

MEDIA RELEASE



Maronite Eparchy of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania Gifted with a New Priest at Christmas

Sydney, Australia - January 2021 - It was a joyous day of celebration as the newest Maronite Priest, Father Michael Boudaher, was ordained by Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay, Eparch of the Eparchy of Australia, New Zealand, and Oceania, on Saturday 18 December 2021 at Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Thornbury, Melbourne.

In his homily, during Father Michael's ordination, Bishop Tarabay expressed his great joy, emphasising that the call to priestly ministry is indeed a great gift, "Each soul is infinitely precious to God, and each priest is a reminder that the priesthood was initiated by Our Lord for the salvation of souls.

"For those who answer the call to the priesthood, as Father Michael has, the gift offered by God is of unimaginable grace. The priest becomes the bridge between humanity and the divine. He is the door through whose ministry in the sacraments, especially the Eucharistic miracle, eternal graces descend to the earth. He acts in the person of Christ when he stands at the altar."

Although a promising career in law was ahead of him, Father Michael, the only son of faithful Maronites Jack and Wadad Boudaher, heard and accepted the direct call from the Lord ten years ago, to be a priest. Even though this was not something he had previously considered, he joined the seminary in 2015, upon completion of his Bachelor of Laws.

Father Michael said the Lord had extended His hand, touching his heart and leaving an indelible mark, "The words from Saint John's Gospel *You did not choose me, but I chose you* (Jn 15:16) vividly capture my vocation and this is why I have chosen them for my priestly motto. Almighty God has bestowed upon me a great gift and mystery that leads me to proclaim with our Blessed Mother: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour (Lk 1:46-47)."

"Throughout my life, my parents nourished my faith, and when I was a young child, creative play sometimes meant I 'put on a Mass' for my family. Whilst I did everything except take up a collection, unbeknown to me and my family were the early workings of the Holy Spirit and the seeds of a vocation to the priesthood."

After thanking Father Michael's parents for the gift of their son, Bishop Tarabay addressed Michael saying, that despite the journey to priesthood not being a straightforward one, "Our Lord's plans are a mystery; He disrupted your laid out plans, as He revealed His plan for your life, to which you answered, 'yes' and surrendered yourself entirely into His hands."

An elated Father Michael said, "I am thankful to the numerous people in my life who have been praying for me, guiding, and supporting me over all these years. It has truly been a journey, though it is far from over. For the adventure in and with Christ never ends and the work and service to His flock awaits.

"I go forward now to serve wherever God wants me to be His instrument, holding Our Lady's hand and consecrating my priesthood to her, that I may faithfully and fruitfully fulfill this mission, and so, proclaim with my entire life the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ."

And now, with the boundaries of the Maronite Catholic Eparchy of Australia expanded to include New Zealand and all the countries of Oceania – with a population of 41 million, spanning Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia – even more workers will soon be needed on the ground in the Lord's Vineyard.

Bishop Tarabay's plan of pastoral and missionary priorities reflect a key focus on vocations, "Our Eparchy is a fertile soil for vocations to the priestly and the consecrated lives. We continue to encourage vocations in our parishes and our families and pray that the door of formation in wisdom and spiritual discipleship is open, that both may be in accordance with the heart of the Lord."

Fr Michael celebrated his first Mass the day after his ordination. He said there is great beauty in the priest's mission to be a bearer of Christ's message of hope, "How thankful and humbled I am...For God has entrusted to the priest the task, at once challenging and uplifting, of working with Him in building a civilisation of hope in Jesus Christ.

It is precisely the hope in Jesus Christ that will give us the antibodies we need to confront adversity, such as the ones presented over the past two years due to the pandemic.

"Pray for our priests that they may be faithful to this mission of hope and so be the light that guides all people to the One who shows us in a definitive manner that God is truly with us," concluded Father Michael.

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