



Together

The Newsletter of St Michael's Meals

Issue 1

2022

Welcome to our first issue of **Together** for 2022. **Together** allows our readers to stay well informed of the activities of our Charity, St Michael's Meals, as well as providing you with some much needed inspiration in these challenging times and, we hope, more than a little motivation to keep achieving our goals of feeding Sydney's homeless and ministering to the needs of others less fortunate than ourselves. To quote Street Side Medics, a Sydney team of doctors and health professionals who give free consultations to the homeless from their mobile clinic: "We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved, unspoken to and uncared for is the greatest poverty."

Have you wondered what goes into a food hamper from St Michael's Meals? Firstly, delicious mostly Middle Eastern meals are prepared by our home cooks. These are then collected by various drivers or delivered to the church hall. Every Wednesday morning, Fr Gerges and Roda Kanawati do the weekly shop at the Food Bank for bulk items such as fruit and vegetables. They also collect the tamper-proof supply boxes of food for families who are experiencing food insecurity. Back at St Michael's kitchen, eggs and potatoes are boiled and sandwiches made. Some food will have been donated by local restaurants and some by businesses further afield. It is reheated to just the right temperature. Meanwhile the team on duty for that week arrives to pack the hampers.

At approximately 6:00 pm the first van, loaded to the hilt, leaves for Martin Place. By 6:45, the second van, also bulging at the seams, has departed for Central. Our friends, the Homeless, are always delighted to see us. "Best food in Sydney!" is often the refrain.

Over the last few months our activities have expanded to include buying brand-new tracksuits for the Homeless, subsidising individuals here and in Lebanon and Syria who are desperately in need of help, plus funding the planting of autumn crops in Syria. This is a mere drop in the ocean of need, however in the words of Mother Teresa, "... the ocean would be less for that missing drop." We aim to help people help themselves.

None of this could be achieved without our team of keen, hardworking, committed volunteers, without your generous support and without the leadership of Fr Gerges who is tireless in his commitment to helping those in need. Warm thanks are also due to our hardworking President for 2021, Norma Ghattas, who is continuing this year in the role of Treasurer. We also welcome to the fold Rania Shashati, who does outstanding work for children in Westmead and Bankstown-Lidcombe hospitals, plus in Sudan.

It is with great pride that we introduce the Board of Directors for St Michael's Meals for 2022:

Chaplain: Fr Gerges Al Butros *President:* Jane Karame

Directors:

George Ayoub

Charbel El Haddad

Norma Ghattas

Naguib Kanawati

Nevine William

Randa Zakarian



ST MICHAEL'S MEALS VOLUNTEERS GATHER AT CENTRAL STATION DURING THE RECENT CHRISTMAS PARTY ON DECEMBER 22, 2021.

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MY JOURNEY INTO CHRISTIANITY

My two siblings and I were raised with no religion. My parents believed that we could choose a religion in our adulthood if we desired to do so. I soon started to make the connection between religion and faith – with them being one and the same. This gave me the realisation that I lacked faith in almost everything and, most importantly and sadly, in myself.

I had recognised this in my early twenties, but I did not have the courage or self-love to act on it. At the time, I lost one of my aunts to whom I was very close, and this bereavement left me in a state of grieving that I had never experienced before. Angry at the world, sometime after her death, I found myself reflecting on our memories together and began to sob uncontrollably. Something grabbed my attention outside, which resembled golden rain drops. I went outside to investigate, thinking it might be starting to rain. It wasn't raining. I looked around to find any birds that may have pooped. There were no birds either. Then I looked to the sky and directly above me was the biggest and most perfectly shaped heart cloud that was zooming in on me – as if someone was blowing it towards the Earth.

In that moment, I initially felt afraid. Upon consideration, it reminds me of Gabriel, the Archangel, consoling Holy Mary when he first appeared to her, telling her to not be afraid. My feelings then turned to utter astonishment. I then went inside and sat down as my legs felt weak. I burst into tears as I contemplated what had just happened: I remember thinking could this be it?

Is this what I've been waiting for? Is this my late Aunty trying to communicate with me? Or, is this God trying to reach out? I decided that, yes, I had just had a connection to a higher power and with that connection I was ultimately given two messages:

- This was a divine intervention to kick start my spiritual journey
- That I am loved

You can have an interaction with a higher power as I did and still feel sceptical about what it represented. But this scepticism is mostly a result of resistance. If we do not resist, everything will become more fluid. I stopped resisting. I chose Christianity. But, being part of a religion is no easy task. It requires nurturing like any other relationship. We can nurture our relationship with God by praying, reaching out to those in need in His name, and looking after ourselves. Just remember, love is always the answer!

Ashley Al Butros

ON CHILDREN

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, and though they are with you, yet they belong not to you. You may give them your love, but not your thoughts. For they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you. For life goes not backward, nor tarries with yesterday.

An extract from 'The Prophet' (1923)
Khalil Gibran



MEET LOUIS, OUR YOUNGEST VOLUNTEER!

How you can be a part of St Michael's Meals

- Pray for us
- Become a member
- Prepare meals
- Join the team in distributing food and clothing
- Donate money (donations of \$2 and above are tax deductible)

Like Leaves

Like leaves no longer on trees,
We find ourselves lost.

Moving further away from what is known,
A feeling grows inside,
Out of our control,
It evolves.

Clueless of our direction,
Uncertain of our destination,
We are forced to take roads with ends that remain unknown.

No one ever reveals the purpose of a rocky path.
Its worth,
Its value,

The lessons of it all remain a mystery until found.

When our journey has been nothing but exhausting,
We find that our sight is quick to disappear,
That our hope doesn't shine as bright as we thought.

What one needs to hear is hardly ever said.

Like leaves who find ground eventually,
We will not be lost forever.

