

Bishop

Rev Fathers, Sisters.

Ladies & Gentlemen:

For many centuries, the Lebanese have ventured far from their native land in search of adventure and opportunity; and to fulfill their dreams of freedom from the many conflicts and nightmares that have engulfed their beloved homeland. Their successes abroad have become legend. The Lebanese have succeeded in adapting to the new world while remembering their cultural and religious roots and relying on the wisdom and faith of their parents, grandparents and forefathers.

They lived by the values they inherited from their forefathers: integrity, entrepreneurship, hard work, courage, openness, generosity and hospitality. You and your families are true examples of the success of the Lebanese who emigrated with heart in hand and faced the difficulties of a world filled with challenges: Challenges of a different language, a new lifestyle, different sets of values, and yes, a strange set of moral standards. Yet you and they have excelled beyond any one's wildest expectation in every walk of life... You are the leaders in government, industry business and charitable works around the world. What other ethnic group can claim such accomplishments.

And, yet, your successes have not diminished your love and affinity for your homeland. You have strengthened the ties to your families and relatives still in Lebanon. You have maintained a love and loyalty to your home villages and towns, and most importantly many of you have continued to support your families and visit them on a regular basis.. Thanks to you, Lebanon has the highest immigrant revenues in proportion to its population reaching 7 billion dollars a year, making up 20% of the national income.

Indeed, we, the Lebanese at home are most grateful to you for your efforts, emotionally, financially and politically. We are proud of you for your success, for what and who you are, and most importantly for your proven devotion to Lebanon and the dream of freedom and liberty over the generations. The

“Lebanese dream” lives strong in the hearts and minds of all Lebanese ... the dream you have turned into reality.

Ladies & Gentlemen:

While our people thrive in foreign lands, the Christians of Lebanon have fallen on dire times. Today, we have representation that is less than equal to our population; this presents great concern for the Christians, Maronites and Lebanon. For if we are not alarmed, and take action, the future for our families and our countries is indeed bleak. As Lebanon bleeds its intellectual resources, its future, both economically and politically assumes a dire hew. This can be reversed only by the concerted action of our people outside of Lebanon.

Today, unfortunately many generations of Maronite Lebanese immigrants have lost or ignored their interest and ties with the motherland. The new official records, for example, show that 75% of Lebanese born between the years of 1940 & 1979 (69-30years old) are single; this means that hundreds of thousands of marriages abroad have not been registered. In addition records show that 24% of the Lebanese population is under the age of 20 years old; only 15% of these are Maronites. This means that Maronite children born abroad are not being registered as Lebanese.

Our educated guess is that there are around 1.600.000 Christian Lebanese immigrants who are not registered, if we continue this course in 50 years, Christians will be less than 10% of the total Lebanese population.

We, at the Maronite Foundation a patriarchal organization, are extremely worried about these numbers. The delicate balance between the different confessional groups in Lebanon is a must for our existence and our National harmony. The emigration of the Maronites as well as other Christian communities is a threat to the mere existence of Lebanon... These dire consequences will reverberate throughout our society, impacting political representation, economic success, and religious freedoms and liberties. This may seem alarming to you. It is!!! We must all take notice and act now.

We, at the Maronite Foundation are working to enable those of Lebanese descent to process a formal request to claim their Lebanese nationality. Also, to make

things easier, we are lobbying for laws to simplify the paper work and process for registration and participation in Lebanese parliamentary elections. In fact, a month ago the Lebanese parliament approved the mechanism to allow participation in the upcoming 2013 parliamentary elections.

We strongly believe that the Lebanese abroad should be part of our economical, social, cultural and political life. Our Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai has visited many of his flock around the world to help strengthen the Maronite family and the ties which bring you closer to Lebanon and our Maronite church. These visits have been extremely successful in raising awareness about registration and preserving the land. We are all working toward the goal of a strong, vibrant and viable Lebanon for future generations. This is a job for all of us, in Lebanon and abroad.

Before I close, allow me to share with you a “Lebanese Ten Commandments” to strengthen the Lebanese dream.

- 1- Pursue higher education in Lebanon. This way you will enrich your children with the heritage of your motherland, its pluralism, warmth, beauty, and cultural values, to take with you wherever you go.
- 2- Maintain your connection with your faith and your church. This is the eternal fount of the water of life that will quench your thirst, and bind you to the rich Maronite and Lebanese values. These will strengthen your resolve to live your faith, and retain your bonds to Lebanon. A visit to Lebanon will further renew the strength of these bonds. .
- 3- Be good ambassadors of the Lebanese Culture and Heritage. With the moral and ethical values you inherited, become part of the political and economic fabric of your adopted land, being loyal and patriotic citizens.
- 4- Seek to come together, building on those things that unite rather than divide. Come together for common causes, forming information and lobbying groups to promote your ideas and to advance the cause of Lebanon and support it politically and economically. If we do not unite, we will surely fail.
- 5- Marry the one you love, especially if they are the sons and daughters of Lebanon. Then register your marriage and the Birth of your children in Lebanese consulates and Embassies.

- 6- Teach your children Lebanese history and help them understand its rich culture and heritage, Teach them the mother Tongue; tell them stories of your villages, grandparents, your childhood; plant in them the seeds of love for Lebanon... This way they will remain citizens of the world while retaining their Lebanese Maronite identity.
- 7- Visit Lebanon with your children when they are of the proper age to travel. Enroll them in activities and summer camps there; this way they will experience Lebanon and fold it into their hearts and memories to pass to future generations.
- 8- When pursuing higher education, encourage them to participate in exchange programs with Lebanese colleges.
- 9- And when you have achieved financial success, buy land in your village, renovate your ancestral home, and participate in developing your villages socially and economically by investing in their future..
- 10- Finally when it is time to retire, after a long fruitful and productive life in the land you adopted, choose Lebanon for retirement and spend the autumn of your life there. And, if God wills, be buried in your native soil side by side with your forefathers' and ancestors.

We, in Lebanon, want you to remember that you are the sons and daughters of the “Lebanese dream”. We count on you to keep this dream alive. Be good citizens of this great nation the USA, yet remain faithful to the land of your fathers. To borrow a line from the “Fiddler on the Roof” movie: “It is all about tradition”; you excelled in keeping the tradition of our folklore dance; the dabke, of our food: kibbe, tabboule. Keep the tradition of registering your vital events too and teaching the new generation to do so.... By registering your marriages and births, you keep alive the reality of a viable Christian presence in the land on which Christ walked. You will always be able to visit the land of your dreams, of the martyrs and saints, and walk in the steps of those who made you what you are.

Thank you.

God Bless You, and May God Bless Lebanon & the US.

Antonio Andary
Foreign Relations Director
Maronite Foundation in the World