



# *Watering the Seeds*

Pastoral Priorities for the  
**Maronite Eparchy of Australia**

**20<sup>21</sup><sub>27</sub>**



## Table of Contents

p. 6 <b>Bishop's Message</b>	p. 8 <b>01. The Call to Priestly Service</b>		
p. 10 <b>02. The Family</b>	p. 12 <b>03. The Youth</b>	p. 22 <b>06. Our Maronite Liturgy</b>	p. 24 <b>07. Communication and Maronite Outreach</b>
p. 14 <b>04. Emerging Social Issues</b>	p. 20 <b>05. Evangelisation: Proclamation &amp; Formation</b>	p. 26 <b>Conclusion</b>	p. 28 <b>Report on our Pastoral Priorities 2013 - 2020</b>



## Bishop's Message

Let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the abundance of His blessings, for His bounty to His church and the faithful. We meditate on the words of Our Lord Jesus, when he prayed to his Heavenly Father: *"Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth ..."* (Matthew 11:25). So I thank the Lord for the children of our Maronite Church in Australia, active and growing, who strive always to fulfil the Lord's will.

After my election by the Synod of Maronite Bishops, and my appointment by His Holiness Pope Francis on 12 April 2013 to be the fourth bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maroun, Australia, I announced a plan of pastoral and missionary priorities for the next seven years (2014-2020). Today, I look back and contemplate what has been accomplished during these seven blessed years. I am fully aware that when our goals were achieved, it was not through our human powers alone, or because of the work and sacrifices made by my brethren: priests and religious, collaborating with many committed laypeople, but rather, it was done relying above all on the grace of God, only seeking to do His will in all things, for as the Lord taught us: *"You cannot do anything apart from Me"* (John 5: 15).

This selection of seven priorities for pastoral and missionary work was not haphazard. Rather, it was the result of much prayer, contemplation, consultation and listening to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The selected priorities were as follows: vocations, youth, family, caring for the elderly, pressing social problems, Maronite outreach, and the establishment of the Maronite Diocesan Assembly.

The process of reviewing and re-evaluating these priorities, both at and after the Diocesan Assembly, allowed us to better see how to pursue our course in a renewed ecclesiastical spirit, crystallizing and renewing our basic priorities: vocations, the family, youth, and Maronite outreach, while adding to them three new priorities inspired by the recommendations of the Diocesan Assembly which concluded its work in 2018. These were: the Maronite liturgy, evangelisation and media, and emerging social issues.





Blessing the site of the new  
**Our Lady Aged Care Centre,**  
Harris Park

Seven years ago, when, as the new shepherd of this diocese, I launched this program of priorities, I contemplated the Parable of the Sower. Like the sower, I found myself with my brother priests, delegated by the Lord to attempt first of all the task of planting His word in the souls and hearts of all our people. These priorities appeared as new seeds which were to be planted in good soil. We tried to express this by placing photographs of hands on the covers of our publications. The hand is a most expressive instrument: it blesses, it expresses strength, capacity, and protective power. With our hands we perform good deeds, we offer greetings, we share, we pray, and – in the traditional manner, sow the seed. Over the next seven years (2021-2026), let us use our hands to care for the crop, and to water it with love and service, so that faith may grow, and hope be renewed in our Church and our society.

Let us, day by day, renew our reliance on divine providence in all our pastoral actions and priorities, for as Saint Paul the Apostle says, it is God who makes any work we do grow and succeed: *"Neither the one who plants, nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who causes the growth."* (1 Corinthians 3: 7).

