



Together

The Newsletter of St Michael's Meals

Issue 2

2022

Welcome to Issue 2, 2022 of Together. At the beginning of the pandemic, we, at St Michael's Meals, promised ourselves that our organisation would not interrupt any of its services. We knew that more people than ever would need help.

This proved to be true. Since the onset of the pandemic, we have served over 25,800 home cooked meals. It is a rewarding outcome, and we know that the homeless and vulnerable count on us to show up every Wednesday as we have been doing for over five years. Indeed, we have expanded our mission, now serving meals to three locations in Sydney: Martin Place, Central Station and Liverpool. We also provide food to a number of families in need.

It has been a huge effort, especially considering the health precautions needed to keep everyone safe. We are immensely proud of the whole team, of our dedicated volunteers who week after week cook for us, and we are enormously grateful to our donors too, for without their great generosity, our efforts would have not been possible. We foresee demand for our food services continuing to grow throughout 2022 and beyond, and are determined to meet the need.

As a new service, the Board of Directors of St Michael's Meals decided to lodge an application with the NDIS Commission for our Charity to become an NDIS provider, thus allowing us to reach out to more people.

The Editors

ST MICHAEL'S MEALS – THE PARKS

The Parks has been established for about 6 months in the Liverpool area and what a great turnout we've had! We now serve over 40 friends who not only come for a warm homemade meal, but to join us in prayer and a sense of unity, as one family and community in Christ.

We have not only grown in numbers but also in volunteers, including young children! We run our homeless food drive every fortnight on a Thursday at 6:30pm at Pioneers Memorial Park, Liverpool (opposite the NAB Building).

We are also working on a project for the end of the year, this being a Christmas dinner where we can all sit down and share a meal as one family. More details will be announced in due course.

In the meantime, pop in and say hello!

Rania Shashati



OUR FOOD RUN IN LIVERPOOL

THE GLORIOUS MELKITE (BYZANTINE) LITURGY – YOUNGSTERS WILL LOVE IT!

A quick question for you: Can you find for me the city of Constantinople on a map? Ok, it's an unfair question, because the city was raided and stolen from its native inhabitants (Greek Orthodox Christians) back in 1453. Some people now call the city (which is in the State of Turkey) "Istanbul". However, in the days when it was the independent capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople was the most important Christian city in the world, housing the greatest Cathedral ("Hagia Sophia" or the Holy Wisdom) and being the resting place for many important relics, such as the Church of the Holy Apostles. Sadly, these buildings have been desecrated and robbed of their Christian history.

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The Glorious Melkite (Byzantine) Liturgy –Youngsters will love it! (cont.)

So, what does that have to do with the Melkite Rite? Well, you may also know that the Melkite Rite of the Catholic Church is also called "Byzantine". It is a Rite we share with our brothers and sisters in the Ukranian Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox and Antiochian Orthodox Churches, which all shared a common heritage from the Church in Constantinople. The reason it is called "Byzantine" is because the Roman Emperor after whom Constantinople was named (Constantine the Great) founded his new Christian Capital in the then small city of Byzantium, which straddled the Bosphorus strait between Asia and Europe. Hence, anything to do with Constantinople is also called "Byzantine", including our Holy and Divine Liturgy. Did you also know that the Byzantine Liturgy has been essentially unchanged since 400 AD? It was written by the great Saint, John Chrysostom (who was then Patriarch of Constantinople). That means the Holy Liturgy in which we partake each week,

as well as being a vibrant, joyful means of connecting us with the Divine, is actually an ancient treasure, handed down from generation to generation for over 1600 years!

There is an outdated and erroneous notion (which seems to have sprung up in the 1960s and 1970s) that young people need to be "entertained" and that they have no appreciation for tradition and beauty. However, nothing can be further from the truth! We, and the generations before us, were all "young people" at one stage, yet we too were able to appreciate the beauty and value of the Divine Liturgy. The youth of today are not lacking in intelligence, nor in appreciation of beautiful things, but it is true that modern society has spoiled many things. Admittedly, they have their own taste which sometimes presents us with real challenges of understanding.

Young people are growing tired of modernist ways and have had an awakening of a love for things of truth and tradition. Look at what is happening at traditional Latin Mass parishes in the West – in Australia, Europe and the USA, young people are turning up in large numbers to hear the "old Mass" celebrated according to the Traditional rites which date back to before St Gregory the Great (the solemn Mass held in the Latin language), whilst there are dwindling numbers at the newer modern "Novus Ordo" parishes (where Mass is said in the vernacular language, with the priest facing the people and in a more "interactive" style).

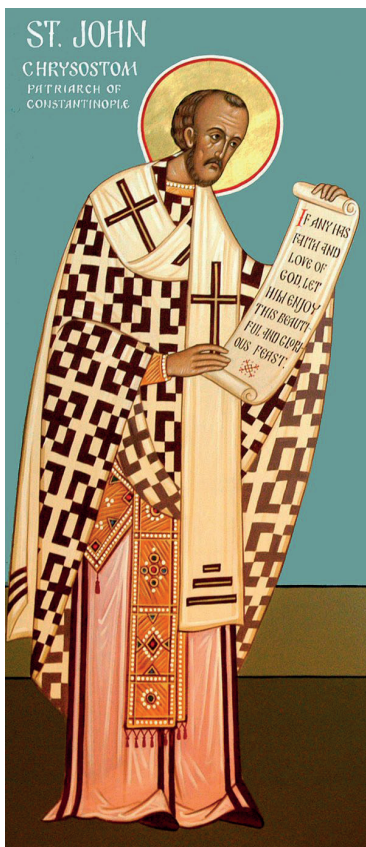
Young people want what the Melkite Divine Liturgy has to offer – clear catechesis, unambiguous Trinitarian theology, a snapshot of life in Heaven and a focus on the Divine Sonship of Christ, the Eternal Logos. This can be appreciated whether we celebrate it in Arabic, English or even in Greek. You don't have to "understand" any particular language to enjoy the beauty and sanctity of the Liturgy (I myself speak and understand almost no Arabic). Personally, I would like to see a lot more Greek being used in the Liturgy as it is the traditional language of the Eastern

Church and it was the way the Melkite Church worshipped until fairly recently in our history, when certain cultural pressures forced a change to Arabic.