Jamie Kanawati



A PATCH OF BLUE

As we start 2022, one reflects with a bittersweet lens on the year that has passed. Marked by many moments of bliss and laughter but also a severe lockdown and the barrage of negative media we received daily about the Coronavirus, understandably, our morale may be low and outlook pessimistic, especially for the near future. One of my favourite French authors, Marcel Proust, said to "always try to keep a patch of sky above your life." It is an apt reminder to be thankful for everything in our lives and to be inspired. If we use the analogy of the pandemic being a storm, we should always strive to look for the patch of sky that may be hiding occasionally, but always present for us.

Perhaps it is a matter of changing our attitude or perspective to see it, or working to become more spiritual? One way that we may see this 'patch of sky' could be to become an active listener to those around us, forcing us to be more thoughtful towards our family and friends. Another approach might be to take the time to pray and thank God for the abundant blessings he has afforded us, which in perspective, far outweigh some of the negative experiences we have faced over the course of the last year. As we all embark on our spiritual journeys, the inspiration one can gain from meaningful connection with God can completely alter our viewpoint. I know that for me, my faith brought me comfort and optimism in the arduous times I faced last year. This can offer us a sense of hope for 2022 and all the happiness and opportunities that it holds for us as individuals and as a charity.

Pondering on Proust's words, the new year truly does represent a symbolic transition whereby many choose to make 'resolutions' that aim to shape them into better people. Certainly, one of my favourite ways to see the patch of sky over my life and be thankful for the privilege I enjoy, and sometimes take for granted, is my weekly volunteering commitment with St Michael's Meals. Could this be your 'resolution'? Even after a busy and tiresome week at school, submitting extended essays or sitting for exams, I experience an indescribable boost of energy as I make my way to the Cathedral to prepare delicious and nutritious meals for our homeless friends. Another French writer, Victor Hugo, asserts that "because one doesn't like the way things are, is no reason to be unjust towards God". Although I, myself, am guilty of sporadically complaining about the trials and tribulations that the lockdown brought for me, it was through volunteering with the organisation that I came to the realisation that, in contrast to those we serve, my life was significantly better and I had so much to be thankful for. This obliged me to cease any negativity about online learning or the surge in infection rates, which were still valid complications and worries for me, and change my focus to instilling hope, joy and love in the lives of our friends, the needy, all through our short weekly encounter.

As a member of the St Michael's Cathedral Youth Group and St Michael's Meals, I have had the incredible opportunity to meet people from all walks of life, sharing deep conversations



MARCEL PROUST (1871-1922), THE FRENCH NOVELIST, CRITIC, AND ESSAYIST WHO WROTE THE MONUMENTAL AND CELEBRATED NOVEL *À LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU*.

and occasions that are etched into my memory, like our last Christmas party and tracksuit presents for the homeless. I am forever thankful for the amazing and passionate team of volunteers on which our ministry relies. It is only with their continued commitment that we are able to do what we do week-to-week. So, when I look back at the year, the pandemic withers into oblivion and instead conjures up a range of beautiful times, many of which were with St Michael's Meals. And, when I look to the year coming, I see the renewed opportunity for us to expand our work and engage in new endeavours in Australia and internationally, all aimed at improving the lives of others and implementing Christ's mission. I invite everyone that has the time or interest to get involved, especially from the youth demographic. I assure you that after only one week it becomes most addictive and so fulfilling!

Jack Bettar

First Coming of the Child God

The light of the Baby shines from the manger,
Luminous through the walls,
Glowing through the doors.
The kings of Persia, the kings of India, the kings of China,
travel from afar
Carrying myrrh, coral, gold and rare spices
For a Child God to be born,
Guided by a divine Star,
To a manger in Bethlehem.
As Mary gathers the softest straws
To make a mattress for her baby,
The Child prays beholding the face of God
Glowing on the bare white wall, and murmuring:
You are my son and in you I have come to be with
my own creation.
So, go to the world and teach as I taught you,
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
The universe is chanting hallelujah, hallelujah!

God is with us, God is of us,
He has come in the image of a baby.
The baby steps out walking with a lamb and carrying a lantern
And stands under a lofty palm tree and teaches:
"The truth I say unto you:
Man was not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath was made
for man.
God is love,
The eye is the mirror of the body,
Be joyful, you make the heart of God joyful.
I am the way; he who sees the light, let them step unto the trails
of my robe
And walk along with me,
To celebrate the birth of God in the image of a baby."
He has come to renew the world and impart hope and joy to you
all until the end of time.

Kamal Abu-Deeb
Chair of Arabic, University of London

THE MARVELLOUS PARALYMPICS

Watching a game of football or tennis has never been my favourite way of entertainment, and less interesting to me are perhaps marathons, bicycle racing, and boat sailing. That does not mean that I did not admire the high achievers in all sports, or was not proud of the outstanding results obtained by the Australian athletes in Tokyo. However, with my limited appetite for viewing games, I was still interested in watching the finals, but only if they included Australian participants. When the Olympics ended after 17 days of constant broadcasting on Channel 7, it was a relief, yet, soon after, the Paralympics began.

I decided to watch a session or two, just out of curiosity and to understand what it is all about. It was an eye-opener: men and women with different disabilities competing in various games – amputees, the visually impaired, athletes with cerebral palsy or an intellectual disability were

racing in wheelchairs and playing very competitive games of tennis, table tennis, basketball, rugby, fencing, powerlifting, or judo; others competing in the pool, or rowing and canoeing.

I felt like following them for a few minutes more, but soon I found myself glued to the television. It was clear that the wheelchair basketball is more challenging and accordingly more interesting than ordinary basketball where a tall person has the advantage of longer strides and, with a little jump, can virtually hand-deliver the ball into the basket. With amputated limbs, men and women were able to not only run or swim, but also reach unbelievable speed. I certainly forgot that I was watching the Paralympics! They were athletes competing at the highest level with no apparent restrictions due to disabilities. Our perception of disability is clearly wrong, and the negative views imposed by society on people with so-called disabilities

of any kind must change, not only in sports, but also in all aspects of life and society.