That the yield be abundant, we must learn from the parable of a grain of wheat that fell on good land, and sacrificed itself with humility and faith, returning thirty, sixty and a hundred

times as much wheat. In this context, Pope Benedict XVI says:

*Although the Kingdom of God demands our collaboration, it is first and foremost a gift of the Lord, a grace that precedes man and his works. If our own small strength, apparently powerless in the face of the world's problems, is inserted in that of God it fears no obstacles because the Lord's victory is guaranteed. It is the miracle of the love of God who causes every seed of good that is scattered on the ground to germinate. And the experience of this miracle of love makes us optimists, in spite of the difficulty, suffering and evil that we encounter. The seed sprouts and grows because God's love makes it grow. May the Virgin Mary, who, like "good soil", accepted the seed of the divine Word, strengthen within us this faith and this hope.* (Angelus, 17 June 2012).

Despite all the difficult circumstances that our world is going through, from the COVID-19 pandemic, to the global economic crisis, to the political and crisis situation in Lebanon and other countries in the Middle East, the experience of the miracle of divine love remains a source of optimism and hope, as His Holiness said.

This optimism is at the core of my episcopal motto, **"Faithfulness and Openness,"** and is the true path that the seven pastoral priorities foster to meet the spiritual, missionary, social and human needs of our Maronite community and our society in general.

**Antoine-Charbel Tarabay**  
Maronite Bishop of Australia



# 01

## The Call to Priestly Service



The invitation to accept the sacrament of Holy Orders embodies the mystery of love through which God chooses people to serve the altar, spread the word, and distribute the sacraments. The process of discovering, developing, and not losing the vocation is not an easy one. Seven years ago, the project of concern for and caring for priestly vocations began again, elevating the call of Christ to his followers to discern the priestly vocation. This is the first priority of our pastoral program. The divine sacraments cannot be celebrated without priests, and there can be no Church without the sacraments, for they transmit the blessings of heaven to earth. Unless God sends His blessings to us, there can be neither faith nor a faithful community. In this context, Pope Francis says:

**... on this day in particular, but also in the ordinary pastoral life of our communities, I ask the Church to continue to promote vocations. May she touch the hearts of the faithful and enable each of them to discover with gratitude God's call in their lives, to find courage to say "yes" to God, to overcome all weariness through faith in Christ, and to make of their lives a song of praise for God, for their brothers and sisters, and for the whole world. (Message for 2020 World Day of Vocations).**

To encourage vocations in our diocese, in response to the recommendations of the Diocesan Assembly, and after seven years of prayer, thinking and planning, I am pleased to announce the opening of the first Maronite Seminary in Australia, at St Maroun's Cathedral, Redfern. The feast of our Father Saint Maroun, on February 9, 2021, will be a historic day for the start of the seminary. It has become clear in our vision for the future that we cannot continue and there are no guarantees that priests from Lebanon will be able to serve in our diocese.

The experience of years of discernment, and the accompaniment of vocations, has provided me with the confidence to say that our Eparchy is a fertile soil for vocation to the priestly and to the consecrated lives. From here

begins our shared responsibility to encourage vocations in our parishes and our families, as Pope Francis said. Consequently, we have to continue praying that the Lord continually send us holy vocations, and that the door of formation in wisdom and spiritual discipleship is open, that both may be in accordance with the heart of the Lord. Therefore, it became imperative that we persevere with the annual spiritual retreat for young people who are considering their vocation, in addition to regular discernment programmes.

Pope Francis says in the Apostolic Exhortation "Christ is Alive", that what Jesus wants from every young person is his friendship in the first place, and so the main thing becomes to distinguish and discover the vocation (Introduction, no 3).

# The Family

## 02



***“The joy of love that lives in families is also the joy of the Church.”***

As the Fathers of the Synod for the Family pointed out, despite the multiple signs of the marriage crisis, “the desire for the family is still alive, especially among young people, and it inspires the Church.” With these words Pope Francis opened his Apostolic Exhortation “The Joy of Love” to express the new reality experienced by the Church between the call to marriage based on self-sacrificing love, the marriage crisis and the challenges that married couples face.

