

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

SOLEMN MASS MARKS THE FEAST OF SAINT MAROUN AND LAUNCHES THE 2026 YEAR OF PRAYER FOR PEACE

Sydney, 10 February- The Maronite Eparchy of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania gathered in deep faith and unity on Sunday for the Solemn Mass celebrating the Feast of Saint Maroun at St Maroun's Cathedral, Redfern. The liturgy, presided over by His Excellency Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay, marked a significant moment for the Maronite community with the formal launch of the **2026 Year of Prayer for Peace**.

A Message Rooted in Hope and Renewal

Bishop Tarabay reflected on the life of Saint Maroun, describing him as *"a lighthouse, guiding others to God."* He highlighted the saint's pastoral wisdom and relevance today: *"He received the wisdom of the Church and the saints and adapted it with great pastoral sensitivity to the needs of his time. He spoke to the people where they were, and he led them where God was calling them to be."*

Drawing on the Gospel, Bishop Tarabay added, *"Whoever clings to life in a self-centred way will lose it, but whoever offers his life to God will preserve it for eternal life."*

Launch of the 2026 Year of Prayer for Peace

During the celebration, Bishop Tarabay formally announced that 2026 will be observed as the Year of Prayer for Peace across the Eparchy, under the theme: *"My peace I give to you"* (John 14:27).

He recalled the Holy Father's recent prayer for peace at the tomb of Saint Charbel in Annaya, Lebanon,

"For the world, we ask for peace... We especially implore it for Lebanon and for the entire Levant. But we know well, there is no peace without conversion of hearts."

Bishop Tarabay continued, *"This Year of Prayer for Peace is not simply an initiative. It is a call to holiness. When Christ reigns in the heart, peace begins to grow, and when that peace lives in many hearts, it has the power to renew society itself."*

He also addressed the need for unity in Australia, drawing on the spirituality of Saint Maroun, saying, *"It is a spirituality that rejects antisemitism, hate speech, and all forms of division. The answer does not begin with strategies or programs, but with reconciliation, unity, and a renewed commitment to the common good of our nation."*

Blessing of the Commemorative Candles

At the conclusion of the Mass, representatives from Maronite parishes and colleges across Australia and New Zealand received commemorative candles blessed by Bishop Tarabay. These candles will be placed in communities from Western Australia to Auckland, symbolising a shared commitment to prayer for peace throughout 2026.

Upcoming Initiatives Announced

Bishop Tarabay also shared two significant developments for the Eparchy:

Opening of the Transformation Centre, Dooralong – 2 March

“With God’s grace, we will open the Transformation Centre in Dooralong in NSW, in collaboration with Courtly Roy. This centre is a place of hope for those suffering from addiction... a concrete expression of the Church’s maternal care.”

Opening of Saint Rita’s Church, Guildford – later this year

“A new church is a sign that faith continues to grow, and it will become another spiritual home for Maronites in Sydney.”

Reflections from Civic and Religious Leaders

Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW, spoke about the Maronite community’s contribution to Australia’s multicultural identity and said, *“The wonderful thing about Australia is that we can be Australian... and the Maronite community has brought so much richness to Australia. These communities make up the vibrancy of Australia — they are the story of Australia.”*

His Eminence Cardinal Mykola Bychok offered words of gratitude amid the suffering of the Ukrainian people saying, *“We trust in God... our people are having a difficult time, but we are still praying because we know that true peace comes from God.”*

Distinguished Guests in Attendance

The celebration was honoured by the presence of:

- **Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC**, Governor of NSW, and **Mr Dennis Wilson**
- **His Eminence Cardinal Mykola Bychok**, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church
- **Most Reverend Joseph Naffah**, visiting from Lebanon
- **Most Reverend Robert Rabbat**, Melkite Eparchy
- **His Grace Bishop Anba Daniel**, Coptic Orthodox Diocese
- **Right Reverend Archimandrite Nabil Kashab**, representing the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese
- **Very Reverend Msgr Marcelino Youssef**, Vicar General, and clergy of the Eparchy
- **Her Excellency Mrs Sarah Al Dirani**, Consul of Lebanon in Sydney, and **Mr Jaafar Mehydeen**
- **Very Reverend Tony Fakhry**, Lebanese Maronite Order
- **Reverend Sr Elham Geagea** and the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family

- **Right Reverend Abbot Simon Abboud**
- Local councillors, community leaders, Maronite organisations, Lebanese political representatives, parish sodalities, and parishioners.

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