

# *Milestones*



**Our Lady's Parish**

# Maronite Community celebrates 20 years in Austin

**A Brief History of Our Lady's Maronite Catholic Church  
by Fr. Dr. Donald J. Sawyer, Founding Pastor**



Our first Chapel was in this tiny house located at 1320 E. 51st Street. The interior walls were knocked down to accommodate the altar and up to 21 people. In 1998, the house was moved to make room for the present day church building.

The story of Our Lady's Maronite Catholic Parish in Austin, Texas started as a dream.

I was ordained on April 27, 1974 at St. Mary's Cathedral by Archbishop Francis M. Zayek, the first bishop of the newly-formed Diocese of Saint Maron of the United States. Bishop Vincent M. Harris, the bishop of the Diocese of Austin, presided. Although I was ordained Maronite, I worked in the Diocese of Austin for eight years before being released to serve the Maronite Diocese where Archbishop Zayek assigned me to form the new mission in Austin.

The story of the founding of our mission is the story of a spiritual journey. It was a journey in which 11 special people were called to start a special parish. It is the story of God's goodness and people's faith and endurance.

There were tough times filled with disappointment, work, joy, trust, frustration, challenges and victories. People were called to build a community and to learn what it meant to be Eastern and Maronite. Although there were Maronites in the Austin area for years, we were now called to build a home where there was none and challenged to build a faith community that would be our support and nourishment.

At the request of Lewis Zegub, we started having Maronite Liturgies on a weekly basis in the fall of 1983 at St. George Episcopal Church on IH-35 and Airport Blvd. The people of St. George were wonderful to us. We were given keys to the entire complex and were able to use the church, classrooms and their parish center.

Longtime parishioners remember the church well and in particular remember on Christmas Eve when we

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stood outside St. George, in freezing temperatures, waiting for the Episcopalians to finish their services, so we could enter and begin ours. It was time to have our own home, and the search for this home began.

After 13 months of coming together at St. George's, we began having our Liturgies in a small, two-bedroom house at 1320 E. 51st Street. This would become our permanent home after Johnny Joseph and his sister donated five acres behind this property in memory of their late mother, Fronia Joseph. In 1984, we purchased the rest of the property up to 51st Street.

The Parish then set upon an ambitious plan to build a worship and community center that would serve as our home. Plans were drawn for a 10,000 square foot Center with a closable Altar, a full-size kitchen, offices and large meeting area. The



Ground is turned on the site of the Parish Center seen completed below in 1985.

meeting area would serve as the Church and Community Center. Foldable tables were used as walls and partitions and folding chairs served as our pews.

Clint Gerhke, who is a parishioner still today, was the contractor for the

building which was completed in December 1985 for only \$280,000. Archbishop Zayek joined us in that month to dedicate the building, which we would call home for 15

years, as we saved to pay our debt



Our first building project was the Rafka Parish Center. The 10,000 square-foot Center served as our community's church, nursery, religious education building and family center. It also had two small offices and a kitchen. It was completed in 1985 and dedicated by Archbishop Francis Zayek who first assigned Fr. Sawyer permission to begin a Maronite Mission in Austin.

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and save for a permanent and authentically Maronite church building.

On February 3, 1996 our first deacon Joseph K. Crowley was to be ordained by Bishop John G. Chedid. We had so much planned and were full of anticipation when Austin received an unusual ice storm which closed down the airport. Bishop Chedid was rerouted to San Antonio where he was not due to arrive until a day later. So, on Sunday morning a small group of us caravanned in dangerous icy weather to San Antonio to St. George Parish to witness Deacon Crowley's ordination.

After purchasing the additional property to the west, we had dis-

cerned that the Lord wanted us to build in the front and not in the back as we had first anticipated. We formed a Building Committee consisting of Yolanda Teran, Roger El Khoury, Julia Sawyer and Father Don. The parish had to discern and select an architect who would put on paper all of the desires and wishes of our parishioners for a church. Mr. Bill Scarmardo did just that; however it took us over a year to find a contractor who would build what we wanted for a reasonable price. After much searching, the Lord sent one man and his company, who we contracted with in November of 1997.

We were all excited when we had the official groundbreaking on Sun-

day, December 16, 1997. It was a big day. The sky was blue and the weather was crisp and cool. It was a long awaited day that seemed like a dream. The Building Committee and everyone participated in the turning the ground. We have more pictures of that day than of any other event in the parish's history.

All of 1998 was taken up with construction. Bull dozers hummed, and dust filled the air. Slowly and surely the church rose from the ground. Steel went up, and masonry went up to reveal a skeleton of Eastern splendor in the midst of concrete and dust. Every Sunday our cars and our shoes were dusty or muddy.

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We had Christmas Liturgy in the Parish Center, but we planned on going into the new building on Sunday, January 9, just one Sunday before Bishop Chedid was scheduled to arrive to dedicate the new church. That first Sunday, everyone grabbed something from the “old” church and took it to the new building. Dust was still settling but we were moving into the “promised land.”

The dedication of the church was a grand and fun time. We had a catered banquet and dance in the Parish Center the night before. People of the parish pulled together and answered many problems and challenges that came their way. We had Bishop John Chedid and Chorbishop Gregory Mansour, Chorbishop Joseph Kaddo of Brooklyn, Fr. Anthony Spinosa of Flint, Michigan, Msgr. Richard Saad of Birmingham, Alabama, Fr. Milad Yaghi of Houston, Fr. Ron Larko of Dallas, Fr. Kirby Garner of Austin, Fr. Roger Hall, Fr. Bartholomew Leon, Fr. Robert Bradley of Austin, and Orthodox Bishop Michael Jachimczyk. St. George Parish in San Antonio chartered a bus to be with



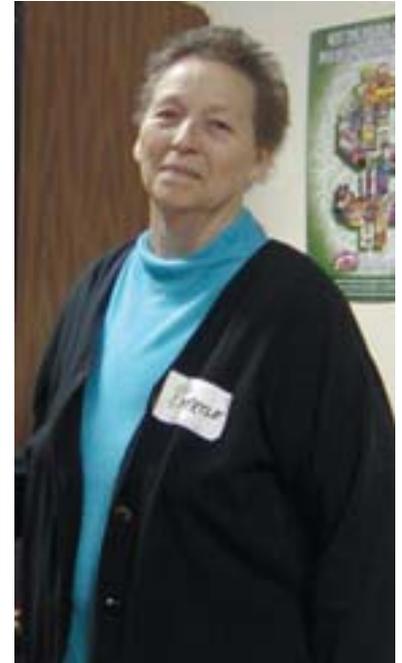
us for the occasion.