Gladly, this is happening, and at a fast rate. The success of people with disabilities in the Paralympics led to viewing them as heroes and strongly highlighted their capabilities and skills, resulting in changing the perception of disability itself. Paralympic athletes are, in fact, role models for their achievements. Media coverage of the Paralympics has increased lately, and Paralympians are on magazine covers and guests in high-profile TV shows, with each having an amazing story to tell. Without exception, we are all different, and just because someone does not fit into one's perception of 'normality' does not mean that they should be marginalised. The only real disability is in our mind and attitude. I salute Channel 7 for opening my eyes, and those of many others.

Naguib Kanawati

The Editorial Board of **Together** congratulates Dylan Alcott, tennis star, Paralympian and disability advocate on being made Australian of the Year for 2022.

LEBANON – WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR THE AVERAGE CITIZEN?

The situation in Lebanon is obviously continually evolving, so it is hard to characterise without noting that things can change dramatically quite quickly. But broadly speaking, the country is suffering from three intersecting crises. Each crisis feeds into the others. The first is a political crisis, caused by the fact that the majority of ordinary citizens are not happy with the *de facto* political arrangements between the major political blocs that have been in place since the end of the civil war; this is what caused the outbreak of protests in October 2019. The second is a financial crisis which has been brewing since 2014, when remittances from the Arabian Gulf countries began to reduce due to the fall in the oil price and the political tension between Lebanon and the GCC countries; this crisis accelerated dramatically after protests began in 2019. Now most Lebanese are unable to access their US dollar savings in Lebanese banks, living expenses are increasing dramatically, and the Lebanese pound is rapidly losing its value against the US dollar. The third major crisis is of course the public health crisis caused by COVID. For people living here the

major divide is between those who have access to US dollars and those who do not. The fact that many Lebanese families have relatives working overseas means that there is still a flow of US dollars into many households, and because the increase in the value of the US dollar is much greater than the inflation in prices, they can continue to live a good life. But for those who are paid in Lebanese pounds, the situation is extremely difficult. For example, the price of a tank of petrol is now equivalent to an average monthly salary. Even those who have access to US dollars are still affected by the overall deterioration of living conditions, with crime increasing and limited public services (such as electricity supply). Importantly, hospitals are under increasing strain due to difficulties in sourcing fuel for generators, purchasing medicines, the flight of medical personal to better paying jobs outside Lebanon, as well as the impact of COVID. St Michael's Meals has been committed to helping those suffering in Lebanon, especially through partnerships with trustworthy



THE CHARRED PORT OF BEIRUT, TAKEN DAYS AFTER THE EXPLOSION ON AUGUST 4, SHOWING THE LEBANESE EMIGRANT STATUE. IT STANDS AS A POIGNANT REMINDER THAT FOR MILLIONS OF LEBANESE INTERNATIONALLY, LEAVING THEIR HOMELAND WAS A DIFFICULT BUT NECESSARY CHOICE TO ESCAPE A PRECARIOUS SITUATION AND HAVE A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE. Photo: N. RICKLEFS

organisations like the Besançon nuns and devoted individuals. We have assisted a number of families financially and materially and look forward to expanding our aid to Lebanon and the Middle East in the future.

Norman Ricklefs
Keserwan, Lebanon.

Dr Ricklefs is a geopolitical expert, political advisor and ancient historian.

ST MARIAM BAOUARDY: A CHRISTIAN MYSTIC BORN OF MELKITE CATHOLIC PARENTS



ST MARIAM BAOUARDY.

Early last year, Jack Bettar, a parishioner of St Michael's Melkite Catholic Cathedral, contacted me regarding the relics of St Mariam Baouardy that are in possession of our Eparchy. In a brief exchange of words, I was inspired to reach out to the Prioress of the Carmelite monastery in Bethlehem, whom I met while on a pilgrimage in 2017, to source a first-class relic of St Mariam for St Michael's in Darlington. The life of St Mariam was not long in years, but her impact then and legacy now remains extraordinary. In short, here is her story...

In 1846, Mariam was born on 5 January, the Eve of the Epiphany. Mariam, also known as St Mary of Jesus Crucified, The Lily of Palestine and The Little Arab, was born in Upper Galilee, Palestine. Her father was Giries Baouardy, and her mother was Mariam Chahine. The family was Melkite Catholic. Mariam was the thirteenth child born to her parents, with all 12 siblings born before her having died in infancy. Sadly, both of Mariam's parents died when she was aged two. Orphaned, she was

then raised by relatives in Palestine, who then moved to Alexandria, Egypt, when Mariam was eight. She was trained as a domestic servant.

At 13, Mariam was set-up to be married by her family, but she refused, wishing to dedicate her life to Christ. Due to her disobedience, her family began to treat her more like a slave. Being dealt with poorly, Mariam sought travel advice from a Muslim man she knew so she could leave Alexandria, but instead he attempted to convert her. Mariam refused conversion, declaring her faith and so the man slashed her throat. He dumped her body in a dark alley. It was then that Mariam experienced a mystical encounter when a woman in sky-blue clothing, The Blessed Virgin Mary, took her to a grotto and stitched her wound.

Mariam offered service, particularly to the poor, to different families throughout the Middle East, but was eventually taken to France. It was there that Mariam experienced many ecstasies and the Stigmata, eventually becoming a Carmelite nun in Pau, France, at the age of 22. At 24, Mariam was sent with a group of Carmelites to Mangalore, India, to establish a new community there. Following her profession of vows in 1871, her mystical experiences increased. Mariam continued to be subjected to the Stigmata, she regularly levitated in prayer, witnessed several apparitions, and had many visions.