I urge all of you who have young children or grandchildren – please bring them each week to the Divine Liturgy. Look at what is happening in the Latin Mass communities – young people love it! They will also love the Melkite Liturgy – but they need to be exposed to it each and every week. We must keep the Faith of Our Fathers burning in the hearts of our youth!

Bring your children and grandchildren every week, sit up towards the front of the church and let them see the beauty of the Liturgy. Make each Sunday a special day for them. Prepare for the Liturgy the night before or early in the morning – find out the Saint of the Day and quickly go through the Gospel reading for Liturgy and explain it to your young people so that they are fully prepared before they enter the church. Tell them to watch out for the really special moments like the Little Entrance and the Great Entrance and explain why we bow and bless ourselves as the Holy Gifts are brought forward. Teach them the Trisagion ("Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One...") in English, Arabic and Greek so that they can join in. Teach them how to make the sign of the Cross and why the way we hold our fingers (three fingers together and the 4th and 5th clasped into the palm of the hand) is so important. Teach them the reverent way to receive Holy Communion and the importance of venerating the icons of their favourite saints. Talk to Abouna after mass and become fully part of the "family". Afterwards, for a special treat, take them for a celebratory lunch to McDonalds, or the local Lebanese restaurant – that will help to reinforce how special the whole day has been and tell them how much fun you have had together and that you look forward to doing it again the following week! Every kid and grandkid would love that!

I hope to see you, with all your young kids and grandchildren at the Divine Liturgy!
Dr John Obeid



ICON OF ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE AND FATHER OF THE BYZANTINE LITURGY.

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)

ST MICHAEL'S – AN ENDURING LEGACY

My ancestors were Maronite and Melkite Christians from Beirut and the village of Becharre. In 1886, having little in common with the oppressive Ottoman Empire, they migrated to Australia. As their loyalties were centred on village life, family and strong Christian beliefs they settled with other Syrian/Lebanese migrants in the area of Redfern and Waterloo in Sydney that was then known as the 'Syrian Quarter'. This tract of land around the inner city allowed them to belong somewhere, to connect with their past, and gain the support of a like-minded community as they strove to become a part of their new land. My ancestors did not abandon their roots, however, but infused their distinctive cultural heritage — different traditions, values and experiences, into their Australian lives forming their own hybrid Arabic/English place in the Colony.

Since 1891, when St Michael's Melkite Church was completed, there have been three generations of my family who were active parishioners in the establishment and ongoing life of this church. According to my Aunt Mary who was educated at Mount Carmel

School in Waterloo, "St Michael's was the centre of our community where my family would meet regularly to pray in Arabic, receive spiritual nourishment and provide social welfare to newly arrived migrants." (Mary Dadour c. 1996).

Owing to life cycles and the passing of my ancestors, I unfortunately lost important connections to St Michael's. Recently though, I have been reconnected to my family's long involvement and love of St Michael's through my association with The Australian Lebanese Historical Society. In 2021, I was invited by Jack Bettar to visit the Melkite Heritage Display at St Michael's where I discovered original church artefacts including an Icon of St Elias and a Sanctuary Lamp Holder, which, to my amazement, my great grandparents and grandparents had donated. Locating these artefacts provided my family with a sense of our Christian identity and our historical and cultural connections to St Michael's.

During the past two years, I have been creating artist books that document my ancestors' memories and stories. These books act as narratives with images woven into them that create visual



VIVIENNE AND HER SISTER, JOANNE, PICTURED AT ST MICHAEL'S CATHEDRAL.

descriptions and signifiers about our Lebanese community, culture, beliefs and traditions. The connections my family had to St Michael's inspired some of these books and the State Library of NSW recently acquired a selection for their permanent collections, thus ensuring an enduring legacy.

Vivienne Dadour

ST MICHAEL'S MELKITE CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL: HISTORY, FAITH AND FIDELITY

In May, we were all very excited to launch our book "St Michael's Melkite Catholic Cathedral: History, Faith and Fidelity", which commemorates 130 years of the rich Melkite heritage in Australia. The research for this book was undertaken from 2018 and the publication in 2022 is the culmination of years of work from a variety of invested individuals – epitomised in the inauguration of the Melkite Heritage Display at the Cathedral in 2021. It is my hope that this book will inspire its readers and help shed light on our humble beginnings in this 'Great Southern Land'.