The Consecration was followed by a Mexican luncheon with mariachi bands playing.

Our parish continues to grow and evolve. We are not finished and our church temple is not finished. We have been graced by the generosity of parishioners and friends who are willing to give to see the church

“with the finest of religious art and appointments.”

The Mother of God and Christ in the dome icons created by James Campbell of Dallas, were inspired and modeled on traditional Maronite sources and iconography, especially the Rabulla Gospels. He also created the podiums, the design of the altar, **continued on page 6**





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the altar curtains, and all interior designs. Our good friend, Bishop Michael Jachimczyk shared his talents with us by making the altar curtains and elegant vestments.

We cannot tell the history of Our Lady's without mentioning the people who worked and played with us but are no longer with us. They are still with us and we remember them and will never forget them. They are: Louis Joseph, Johnny Samon, Rose Tannous, Bernice Joseph, Amelia Samon, Raymond Teran, Lucille Crowley, Jenny Joseph, John Kocian Sr. Arthur Joseph, Jim Ferris, Anna Ferris, Helen Daywood, Harry Joseph, Sam Hage, Richard Kouri, Lulah May Schweng, Louie Munoz, Belen Coyle, Hugo Tames, Bruce Banks, Edward Lattouf, Hester Naura, Lewis Zegub, David Crowley, Wanda Ferris, Rose Colletti, Julia Terbay, Frances Abijaoude, Richard Daywood, Deborah Greenacre-Smith, Josephine Mizisko, Mary Attra, Beatrice Hannah, Virginia Cureton, James Pinget, Cynthia Naufel, Rose Munoz, Troy Hepner and Amelia Migoni.

Our parish is on a journey. We are people of many varied backgrounds  
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called together by God in the spirit of our patron, Saint Maron. We are from Texas, Ohio, Louisiana, Missouri, Alabama, California, Mississippi, Pennsylvania and other states. We are from the United States, Spain, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Palestine, England, Germany, Italy, Canada, Malaysia, Iraq, France and many other countries.

We feel very blessed with the wonderful people that make up Our Lady's and blessed with the beautiful church complex. We work together to live out what the Lord wants for us. "Praise the Lord all you nations, Glorify Him you people, for steadfast is His mercy to us and His truth endures forever."





# Writing the Holy Gospel in Color

## Iconographer Jim Campbell

Article by Ken Vargas

Adorning the walls, ceilings and altar of Our Lady's Church is a collection of iconographic images depicting Christ, the Blessed Mother, saints and angels. The art is the creation of iconographer Jim Campbell.

The centerpiece of our church is the

icon of Christ in the center top of the dome. Under His watchful eye, worshipers join together in prayer to celebrate the Liturgy and meditate on the mysteries of their Catholic faith.

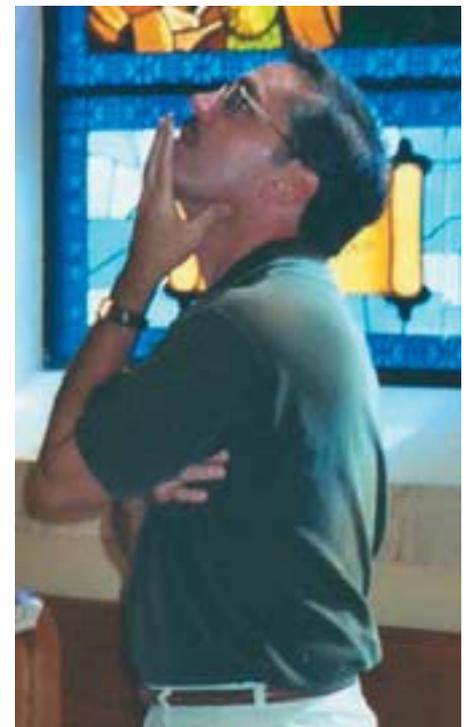
The icons, which are a rich canvas of colors, Jim says, "serve as a giant

pictorial of the Liturgy."

Iconography is an ancient art that started in Greece, Russia and Eastern Europe. Embraced by the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches, iconography is the traditional adornment used to illustrate the characters and events of the Bible and the lives of the church's saints.

Mr. Campbell is the son of James and Gloria Campbell. Early on in his life, Jim knew he wanted to be an artist. A graduate of Jesuit College Prep School in Dallas, he went on to study History and Fine Art at North Texas State University where he earned a degree in both subjects. Spiritually, he was drawn toward the imagery in icons while a student at Jesuit. From there, he said he "fell in love with the Eastern spirituality"

It was his desire to begin collecting icons that started him on his career in the art form. "I couldn't afford to buy the old icons from Russia or Greece, so I decided to paint my own," Campbell said. The first icon he created, which he calls primi-



tive, compared to his work today, was of the Mother of God with Christ Child. He gave the icon to his grandmother, who still has it in her home. He says the image of the Mother of God with Christ Child is still his favorite subject.