When Mariam was 29, she returned to her homeland of Palestine to establish a Carmelite monastery in Bethlehem. Mariam died in Bethlehem on 26 August,

which is now her feast day. She passed away in her thirty-third year of life, the same age as Christ when He was crucified. Beatified on 13 November 1983, Mariam was canonised on 17 May 2015.

Today, our Eparchy hosts four first-class relics of St Mariam Baouardy, including:

- A relic of her hair acquired in 2016 for St Elias' Melkite Church in Guildford NSW
- A relic of her blood acquired in 2019 for iMelkite NSW, a young adult group with St Mariam as their patron
- A relic of her blood acquired in 2021 for St John the Beloved's Melkite Church in Greenacre NSW
- A relic of her bone acquired in 2021 for St Michael the Archangel Melkite Cathedral in Darlington NSW

The relic of St Mariam's bone was received at St Michael's by His Grace, Bishop Robert Rabbat, and the Dean of the Cathedral, Fr Gerges Al Butros, on 7 November 2021. This relic is now securely featured in the Melkite Heritage Display, located within the Cathedral, which celebrated over 130 years of a Melkite Catholic presence in Australia.

St Mariam Baouardy, pray for us.

Mark Scotto Di Perta
Subdeacon at
St Elias' Melkite Church
in Guildford, NSW

Author's note: St Mariam Baouardy's story was inspired by Fr Brunot's book, *Mariam The Little Arab* (1981).



THE PROCESSION WITH THE RELICS OF ST MARIAM AT THE CATHEDRAL.



THE RELICS AS DISPLAYED NEXT TO THE ALTAR AT THE CATHEDRAL.

ST MICHAEL'S MEALS ACTIVITIES

In honour of Janet and Julie Maakrun

Saturday, the 27th of November 2021, was a very special day. Members of the congregation of St Michael's Melkite Cathedral met for a double celebration. The group was invited for a most enjoyable special lunch in a function room at South Hurstville RSL Club. The first celebration was to honour Mrs Janet Maakrun, who chaired St Michael's Ladies' Fraternity for many years. In this capacity, she organised activities for the community and raised funds for the necessary maintenance and repairs of the Cathedral. The wife of the late Salim Maakrun, who was one of the main pillars of our church, Mrs Maakrun's long contribution and absolute dedication were recognised by two speeches given by Dr Roni Sikh and Mr Elias Badawi. Both speakers addressed her outstanding and continuous association with St Michael's, and gave examples of her generous and caring deeds. A plaque was presented to her in recognition and appreciation of her most valuable services. The second celebration was in honour of Dr Julie Maakrun, who has recently obtained her



Doctorate (PhD) in Education from the University of Notre Dame. This is the highest academic achievement in any field of studies. It should, however, be mentioned that Dr Maakrun has a long and distinguished career in education. She was the first and founding Principal of our own Holy Saviour School at Greenacre, and has played a fundamental role in its establishment. All the invited guests congratulated Julie for her brilliant accomplishment, and wished her all the best in her future career. As a momentum of this special occasion, the congregation presented Julie with a special plaque expressing our pride in her academic success and wishing her the best in the future.

End of year outing for Seniors and Friends

2021 has been a difficult year, especially heightened with the worries from the Coronavirus, the prolonged lockdowns and the unprecedented lack of freedom to go out, to visit friends, to socialise, and even to go to church. Fortunately, however, the year is over and most of the restrictions are behind us – and that in itself deserves celebrating. Seniors and Friends have regularly met for years at St Michael's Melkite Cathedral on the first Friday of each month to celebrate the Holy Liturgy followed by a lunch in the Cathedral's Hall. On special occasions, the group has the lunch in one of the not-too-distant clubs. On Friday, the 3rd of December, to celebrate the end of the year, as well as the end of the lockdown, it was decided to have the lunch at the Rockdale Tennis Club. It has one of the best kitchens and the atmosphere is so warm and friendly. The group of 35 friends were all invited for the lunch and drinks and had a memorable time. The delicious meals were followed by some entertaining activities. Then, there was a lucky door prize, a raffle and finally an exciting game of Bingo with valuable prizes! We all had a marvellous experience and look forward with great anticipation to many more of such activities in 2022.



A Golden Wedding anniversary for Gameel and Renée Farash

Gameel and Renée Farash have celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on the 26th of December 2021. Termed as the Golden Anniversary, this special occasion is rightly associated with a most strong, durable, resistant and beautiful metal, since the couple have already proven and demonstrated their love for each other in a union that lasted for half a century. On this occasion the lovely couple travelled to Melbourne where some members of their family and many old friends currently live, and there they had an unforgettable celebration and reunion with family and friends. But Gameel and Renée also have many friends in Sydney and are loved by all the congregation of St Michael's Cathedral. A celebration of this milestone in their life was therefore organised at the Tennis Club in Rockdale by their close friends. After a delicious dinner, the couple cut the cake in a joyous atmosphere, making the occasion both special and memorable.



Tracksuits for the Homeless and a learning curve for us

It was our plan to provide a brand new tracksuit for a homeless person on the feast day of St Nicholas, 8th of December 2021. We duly recorded names and sizes and started a fundraising campaign for the tracksuits which was responded to with great generosity by our parishioners and friends. The idea was to match a homeless person with a donor, who would gift wrap the tracksuit and write a personal Christmas greeting to him or her. Well, what a surprise! When the day came to distribute the tracksuits, very few on the original list turned up. A whole other crowd appeared instead. The situation was easily salvaged. We simply gave out the tracksuits to the newcomers. The ones that are left over will be shipped to Lebanon and Syria.

From this, we learned how transient the homeless population are around Martin Place and Central Station. We do see familiar faces every week, but we are also continually seeing new ones. We look forward to our next project with alacrity!



GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

Interview with Nibal Arakji

"Wanted" (Matloubin) is a Lebanese movie released in 2019. Beneath the plot line of the hilarious antics of a group of escapees from a nursing home, are deeper, darker issues: loneliness, depression, longing for love, lost youthfulness and family connection. The four fugitives are wanted by the authorities but are they wanted by their families? Some residents of the nursing home are ostracised by others. Daad, in her fiercely protective way, is prepared to scratch out the eyes of any other woman who looks at her partner. Yet she lovingly takes on Jacquot's quest to save her husband's burial plot. This movie has resonated with its Australian audience. Our particular Middle Eastern community here in Sydney shares some of the universal hopes and dreams of these larger-than-life characters.



- **Is it unusual for a woman to become a movie director in Lebanon? Tell us about yourself.**

It is not unusual for a woman to become a movie director in Lebanon. On the contrary, we are seeing more and more female directors. I am regularly meeting lots of talented young, energetic Lebanese women in this field. I personally grew up in Paris and studied communication, doing a masters in advertising. My background is not in cinema, I spent most of my career writing small advertisements that I turned into long movies. I always loved writing, so, directing is not my main interest. I am more of a scriptwriter than a director. Here in Lebanon, I produce both my own films and others across the Middle East.

- **I notice that you wrote the screenplay as well. Why did you choose the themes of loneliness and alienation, which are essentially full of sadness, for a film which is a comedy? Was there a danger it would all just descend into farce?**

I wanted to do a film with the elderly as it has never been done in Lebanon before. So, the concept was new and different from my previous films, like "Nour" and "Blind Intersections", which were very dark dramas and also compared to my 2014 film "Yalla A'belkon" (Single, Married, Divorced) which was a light comedy about relationships. In "Wanted", there are messages of pain and sadness, such as Walid being left in the nursing home and never being asked about and treated with indifference by his family. That was very important for me to highlight as, sadly, many people treat their parents like this. Though, at the same time, I wanted to show that although they were old, they had the right to live happily and be full of life! Yes, maybe it was a danger that it could have descended into a farce without some deeper themes, but I don't believe it did because you go through a full range of emotions when watching the film.

- **What inspired you to make this film? Was it someone in your own life, or a scepticism of what aged-care has become? It seems you want to give the elderly renewed vigour, to show their capacity for love and joy and resourcefulness, and indicate that they should not just be shut away and forgotten.**

I wanted to select a topic that was completely new and, yes, it is full of sadness, especially regarding the elderly and death. But, it showed them in a new light with humour because often we regard the elderly as dependent. It is very hard for them to see where they've been in life and where they've come to, so I wanted to show that you can be both old and full of life. Laughter and love are the emotions I wanted to strongly convey in my characters.

- **While watching the film, we feel as if the 4 "oldies" could be one of us, or members of our families. We all know someone a little like them. Was it difficult to cast the film? Are the actors well known in Lebanon or did you try to cast unknown actors?**

When it comes to casting, it is very difficult to work with older people. In fact, it is very similar to working with young children. Not due to a lack of professionalism, but due to the lack of stamina and strength to shoot for 15-16 hours per day. This meant that many breaks had to be taken during the day. The movie is a road trip and it was very hard for them as we were filming in the middle of summer, in July, in intense heat. Most of them were professional actors, but Gerges Bou-Khalil (Walid) was cast from the street. I approached him in Beirut and asked him if he would like to act. He quickly told me he was never involved in acting before, but he suited the role – so his first acting experience was at 80! I always have new people in my films, I do not just work with known actors, I like to have 'new faces'. This is because some untrained actors can provide a more genuine, spontaneous or raw performance compared to trained actors that may have a style which they apply to each project they work on.

- **It's delightful for overseas audiences to catch glimpses of a Lebanon we have been unable to visit because of COVID and the travel bans. The scenery in "Wanted" is stunning. Where did you do most of the filming?**

As "Wanted" was a road trip, we did record it throughout Lebanon. The nursing home interiors were filmed near Harissa and the exterior and gardens were elsewhere. I wanted to show the beauty of Beirut and Lebanon and that is why we stopped in different places, like Raouché, the coastline, the mountains near Jezzine, and many other villages. There was a lot of driving!

- **We would love to hear about your next project. Are you able to share with our readers your plans for your next film?**

No, I am currently not working on a film, though I am still producing. To me, the cinema scene is slowly dying with many of the theatres closed in Lebanon. It is not the right time!

For those interested, "Wanted" can be watched on Netflix and other streaming services.

Prepared by Jane Karame and Jack Bettar



NIBAL ARAKJI

KITCHEN CORNER

Sharing my Love for Cooking: Omaima Bettar

Omaima Bettar migrated to Australia in 1968 from her hometown of Safita, Syria, with her husband, Louis, and her 5-month-old son, Paul. In 2007, she joined the Melkite Eparchy's Social Committee and was a very active member involved in organising functions, fundraising and delivering flowers to the Church every Saturday. She is a member of the Seniors and Friends Group at St Michael's Cathedral and thoroughly enjoys the monthly get-together.

Omaima is the acknowledged doyenne of the numerous talented cooks in her family. Like all good cooks, she is firm about detail and many dishes in the well-known canon of Middle Eastern cuisine have new refinement in her hands. When reflecting, she laughed and said "When I came to Australia, at my young age, I didn't know how to cook anything! I used to send letters to mum and ask her for her recipes. Initially, I might burn something or get the proportions wrong, but slowly, I learnt!"

She quickly proved her skills in the kitchen and, in 1986 and later in 1987, her cooking reached the cover of Australian Gourmet Magazine. When asked what recipe she wanted to be featured in **Together**, she quickly suggested Maqloubeh because it is a "favourite of the grandchildren".

She can cater for an army at a moment's notice and serves dishes, like this, to the delight of everyone. Maqloubeh is thought to originate in Palestine, however, it is also popular in parts of Syria and Jordan. Omaima acknowledges that even within Syria, there are regional variations of most dishes, so the recipes may vary.



