

October 1, 2017

Guidelines for the establishment of Maronite Missions in our communities.*

As our communities across the United States are growing, so must our Maronite Church. In an effort to help members of our communities begin the process of forming a Maronite Mission in their area, and most importantly, in an effort to preserve and grow our Maronite heritage and Church in the United States, following are some basic guidelines to assist the laity in the development of a Mission.

First, you must believe that it can be done. It is not an easy task, you will run into obstacles and negativities, keep the faith and it will happen with the grace of God.

- Gather 20 – 30 individuals or families in your community, expand your territorial reach, our people will travel to attend a Maronite Liturgy. Once those families come together and affirm their commitment, dedication, willingness and eagerness to start building a Maronite home for the next generation, a Church is born.
- Submit to your Bishop a letter signed by all the families indicating their desire to start a Maronite Mission in their community, one or two individuals must take on the role of coordinating this effort. Once the Bishop determines that your community is ready, he will contact the local Roman Catholic Bishop to present the Mission in his jurisdiction. This will assist you in finding a home for your small group. It is recommended that you contact local Catholic Churches and ask them if they can host you once or twice a month on Sundays. Please note that you do not want to contact Churches that have more than one Mass on Sunday or Saturdays, those churches have large congregations and are too busy to host a new group. Try to find a Church that has one Mass on Sunday or Saturday and you will find them very welcoming. Try to arrange for a small monthly rent so you are not burdened with a large financial commitment. If a Catholic Church is not available, you could reach out to other denomination Churches, that is; if they do not have a conflict with us. However, it would make things much easier and simpler as you are beginning your journey to be at a Catholic church, we share common traditions and sacraments.
- Once you find a home, contact your Bishop to assign you a traveling priest. Contact the office of the eparchy to obtain the Mass Books, the Book of Letters and the Gospel. Those will become the property of the Mission. Try to stay consistent with your Mass schedule and time. If you set up a Mass once a month at 4:00 p.m., stay with it. A family or more have to be able to host the visiting priest overnight if need be, hotel expenses should be avoided. Discuss with the Bishop as to compensation of the visiting priest.

- Insurance. You will need to purchase a liability insurance for the mission through the Eparchy office, contact them and they will send you the forms, it is a simple process and a small annual fee. This is very important to set up before you have your first Mass. It will protect you and everyone involved in the case of any accidents. When holding future events/benefits at the mission and are expecting a large number of people, a “Per event” policy should be purchased through the same insurance company, (Catholic Mutual Group).
- Choir. Music adds so much to our liturgy, having a choir even if it is only few people is very important. Find a choir director and encourage everyone to join the choir, try to find a member who plays music and get them involved. The choir director will coordinate the Mass hymns with the priest, all Maronite Music books/notes can be acquired from the eparchy office or other close by Churches, reach out and get them to your mission. Your Mass will be more beautiful and engaging and this will keep people coming if they enjoy the service.
- Set up a mission e-mail address and contact list. All members should reach out to everyone they know and inform of them of the establishment of the Mission, Maronites and non Maronites alike. Set up a face book page and a simple web site (There are free or very inexpensive sites), reach out to members to volunteer their time in setting this up, you don’t have to hire professionals to do it, keep in mind you are starting with very little funding. Post Mass schedules as ahead of time as possible on the sites and via direct e-mail. It is a good idea to have a pot luck meal after every Mass in the beginning, it will get people to spend time together and get to know each other; this will help with the growth of the mission.
- Develop a good relationship with the hosting Church community and priest, invite them to special Masses, when the Bishop visits, brunches, etc., and ask them to post your Mass schedule and events in their church bulletin. Remember you are building a Church community for all. Be very respectful of the Church facility you are using, make sure you leave everything better than it was when you used it. The Church, the altar, the hall, the kitchen, the cry room, the musical equipment, etc.
- Refer to the Eparchy manual for the collection of money on Sundays or any other events and adhere to it. The Chancery office can provide you with that. Discuss the protocol with the Bishop. An account has to be set up at a local bank under the name of the Mission, the Bishop’s signature is required on the account as well as two responsible members of the community. Two signatures must be required on the issuing of any checks for the expenses of the mission.
- Plan simple gatherings and events at the mission, retreats around Easter, Christmas, social evenings, pilgrimages to local shrines, Cathedrals, it is good to show the community that the Mission is active beyond the one or two Masses you hold in the beginning. Volunteer at local soup kitchens, put together a Food Drive Collection for a local shelter, food pantry. This gets the members involved in community work especially the youth and reflects well on the Mission.

- It is going to take many hours, patience, dedication and prayers to keep the mission going, some Masses you will have 10 people in attendance and some days you will have 50. Do not despair, keep the faith and stay the course. It will take the community a while to get used to the idea of a new Church, persistence pays off.

****Please note that eparchial – canonical rules & bylaws relating to the establishment of a Maronite mission should be referred to when setting up the mission papers. The document can be obtained from the office of the eparchy.***

Document prepared by Vera Maalouf for adaptation to NAM Workshop & Education Office.

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The following guideline has been reviewed for adaptation by:

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