Jim’s travels to Greece, Czechoslovakia and Russia have greatly influenced his art. He formally studied his craft in Russia, but has also visited churches and museums in Greece and Czechoslovakia – countries famous for their holy icon collections and artisans. He has drawn inspiration from his pilgrimage of St. Paul’s journey from Istanbul to Athens but says

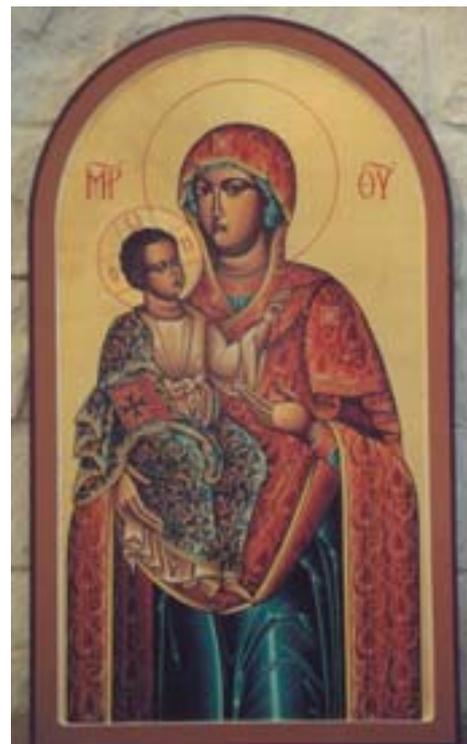
most of his inspiration comes “from the services of the Divine Liturgy.”

Working on commissions for churches and individuals throughout the country, Jim works in his studio in Dallas. Most of the icons he creates are large projects, taking months or years to create.

The icon of Christ in the dome of Our Lady’s Church took a year and a half to design and create. It was his largest icon yet, and was so large that it had to be done in pieces. Though he created the image in his studio, he did not see it as a complete icon until it was hung in the dome. The project of hanging the icon, which was done by wallpaper hanger Lynn Stackable, was so large that the pews in the church had to be removed to allow for a boom scaffold to reach the ceiling.

But painting alone is not his only talent. Campbell is a master at woodcarving. The podiums in Our Lady’s Church are testimony to that. He began woodcarving once he started iconography as a profession. In fact, he is currently carving a mahogany icon screen, measuring 10 feet high by 30 feet wide for St. Sophia’s Ukrainian Catholic Church north of Dallas. The screen will hold 13 icons, which he will also create. The project will take him 2-3 years to complete, with the carving alone taking 18 months.

His art has evolved from a few relatively simple projects into major

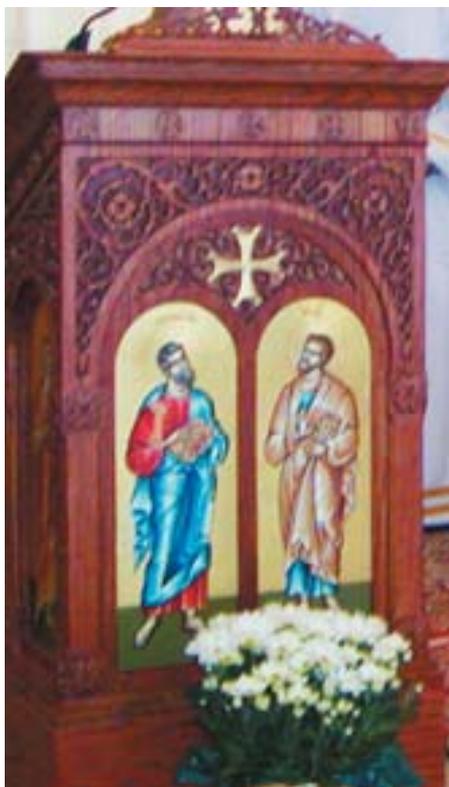


embellishments for a select few churches that have the vision and patience to wait for their art.

Campbell was attracted to working on whole church projects after planning a restoration for a church in Philadelphia, where he said, “I fell in love with the whole process of architecture — masonry, woodwork and [the spiritual] art. That is where I developed a desire to embellish churches.”

The embellishment of Our Lady’s Church, which has happened in a few short years, is still not complete. “There are still a few more things that need to be done,” Campbell said.

But Campbell is quick to point out that embellishment is more than just creating an aesthetic appeal. “The whole idea of the aesthetic is to glorify God. The windows, podiums, icons, and vestments point to His glorification, and are not there just to be pretty. There is a liturgical reason for them.”





# Our Saints

As Maronites, we believe that all of us are called to Sainthood. More than an official recognition by the Vatican, a saintly life is an example of how Christ asks us to live.

While we all can do this with varying levels of success, there are examples in our Church of people who completely and without fear devoted their lives to living the principles of the Gospel and sacrificed worldly pleasures in exchange for a closer relationship with God.

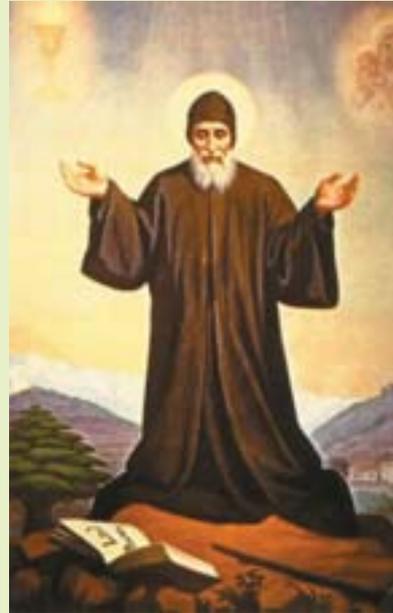
Though our worship and longing is for God alone, we recognize that the saints are available to us for petitions and inspiration. It is by reading the stories about their lives, and more importantly, their character, that we see examples of Christ's teaching.

The miracles of cures and favors attributed to the saints is evidence of the favor God has for them and for our faith.

The common character of all our saints is the desire to know, love and serve God with a great intensity. Many of the saints come from very humble backgrounds, and though many chose a religious vocation as their profession, it is their devotion to prayer that sets them apart from the rest of us.

Thus, we can learn from them how to live saintly lives today.

For Maronites, there are a number of patron saints who we are particularly inspired by. Many of them lived very simple ascetic lives. But, in common, they teach us to look for quiet solitude and to shut out the cries of modernity so that we can hear the voice of God through prayer.



