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***The Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon  
Establishes the Secular  
Order of The Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph***

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*Create in me a pure heart O Lord; renew your holy spirit within me.*

With praise and gratitude to Almighty God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and with filial devotion to Our Blessed Mother Mary and Saint Joseph, the just one, we respond to the prompting of the Holy Trinity to formally establish in the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon the Secular Order of the Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

The purpose of the Order is the sanctification of the members for the greater glory of God, the salvation of one's soul and for all who undertake the pursuit of evangelical perfection in the world. "To love the Lord Thy God with all one's heart, with all one's soul, with all one's strength and with all one's will. To love Thy neighbor as thy self. Yes, to love Him with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength and all your will is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice" (Mark 12: 30-31,33).

The Christian life of the members is inspired and nourished by the spirituality and guidance of our Maronite Church, which reflects the teachings of the Master who founded His Church and walked upon our soil.

The members live out their call in the world in their families, relationships, employment and the culture to allow the Lord Jesus to use them in the coming of the Kingdom.

The Order strives to live the spirit of the evangelical counsels by living "a deep sense of faith in God's love (1John 4: 16) in holiness, fidelity, by virtue of humility which, as we know, is the mother of all Christian virtues. "Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart," said the Lord Jesus (Matthew 11:29). Members learn how to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit and to know the "ways of Grace" as given to us by the Fathers of the Church both in the east and in the west. Members strive to live the Spirit of the evangelical counsels by living chastity according to their state of life. The counsel of poverty of spirit is expressed by a lifestyle of simplicity, using their goods as a means to an end.

Obedience is lived out by striving to become freer from unruly attachments so that the will of God can be discerned and followed by submission to the legitimate authority as expressed by the Magisterium of the Church. The members will strive to put into practice the guidelines of the rules in the context of a daily life, avoiding the temptations to be either lax or scrupulous.

## *Daily Life*

Faithful to Our Blessed Lord's invitation and to His example of praying without ceasing, to our holy fathers and saints of our Maronite traditions, the members will prefer before all else to remain in the presence of God, continually fulfilling His holy will as we read in the Vatican II Decree of the Apostolate of the Laity.

To live in the presence of God not only in the spirit of prayer but also the exercise of prayer. They will practice prayer itself for at least a half hour each day in an atmosphere of interior silence and solitude. "They will be careful to let the hearing of God's Word especially in the Church's liturgy and in the exercise of spiritual reading" (Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation 25).

They will, as far as possible:

- a) attend the Holy Mysteries (Mass) and communion, daily if possible;
- b) pray the short Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office) known as the "The Prayer of the Faithful" in the morning and evening (for a good reason, other prayers may be substituted for the Office);
- c) receive the Sacrament of Confession at least once a month or more as needed;
- d) prayerfully read the Scriptures regularly and pray the Rosary;
- e) attend a yearly retreat, which should be at least a weekend to one full week;
- f) keep faithful to their promises made at oblation (profession); and
- g) annually renew their oblation.

The Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph shall pray for all the bishops/priests, clergy, religious and laity of our Maronite Church in the United States and throughout the whole world. They shall make themselves available in our Maronite Churches in aiding the pastors in ways that are needed and determined for the temporal and spiritual edification of the Church, both local and diocesan. They shall make spiritual reparation for the Maronites, especially for those who are in most need of God's mercy. Saint Teresa of Avila once said: "Prayer cannot be accompanied by self-indulgence" (Way of Perfection, 4,2). They will also make use of other means of mortification, particularly on those days and at those seasons that have a distinctive penitential character as prescribed by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Constitution "Paenitemini," Acta Apostolicae Sedis (1966). They will dedicate themselves to the promotion of priestly and religious vocations as well as being faithful witnesses to the conjugal life. Lastly, they shall meet periodically to receive spiritual direction at least once a month, except during the summer, and shall meet as a body in their parishes periodically for conferences and days of recollection. At those times, the priests should lead them in prayer and study of the Desert Fathers, the life of the Maronite Saints and Martyrs, Maronite Spirituality, Encyclicals of the Church, Rosary, spiritual sharing as an oblate and conclude with Benediction to the Blessed Sacrament.

## ***Formation***

Those members of the Church who are called by the Lord, and are free from impediments and conscientiously accept this call and rule of life offered by the Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph are admitted for a period of formation which normally extends for two years before temporary Promise, and for another three years before definitive Promise. This will be determined by the Spiritual Father, who is approved and appointed by the Bishop, who will then delegate the local pastor to receive their temporary promises. At the end of this period the Bishop or the Spiritual Father of the Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph or both will receive his/her definitive Promise. The Bishop and the Spiritual Father shall ask that each local pastor insist that the meetings and gatherings of the Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph shall maintain fraternal communion and sincere docility to the Holy Spirit.

The pastor if at all possible, shall be the mentor who then will write the Spiritual Father monthly on all proceedings, memberships, and activities, making sure that the Oblates is fulfilling the rules and directives asked of them. They shall be open to exhortations and if necessary, corrections. In case of disputes, appeal will be made first to the Spiritual Father, and then to the Bishop, if necessary. The mentor should be a Maronite priest preferably; however, if the local pastor is unable to fulfill this role for whatever the circumstance, the Bishop or Spiritual Father shall appoint a suitable priest or member of the Oblates, from the recommendation of the pastor, to oversee the activities of the Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph at the local level.

The Bishop will:

- 1) appoint Spiritual Father;
- 2) allow him to admit candidates to formation, the promise and the final vow/promise;
- 3) reduce for just reasons the period of formation before the temporary promise;
- 4) dismiss a member of the Community, should this be necessary;
- 5) receive a lapsed member who asks to be admitted back to the Community, and determine the conditions for this; and
- 6) share with all the mentors (pastors) any suggestions he may see fit to offer for the edification of the Community and their apostolic work(s), after receiving an oral and/or written report annually of the activity of the Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph from the Spiritual Father.

## ***Conclusion***

In his letter to all the priests and laity in September of 2004, Bishop Robert J. Shaheen announced that then Pope John Paul II would begin a special year of the Eucharist from October 2004 to October 2005. In that letter Bishop Shaheen reflected beautifully the sentiments as well as the teaching of the Church on the Eucharist as “being the source and summit of the life and mission of the Church.” “The Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ’s presence par excellence... becoming our spiritual nourishment, bringing us closer to the union with the Trinity.”

It is our hope that if God permits, this rule for the Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph will above all else center all spiritual formation around Eucharistic adoration, and be willing to “welcome Christ into our lives, always ready to love others and lay down our lives for others, always [as Bishop Robert Shaheen continued in the same letter] thankful for all of God’s graces and blessings.” To be like Mary our patroness, ever looking at Christ Jesus in every moment of our lives and being led by her to be transformed by the power of her only begotten Son’s presence in the Eucharist. “Listening to her, we will find in the Eucharistic mystery the courage and energy to follow Christ, the Good Shepherd, and to serve him in the brethren” (Pope John Paul II).

May the Oblates of Jesus, Mary and Joseph help advance, nourish and respond graciously to the moving of the Holy Spirit, as did our ancestors before us, especially Ephrem, Maron, Sharbel, Rafka, Al-Hardini, and the Massabki Brothers. May they be leaven in our parishes and our eparchy for truth and love of Christ Jesus. May they respond generously to what God asks of them: “Act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). •