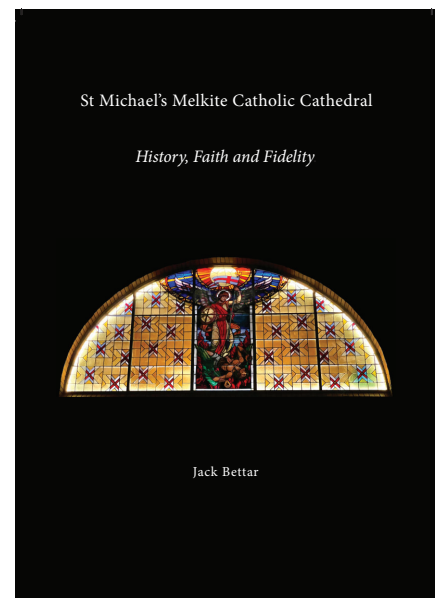
St Michael's Melkite Cathedral holds a very special place in my family's heart, for many reasons. My family's migration story was built on the existence of the Church, with my great-great-uncle, Archimandrite Malatios Chahoud, travelling to Australia in June 1934, specifically for a posting at St Michael's Melkite Catholic Church in Wellington Street, Waterloo. From that time, subsequent arrivals of my family, between 1935 and 1951, resided full-time in the presbytery, including both of my grandfathers (Elias 'Louis' Bettar

and Frank Chahoud) and my maternal grandfather's siblings: Josie, Issa, Ibrahim and Georgette.

Their zeal and love for St Michael's was clear. My grandfather, Elias, reminds me that, each morning, and aged 11, he helped serve the Divine Liturgy with Archimandrite Chahoud as an altar boy. My late great-uncle Issa was the cantor at St Michael's, and was the first of the family to get married there to Rita (née Sharah) in 1949. Our familial history with the Church is coloured by beautiful anecdotes, such as Cardinal Gilroy complimenting Georgette for her chanting of the hymn 'Enna al Baraya bi Asriha' dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Josie also recalled being the godmother for a number of babies whose parents did not have extended family in Sydney. Due to the fact he cleaned and prepared the Church, until now, my grandfather, Louis, can recount the exact numbers for the varying designs of brass candle sticks, the different altar coverings and the donors of icons.

My mother and her first cousins would be later baptised at St Michael's – in the same baptismal font in which

thousands of young Melkite children throughout the 20th and 21st centuries have entered their rite in. After moving to Darlington, it is where my parents were married and is where my sister and I were baptised. As one of the few Melkite Cathedrals outside the Middle East, St Michael's holds immense historical and cultural significance to the wider Syrian, Lebanese and Arab



St Michael's Melkite Catholic Cathedral: History, Faith and Fidelity (cont.)

migratory experience, many of whom have found solace and community within its welcoming arches.

So, as a descendent of two grandfathers and relatives who gave the larger part of their life, energy and unwavering dedication to the Melkite Church, I felt compelled to follow their legacies and properly record the history of this unique and beautiful Cathedral. In telling this story, it is one for all Melkites to aspire to and learn from. As an imposing site at the end of Abercrombie Street, in the vibrant inner-city of Sydney's Central Business District, we are very proud and fortunate to have purchased this site in 1977, which reflects so highly the presence of our relatively small Melkite flock in Australia and New Zealand. We fervently pray that St Michael's Cathedral will serve the future generations and remain as

both a grand symbol of our heritage and continue to be a sanctuary of the Byzantine liturgical tradition for many years to come.

This book details our ecclesiastical presence from its early beginnings in the late 19th century, including the consecration of the current Cathedral, until the present day. Further, select biographies of the early missionaries from the Basilian Chouerite Order, and other clergy, are included as inspirations. In writing this booklet, I was greatly assisted by the Dean of the Cathedral, Abouna Gerges Al Butros, who facilitated the renovation of the Display, provided historical texts and photographs, translations and organised the printing. Additionally, the following institutions offered their archives to form the historical narrative: National Library of Australia,

Sydney City Council Archives, National Archives of Australia, Trove, Australian Lebanese Historical Society, Sydney Catholic Archdiocesan Archives, Australian Catholic Historical Society, Land and Housing NSW Archives, State Library of NSW and NSW State Archives. Moreover, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the many individuals who have been instrumental in providing me historical resources, knowledge, encouragement and offering generously their time to my cause. I am eternally grateful.

Jack Bettar

(This book is available for purchase. For more information on how to obtain a copy, please contact any member of the Editorial Board of Together.)

MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA: A WOMAN WITH A MISSION

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the founder of the Missionaries of Charity and the winner of a Nobel Prize, has a remarkable story. Her incredible work in India was driven by her strong faith. Mother Teresa consistently claimed that she was simply responding to Christ's boundless love for her and for all humanity, the love that gave the world a great lesson in joyful and selfless love.

Mother Teresa's secret was in her prayer and her belief that Christ is present in the poor, whatever form that poverty might be. She strongly believed that all her work, her achievements, were not hers, but God's, that she was a channel, an instrument of his love. "If you remove Jesus from my life", she once said to a reporter, "my life is reduced to a mere nothing". She also said: "If there are poor in the world, it is because you and I do not give enough". In her seventies, Mother Teresa wrote her own philosophy of life, from which we can learn a great deal: "Life is an opportunity, grab it. Life is a beauty, admire it. Life is a dream, realize it. Life is a challenge, meet it. Life is a duty, complete it. Life is a wealth, keep it. Life is love, live it. Life is a mystery, know it. Life is a promise, fulfil it. Life is sorrow, overcome it. Life is a song, sing it. Life is a struggle, accept it. Life is an adventure, dare it. Life is life, save it.

Life is too precious, do not destroy it". These words were inscribed on a poster hanging in a home for AIDS sufferers that she and her sisters opened in 1985 in the very heart of New York city. She called this home "Gift of love".

On September 10, 1946, a date now celebrated annually by the Missionaries of Charity, known as "Inspiration Day", Mother Teresa experienced 'the call within a call'. She was to leave her convent and help the poor while living among them. It was an order. "To fail it, would have been, in her own words, to break the faith". She wanted to follow in the footsteps of Christ, who in St Mathew's Gospel (25:35) identified Himself to those in need: "For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me..."