## St. Sharbel

**Feast Day July 23**

St. Sharbel was a Maronite monk who lived a devout life of prayer, chastity and discipline. He spent his priestly life in humility and was particularly devoted to the Eucharist and the Blessed Mother. Many miracles are attributed to St. Sharbel, who is a favorite saint of Maronites around the world. His body remains uncorrupted to this day.

### Saint Sharbel Pray for Us

Najib & Roberta Wehbe and Family

Simon & Lina Najm & Family

† Dr. Herbert R. Nassour, Jr.

Rosalinda G. Fernandez

Jaime Tames Gonzalez

† Joseph J. Tebcherany

Samira Tebcherany

† Hugo E. Tames

Sofia Darwich

Luis Gonzalez

† Shikrey Joseph

† Jenny Joseph

Joe Tibiletti

Dr. and Mrs. Kamil Jbeily and Family



## St. Maron

**Feast Day February 9**

The Father of the Maronite Church, St. Maron (for whom we are called Maronites) was a hermit monk who ministered to the faithful about the year 400 on the mountain slopes of Cyr, near Antioch Syria. He was a contemporary of St. John Chrysostom, who wrote to Maron and asked him to pray for him. He taught his disciples how to live a ascetic life.

### Saint Maron Pray for Us

† Jake Pizzolatto

Kenneth Vargas

# Pillars of the



### Saint Peter Pray for Us

† Giovina Colletti

† Domenico Colletti

† Bishop Pedro  
Dionisio Tibiletti

David & Lillian Langston

Warren Langston



## Mother of God

Suha Vargas

Melanie Ledesma

Eddie Ledesma

Jimmy & Dina Nassour  
and Family

Mr. & Mrs. I.J. Ermis

Mr. & Mrs. John Cordier  
and Family

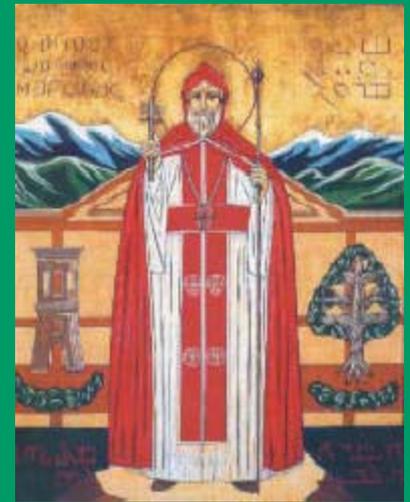
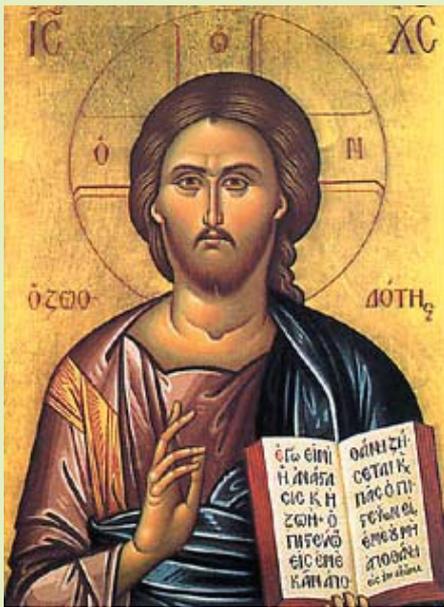
The Newell/Townsend Family

Mr. & Mrs. Howard Joseph  
and Family

Evelyn Holub Johnson

Patrick & Clara McNamara  
and Family

# The Church



## Pray for Us

Anthony & Fannye Lamme, Sr.  
and Family

Charlie & Rose Bashara, Sr.  
and Family

Michael & Laura Mery  
and Family

Joseph & Mara Bashara  
and Family

Thomas & Christine Bashara  
and Family

Raymond & Rose Karam  
and Family

Joseph and Myrtle Bashara

† Emil Tibiletti

† Amelia Gossman Migoni

## Saint Paul Pray for Us

† Rose Colletti

† Marianna Shilkoski

Dennis Buie

Lolly Sandoval

## St. John Maron

Feast Day March 2

St. John Maron was a Maronite monk and bishop who became the first elected Patriarch of the Maronite Church, and the 63rd successor to St. Peter who established the Church of Antioch. St. John Maron led his followers from the Muslim persecution in Syria and fled to Lebanon. In the mountains of Lebanon, he grew the church and brought Christianity to that region, where it flourished for centuries to follow.

## Saint John Maron Pray for Us

Mike McNamara

Julie McNamara

† Ms. Anne Tibiletti



## **St. Rafka** **Blind Mystic of Lebanon**

**Feast Day March 21**

Saint Rafka was a Maronite nun who lived in Lebanon in the nineteenth century. She had a deep devotion to Christ in the Eucharist and to Mary. She endured a great deal of pain in her life. For that reason, she is a model for us of redemptive suffering, patience and gentleness.

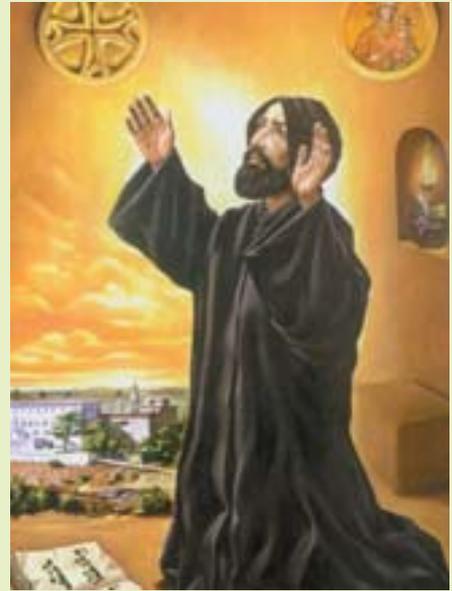
### **Saint Rafka Pray for Us**

† Joseph J. Tebcherany  
Samira Tebcherany

† Cynthia Naufel  
Hoda Z. Nassour  
Marian Romero

Ben & Wafa Rivera and Family  
Deacon Joe & Carolyn Crowley and Family

† Josephine Tibiletti  
Mr. & Mrs. Imad Mouchayleh and Family  
Mr. and Mrs. Assaad Jbeily and Family



## **St. Nemtallah Al-Hardini**

**Feast Day December 14**

St. Al-Hardini (named to be canonized this year), was a man of prayer, totally “enraptured by God.” He spent days and nights in meditation, prayer and adoration of the Eucharist. The Virgin Mary was his patron to whom he prayed Her Rosary. As a monk, he was a very humble, sensitive and patient person who lived his monastic vows of “obedience, chastity and poverty” to perfection. People who knew him called him “The Saint” while he was still alive. One of his students was St. Sharbel. He died holding an image of Mary to whom he was praying.

