Celebrations

Heart of Jesus Maronite Church celebrated the Season of Announcements and Christmas with a series of events that highlighted the parish's commitment to faith, fellowship, and service.

On 14 December 2025, the children of the parish presented their annual Christmas Pageant to the congregation. The young performers brought "The Birth of Jesus" to life in a heartfelt presentation that drew appreciation from all in attendance. Father Rabih Aoun, ML, extended a special word of thanks to the catechism students, teachers, and parents whose dedication and hard work made the production possible.

The Maronite Young Adults (MYA) organized a Christmas celebration that provided a beautiful evening of fellowship for parishioners and

their families. The gathering offered an opportunity for the community to come together and share in the joy of the season.

In the spirit of giving, members of the Maronite Youth Organization (MYO) visited a local nursing home on the Sunday before Christmas. The young people spent time with elderly residents, spreading cheer, smiles, and love to those who might otherwise feel forgotten during the holidays. Their visit served as a meaningful reminder that the true spirit of Christmas is found in togetherness and gratitude for one another.

Heart of Jesus Maronite Church continues to nurture a community where faith is lived out through worship, celebration, and compassionate outreach. ■



GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA

## MCF Students Celebrate Feast of Saint Anthony

The catechists and students in the Maronite Christian Formation program at Saint Anthony Church gathered on Sunday, 18 January, in the Church Hall to celebrate the patronal feast of the parish.

The students watched an engaging film prepared by the Coptic Church—a fitting choice since Saint Anthony lived in the deserts of Egypt—and learned that the entire Church honors Saint Anthony, sometimes given the title “the Great” or “of the Desert,” as the Father of Monks. While he was not the first to adopt a severe solitary life of prayer in the desert, he set the example that has been followed by monks and nuns for more than 1,800 years.

The celebration was made even more meaningful by the presence of the parochial vicar, Father Tony Jabbour, OMM, himself a monk, who serves alongside Chorbishop John D.



Faris, the pastor. The students also enjoyed fun projects and a lovely breakfast as part of the festive day. ■

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

## Holy Family Choir Makes History at Carnegie Hall

Holy Family Maronite Church celebrated a landmark achievement when its parish choir participated in a performance of Handel’s Messiah at Carnegie Hall from 28 November to 2 December 2025. Father Emmanuel Nakhle accompanied the choir on this memorable pilgrimage to New York City.

The event marked the first time a choir from a Maronite parish in the United States had performed Messiah at the renowned venue—an accomplishment of historic significance for the Maronite community nationwide. Under the direction of Maestro Dr. Jonathan Griffith, the Holy Family Choir joined a 160-member ensemble accompanied by a 60-piece orchestra. Griffith’s leadership was marked by clarity, warmth, and respect, fostering a strong sense of unity among all participants.

Choir members described the experience as transformative. From the first rehearsal to the final notes of the sacred

performance, they felt welcomed, valued, and inspired. The entire pilgrimage was distinguished by exceptional organization and coordination, with every detail handled professionally and with kindness.



The culminating performance of Handel’s Messiah was described by participants as a “dream of Heaven,” proclaiming with power and beauty the mystery of the Nativity and the Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The parish extends heartfelt gratitude to all whose support, prayers, and encouragement made this historic journey possible. ■

# Parish News

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

## Winter Events



Saint Maron Maronite Catholic Church celebrated a season filled with faith, service, and community during the autumn months. The children's activities began with a Kids' Party in early November. Thanks to the efforts of the MYA and dedicated parents, the evening was filled with music, dancing, games, food, and a costume contest.

On the Feast of the Consecration of the Church, Father Andrawos El-Tabchi consecrated the parish children to God and placed them under the protection of the Blessed Mother. During the Renewal of the Church celebration, the children participated by dressing the altar with new linens as a sign of renewal and dedication.

Later in November, with support from parents, the children held their annual Fall Service Projects. The CCD prepared a bake sale while the MYO cooked meals for Caring for Friends, a nonprofit organization providing meals for the homeless. Special thanks go to Janah, Religious Education Director, for organizing the event and to the Men's Club for sponsoring it.

More than 30 men of the parish gathered for the Men's Annual Christmas Dinner, where Father Andrawos expressed gratitude for their continuous love and support of the church.

As is tradition, parishioners participated in the Thanksgiving Food Drive and Christmas Giving Tree, supporting over 60 children and 10 elderly individuals. The parish also welcomed members of the Hispanic community, with more than 40 people gathering to pray the rosary followed by a shared dinner prepared by parish families.

Following Divine Liturgy, the MYA honored Debra Mosier for her dedication to the organization, presenting her with tokens of appreciation for her love, faith, and care for the Saint Maron community. ■

UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

## December Activities

Saint George Church, under the pastoral care of Father Aaron Sandbothe, observed a particularly active December as parishioners embraced the spirit of the season through charitable works and community gatherings.