On August 16th, 1946, Mother Teresa exchanged the religious habit she had worn for nearly 20 years as a Loreto nun for the new habit of her future congregation of the Missionaries of Charity. "To leave Loreto", she later said, "was my greatest sacrifice, the most difficult thing I have ever done. It was much more difficult than to leave my family and country to enter religious life..." Soon after Mother Teresa began her work in the slums of

Calcutta. In her diary, she wrote how her experience of a dying woman opened her eyes to the need of working with the suffering people.

With a group of young nuns, Mother Teresa began the work of serving the poorest of the poor, going begging from door to door, taking the proceeds to those who were starving in the streets, comforting the sick and the dying and teaching children the dignity of human life.

There are many stories about how poor the Missionaries nuns were. Mother Teresa always relied on Divine Providence. Once in Calcutta her small community had nothing to eat; suddenly a woman, unknown to them knocked at their door with some bags of rice. She told them that some inexplicable impulse brought her there. In the bags, there was enough rice for the evening meal. This was just one of many similar examples that God would meet the needs of those who totally trusted in Him. "The finger of God was always there". (At St Michael's Meals, some weeks when we think we have not got enough food to go around, as we are reaching more people in need, we receive food from unexpected sources...)

In her Nobel Prize Lecture (Dec. 10, 1979), Mother Teresa urged us to get to know the poor, look them in the eyes

Mother Theresa of Calcutta: a woman with a mission (cont.)

and give them a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love. A journalist from the U.S. who was visiting Mother Teresa, in Calcutta, asked her: "Are you married?" She said, "Yes and I find it sometimes very difficult to smile at Jesus because He can be very demanding." This is where love comes from. It can be demanding, yet we give

it to God with joy.

Mother Teresa once said: "By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, I am Indian. By faith I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling I belong to the world". And she did! She urged us to let God's love continue to inspire us, to give ourselves generously to the Jesus we all can see, by serving the poor, the sick,

the lonely and the abandoned! Here in Sydney, Australia, we have chosen Mother Teresa to be the Patron of our Seniors and Friends Group, and of St Michael's Meals. We are so blessed and privileged to walk in her footsteps and share her amazing vision!

Roda Kanawati

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF THE COVID PANDEMIC AND SOLUTIONS

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic struck the world suddenly and spread quickly, causing significant personal, financial and social destruction worldwide. The bio-psycho-social-spiritual effects of the pandemic were widespread, and required immediate responses from individuals, groups, organisations and governments.

The most obvious biological effects of the COVID-19 virus were the spread of infection within the body and from person to person. The infected person developed various symptoms according to their age and health condition, for example, fever, cough, tiredness, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, headache, aches and pains, diarrhoea, a rash on skin, or discolouration of fingers or toes, red or irritated eyes, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, loss of speech or mobility, or confusion, and chest pain. These have often led to serious complications and hospitalisations, and sometimes death.

The most common psychological effects of contracting the virus in adults and children included clinically significant symptoms of anxiety (fear), depression (sadness), distress, worry, uncertainty about the progress of the disease, the feeling of helplessness, shock and post-traumatic stress (PTSD). These presented in varying intensities.

The most common socio-economic effects of the pandemic generated following the quarantine (imposed isolation) were separation from loved ones and loss of freedom. These were further exacerbated by the economic repercussions of the social distancing, and the closure of all but essential services in the community. The effects were significant job and income losses. The most common spiritual effects of the pandemic were difficulties in attending and carrying out religious



activities in designated religious sites. Such spiritual and religious practices gave meaning and purpose to the believers, and helped constitute a supportive community, which are the necessary pillars for mutual support.

Despite these problems, the human population, demonstrating resilience and marked adaptation skills, immediately implemented compensatory strategies to cope with the social isolation into which they were forced: in fact, innumerable initiatives were created online to offer solidarity for physical, psychological and spiritual well-being. Online communities came together to practice recreational, sports and spiritual-religious activities "together." Medically too, the medical and pharmaceutical companies worked tirelessly to develop a vaccine that could act as an antidote to the virus. Different types of vaccines were manufactured within a short period and distributed worldwide with significant positive effects on our health. The rate of infections, hospitalisations and death were markedly reduced.

With such improvements in alleviating symptoms and preventing hospitalisation

and death, our psychological health and mental state eased significantly. We became much less anxious and depressed, and felt as if we were becoming more in control of our well-being. The widespread counselling resources available helped in this process, and we are urged to continue to use them.

The improved mental health improved further as our social isolation decreased with increased lifting of social restrictions in the community. So did our economic welfare, as businesses and commercial outlets opened and job opportunities increased.

Therefore, there is hope and "light at the end of the tunnel", as we continue to improve our bio-psycho-social-spiritual well-being. We can take charge of our overall health by making sure we are fully vaccinated, well connected with our loved ones (face-to-face or virtually), physically and mentally active, and spiritually nourished.

Hadi Stambouliah
Senior Psychologist,
St John of God Hospital, Burwood

BEHIND THE MASK

When you see a face, please do not misjudge the person, for the face you see is just a mask that one wears for protection and according to the occasion. A mask is the best means to hide one's true face. Along with masks, we all master the art of pretending until it becomes natural. We often use sweet words and superficial talk to hide our true selves, for fear that people will not like our true nature.

The mask may project the image of a courageous, self-confident, cheerful and gentle person, but such a façade should not prevent you from seeing the real person behind the mask. This person may be suffering from weakness, fear, isolation, bad thoughts, and be burdened by many issues.