### **Saint Hardini Pray for Us**

† John Pozzi  
Sean Vargas  
Jonathan Vargas  
Rumzy Hneiti



## The Massabki Brothers

**Feast Day July 10**

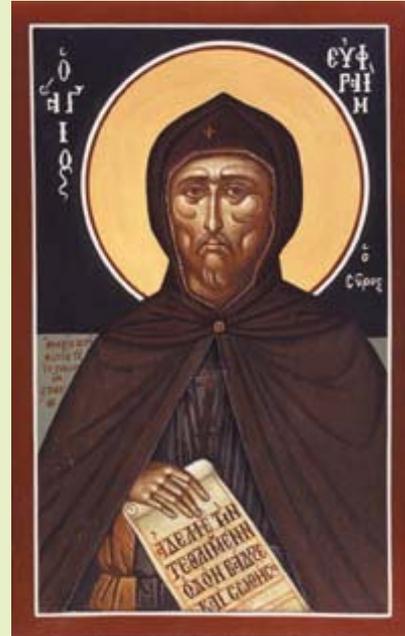
The Massabki brothers were among the thousands of lay Christians who were martyred in 1860 at the hands of assailants who demanded that they abandon their religion. They were martyred before the altar of the church where they had fled for safety. They are models of Christian life in secular society and can be thought of as patrons of the Maronite laity.

### Brothers Pray for Us

†Helen Schianni

Thank you, Eddie & Melanie Ledesma for sponsoring the Youth Breakfast

Thanks to Our Lady's Altar Society and St. Joseph's Men's Club for sponsoring our Dedication Weekend Luncheon and Reception



## St. Ephrem of Syria

**Feast Day June 9**

St. Ephrem of Syria was a priest, poet, writer and theologian who holds the title of Doctor of the Church for his written works on spirituality. He was also called the Harp of the Holy Spirit for the 72 hymns he composed for us. He taught and followed a life of prayer and service. When not writing or praying, he was busy helping the poor and hungry in his village of Edessa. He taught that prayer formed virtue, which led to temperance while suppressing pride to allow us to surrender our soul to the Holy Spirit.

Thanks to Our Lady's Anniversary Celebration Committee:

Deacon Joe & Carolyn Crowley

Suha Vargas

Mike McNamara

Eddie & Melanie Ledesma

Paula Joyce

# Thirty Years of Priestly Service

On April 27, 2004, Fr. Donald J. Sawyer will celebrate the 30th Anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

He was born to Charles and Julia Sawyer. His father, Charles (deceased) was a native Texan whose grandfather fought in the Civil War. His mother, Julia Joseph, is the daughter of parents who left Lebanon to come to America in search of opportunity and freedom to celebrate their Maronite faith without fear of persecution.

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(Top) - Fr. Don gives his blessings during an Easter Liturgy in the Family Center. Fr. Don is the founding pastor of Our Lady's Church in Austin.

(Center) - Newly ordained Fr. Don Sawyer with his mother, Julia Joseph Sawyer.

(Left) - Fr. Don passes out palms to the children during a Palm Sunday Liturgy in the new Church.

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Fr. Sawyer, who was born and grew up in Austin, went to school at St. Mary's parochial downtown. He regularly attended and served Mass. He enjoyed being with his friends and went to school at Baker Jr. High and then on to graduate from McCallum High School.

Despite a "regular life," he knew that he was being called to a vocation in a religious life, and with the support and encouragement of his mother, Julia, he began his collegiate and seminary studies at St. Mary's University in Houston. He earned his Bachelor's degree in History and stayed on to earn a Master's degree in Theology. He earned a Doctorate in 1991.

Although he had difficulty accepting a full call to the priesthood, he was very much drawn to the spirituality he found in the Eastern Church. As a seminarian, he was inspired by the spirituality of John Namie, an Orthodox priest he befriended in Houston. It was there that Fr. Don began



to explore the traditions, writings and prayers of the Eastern Catholic Church, including the Maronite traditions which were the heritage of his maternal ancestors.

After discerning his calling, and overcoming his doubts, "I fought the vocation, but you know who won," he says, he accepted God's call to the priesthood. Discovering his Maronite heritage and falling in love

with its traditions, he was ordained as a Maronite priest by Archbishop Francis Zayek in 1974. But the Archbishop decided that Austin was not yet ready for a full-time Maronite priest, and in an agreement with the local bishop, Fr. Don began his priestly service in the Austin Diocese.

His first assignment was in Lockhart, Texas where he stayed for a short while before moving to Cameron and then Taylor. He spent four years as an associate pastor at St. Anthony's Church in Bryan and four years as the associate pastor at Sacred Heart Parish in Austin. During this time he celebrated the Maronite Liturgy and the Roman Mass.

He was eager to serve the Maronite Church full-time, but Archbishop Zayek asked him to be patient and he obeyed. Finally in 1981, Bishop Zayek asked Austin Bishop Harris to release Fr. Don from his commitment to the Latin Church, so that he could start a Maronite mission in Austin. Bishop Harris agreed, and Fr. Don began the arduous task of starting a church from scratch.



In a solemn Ordination Ceremony, Fr. Don is anointed into the priesthood by Archbishop Francis Zayek at St. Mary's Cathedral in Austin on April 27, 1974.

