



# MARONITE EPARCHY OF AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND AND OCEANIA

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Australian Maronite Church Ordains Three Married Men**

**Sydney, Australia, 31 July** - The Maronite community is rejoicing, with the Ordination of Fr Ron Hassarati, Fr Joseph Maatouk and Fr Mekhael Gebrael to the Priesthood, by His Excellency Antoine Charbel Tarabay, Maronite Bishop of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania on 29 July at Our Lady of Lebanon Co-Cathedral, Harris Park.

In a first for the Maronite Eparchy, all three priests are married men and fathers.

Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay praised the unique journeys of Ron, Joseph and Mekhael adding, "They have answered the call to serve God's people with dedication, love and compassion. For as priests, our call is to be humble shepherds, recognising that it is Jesus who leads His Church, and He is entrusting us to look after His flock."

Married with three children, Fr Ron Hassarati, who grew up in the Canterbury-Bankstown area, studied Theology and Religious Education. He is the author of two books and has worked as a teacher at the Maronite College of the Holy Family for 34 years. He sees his role as an extension of his teaching, spreading the message of the Gospel and the Good News.

"Jesus came for the sinners, not the righteous. I'm a sinner who has been touched by the mercy of God and also called by His mercy. And this is the core of my faith and what motivates me," said Fr Ron whose motto is "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Luke 5:31).

Fr Joseph Maatouk, who migrated from Lebanon to Australia in 1976, had a successful career as a hotel chef, and owned restaurants and a catering business before dedicating himself to helping those struggling with addiction. He has been a counsellor for MaroniteCare since 2017, which he calls a vocation within a vocation and a calling within a calling, adding, "I felt drawn to people

who are struggling and that's why I took up this mission."

Fr Joseph who is married with two children and grandchildren said that being able to balance family life and priesthood will come with God's grace, "I'm not on this journey by myself, my wife has been with me the whole time, and we continue to share this journey." His chosen motto is: "You have seduced me, God, and I have let myself be seduced" (Jer 20:7).

Fr Mekhael Gebrael, born in North Lebanon, completed a Bachelor of Philosophy and a Bachelor of Theology in Lebanon before taking on various pastoral missions in nursing homes, schools, and hospitals. Married with two young children, Fr Mekhael has served at many parishes in the Eparchy as Subdeacon and Deacon. His motto "My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God" (Psalm 84:2) reflects the joy he feels while doing pastoral work with the youth.

Fr Mekhael, whose parents flew over from Lebanon to witness his ordination said, "My dad was the first person to direct me towards the Church. He was always involved in the Church when I was younger and because of him, I grew up in it. I'm very happy to have him by my side at my ordination."

As the Maronite Eparchy of Australia celebrates its Golden Jubilee Year, with the relics of Maronite and Australian Saints have been touring all parishes, Bishop Tarabay reminded the new priests that they are not alone in their sacred calling, for the Saints serve as intercessors and role models, and their fellow clergy and parish communities stand beside them on this holy journey.

May the joy of the priesthood always dwell in the hearts of the new priests as they administer the sacraments, celebrate the Eucharist, and accompany God's people through the highs and lows of life, finding strength in their intimate relationship with Christ and the intercession of the Blessed Mother.

**ENDS**