Despite the fear, the person should have the courage to tell others about the complex truth of their life. Wearing masks is mostly intended to keep

friends, to protect against sarcastic looks due to lack of understanding and misjudgements, and to stop people from turning their back on you. You may not be the main reason that motivates a person to use masks, but you are an essential partner in the process that makes a terrified person pretend to be a confident one. Strength lies in your look that gives hope and depends on your attitude that shows your acceptance and love. This would be the best encouragement for taking off the masks, one by one. Therefore, let us love each other unconditionally, and show positive feeling after knowing the real person. This would be the best medicine for nourishing self-worth and accepting weaknesses and strengths.

Your love can do wonders in a person's life. You have a magical ability to tear down the walls behind which the truth is often hidden, and to free a



person from fear, confusion and masks. However, this is not an easy task, as you may have to deal with resistance to what is desperately needed.

My dear friends, every time you are kind, loving, encouraging and understanding, you contribute to reviving a desperate soul. Remember that your attitude and care will certainly help people remove their masks and be more themselves in the presence of others.
Abouna Gerges

MY JOURNEY WITH ST MICHAEL'S MEALS

I have been involved with St Michael's Meals since it was just an idea until today and it is hard to believe that five years have already passed since we started. The more I know the people we encounter every Wednesday during our food run, the more I like them. I feel close to them and understand that the only difference between them and us is merely due to circumstances. We all go through life not knowing which direction it will take us and most of us succeed in one way or another. Yes, we have worked hard, but some people worked equally hard and did not succeed. We met and made some good friends who had a positive influence on us; others, unfortunately, did not have the same opportunities. Some did not even have good, dedicated parents and ended up in the situation they are in now. We cannot and should not judge them. Mother Teresa said in one of her memorable quotes: "If you judge people, you have no time to love them". All we can do is love them and offer them as much help as we can. HELP is the key word here. In another quotation, she stressed that "love cannot remain by itself. It has no meaning. Love has to be put into action and that action is SERVICE."

During the time I have been volunteering for St Michael's Meals, I have been a witness to many challenging stories.

Here is a story about one man. He is someone you may have walked past; someone you may not even notice. He is a man without a home. If it weren't for St Michael's Meals, his face would have remained nameless to me. But I got to know him. This particular man was very quiet but over time I learned his story. He immigrated to Australia just like many of us. He found work in Australia using his skills and education, just like many of us. He married and had a son. Due to some poor financial decisions, his wife moved back to her homeland, taking their son, and he was left alone. Through no fault of his own, he lost his job and his friends and he struggled. He has no home and the little money he makes he sends to his wife and son. He is still very much a family man, sacrificing for the people he loves but left with nothing.

Since its inception, St Michael's Meals has worked tirelessly, not only in connecting with people who felt isolated, invisible and alone, like the above-mentioned friend, but also in restoring a sense of dignity to many. Sometimes you see tears in people's eyes because they really feel disempowered, having to ask for help. They take the home-made food with a lot of nutritious goodies (vegies, fruits, muffin, bread, egg etc.), they have a cup of coffee, tea or hot chocolate with



ABOUNA GERGES AND RODA KANAWATI
WITH ONE OF OUR HOMELESS FRIENDS.

our dedicated volunteers and chat about what's going on in their lives. Someone told me recently: "Seeing a friendly face that cares and asks about how we are – it makes all the difference. Again, Mother Teresa said: "Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing".

Vulnerable and isolated, people do not only need food. They need friendship, communication, they need people. The team at St Michael's Meals know that very well and they offer it. In one instance, one of our friends, the

My Journey with St Michael's Meals (cont.)

homeless, came late after we finished distributing the food. I apologised that we had ran out of food. His answer was: "I did not come only for food. I came to see you and to talk to you. You always treat us nice, you treat us like human beings, like we matter". Yes, they matter, and this is why we all do what we do, week after week. Remember to love others for who they are, see the beauty in the journey,

extend a hand, give back and believe in the power of simply being kind.

Hopefully with our attracting more volunteers, or, as Abouna calls them, 'our homeless angels', and financial support, we can reach more vulnerable and isolated people in our community. I heard Abouna often say that St Michael's Meals is the best pastoral activity that works inside a community and for a community through a church,

where we all share the love of Jesus. We all do it with great love and dedication. Early this year during the pandemic, when my brother, George, now a keen supporter of St Michael's Meals, started coming on Wednesdays to help prepack the food, I asked him, "Will you be coming next week?" His reply said it all, "Of course I will. It is addictive!"

Roda Kanawati

LETTER OF THANKS

I received this email regarding our contribution to the people in Beirut after the blast of 2020. It is very heart-warming indeed to know that our work has been recognised not only in Sydney but in all the underprivileged countries we helped during 2020-2021.

Norma Ghattas

Dear St Michaels' Meals team,

I would like to thank you for having helped my aunt, Thérèse Beheit, 2 years ago. I just found your envelope where my aunt had received an amount of \$200 in 2020 from your organisation. I had kept the envelope just to send you an email to say 'thank you' and could not find it again but tonight I just did! So, I decided that it was better late than never to write.

She had received this envelope back then from someone who was visiting Lebanon. It was in August 2020 and we had just been hit by the catastrophic blast. Her house was shattered (and ours too). She is 87 years old and not married with no children. My sister and I take care of her. We are the only family she has. And she is the last aunt that we have! (My parents passed away and she is my dad's sister.)

So, to make a long story short, someone had knocked at her door and after seeing that her home was wrecked and that she was barely able to clean up the mess, let alone pay for any glass to replace the broken ones, he had handed her this envelope and we never saw that person again.

We still don't know who this person was, but 2 years later, we just wanted to say thank you. It was a blessing because thanks to this person, and to you, she was able to fix her doors and replace the broken windows all over her house.