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“I had the support of Chorbishop John Trad, who was in San Antonio at the time. He would regularly come up to Austin.”

Together with a handful of families, many who are still part of the parish today, the community began to celebrate Liturgy on a weekly basis. Next came the challenge of finding a permanent home, which they

did. Determined to build a home, Fr. Don and his dedicated flock saved their pennies, held fund-raisers, and with the blessings of some generous donations, succeeded in their effort. Selecting, the Mother of God as their patron saint, the community soon had its own home on 51st Street.

Twenty years later, Fr. Don and the founders of Our Lady’s Community have much to celebrate. The Parish

now has a beautiful church filled with awe-inspiring icons, intricate carvings and stained glass windows, a full-size religious education building and a large family center that hosts its many events. But more importantly Fr. Don has built a family of worshippers, from all over the world, who share his passion for the spirituality of the East and a deep love of Christ and His mother, Mary.



## Congratulations

**The St. Joseph’s Men’s Club congratulates and thanks Fr. Don Sawyer on 30 years of Priestly Service and 20 years of Pastorship to Our Lady’s Church and Deacon Joe Crowley for 8 years of Diaconal Service.**

# Deacon Joe

Joe Crowley, 60, has been the Deacon of Our Lady's Parish since 1996. Before that he served as a Subdeacon, which is the starting Order for clergy in the Maronite Church.

Deacon Crowley was called to the Our Lady's Maronite Church by fate. His late parents, Leonard and Lucille Crowley, had raised him to be Catholic, but it was his mother Lucille who influenced him to start attending Our Lady's Parish.

Lucille Kouri Crowley was suffering from cancer and while being treated at St. David's hospital in Austin, she longed for a visit from her priest. But instead of her regular priest, Fr. Don Sawyer stopped to visit her like he did so many other patients in that hospital near his church. They became friends and she told him about her grandfather, who was a Maronite priest in Lebanon.

Although she lost her battle with cancer, she grew close again to her church. After her death, Joe Crowley grew closer to his mother's spiritual heritage too, through the church.

As his spirituality grew, he wanted to serve in a way that honored his mother, and so he pledged to seriously study the Maronite faith. In 1989, he was accepted as a candidate for the Subdiaconate. Joe says the study was difficult, but that the greater difficulty was having to explain and defend the "Catholicism of being Maronite." He often had to convince other deacon candidates

that the Maronites were indeed Catholic, something he says reflects an ignorance among many Catholics that the Church is multifaceted.

Joe says his greatest joy in serving the Church is being with "the people — it's always been about the people."

He remembers when his son David was killed in an accident how much comfort he received from his Maronite family. "The day he passed away, Bishop Chedid and Archbishop Zayek called within hours of his death. Their concern and prayers meant a lot to me and Carolyn, as did the outpouring of support from parishioners."

Joe and Carolyn, his high school



**Deacon Joe Crowley**

sweetheart, recently celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. Carolyn, who sings in the choir and serves as a lector quietly supports her husband's ministry. When Joe is not teaching class or visiting the sick or homebound, he and Carolyn can be found taking walks with their dogs and enjoying their three grandchildren.



# One Church, breathing with two lungs

The Universal Catholic Church, as the Vatican Council II *Lumen Gentium* teaches, is “a corporate body of churches.” Indeed, the very word catholic originates from the Greek *Catholikos*, meaning universal. The term was first used about 110 A.D. to designate that the church is spread out all over the world and is for all the people, as opposed to the “church” of one nation or organization.”

In the United States, many Catholics follow the Roman or Latin tradition. Few of these Catholics know that their Church is made of many churches and is divided into Eastern and Western groups. The reason is that the Roman Church was aggressive in its mission to bring Christianity to the Americas and establish the church here at the time of the earliest explorers and settlers. But as Eastern Catholics began to emigrate from their homelands in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe and Russia, they too began to establish churches in the U.S. and abroad. While many came to America seeking a better life, many others fled to this nation to escape persecution and death at the hands of non-Christian extremists who were intolerant of their desire to live their faith.

And so today, in nearly every state, there are Eastern Catholic Churches and Western Catholic Churches. The beauty is that as Catholics, we can enjoy the rich and diverse traditions and spirituality they offer all of us in our quest for a deeper understanding and relationship with God.

While most Catholics know the Roman traditions, they know little about its sister churches in the East. Though the Eastern churches are fewer in number, they offer a greater variety of liturgical services and generally have more rituals.

The Eastern churches can be categorized into four major traditions: The Antiochian, Alexandrian, Byzantine and Armenian.



## **His Beatitude Nasrallah Boutros Cardinal Sfeir Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and All the East**

Cardinal Sfeir is the 3rd Maronite Cardinal and the 76th Patriarch of the Maronite Church. As the Patriarch he is the leader of the Maronites in Lebanon and the world. Cardinal Sfeir was born in Rayfoun, Kesrouan in 1920. He completed his secondary studies at St. Maron Seminary in Ghazir, Lebanon and completed his studies in Philosophy and Theology at St. Joseph University of Beirut.

The Maronite Church is part of the Antiochian tradition, with roots in the West Syria Church established by St. Peter in Antioch. It is one of the few churches to trace its history to the disciples, without schism.

After the Pentecost, Christ instructed His disciple to spread the Word of God throughout the land. And so, the disciples set off to minister His message beyond Jerusalem. St. Peter traveled north to Antioch, which was a major metropolis in what is today modern Syria. In fact, it was in the Church of Antioch where the words “Christian” and “Catholic” was first used.

The Universal Church was established in Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome. It was Rome where St. Peter made his last evangelical mission. It was in Rome where he died. That is why today, that the Vatican City in Rome is recognized as the See of the entire Catholic Church.