It is clear that the desire to marry and start a family still exists, but it faces many challenges, some of which were known in the past and will always be with us, such as the generation gap and the inevitable friction which accompanies it, such as the walls of misunderstanding which often arise between parents and their children. In addition, there is often a problem when fathers and mothers are not ready for parenthood, or when a family resides with their in-laws and there are disputes as to whether the in-laws are helping or interfering.

Further, we now face new and emerging problems, such as addiction to digital and electronic games. Children, adolescents, and even adults may be obsessed with these devices, and so disrupt their emotional and human growth, and stunt their ability to participate in family and social life. The internet and social media often invade homes and family life in an uncontrolled manner, confronting parents and educators with great challenges, as they feel that they have lost control over the upbringing of their own children. Children can be in contact with unwanted and even dangerous people while they are alone in their bedrooms. Are we here confronted with social

and cultural media which are in fact “anti-social” and “anti-family” media?

The family, which is our second pastoral priority, needs guidance, support and assistance to face these and other challenges. Therefore, we call on the specialists and all those concerned in family affairs to further cooperation, initiatives and coordination with our Diocesan Office for Life, Marriage and Family, to organize educational and informative programmes, and to strengthen our counselling service for married couples in cooperation with MaroniteCare.

In addition, we will continue to update our Marriage Preparation Program, rendering it more useful and effective in preparing for the future of our families. Marriage is a covenant of love and faith before God, made in public, and in the privacy of our conscience. Preparing for marriage is an important and serious matter that requires work and knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to instigate spiritual meetings and formation sessions for married couples, especially for those newly married, because this will help young families face difficulties and challenges which are new to them, in the spirit of faith, and human and religious responsibility.



# Youth 03



## *“Jesus Christ is alive and wants you to live!”*

With these words, His Holiness Pope Francis addresses the youth of the world in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, ‘Christ is Alive’ (Par. 1). He invites them to forge a special relationship with the Lord Jesus, because they cannot grow in happiness and holiness through their personal and human strengths alone. Pope John Paul II affirms that the youth are the “beating heart of the Church and society.” The enthusiasm, vitality, and concern shown by young people is a joy for all believers, regardless of their age and physical state.

Our Diocesan Assembly stressed that the youth are the present of our Church and society. They enrich it through the initiatives they take, their attendance at faith gatherings, and their dedication. The Maronite Church in Australia is blessed with active youth in its various parishes. They are indeed its beating heart. It is important to activate the role of the Diocesan Youth Office which was established recently, to open new opportunities for our youth to know their traditions, their Maronite heritage

and values. This office will continue to coordinate the Annual Youth Conference, *Arise*, in our diocese, as well as the participation in World Youth Days and the Australian Catholic Youth Festivals, in addition to faith formation, and building spiritual ties between young people in various Australian States. Our work with the youth over the next seven years will be conducted under the theme: *“Our Youth is the Joy of our Church”*.



## 04

Emerging  
Social  
Issues

The COVID-19 pandemic appeared unexpectedly, leading people and societies to live in a state of panic, fear and confusion. It has had enormous repercussions on the lives of many families due to the risk of death from this virus. For the faithful, it made it hard for people to practise their faith as a community. Indeed, the temporary closure of places of worship was a spiritual shock for many. The biggest transformation was in the livestreaming of the Mass and other liturgies on television and social media. This led to pastoral and theological challenges, because a significant number of believers cannot distinguish the real difference between participating in the Mass by attending at church and following it on small screens. Accordingly, they are now tempted to take the course of least resistance, which is to attend Mass from home.

Therefore, it is required of our priests during the next stage of the unfolding narrative, to urge the faithful to return to parish life, encourage them to come back to the churches, and be nourished by the sacraments and obtain heavenly blessings. This pandemic has demonstrated, beyond any doubt, how the Church is not only an integral part of the fabric of our society, but is at the heart of society, and how social and economic developments can have a tremendous impact on the life of the Church and her children. The mission of the Church remains constant and does not change, for it carries the light of the Lord Jesus to illuminate the sky above our world, expelling from it all darkness and evil.