So, thank you so much and may God bless you for all the good things that you are doing.

We thanked you in our prayers so many times and I'm happy I just found your envelope again.

With our warmest wishes and love from Beirut,

ALINE BEHEIT

For my aunt, Thérèse Beheit

Dear Jesus, shed Your grace on us, so that we courageously engage in fighting division and exclusion in this world. Enlighten our minds to understand that though we are many, we are one in You. Help us to discover the essence of others, and become more compassionate, accepting, caring and loving. Amen

Sometimes we need a bridge and sometimes we are the bridge. No one, I know, has escaped troubled waters, rough seas and challenging scary days. There are times in our lives when we could use a little help and other times when we are given the chance to be that help for someone else. It really does not matter where you are right now. What matters that you remember we are stronger TOGETHER and taking a hand is just as important as offering one.

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

A heart to heart chat with Lydia Obeid

- **Tell me about yourself and your family.**

My family are all well established in their careers, and the grandchildren are busy studying. I cook for them every week and they are my main priority. I love them so much that I can't say 'no' to them. I have a boy and a girl and five grandchildren, plus a great-grandchild.

- **Why did you come to Australia?**

I had two children aged seven and six. There were many problems with the political situation in Lebanon. I couldn't sleep, worrying about my children's future. I wanted them to have a good education. What if my son went to uni in Beirut and somebody kidnapped him? They used to do this. So, I was trying to convince my husband to emigrate. At that time, he was working for the government as a health inspector. I asked my sister in Canada but she replied that it was too cold and reminded me I didn't like the snow. So, I said to my husband, why don't we try and if we don't like it we can come back to Lebanon. I asked my father if we had any relatives in Australia who could sponsor us. My mum said she had an uncle there. My husband didn't want to come until the last minute: he was happy with his work. We sent the papers to Beirut and they replied saying they would interview us in North Lebanon. I had lost a lot of weight because of stress. They talked to us. They asked us what kind of diseases we had in the family and why we wanted to go to Australia. I said I want my children to have the best possible education, but here is not safe. They said they'd let us know if Australia accepted us. We went back to Tripoli and after one week we received a letter, welcoming us to Australia.



LYDIA OBEID WITH ABOUNA GERGES, JANE KARAME AND MR LOUIS

My husband didn't want to come until the last minute: he was happy with his work. We sent the papers to Beirut and they replied saying they would interview us in North Lebanon. I had lost a lot of weight because of stress. They talked to us. They asked us what kind of diseases we had in the family and why we wanted to go to Australia. I said I want my children to have the best possible education, but here is not safe. They said they'd let us know if Australia accepted us. We went back to Tripoli and after one week we received a letter, welcoming us to Australia.

- **How did you feel when you first set foot on Australian soil? What were your first impressions of Australia?**

We came by plane. Lots of people sent food from Lebanon but it was all confiscated at Sydney Airport. I was very happy to be here; I couldn't believe I had finally arrived. That was my dream: to save my children. We landed on 13 January, 1968. We lived in Marrickville with my uncle, and after a month the children went to school at St Brigid's. We then rented a flat because I had found a job in a metal factory. I worked there for 9 years and then I found a job with Marrickville Council. I didn't have much English. I left the factory when I was sacked because another Lebanese lady wanted a job there. I was instructed to help her, which I did. She made up a story that I was hitting her and they believed her. I left one month before Christmas and then my daughter and her cousin found a job advertisement in the local newspaper for an early childhood teacher with Marrickville Council. She said, "Mum, you're a teacher, you love teaching. Why not apply?"

They employed me as an early childhood teacher. I worked there for five years and then the war in Vietnam ended and lots of Vietnamese migrants arrived. The government adopted a multicultural program for the children and their parents. They needed interpreters, multicultural aides and so on. My director had a big meeting at Marrickville Council and they decided they needed a multicultural coordinator, so Jennifer put my name forward. Then she came to me and said, "Lydia you have a new job! You are now Multicultural Officer and I'll give you an office." I had to organise everything for the Centre to make it comfortable for the parents and the children. I used to translate children's books from English to Arabic, and these books were given to the parents to read at home. I started to go to TAFE 2 nights a week to do English literacy. I did the job of Multicultural Coordinator for 27 years. I used to liaise with the State Government so they could see what I needed. I was very happy in the job, but my husband became ill. He asked me to resign. He said, "I want to have breakfast with you every day, Lydia." After a year he passed away, and then I wished I'd never left the job!

- **How did you manage with English when you first came?**

At first I used body language. When I worked in the metal factory they taught me to say, "Sid, bloody machine no good!" if it wasn't working properly. One day they were having a meeting, all the officers, and the machine shut down: it was a big job. I went to the office and knocked on the door and said, "Sid, bloody machine no good!", and they howled with laughter. And I thought, "What did I say?"

- **What did you find strange about Australians and the way of life here?**

I didn't find it strange, I found it very friendly. I can't say anything bad about Australia and the weather is like Lebanon. I love Australia, I can give my life for Australia. God bless this country because everywhere I go, I find support. In the factory, Sid and his wife, Isabelle, used to explain everything and teach me new vocabulary. But when that lady came and caused trouble, she gave me a big headache.

- **What do you miss about Lebanon?**

My parents, and my mother-in-law were old. My mum had said, "Go and see the world, and learn. You'll learn something new every day of your life." I went back a few times to see my family. That's what I missed in Lebanon.