OMAIMA IN HER KITCHEN, PREPARING MUCH-LOVED GRAPEVINE LEAVES.

A Taste of Syria: Maqloubeh

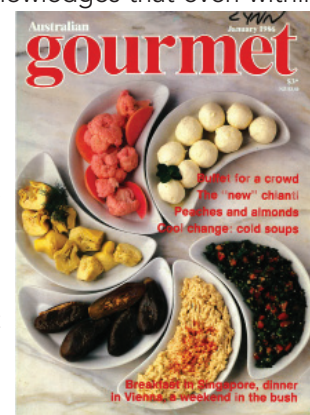
Ingredients:

500 grams of diced lamb
Olive oil for the pan
2 tablespoons
pine nuts
3-4 tablespoons
split almonds
2 ½ cups of rice
2 eggplants

Method:

Start one night before and slice and fry the eggplant. The next day, put olive oil in a saucepan and brown the pine nuts and split almonds. Empty them into a dish and, with the leftover oil, brown the diced lamb. While the lamb cooks, wash and strain the rice. Then, spread the meat across the surface of the pan, and cover it with the eggplant slices. Wait a few minutes and then pour five cups of warm water onto the eggplant and meat. Then, using your hands, or a spoon, spread the washed rice out evenly over the top of the meat. Put the lid on the saucepan, and wait for it to cook. Once cooked, get a wooden spoon and run it around the rim of the saucepan so it doesn't stick. Finally, put a dish on top of the open pan, and flip it over. Before serving, garnish the Maqloubeh with the pine nuts and split almonds. *Sahtein/Bon appétit!*

Serves: 6



AUSTRALIAN GOURMET MAGAZINE 1986 COVER FEATURING OMAIMA'S COOKING.

Worlds in my Kitchen: Cecile Yazbek

I was born into the socially aware Lebanese Yazbek family in South Africa during the time of apartheid, one of the great crimes of the twentieth century. Growing up I saw queues of African people coming to our home to beg my lawyer-father to assist them with problems under apartheid law. Poor people also came to our courtyard knowing there was food available. As an 8-year-old child and fluent speaker of the local Xhosa language, I learnt firsthand the enormous problems people faced daily under harsh laws of racial segregation that caused poverty for millions.

Because of what I saw and experienced, I became a writer to try to understand my own anguish and then show others what I had seen. I have written a memoir, *Olive Trees around my Table*, a vegetarian recipe book and two novels reflecting Lebanese life in South Africa. After university, I married and set up a home in Cape Town. There, I connected with community organisations providing food relief to thousands living in dire circumstances in informal settlements quite close to my neighbourhood. The cost of a prime cut of meat for one meal on my table could sustain one of these families for a month. Injustice causing such inequality turned me into a vegetarian. Sometimes I served fish and chicken but mainly legumes, grains, nuts and seeds with plenty of fresh vegetables. Questions of animal cruelty hung over me at the dining table. My parents emphasised healthy eating: no white bread, sugar and fats, teaching us that food can either harm or heal us.

My Haddad mother and her mother were great Lebanese cooks of authentic dishes which I learned in Arabic from my grandmother. Our ancestral recipes became an important part of what I eventually taught in my vegetarian cooking school. South Africa has a cuisine strongly influenced by Indians who had been brought into the country by the British in the nineteenth century as indentured labour to cut sugar cane – we now recognise this for the slavery it actually was. Similarly in the Western Cape, around Cape Town, Malays were brought from Java by the Dutch colonial masters to labour in



Kitchen Corner (cont.)

farming and construction of the early colony. As Moslems, their religion was not accepted until eventually imams were allowed in to cater to the spiritual and cultural needs of the community. Their use of spices with sweet and sour flavours is reflected in the recipe below.

A Taste of South Africa: Bean Bobotie

A vegan version of a traditional dish made with mince and baked with a topping of milk and egg, not used here. Serve with rice and salad.

Ingredients:

1 large onion, diced
3 tablespoons oil
2 tablespoons fragrant curry powder
4 tablespoons cider vinegar
4 tablespoons water
2 tablespoons fruit chutney
2 cups cooked brown or red kidney beans, minced (tinned beans work well)
2 cups cooked brown or red kidney beans, left whole
1 large carrot coarsely shredded
2 tablespoons soya sauce
small cup cashew or peanut pieces
½ cup of plumped sultanas
For the top: blanched whole almonds or sunflower seeds and bay leaves

Method:

In a large saucepan, sauté the onion in oil. When just softening, add curry powder and stir. Then add vinegar, water and chutney. Mix well; add all the rest of the ingredients and pour into an oven casserole (approx. 20 x 30cm). Stud the top with almonds or sunflower seeds and bay leaves. Bake at 180°C for 30-40 minutes.

Serves: 8

I hope you can try it. *Sahtein!*

MY INVOLVEMENT WITH ST MICHAEL'S MEALS

In September of 2021, I was offered the friendly invitation to be a part of the charitable work of St Michael's Meals on Wednesday afternoons. The idea was brought to me by my cousin Jack Bettar, who is very involved in the program. Helping the homeless is something that I had thought about in the past but never really had the chance to do. However, this seemed like a very good opportunity to connect with some people less fortunate than myself in my city, gain perspective for the many blessings that I have been afforded in my own life and realise the opportunities that I have to make a positive impact in the lives of others around me. There are many moments in my time assisting with St Michael's Meals that have stood out. In this article, I will talk about one moment in particular that has continued to resonate with me.

One man, whom I met a couple of weeks ago, was named Jake and it was the first time that I had spoken to him. He was last in line to collect his grocery bag of prepared food and so, having nobody after him to serve, this presented me with the opportunity to strike up a conversation. I believe that it was Jake's first time using our service, because he paused to ask who we were. He asked what charity or organisation we belonged to, and he was surprised to hear when I told him that we were from the local Melkite Catholic Church in Darlington! Jake told me that he

was from a Polish Catholic family and grew up going to an Orthodox church, however has since found it difficult to reconnect with his faith. He told me that he was keen to try to go to church again in the future, and I suggested the idea that we would be more than happy to have him come to our church on a Sunday and that he was always very welcome there. Jake asked me to write down the address of St Michael's and I was more than happy to give him the address for him to hold on to!