## *Serving the elderly and people with special needs*

Because the Lord Jesus came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28; and Mark 10:45), the message of social service in our Maronite Church stems from evangelical spirituality. We aim to reach the marginalized and needy, the elderly, and people with special needs. This service is one of our pastoral priorities in our Eparchy.

Accompanying the elderly and taking care of their spiritual, social and health needs was and still is a catalyst for establishing centres to serve them professionally. For this purpose, and supplementing existing centres in Sydney and Melbourne under the patronage and care of the Maronite Sisters, the Saint Charbel Care Centre in Sydney was opened at the beginning of 2019, and is operated by the Lebanese Maronite Order. Because the need is great and is increasing day by day, our diocese is establishing the Our Lady Aged Care Centre, which we hope will open in early 2022. Preparations are also being made to launch a new project to serve the elderly and people with special needs in our community. This project will include a daycare and wellbeing centre for the elderly, in addition to providing NDIS services and a specialized rehabilitation centre.

In view of the importance of mental health in our social and humanitarian work, MaroniteCare will continue to develop programmes providing specialized help and guidance to people suffering from mental health issues or addiction problems. MaroniteCare also seeks to raise social awareness of the problems of mental illness and domestic violence, as well as pastoral care for women.



## Loving Service

The Lord Jesus said: *"Truly, I say to you, every time you did not do that to one of my little brothers, you did not do it to Me"* (Matthew 25:45). Because the Lord Jesus identifies with every person who is hungry, suffering and sad, it is clear that loving service and works of mercy are a bridge, connecting us to Jesus Christ Himself. Similarly, any act of negligence or omitting to do good, is to ignore Him.

It is beautiful to contemplate the constant readiness of the children of our Maronite Church to serve in charity, and help the needy wherever they may be, whether here in Australia, or in Lebanon, or in any other land. This wonderful humane feeling has given birth to several charitable societies, both within and outside the diocese, caring for the homeless, the needy, and the sick. In recent years, we have witnessed the work of Maronites on Mission, the Maronite Catholic Society, and Heaven on Earth. The dedication of these volunteers was shown in their care for the poor of Lebanon, especially in the wake of the criminal explosion at the port of Beirut. They collected donations from the benefactors in Australia, and sent in-kind aid to our brothers and sisters in need in Lebanon. In the next stage, what is needed is for our local Maronite charitable organisations to develop a shared strategic plan to organize their acts of mercy and charity, and collect donations, so that we are more effective in supporting families in need, especially in Lebanon, and helping limit the emigration of its youth.

Low-income people in Australia often find it hard to secure housing for themselves and their families. MaroniteCare is taking the initiative in establishing a private foundation to provide housing units at reduced rents, in conjunction with New South Wales Government's housing programs. We are pleased to inform you that we recently obtained a license for this institution, which shall be called 'Kadishat Affordable Housing'. The first phase of work is slated to begin in 2021.



Maronites on Mission,  
Naga – Philippines



# 05 Evangelisation: Proclamation and Formation



For more than two thousand years, the call of the Lord has echoed from generation to generation, saying: **"Go and make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 19:28).**

The Lord commands us to go and spread the good news of the Gospel to all people and nations. This task was no easy one at the birth of the church; the disciples faced all kinds of persecution and rejection, but they

continued to bear witness to the love of the Lord Jesus and His heavenly kingdom, even unto martyrdom. The challenges for evangelisation today are not so different from those of the past. In today's world, proclaiming the Word of God, and the call to believe in Our Lord Jesus Christ, continually meet with refusal and rejection. The Word is obstructed and obscured. The persecution of evangelists is conducted by both overt and hidden methods. Confronted by this stringent reality, we hear the words of the Lord Jesus

saying: **"Do not be afraid ... I am with you always to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).** Then the Spirit arises within and gives us courage to set out again, bearing the word of the Gospel, ready to make disciples of all peoples and societies.