- **When you look back on your life, what things stand out the most? What can you teach us about life in general?**

Be happy, serve God, be honest with people, don't gossip and don't judge people. I stopped visiting people after my husband died. Very few people came to his funeral. Before his death, we used to invite people for a barbecue every weekend. Since that time, I realised people were using me, abusing me, eating our food and stabbing us in the back. So I cut back my visits to certain people. I don't like to socialise with gossips. I like to be honest with people.

Getting to know one another (cont.)

- After telling us about your migration to Australia, what conclusion would you make?

I was 32 when I arrived here. I would have loved to join the army. I'd love to be able to defend my country, Australia. From 17 to 35, young people should be in the army reserve, not in the street taking drugs. I'd like to be Prime Minister to show how to lead the country. Bipartisanship is what we need: the political parties working together. Politicians need to work for Australia, not for themselves. I owe this country a great debt of gratitude. I would give my life for Australia.

Prepared by Jane Karame.

We need more people like Lydia in this world. We can all learn a lesson or two from this great lady!

ST MICHAEL'S MEALS ACTIVITIES

St Michael's Meals day, 5th Anniversary, 2022

St Michael's is now over five years old, going from strength to strength, with more commitment, more services, more volunteers and more members. There are many reasons for celebration; what started as an idea to feed homeless people near Central Station, is now an organised group of dedicated volunteers feeding nearly 160 homeless in three locations in Sydney: Central Station, Martin Place and Liverpool. So, on Sunday 20th of February 2022, St Michael's Meals Day was celebrated at St Michael's Cathedral with over 100 members of the congregation present. It was held in conjunction with the All Souls' mass devoted to the memory of our departed loved ones, as well as to the Meat Fare Sunday.

In his homily, Abouna Gerges spoke of Matthew 25:31-40, which says: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'" Asked about when that happened, Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me".

Living in one of the richest countries in the world can blind us to the fact that in the near vicinity is someone sleeping rough on a bench in the park, or spending the night hungry and inadequately clothed, and these people indeed constitute the very essence of St Michael's Meals' mission. If we give a little to those in desperate need, we can make their lives more tolerable.

Following the Liturgy, we heard three short, inspiring speeches, by Jane Karame, our President, Jack Bettar and Norma Ghattas who spoke about the objectives and the work of St Michael's Meals, and that was followed by a video presentation prepared by Jack Bettar and documenting the work undertaken by our dedicated and hardworking volunteers. The day ended with a delicious lunch of shawarma, followed by watermelon and Lebanese sweets, offered by St Michael's Meals. All the participants had a marvellous time in a beautiful, family atmosphere.

Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the feast of St Michael's Meals. May all here present who celebrate with us, be moved to give of their time and resources to help us maintain and expand our mission

What a fun day for everyone: our big garage sale!



On the 9th and 10th of July 2022, thanks to the generous donation of new garments we received at St Michael's Meals, from two of our very committed volunteers, Vicki and Christine Raffoul, we organised a big garage sale. It was indeed a delight to welcome so many. Our community hall looked amazing with all these colourful, beautiful garments, spread over the many tables. We had a constant flow of visitors as the weather decided to put on its best appearance by giving us a reprieve from the constant rain of the last weeks. People came, all looking for a bargain, enjoying our sausage sizzle, and special jam and cream scones, prepared by the very capable hands of Abouna and the Ladies' Fraternity. The big surprise was the music. Bill entertained us with songs from the 60s and 70s and even in Arabic and French. Some of our volunteers could not resist getting up and trying a few steps to the beat of his nostalgic music. All in all, it was a very successful event and the big winners were of course our friends, the needy. The support you all gave went directly to them.

A heartfelt thank you!

KITCHEN CORNER

A Taste of Lebanon: Sambousek

My name is Laudie Nakhl and I have been a member of St Michael's Melkite Cathedral for 46 years and a member of the Ladies' Fraternity for approximately 20 years. My Church and my family are my life and my happiness. I love when all my children and grandchildren come over for a weekly gathering. Everybody always loves Tayta Laudie's food and my most requested dish is *sambousek*.

This is my recipe

Dough

1kg plain flour
0.5kg self-raising flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
1 cup vegetable oil
Approximately 1.5 cups of warm water, added slowly when kneading the dough.

Meat Stuffing

1kg minced meat (lamb)
7 medium onions finely chopped
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon white pepper
1 teaspoon mixed spices
0.5 teaspoon cinnamon
1 cup roasted pine nuts
1 tablespoon pomegranate molasses

Method

- Brown the meat in a frying pan then add pomegranate molasses.
- Leave the mince to cool down and rest the dough for at least one hour. Ensure the dough is covered with Gladwrap and a tea towel.
- Roll the dough and cut it into circles.
- Fill each circle with one tablespoon of mince, then close the edges of the dough and twist into a design.
- Deep fry the pies in vegetable oil. *Sahtain!*



LAUDIE NAKHL (ABOVE) AND HER FINISHED SAMBOUSEK (BELOW).



FERNANDO

A young man, probably in his early forties, Fernando is of a slim build, darkish complexion, and has a quiet, gentle character. Originally from The Philippines, Fernando found it difficult to start a career in Sydney, and certainly not by choice, he ended up on the street. For the last few Wednesdays, he joined the queue at Central Station to receive the food distributed by St Michael's Meals. However, this was not what he wanted; his aim was to work and be able to support himself, and he frequently asked Abouna Gerges to pray for him to find a job. On one Sunday, he even found his way to St Michael's Cathedral at Darlington and attended the Mass, even though it was in a language he did not understand. Obviously, the prayers helped and last week, Fernando came to Central Station, not to collect the food, but with a big smile to deliver a small envelope to Abouna. Opening the envelope, Abouna found in it a \$50 note. When asked: "What is it for?"; Fernando said: "God listened to your prayers, and I have got a part-time job". Abouna advised him to keep the money because he needs it more than we do. Yet, he answered: "I am very grateful for what you do, and this is only a small token of gratitude".