After my conversation with Jake ended and we shook hands to say goodbye, I thought about the multifaceted importance of what we do in our humanitarian work. Not only are we helping those in need, but we are also showing our faith in action and displaying the love of Christ for all people through the charity of His Church. It made me realise that it is not only the physical needs that we are caring for in these people, but how we can also help to make a significant impact the spiritual health of others. In John 13:34-35, we read how on the night before His death, Jesus told his disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." The first part of this passage is extremely well known to Christians; however, the



THE AUTHOR (CENTRE) OFFERING A HELPING HAND WITH OTHER SMILING VOLUNTEERS, AT CENTRAL STATION.

second part of this passage is also very important and central to the role of our Christian mission. I believe as Christians it is important that we care for others, living out the teachings of our Lord and representing the objectives of the Church in a positive light. By following and living the example of Jesus, we have the opportunity to nurture in others, the true belief in the presence of God in their own lives. My experiences with St Michael's Meals have been really enjoyable and fulfilling. Definitely the best thing about it are the genuine human connections that I have with others on every occasion that I give my time. I hope to continue this important work and I look forward to many more positive moments in the future.

Peter Obeid

THE KINGDOM IN YOUR HOME

“And the two shall become one flesh” (Mk 10: 8), “this is a profound mystery” (Eph 5: 32).

The union of marriage mysteriously turns two people into one flesh. The profundity of this verse attaches us to its literal meaning. Becoming one flesh leads us to understand the depth of the mutual relationship designed by God for all couples.

Surprisingly, some clergy and lay people try to shorten this verse by removing the word flesh, noticeably distorting its real meaning. The two partners are not meant to be ‘absorbed’ into one another, nor are they supposed to become one person. The partner is still a separate person, who has their own free will, decisions, opinions, feelings, social involvement, thoughts and spirituality.

The union of marriage is supposed to offer the couple a golden opportunity to help each other to attain both maturity and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13). In fact, in such a union, the partners are supposed to enable each other to individually reach their full potential.

The growth of the couple is an important theme of the service of the Holy Matrimony according to the Byzantine

Rite. The rich symbolism used during the ceremony helps focus on the mission of the married couple towards each other and towards the society. Those of you who have attended weddings at the Cathedral or elsewhere, in accordance with the Byzantine Rite, will most certainly remember aspects of this distinctive tradition.

Below is a quick summary of some of the used symbolisms during the service of the Holy Matrimony:

Standing in front of the Altar: Points that their love is based on reciprocal sacrifice and self-denial.

The wedding rings: Expresses the exclusive commitment of this couple and the eternal love to which they are called.

The crowns: In marriage, the husband and wife become king and queen of a new family in the society. It is also a Crown of martyrdom, where the couple should give witness of God’s undying love for them.

The crowning: The realisation of the Kingdom of God on Earth is entrusted to the new couple.

The common Cup: The couple drinks from the common cup to symbolise their willingness to share in whatever life brings: the sweet and the bitter.

The dance of Isaiah: A sort of “Holy dance”, which the priest and the bridal party perform around the table. In this dance the congregation represented by the priest, the couple and the witnesses express their great spiritual joy.

Leaving the church: The couple begins a new mission: they are sent forth to live as a reflection of God’s love in this world.

A Christian couple is committed to live an ideal marriage, in which each partner feels being important and taken care for physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. May all our married couples keep their eyes on their Christian values, so that their happiness prevails not only within their homes but also in the society.

In Christ,
Fr Gerges Al Butros
Dean of St Michael’s Melkite
Cathedral



ARCHIMANDRITE AFTIMOS HADDAD LEADS THE BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM DURING THE DANCE OF ISAIAH WHILE THEY WEAR THE COMMEMORATIVE CROWNS.



ARCHIMANDRITE AFTIMOS HADDAD REMOVES THE CROWN FROM THE BRIDE.

ST MICHAEL’S MELKITE CHURCH AT WELLINGTON ST, WATERLOO, 1978.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13:13)

IN LOVING MEMORY...

Forever in our hearts

Albert Griplas



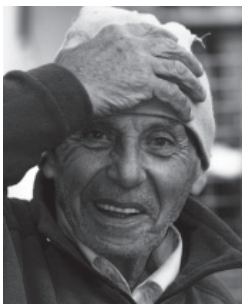
Albert Griplas had a passion for the Melkite church and an enduring commitment to the Melkite community. It began in Egypt and continued in Australia upon his arrival in 1967 until 2018, where he was involved in all aspects of the church from committee membership, fundraising, treasury through to the successful establishment of a church for western Sydney. He was awarded the Melkite Cross for his exemplary service by Bishop Issam Darwish and two Icons of appreciation for his dedicated service to the Melkite faith in Australia by Fr Ibrahim Sultan.

Renée Latif Kanawati



Renée will be remembered by the many qualities she possessed, and which are rarely combined in a single human being. She was a kind, generous and forgiving person who loved people and sincerely wanted the best for everyone. Renée was full of life, and, even at the golden age of 103, she wanted people around her – the more the better and 24 hours a day if possible! She had a delicious sense of humour, enjoyed laughter, radiated happiness and was always the life of the party. Even at the nursing home, where she spent the last four years of her life, and despite the huge language barrier, she somehow managed to communicate with everyone and to be so well-known and loved. Renée was part of the Seniors' Group at St Michael's and greatly enjoyed the monthly gathering at the church as well as the occasional outings with the group, and had special fondness for Fr Gerges. Renée will be greatly missed.