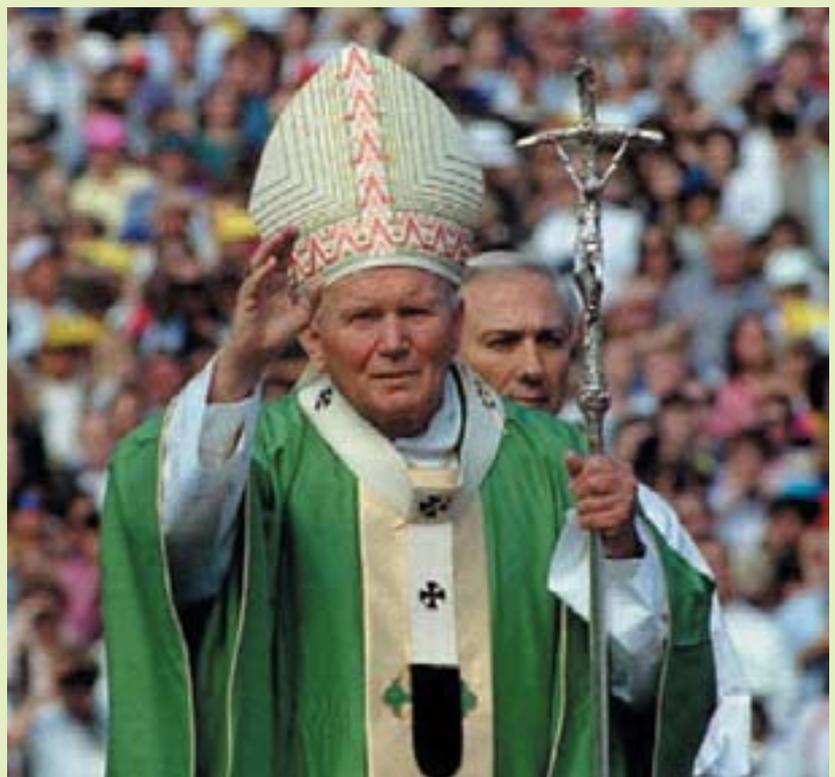
There are no rules prohibiting Catholics today from worshiping and taking the Eucharist in either the Western or Eastern Churches. Often times, Catholics attending an Eastern Liturgy may wonder if “it counts as fulfilling their obligation to attend Mass.” It does.

The Vatican maintains, however, that the Western and Eastern Churches should be steadfast in pre-

paring their traditions. In his 1995 encyclical, *Orientale Lumen*, Pope John Paul II directed the Latin Church “to accept gratefully the spiritual treasures of which the Eastern Catholic Churches are the bearers, to the benefit of the entire Catholic communion.”

These treasures are not the exclusive possessions of the Eastern Churches, but rather they belong to all Catholics who make up the Church of Christ. Pope John Paul II says, “I listen to the Churches of the East, which I know are living inter-

preting of the treasure of the tradition they preserve. In contemplating it, before my eyes appear elements of great significance for a fuller and more thorough understanding of the Christian experience. These elements are capable of giving a more complete Christian response to the expectations of the men and women of today. Indeed, in comparison to any other culture, the Christian East has a unique and privileged role as the original setting where the Church was born.” (*Orientale Lumen*)



## His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Bishop of Rome, Successor to Peter and Vicar of Christ on Earth

Pope John Paul II is the Holy Father of the Catholic Church. He has often referred to the Church as being one church breathing with two lungs. He encourages both the Eastern and Western Churches to maintain their heritage and traditions while acknowledging the richness that both have to offer Catholics in their spiritual journeys.

Excerpts in this article are from *Eastern Catholics in the United States of America*, published by the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops ([www.nccbuscc.org](http://www.nccbuscc.org)) and *The One Church and the Communion of Churches*, edited by Fr. Antoine Bakhavailable for purchase on the internet at [catholicexchange.com/booklet](http://catholicexchange.com/booklet)

# The Best Kept Secret in the Catholic Church

By Fr. Dr. Donald J. Sawyer

Within the one Catholic Church there are in fact many churches which maintain their own traditions of theology, liturgy, spirituality, and government that are quite different from those usually associated with “Roman,” or Latin (Western) Catholicism.

As most of us realize, the Church began in the East. Our Lord lived and died and resurrected in the Holy Land. The Church spread from Jerusalem throughout the known world. As the Church spread, it encountered different cultures and adapted, retaining from each culture what was consistent with the Gospel. In the city of Alexandria, the Church became very Egyptian; in Antioch, it remained very Jewish; in Rome, it took on an Italian appearance; and in Constantinople, it took on the trappings of the Roman imperial court. All the churches which developed this way were Eastern, except

Rome. Most Catholics in the United States have their roots in Western Europe where the Roman rite predominated. It has been said that the Eastern Catholic Churches are “the best kept secret in the Catholic Church.”

The Vatican II Council declared that “all should realize that it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve, and foster the exceedingly rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern churches, in order faithfully to preserve the fullness of Christian tradition” (*Unitatis Redintegratio* p.15). Pope John Paul II said that “the Catholic Church is both Eastern and Western.”

Our Lady’s Maronite Parish belongs to the Eparchy (diocese) of Our Lady of Lebanon, one of two Maronite dioceses in the United States. The Eparchy consists of over thirty-five parishes located in major American cities from the Smoky Mountains westward. Our Lady’s parish boundaries cover all of central Texas and we are a sister parish to the Maronite parishes in San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, and El Paso.

## History

Many people forget — or do not realize — that Christianity came from Judaism. As the church expanded beyond the realm of Judaism, it adapted itself to the people and cultures in which it took root. This cultural adaptation resulted in the 22 different Churches of the Catholic Church today.

It is from Jewish roots that the church of Antioch sprung. In fact, the

church of Antioch was founded by St. Peter, and it was there that the terms “Christian” and “Catholic” were first used. The first Christians were Jews and entire communities came to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Evidence from archaeological studies of early Maronite church buildings show that they had earlier been synagogues.