To be disciples of the Word of God, we must go to those places and use those means needed to communicate with all people and our youth. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare a specialized media team to forward the mission of evangelization and discipleship through the media, particularly through social media. The COVID-19 quarantine period helped us acquire a wide experience of social media, and its use to livestream Masses and liturgies from our churches and monasteries into the homes of the faithful. The media and communication revolution may produce a true spiritual revolution, by facilitating the proclamation of the Word of God and the good news of the Kingdom. Among our pastoral priorities for the coming years, we aspire to establish a media centre to organize and launch educational programmes. What was sufficient last year may not be enough this year, so we are responsible for renewal and development. However, adopting electronic media does not mean abandoning traditional face

to face methods of faith formation and spiritual upbringing. Rather, they are complementary, and will have a wide use in parishes and ecclesiastical institutions, especially in the upbringing of children, teenagers and youth.

In addition, our project to develop an application (App) for our diocese called iMaronite, should make it easier for everyone, with just a touch on the phone, to communicate with their church, and to obtain the necessary information for spiritual formation, advising them as to the availability of the sacraments, and help in practicing the faith.

Christian formation in schools occupies a fundamental place in our pastoral priorities.

Therefore, it is clearly necessary to devise a school curriculum for Maronite students. This curriculum will not only explain our liturgy, the lives of our saints, our spirituality, and the history of our Church, it will also answer urgent questions:

Why are our faith and our Maronite heritage valuable in themselves? How does our liturgical heritage differ from that of other Catholic churches? How can we preserve our Maronite values and traditions and pass them on to new generations?

# 06

## Our Maronite Liturgy



The Maronite Patriarchal Synod said: **"The liturgy is the living treasure of the Maronite Church. It is on a permanent pilgrimage toward the Kingdom of the Father. The Church is enriched by the liturgy and her spiritual and human experiences are richer through it."**(Text 12, Par. 1)

The Synod also adds that "The Maronite liturgy summarizes the Maronite experience and embodies it in most of her dimensions and aspects. Thus, theology, spirituality, Sacred Scriptures and the mission of evangelization are all reflected in the liturgy" (Text 12).

The Synod also taught that liturgical renewal does not mean a return to past practices, but rather requires a good understanding of the pastoral realities, integrated with established traditions, and developed along an authentic liturgical line. This may lead to an effective popular participation in harmony with the pastoral realities, the aspirations of the faithful, and the requirements of the times. The liturgy is a school of faith. It is the spiritual home of the Maronites wherever they

may be. And so, we look forward in the coming years, in accordance with our pastoral priorities, to pursuing liturgical renewal in our Eparchy, to completing the necessary translations, especially of the liturgical rites, and the books of the Sacraments. This important work is intended to preserve the identity of our Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church, making "the rites pastorally effective and popular, so that the mystical spirit of the hymns and the prayers may be on the tongues of the people, consciously and fruitfully participating." The work of the Eparchial liturgical committee will focus on developing translations that use a liturgical language characterized by ease of formulation, clarity of meaning, and depth of biblical and theological spirituality, so as to help the community pray and glorify the Lord. Among the main tasks facing the committee is collating the Maronite liturgical hymns into books, and to guide us in choosing hymns to sing in church.

The goal of all this is to demonstrate our Maronite identity: the liturgy alone is truly capable of uniting the Maronite people as one.





*Msgr Shora Maree celebrating mass at the newly established Christ the Redeemer Parish.*

## Communication and Maronite Outreach

The Maronite presence in Australia dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. The first Maronite church was inaugurated in 1895, in the name of our father Saint Maroun, in Redfern. It was preceded by the arrival of two Maronite priests, Fathers Yazbeck and Dahdah, to serve Maronites, whose numbers had been constantly increasing. From the time of that first church, to the completion of St Charbel's Church, Melbourne, at the end of 2020; from the arrival of those first priests in the nineteenth century, to an Eparchy that today comprises **19 parishes, served by 51 priests, 9 deacons, 7 subdeacons, and 18 religious sisters, in addition to schools, educational institutions and nursing homes**, it has been a long and bright journey of religious and humanitarian giving and service.