Parish organizations conducted their annual Food Drive for those in need throughout the local community. Parishioners generously donated nonperishable food items and monetary contributions, which were delivered to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in Uniontown for distribution to families facing hardship.

The parish also participated in the Fayette County "Toys for Tots" Christmas Drive. Saint George parishioners contributed gifts and volunteered alongside the Uniontown Fire Department to collect and organize donations for less fortunate children. This year's drive was a remarkable success, with 3,720 gifts distributed to children in registered Fayette County families—a testament to the generosity of local organizations, businesses, churches, and individuals.

The Ladies Guild sponsored the annual Christmas Party for the children of the Maronite Christian Formation program. The youngsters enjoyed a festive morning of breakfast, arts and crafts, cookie decorating, games, gifts, and treat bags, capped off by an exciting visit from Santa Claus.

The Maronite Youth Organization brought Christmas cheer to residents at the Addison of Uniontown, a personal care and assisted living facility. The young people distributed Christmas cards and cookies while sharing conversation with residents. Subdeacon Mallard George, currently a resident at the Addison, expressed his delight at the visit. The youth members found the experience deeply moving, touched by the joy their presence brought to the residents. ■



CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN

## Christmas Concert and MYA Reunion



On 13 December, the Saint Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church community, friends, and visitors enjoyed a spectacular evening of music and prayer performed by the Saint Sharbel Choir. The choir presented their annual Christmas Concert to an audience of over 600 people. Under the guidance of Music Director Aziz Charabaty, they performed a program entitled, "Hymns and Carols from Around the World," offering a rich tapestry of sounds celebrating the Nativity through various cultural traditions and languages. The concert extended beyond the church doors, as many watched the event live-streamed from home and abroad. The altar was beautifully decorated with glowing candles while Christmas up-lights accented the church walls, creating a festive and reverent atmosphere. A light reception

followed in the parish hall to commemorate the choir's amazing performance. It was a memorable night bringing the community together to honor their faith, heritage, and the Birth of Christ.

The Christmas holiday also provided an opportunity for the MYA college students from Saint Sharbel Church to reconnect. On 30 December, 45 MYA college students and parish clergy enjoyed breakfast together at Tommy's Diner in Clinton Township. They gathered to celebrate their faith and friendship. Pastor Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Father Chris Nahra, and Deacon Michael Magyar shared refreshing conversations with the young adults. ■

# Parish News

HOUSTON, TEXAS

## Christmas Celebration



Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Catholic Church hosted a beautiful Christmas Play and Concert that brought together parishioners of all ages in a meaningful celebration of Christ's birth. Under the pastoral leadership of Fr. Milad Yaghi, the parish community witnessed a memorable evening of faith, creativity, and fellowship.

The children of the parish took center stage, delivering heartfelt performances that captured the true meaning of the holy season. With stunning light effects and modern visuals enhancing the presentation, the timeless story of the Nativity came alive in a way that resonated with every generation present. The young performers shared their gifts with joy, love, and dedication, reminding all in attendance of the hope and beauty that Christmas brings.

Following the performance, families gathered for the annual Christmas dinner, a cherished tradition that strengthens the bonds of the parish family. The evening was filled with laughter, warmth, and genuine togetherness—a true reflection of the spirit that defines this vibrant Maronite community.

The success of the event was made possible through the dedication of many hands. The parish extends heartfelt thanks to the children who performed so beautifully, the teachers who guided them, and the many volunteers who worked behind the scenes. Their collective efforts transformed the evening into something truly special, creating lasting memories for families and deepening the community's shared faith during this blessed season. ■

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

## Centennial Celebration

The parishioners of Saint George Maronite Church joyfully celebrated their Centennial Anniversary—100 years of faith, heritage, and community. Founded in 1925 by Lebanese immigrants determined to preserve their Maronite faith and traditions despite hardships and language barriers, the parish has grown from humble beginnings into a beacon of faith for future generations.

The Jubilee Year was marked by rich spiritual, cultural, and social milestones. The opening Liturgy was celebrated by Bishop Elias Zaidan and Pastor Father Charles Khachan, MLM. The closing Liturgy welcomed newly ordained

priests Father Joseph Harb, Father Christopher Pond, and Father Jihad Kayrouz, MLM. Bishop Elias dedicated a statue of Saint George, crafted in Lebanon by Nayef Alwan. Memorial bricks and benches create a pathway to the statue, offering places for prayer and reflection.

The faithful participated in cultural and social events throughout the year, including the annual Lebanese Food Festival, NAM Convention, traditional folk dancing and music, Lebanese cooking classes, a vintage fashion show spanning 100 years of style, a charity golf tournament, Casino Night, and activities hosted

by the Ladies Altar Society. The grand finale, “Magic of 100 Years,” brought the community together for a black-tie evening featuring Lebanese folk dancers, traditional cuisine, fellowship, and a spectacular fireworks display.