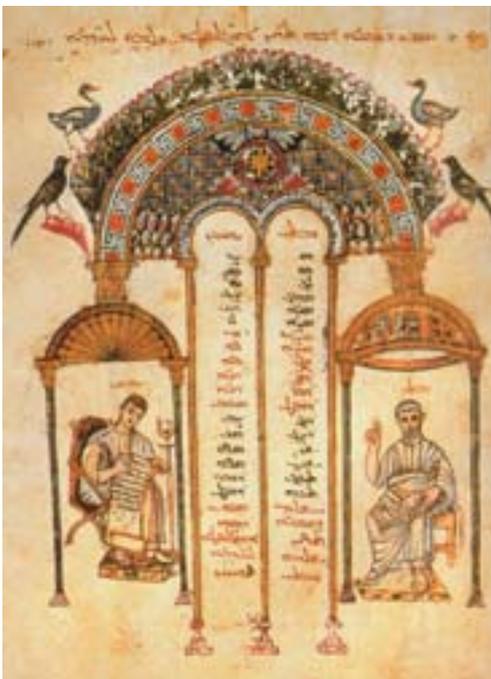
During the many disputes among Christians in the fourth century over the divinity and humanity of Christ, arguments became heated in Antioch. Under the leadership of St. Maron, the head abbot, monks left the city for peace and quiet. Lay people and clergy — Maronites — followed the monks. Later during the Arab invasion of the Middle East, the Maronites fled to Cyprus and to the safety of Lebanon’s mountains.

To this day, the Maronite Church retains its Jewish roots more than any other Catholic Church, as evidenced by its use of Aramaic/Syriac and by the prayers which remain faithful to Semitic and Old Testament forms.

## The Liturgy

The Maronite liturgy is one of the oldest in the Catholic Church. St. Peter and other Apostles brought the liturgy of the Last Supper to Antioch where it developed in Greek and Syriac concurrently. The early Antioch liturgy is the basis of the Maronite Liturgy.

The first thing you will notice is the layout of the church itself. There is a platform extending from the altar, called a bema. The early churches



were former synagogues, and the bema was the raised platform on which the elders stood and read scripture. You will also notice the richness of the priestly vestments. The design of the Maronite vestments is indigenous to the Holy Land.

The seating arrangement dates back to the two monastic choirs of the early church; it encourages the con-



gregation to be participants in the liturgy, rather than spectators. The liturgy is throughout a dialogue between the people and the priest.

The priest serves as the prayer leader in much the same way as Moses served the Israelites. The congregation stands or sits during the liturgy, as the Liturgy is chanted back and forth between the priest and the congregation. In Eastern Catholic Churches, kneeling is done only during Pentecost, in private prayer and can be done during Confession (Reconciliation).

The Maronite liturgy begins with calling on God's mercy, whereas the Latin Rite liturgy begins with "let us call to mind our sins." We also acknowledge our sinfulness, but greater stress is laid on God's mercy. As one prayer says, "Your mercy, O Lord, is greater than the weight of the mountains ..."

The Trisagion (*Qadeeshat Aloho*) is sung in Aramaic three times in honor of the Holy Trinity. It is normally sung facing toward the East.

The sign of peace is also different from the Latin Rite. The priest kisses the altar, places his hands on the chalice, then passes God's peace to the deacon, who then gives it to the acolyte, who passes it to the first person in the pews, who passes it to the next person, and so on- Very rich indeed!

The Consecration is sung in Aramaic, the everyday language of our Lord, the Blessed Mother, and the Apostles, it is the closest we come to the Lord's actual words at the Last Supper.

Throughout the liturgy, the priest will bless the congregation using the hand cross, the Gospel, and the Eucharist itself, both before and after Communion. Holy Communion is given only by intinction. There is no Communion in the hand and there are no Eucharistic ministers. Only the bishop, the priest, the deacon or subdeacon may give communion. It is done with the words, "The servant of God . . . receives the Body and Blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life." The Maronite rite has over eighty Eucharistic Prayers, called Anaphorae. Most were composed by different saints, including St. James (the oldest prayer), the Apostles, St. Peter, St. Sixtus and St. Basil. The prayers

throughout the liturgy are full of Biblical imagery. The story of salvation is told over and over again, and each liturgy is a short course in theology, using spiritual poetry to give praise, honor and thanksgiving for God's mercy and forgiveness, and for His constant love for us no matter what!

Any Catholic may attend any Eastern Catholic Liturgy and fulfill his or her obligations. A Roman rite Catholic may join any Eastern Catholic Parish and receive any sacrament from an Eastern Catholic priest, since all belong to the Catholic Church as a whole.

The Holy Father encourages Roman rite Catholics to visit the Eastern Catholic churches, although Eastern Catholics are discouraged from going to Roman rite parishes, as it is the will of Rome that Eastern Catholics retain their rich heritage and support their own parishes. Vatican II even went so far as to say that if any Eastern Catholics have fallen away from the Eastern rite out of time or neglect, they should take pains to return to their heritage. Eastern Catholics who attend a Roman rite parish because there is no Eastern parish for them to attend still remain Eastern Catholics of their own particular rite.

**To learn more about the Maronites, read *The Maronites — History and Constants* by Antoine Khoury Harb. Published by Maronite Heritage Publishing, 2001.**

**You can also visit the following websites for more information:**

[usamaronite.org](http://usamaronite.org)  
[stmaron.org](http://stmaron.org)  
[www.bkerke.org.lb](http://www.bkerke.org.lb)  
[www.mari.org](http://www.mari.org)  
[www.opuslibai.org](http://www.opuslibai.org)

## Congratulations Father Don & Deacon Joe

**The Altar Society congratulates and thanks Fr. Don Sawyer for 30 years of Priestly Service and 20 years of Pastorship to Our Lady's Church. We thank Deacon Joe for 12 years of service to our parish.**

A Special Thanks to the many Parishioners, living and deceased, young and old, Catholic and non-Catholic who give their sweat, their tears and their gifts of talent and treasure to make Our Lady's Church a vibrant house of worship and a community of Love.

We especially thank Our Father for his watchful eye;  
His Son Jesus Christ for our Salvation; and  
His Mother Mary our Patron Saint for her Light on us all.

Mother of God Pray for Us, Now and at the Hour of Our Death.