The growth of our Maronite community has been remarkable. Our growth has been owing mainly to immigration, and to the birth of generations in Australia. This inspires our souls with hope, and gives us the courage and determination to expand our Australian Maronite house with each new generation. This prompts us to project a vision for the religious and educational service of the young generations, including the establishment of new parishes and schools in developing areas. The Maronite Outreach Project was launched in the year 2014, with its

pastoral priorities, which included a plan to establish seven new parishes in different regions of Australia. I thank God and all the benefactors and volunteers who worked with the priests. Six of these parishes have been completed and are now actively serving the faithful.

We will continue our Maronite Outreach Project by opening new parishes, for it has become clear that the church and the school are essential factors for gathering Maronites, and building bridges of communication with one another. This has encouraged us to formulate a new plan for five new parishes, which we hope, through the grace of God, we can establish in the next seven years (2021-2027) in the following areas:

- Kogarah (Saint George)
- Fairfield
- Campbelltown
- Canberra/ Goulburn
- New Zealand

Another important project for outreach amongst Maronites is the establishment of a pastoral and social centre in the coming years. We hope to provide spiritual retreats for children, youth, adults and families, at that centre, which will also have various sports and recreational facilities, in beautiful natural surroundings.





## Conclusion

***“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all else will be added to you” (Matt 6:33)***

The methods we use may change and develop, but the goal is fixed and known, which is to obtain the heavenly kingdom, according to the will of the Lord. These pastoral priorities are but paths we adopt on our journey towards the Kingdom. They suggest to us ways and means of helping others reach this goal as well. And because we live in a world of challenges and changes, we will, from time to time, with an open, humble and faithful heart, evaluate and review these priorities.

We ask the Holy Spirit to inspire us, and lead our Eparchy along the spiritual and apostolic path, to teach us how to take care of the planted seeds, and to water them with the water of eternal life, so that they may yield and give returns of thirty, sixty and a hundredfold (Mark 4:20), as a testimony to God's kingdom on our earth.



# Report on our Pastoral Priorities 2013-2020



## Vocations

# 01

A vocation to the priesthood is unique in that it is a call from the Lord, who is always sending to His Church people chosen to serve the faithful. In our Eparchy, vocations are always among our very highest priorities. The Church's responsibility to vocations is shown by how we accompany, welcome, and care for those who have been called.



During these past seven years, we held annual spiritual retreats for young people discerning their vocation to the priesthood or to the consecrated life, and, from time to time, we opened our doors to them, hosting programmes to assist them in discerning their vocations.

From the approximately one hundred young men who participated in these spiritual retreats, the Lord chose several people, who have since successfully studied theology as external students, that is, without joining the seminary. In addition to that, some vocations have come to us from Lebanon. Considering the Eparchy's need for priests, deacons and subdeacons, I ordained:

**Four diocesan priests:** Fathers Danny Nouh, Elie Yammine, Richard Jabbour, and Charbel Dib;

**Seven new deacons:** Nehme Khattar, Michael Gebrael, Joseph Maatouk, Joe-Awtel Maroun, Robert-Pio Al-Bayeh, Ron Hassarati, and Michael Boudaheer;

**Six subdeacons:** John Tabet, Nabih Raffoul, Wade Ayoub, Dory-Peter Zaouk, Sid Isaac and Ghassan Nakhoul.

**Give us, Lord, holy vocations for the glory of your Name and the salvation of souls.**



# Youth 02



Our youth are the beating heart of our Church, and the Maronite Church in Australia is blessed in the effective role that youth play in our parishes and our Eparchy. The Diocesan Assembly recommended that we do our utmost to create new frameworks for the formation of our youth, and to introduce them to the richness of their traditions and heritage, and the significance of the history of their Church, and their Maronite values.

