



MARONITE EPARCHY OF AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND AND OCEANIA

Press Release

Australian Maronite Youth Join Bishop Tarabay in Historic Visit of Pope Leo to Lebanon

Beirut, Sydney — 4 December 2025, The Maronite Bishop of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, Bishop Antoine Charbel Tarabay, led a delegation of more than 40 young Australian Lebanese from the Maronite community on a historic pilgrimage to Lebanon for Pope Leo XIV's apostolic visit. The three-day visit, held from 30 November to 2 December 2025, marked Pope Leo's first trip to Lebanon since his election and centred on a message of hope and peace for the country and the broader Middle East.

At the meeting with Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Men and Women and Pastoral Workers in Harissa, Bishop Tarabay met Pope Leo and greeted him personally, a warm handshake that symbolised the living bond between the Maronite diaspora, their homeland and the Holy See.

“As a Maronite bishop serving the faithful in Australia, I was honoured to receive the blessing of His Holiness the Pope and to thank him for his timely visit to Lebanon in support of peace. The meeting brought great joy to the Lebanese community in Australia, especially Maronites, and is a blessing I carry back to our Church,” Bishop Tarabay said. He continued, “Blessed are the peacemakers, not merely the peace lovers. Peace demands action, commitment and sacrifice. We are called to make peace happen, not simply to hope for it, just as Pope Leo is calling us and teaching us through his visit.”

Reflecting on Lebanon's enduring role, Bishop Tarabay recalled Saint Pope John Paul II's words: *“Lebanon is more than a country. Lebanon is a message.”* He noted that the Pope's presence was for all people, not only for Catholics or Maronites: “His visit is to promote peace, to promote social justice, and certainly to promote hope for the people of Lebanon and for the region.”

The Australian delegation was accompanied by Fr Danny Nouh, Dean of Our Lady of Lebanon Co-Cathedral in Sydney, who underscored the visit's call to action. “For our young people, this pilgrimage was more than a journey, it was a chance to discover their identity, connect with their roots, and stand alongside their peers in Lebanon during a truly historic moment. The encounter with Pope Leo and participation in the Youth event at Bkerke will remain with them for the rest of their lives,” Fr Nouh said.

During their pilgrimage, the youth met with Patriarch Bechara Boutros Cardinal Rai in a special visit and participated in the Youth event at Bkerke with Pope Leo, an unforgettable

moment of prayer and unity. For many, it was their first visit to Lebanon. Christiane Shina shared, “Visiting Lebanon for the first time helped me understand more about my identity and my roots. I felt deeply connected to my heritage.” She added, “Being part of the Youth event in Bkerke and meeting the Patriarch made me feel closer to my family’s faith and culture than ever before.”

Under the fatherly guidance of Bishop Tarabay, the young pilgrims will return to Australia carrying renewed hope and a deeper connection to their roots and heritage. Their encounter with Pope Leo XIV, the blessing of Patriarch Rai, and their participation in the Youth event at Bkerke with the Holy Father together marked a milestone for them. It was a reminder that peace is not simply wished for, it is lived, nurtured, and made real through faith and unity.

-END-

For media enquiries: media@maronite.org.au