Every life is a wonderful story worthy of being told. Every life is a work of art, and if it does not seem so, perhaps it is only necessary to illuminate the room that contains it. The secret is never to lose faith, to have confidence in God's plan for us, revealed in the signs with which He shows us the way. If you learn to listen, you will find that every life speaks to us about love. Because love is the key to everything, the engine of the world.

IN LOVING MEMORY...

Forever in our hearts

Archimandrite Aftimos Haddad



Archimandrite Aftimos Haddad BCO was affectionately known to us as "Monsignor Haddad". For many years he was our only Melkite Greek Catholic priest in New South Wales. Monsignor baptised and confirmed us, solemnised our marriages, anointed our sick and dying, and buried our loved ones. Monsignor Haddad was our priest, pastor, spiritual father, confessor, brother in Christ, counsellor, and dear friend. Even though I only met Monsignor Haddad in the twilight of his priestly ministry in 1989 it was obvious that he was a most prayerful and spiritual man who genuinely loved the flock which had been entrusted to his priestly care so many years before. The first Liturgy of St John Chrysostom which I ever attended was celebrated by Monsignor on a weekday at St Michael's Cathedral. It was a truly spiritual experience. After the Liturgy, as I was the only congregant, Monsignor took me upstairs to the Eparchy sitting room to gently enquire why I was there. I told him that I was a "liturgical refugee" and he most graciously explained a little about the Melkites. This conversation began the firm friendship that Monsignor and I developed, and which lasted until he fell asleep in the Lord. After his retirement from active ministry, Monsignor and I had very many happy moments when I took him around to visit his old friends. It gave me great joy to see the pure excitement in the faces of his former parishioners when Monsignor turned up at their front door, sometimes unexpectedly. As Monsignor's health deteriorated, I became his unofficial guardian and carer and it was my privilege to be able to ensure that this great man of God, our dear Monsignor Aftimos, received the best care that was available for retired Catholic priests in Sydney. A few years later God granted me the great privilege of being with my dear friend when he drew his last breath in hospital. Thank you, Monsignor, for having been my priest and my friend.

Moira Kelly

Salma Yazigi



During her 93 years Salma Yazigi was the beloved wife of Elias, the loving mother to Alice, the late Ibrahim, Laurice, Morris, Joe, Anthony, Grace and Denise. A proud grandmother of 23 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren, Salma was truly one of a kind and a true matriarch to her family which meant the world to her. She was a kind, strong, loving, forgiving, beautiful woman who only saw the good in everyone and everything around her. Salma loved to be surrounded by her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and filled her home with love, she always had time for others. You would never leave without a full stomach or a smile on your face. Despite the language barrier she would make friends with all of her neighbours while out on her walks and could tell you each of their stories. She has been a devoted member of the St Michael's Church community since arriving in Australia in the early 70's. Her love and faith of the church and Christianity has been instilled in those around her and created the path for her children and grandchildren to follow. She departed this life on the 2nd of August 2018 and will be remembered, loved and forever missed by her family and loved ones. May she rest in eternal peace.

The Yazigi Family

Georgette Raffoul Call to our Angel



We called above to heaven,
To bless us with its grace,
We called to you our Angel,
To see your smiling face.

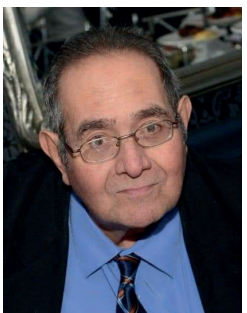
With every dawn we miss you,
With fall of night we cry,
The comfort of your memory,
As on our beds we lie.

But every now and then,
We hear your favourite song,
And realise you our Angel,
Were with us all along.

But till we meet our Angel,
Our tears will surely fall,
Heaven needed angels,
And you answered your call.

Christine, Vicky and Michael Raffoul

Elias Zarzour



Elias was born in Khartoum, Sudan, and raised a Christian by Catholic parents. He was the first grandson of the Zarzour family and was loved and spoiled by all his family. Elias was educated at Comboni College, Khartoum. He finished school and succeeded in the Sudanese School Certificate (HSC), then studied at Cairo University, Khartoum Branch, for his Bachelor of Accounting. After graduation he got a job at a leading petrol company as an accountant. Being a hard worker, he was loved and respected by his managers, supervisors and all his colleagues. Settling down in his position, he got married and was blessed with a son and a daughter. He was very kind, caring and devoted to his family as a husband and father. Elias was responsible for lots of activities in the Catholic Church, such as the Legion of Mary and Don Bosco Fair Festival. After migrating to Australia with his family, he continued his career in accounting. In addition, he trained as an auto mechanic. All his life, he was an excellent handyman. Elias will always be loved and dearly missed by all his family and friends. May His Memory Be Eternal.

The Zarzour Family

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 Geroges Al Butros

UPDATE FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

In conjunction with the name-change of St Michael's Meals to St Michael's Community Services (in line with a wider scope for our activities), the Editorial Board of 'Together' will now be receiving your feedback and enquiries via our new email address.

together@smcs.org.au

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 to get involved and let people in the wider community learn about our mission. You can easily visit our website and become a member and



THE EDITORIAL BOARD FOR TOGETHER, (L-R) JACK BETTAR, JANE KARAME, RODA KANAWATI AND ABOUNA GERGES.

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.smcs.org.au

Angela Shalhoub

www.smcs.org.au

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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