To this purpose, we established the Maronite Diocesan Youth Office. This office has already started organizing various spiritual and social activities for our young people.

In addition, it arranges our participation in national and international youth meetings, and promotes and builds spiritual and pastoral links between the various youth committees in the parishes of various Australian States.

“Faith  
working  
through  
love”



# The Family

# 03



***“The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.”***

***“The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.”***

*Familiaris Consortio, Pope John Paul II, Par. 75)*

From this standpoint, the family was and is still at the core of our pastoral priorities. The convening of a Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2015, about the family, confirmed the place of the family at the heart of the Church's teaching. His Holiness Pope Francis expressed this when he said that the family is a **“community of persons,”** and that:

*(The Family) is the place where one learns to love, it is the natural centre of human life. It is made up of faces, of people who love, dialogue, make self-sacrifices for one another and defend life, especially of the most vulnerable and the weakest. One could say, without exaggeration, that the family is the driving force of the world and of history. (Pope Francis at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family, 25 Oct 2013).*

In order to accompany families in our Eparchy and to prepare spiritual and social programmes for them, we opened a Diocesan Office for Life, Family and Marriage. This office organizes counselling and accompanies our families in cooperation with MaroniteCare and WhiteStone. The office has set up spiritual retreats for married couples, as well as evaluating, reviewing and updating the marriage preparation programme, making it more effective in preparing couples for married life. It also aims to help them realize the importance of the marital covenant and to take the responsibility of marriage more seriously before God, before others, and before their Christian consciences.





Artist's Impression of the Our Lady Aged Care Centre, under construction

# 04

## The Elderly

Our Eparchy attaches a special importance to the elderly, and to the parishes' elderly committees which carry out spiritual, social, and recreational activities for their benefits. Among the more important and successful initiatives of recent years were the launch of the HomeCare program as a joint venture between MaroniteCare and CatholicCare. **More than sixty elderly persons** have received care in their homes through this programme. But the most important issue and biggest challenge is securing specialized residential care and nursing homes for them. In addition to the three

nursing homes in our Eparchy, run by the Maronite sisters, a new aged care facility was opened at the end of 2019. The St Charbel Aged Care Centre is established and run by the Lebanese Maronite Order of monks.

However, and given the increasing number of elderly people not only our community but also in the wider society, and their growing need for specialized care, another project for aged care was launched in our Eparchy, the Our Lady Aged Care Centre, to provide specialised care and further implement the pastoral priorities in our Church.



# 05

## Pressing Social Problems



The Church, as mother and teacher, cannot stand idle before the pressing social problems of poverty, addiction, and physical or mental illness.

MaroniteCare has therefore conducted serious social work and paid special attention to the pastoral care of families by offering them spiritual accompaniment, professional counselling and guidance. In cooperation with WhiteStone, a special programme of assistance was provided for those suffering from diverse destructive addictions, whether to drugs, gambling, alcohol, or otherwise.

Awareness and rehabilitation go hand in hand with spiritual mentoring, aspiring to heal the soul and body together. MaroniteCare has also paid special attention to mental health, launching awareness campaigns, to help those concerned come forward. It is necessary to cease maintaining silence on mental illness, and to work on cultural change in order to overcome any remaining social prohibitions against acknowledging it or considering it as a sign of social and moral failure, or seeing it as a source of shame for both the individual and their family. To a large extent, this work was

successful in fomenting a new attitude to mental illness, seeing it as an illness like others, requiring specialized health care, and acceptance by the family and society alike.