Michel Kharma



Michel was the husband of Rabia; the father of Elie, Charbel, Daniel and Mary Kharma; a proud grandfather to Abigail, Clare and Lucy; and a loving brother to Therese Kharma and Alice (wife of Mouine Chehab). Michel was an integral part of the St Michael's Cathedral community for over 34 years – his love and dedication to his faith and church was felt by his services in the building of the kitchen, his gardening efforts, welding and cleaning abilities, offering a hand to build a nativity to our Mother Mary and also chanting in the choir. He had a fond love for singing and poetry, regularly creating personal pieces for anyone who asked him without hesitation. He had a beautiful voice and engaging personality, both of which can be testified to by those who gathered after the liturgy to talk, have a laugh and drink coffee. The love and passion he held for St Michael's Cathedral and preserving it for future generations was admirable. He will be so dearly missed by us all.

Edmond Sadek



Edmond Sadek was born to eternal life on the 12th of December 2021. He was the beloved husband of Mounira and cherished brother of Eugenie. Edmond was a devoted servant of God, who, for many decades, volunteered his time and services to St Michael's Cathedral community. A generous and gifted upholsterer, Edmond donated his works to the church clergy and the church's fundraising events. He was always willing to help a migrant family or anyone in need of furniture. Before he became chronically ill, he took pride in his position heading many St Michael's social events. We will miss his warmth, wisdom and gentle nature.

Joseph Terzian



During the 91 years of Joseph Terzian's life he was a devoted son and husband, a wonderful father, loving grandfather, and great-grandfather. There was nothing more important to Joseph than his family. He did things for his family and friends that most people wouldn't. When his sister, Margot, was put into a nursing home after a stroke, he would visit her every single day, through the best times and through the hardest times. He was the one to assume daily caretaking tasks. It was a special kind of dedication that put his life on hold so he could do everything possible to care for his sister, which is a testament to his beautiful soul. He was also a devout Christian and was committed to St Michael's Melkite Cathedral. He would often donate money to raise funds for the homeless and enjoyed being a part of the Seniors' Group. Joseph's generosity, humility and selflessness were all qualities that we admired him for – he will be sorely missed.

A prayer for those who have entered eternal life...

Dear Heavenly Father, It is very challenging when we lose someone close to us. It feels like our very existence is shaken; we feel sadness, pain, fatigue, distance, anger, numbness, uncertainty... We have lots of questions to ask and we strive to find a meaning or explanation for our loss. Gladly, You did not give us a book with all the answers. Instead, Your Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Holy Scriptures, offering us enough to understand, to be reassured and to remain hopeful and faithful for a better future...

We believe in your every word and turn to You when our devotion is tested in our many daily struggles. We are comforted to know that our departed ones are in your care. Amen.

Fr Gerges Al Butros

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OUR NEW WEBSITE

St Michael's Meals is very excited to announce the launch of our new website! Our new site gives viewers a detailed look at the love and dedication our volunteers provide to the community on a daily basis. With promotional photos and videos, you can also read up on the latest news through our blog and publications page. All the editions of **Together** and our special publication *Love Inspires* are available on the website. Unique sections include the Seniors,

Homeless, Youth and St Michael's Cathedral. The Cathedral subpage allows you to learn about the history of our parish and services offered by the Charity and Fr Gerges. The website adds to our online presence and aims to inspire those who can get involved and let people in the wider community learn about our mission. You can easily visit our website and become a member and

www.stmichaelsmeals.org



THE EDITORIAL BOARD FOR TOGETHER

see the ways you can contribute to our work, especially through our 'Angels Network'. We're saving a seat for you! You can access the website at:
www.stmichaelsmeals.org

Angela Shalhoub

Our Mission Statement

Members of St Michael's Meals treat others with unconditional positive regard, listen to them with care and empathy, and are genuine in offering their services. This special care is also offered to the elderly as well as the youth in the community.

Our Story:

St Michael's Meals is a core group of dedicated parishioners, led by Fr Gerges, Parish Priest and Dean of St Michael's Melkite Catholic Cathedral.

The group splits on Wednesday nights at 7.00 pm to feed the homeless at Central Station and Martin Place. Our aim is to build a trusting relationship with our friends, the needy, so that we not only feed their bodies, but also their souls. The relief, gratitude and friendship of the people we reach is our reward. No-one chooses to be on the street, we look into their eyes and see the person inside. Each has a story, we know the regulars by name and even know their likes and dislikes. So many have an intellectual disability, who are we to judge the circumstances that pushed them onto the street? The church asks us to imitate the life of the

Our Vision

- Feed the Hungry with God's love.
- Offer the Homeless weekly nutritious meals and genuine friendship.
- Increase our reach by adding locations or increasing the number of days of our meal service.
- Reach out to the elderly, the sick and those with special needs.
- Involve the youth in our activities and prepare them for future leadership.
- Aim to open a centre to feed, house and clothe people on a regular basis.
- Create a mobile team to reach out and help the less fortunate.
- Extend our meal services to those in homes who are experiencing food insecurity.

saints: so let's listen to their words: St Mother Teresa cautions us "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." Our own Australian St Mary Mackillop encourages us to "Never see a need without doing something about it". It is so true that when we give, we receive so much more. Not only do we feel that we have made a difference to the lives of the people we feed, but it has also created a real affection and camaraderie between the people, who show up every week to serve, and the regular disadvantaged on the streets of Sydney.

The disadvantaged are not only our brothers and sisters who live on the street but also many of the elderly, who suffer from loneliness, isolation and frequently experience difficulties in communication. Our aim is to establish

regular contact with these senior individuals and lend them a hand whenever needed.

With the youth being the future of our society, their involvement in our activities is essential in preparing them to carry the flag and build a better, happier world for everyone.

Our motivation is simple and can be found in the Gospel: Matthew 25: 35-40 "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. The righteous will ask: Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?... The King will reply: Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

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