Special thanks were given to Jo Ann Andera, chairperson of this celebration, and to her committees and community volunteers who worked tirelessly to bring this milestone to fruition. As the parish moves into its second century, the legacy of those faithful 1925 immigrants will live on through those who carry the torch. ■



# Parish News

FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

## Christmas Celebration and Upcoming Lenten Retreat

Saint Anthony of the Desert Church continues to offer meaningful opportunities for spiritual growth and fellowship under the leadership of Monsignor James A. Root.

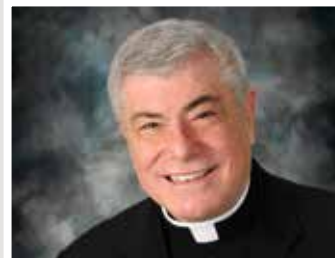
On 7 December 2025, parishioners and friends gathered for an evening of Christmas carols and hymns sung by the Saint Anthony of the Desert Choir. The selections included traditional Syriac chants, Arabic hymns, and English favorites. Everyone was encouraged to participate in the

singing, and several children lifted their voices in praise. Following the concert, the Knights of Columbus and parishioners led the lighting of the grounds, which had been adorned with festive decorations. The lights were so spectacular that the Fall River community referred to the parish as “Little La Salette.” The evening was also an opportunity for giving, with \$2,500 raised for the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Lebanon. The Sisters manage the Holy Cross Hospital, a psychiatric facility in Jall-Eddib, founded by Blessed Yacoub the Capuchin in 1919.

Looking ahead to the Lenten season, a special retreat for women of all ages will be held on 7 March 2026. Entitled “In the Footsteps of Mary: Walking the Way of the Cross,” the retreat will focus on the Blessed Mother and the women at the Cross as a way to enter into Great Lent. Johnette Williams of EWTN’s “Women of Grace” will lead morning and afternoon talks. Continental breakfast and a home-cooked lunch will be provided, and the day will conclude with the Divine Liturgy at 4:00 pm. Register online at [womenofgrace.com/events](http://womenofgrace.com/events) or by calling 508-672-7653. ■



## From the Editor



### A Child Who Needed Help

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

The decorations have been put away. We have attempted to return to our diets. The warm feelings of Christmas have faded. Yet the reality of the vulnerable face of Jesus remains.

When we looked at the image of Jesus in the manger, we often thought of it as something belonging to the past. Yet that image showed us how God chooses to come among us—not only then, but now.

*“The Ancient of Days has become a child.  
The Most High has become small. The Source has  
become thirsty, and the Bread has hungered.”*

— ST. EPHREM THE SYRIAN, HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

The child born in Bethlehem is Almighty God, yet he entered the world in complete weakness. He was hungry and thirsty. He needed to be kept warm. He had no shelter of his own. Very soon, he would have to flee for his life. He depended entirely on the care of others for his safety, his nourishment, and his very survival. This was not the God we expected, but it was the God we were given.

Those who went to see him were not the powerful, the wealthy, or the influential. They were shepherds—working men curious enough to go and see what had happened. They left their fields, walked into the night, and stood before a poor child lying in a feeding trough. What they found was not strength or comfort, but a life that needed care.

When we looked at the scene in Bethlehem, we reacted almost without thinking. Faced with a child who was small, poor, and dependent, we felt the urge to help. We wanted to protect him and provide what was lacking. The image stirred in us a natural generosity. Yet the Christ we encounter in the world today still appears in much the same way—weak, dependent, and in need.

He shows himself in the hungry person who needs to be fed, in the one who lacks shelter, in the sick who depend on patience and presence, in the elderly who fear being forgotten, and in the vulnerable—especially the unborn—whose lives require protection. He is present wherever someone must rely on the care, attention, and responsibility of others. The weakness that moved our hearts at Christmas is the same weakness through which Christ comes to us throughout the rest of the year.

This is where Christmas becomes real. Christ does not ask us to admire the manger. He asks us to do what was done for His Son there: to notice need, to respond, and to take responsibility. It is still the same Jesus—vulnerable and dependent—who comes to us today, asking for our love and care. ■

Devotedly yours in Christ

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

Chorbishop John D. Faris

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## ANNUAL LENTEN APPEAL 2026



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

### ***HOW DO YOU MAKE A GIFT?***

#### **YOU MAY MAKE A DONATION IN YOUR PARISH:**

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

#### **MAIL A GIFT OR MAKE A DONATION ONLINE:**

**Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn**  
109 Remsen Street  
Brooklyn NY, 11201  
[www.stmaron.org](http://www.stmaron.org)

**Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles**  
19300 Rinaldi Street, Box 8509  
Porter Ranch, CA 91327  
[www.eparchy.org](http://www.eparchy.org)