Turning now to the spirit of mercy and to charitable works, Maronites on Mission Australia and Heaven on Earth have been actively helping the poor and needy at both domestic and international levels. Locally, for the past seven years, volunteers have ceaselessly provided food to some of the homeless in Sydney, on a weekly basis. This activity is now spreading to some parishes in other States. On the international level, in addition to the annual mission of love carried by Maronites on Mission to the Philippines by their volunteers, caring for some of the poorest of the poor, they were proactive during the past years, to send aid to different countries including Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Armenia.

After the explosion at the port of Beirut on the 4th of August 2020, all our parishes and organisations contributed greatly to collecting aid and sending it to those in need in Lebanon.



# 06 Maronite Outreach

One of the bishop's critical duties is that of administering in the Church with his assistants, the priests. Given the continuously growing number of Maronites in Australia, through both childbirth (about 3,500 births annually) and immigration, a plan had to be drawn up to establish new parishes in those new areas experiencing expansion and development.



St Raymond's Parish, South Auburn, NSW



St Charbel's Parish, Green Valley, Victoria



Christ the Redeemer, Hills District, NSW



St John Paul II Parish, Ryde, NSW



St Clement's Mass Centre, Bulleen, Victoria



St Charbel's Parish, Western Australia



Beit Maroun Chapel, Strathfield, NSW

Seven years ago, I announced a plan to establish seven new parishes, and by the grace of God, the enthusiasm of the volunteers and the generosity of benefactors, I can announce today that five of these parishes have been completed and two new centres have been opened for the celebration of the Mass:

1. St Raymond's in South Auburn, New South Wales, where we purchased an existing Catholic church and established a new Maronite parish.
2. Saint Charbel's, Perth, our first church in Western Australia; once more we purchased an existing Catholic church and established a new Maronite parish.
3. Christ the Redeemer in the Hills area of Sydney. The parish has been established and now we are preparing to build the parish church.
4. Saint Pope John Paul II in Ryde, New South Wales, in cooperation with the Mariamite Maronite Order of monks.
5. The parish of Saint Charbel in Green Valley, Melbourne. The church was recently completed by the Maronite Antonine Order of monks, and is ready for its consecration.
6. The two Mass centres are: the chapel at Beit Maroun in Strathfield, and Saint Clement's, Bulleen, East Melbourne.

We are, of course, most concerned to be in constant communication with our Maronite children wherever they are, and be of spiritual service to them and their families, not only to know where they are, but to strengthen their connection with their Maronite Church, and to help them preserve their spiritual heritage and transmit it from generation to generation.



## Assembly

The first Diocesan Assembly of the Australian Maronite Church constituted a historical milestone, not only in the lives of the faithful, but also in laying down practical and pastoral foundations for the future work of the Church.

**The Assembly's work was launched in 2016 under the theme:**

***“Strong in Faith,  
Growing in Love.”***

The Assembly involved a process of reflection, and an exchange of views on evangelisation and pastoral matters in our Church, including the role of the laity. The Assembly held its last session from 12 to 14 April 2018, when participants and delegates met in the parish of Our Lady of Lebanon, Harris Park. At its close, directives and recommendations were issued.

In its recommendations, the Assembly stated that spiritual renewal includes change and movement from one place and position to others; it is leaving our comfort zones to go to where the pastoral need arises, where we will meet the other, journeying in faith and reconciliation with oneself and with each other. The mission of the Church is a responsibility shared by clergy and laity. Fulfilling this mission requires listening to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to become aware of where it is that the Lord wants us to be.

In the spirit of the Diocesan Assembly's recommendations, the diocesan pastoral council launched, in 2019, the Year of Maronite Spirituality in our Eparchy, under the title 'Journey to Holiness in Today's World'. It met with widespread success, and in the year 2020 the Year of Maronite Outreach was announced, under the title: "Cast your net... and you will find" (John 21:6). Sadly, due to the global pandemic, we had to cancel most of its programs and activities, but our outreach took a new form reaching out to those isolated at home with the means at our disposal.



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