



MARONITE EPARCHY OF AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND AND OCEANIA

Press Release

Maronite Catholic Society Gala Dinner 2025: Celebrating Faith, Community, and Service

Sydney, Australia — On Friday, 28 March 2025, the Maronite Catholic Society hosted its prestigious Gala Dinner at The Renaissance in Lidcombe, under the patronage of His Excellency Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay, Maronite Bishop of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, bringing together distinguished guests, community leaders, and supporters for a night of celebration, gratitude, and charity.

Esteemed dignitaries in attendance included, The Hon. Chris Minns, Premier of New South Wales; The Hon. Mark Speakman MP, NSW Leader of the Opposition; The Hon. Tony Burke MP, Federal Minister for Arts, Multicultural Affairs, and Home Affairs, representing Prime Minister, The Hon. Anthony Albanese; The Hon. David Coleman MP, representing Federal Leader of the Opposition, The Hon. Peter Dutton; along with members of Parliament, councillors, media representatives, members of the clergy, and religious sisters.

An Evening of Inspiration and Service

The evening was marked by inspiring addresses and remarkable initiatives. In his keynote speech, Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay emphasised the importance of joy, hope, and compassion during the Lenten season. He remarked, "Our celebration is not only a reflection of our faith but a testament to our shared commitment to serve others. Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we strengthen our bonds and embrace the sanctity of life."

He further reflected, "Like the Maronite Catholic Society, many individuals in our community embody the hope we are called to live out in this special Year of Hope, where we are all called to be pilgrims of hope."

Bishop Tarabay also called for respect for the sanctity of life, voicing concern over abortion laws, "The truth is that we are deeply concerned about the sanctity of life and the dignity of every human being, from the moment of conception to natural death. In Australia, abortion laws are among the most extreme in the world. A child can legally be aborted for any

reason, right up until birth. This is not only a moral failure but also a tragedy for our nation.”

“It is our duty to defend the voiceless and ensure that the unborn are granted the most fundamental of human rights: the right to life. I believe these abortion laws must be urgently reviewed and that the freedom of conscience of healthcare professionals must be protected,” Bishop Tarabay added.

Among the evening's key announcements, Bishop Tarabay shared the launch of two vital community-focused initiatives, "The first is the Teresa Centre, under MaroniteCare, which will offer a space for listening, counselling, support, and prayer for pregnant women facing unexpected pregnancies, as well as post-natal care.

The second project is a personal dream of mine for the past ten years: to establish a centre for those suffering from addictions to drugs and alcohol. I am pleased to announce that our Maronite Eparchy has purchased a rehabilitation centre from the Salvation Army in Dooralong, NSW."

In his closing remarks, Bishop Tarabay conveyed his thanks to the Maronite Catholic Society' President and Members, "In his role as President, Mr John Chedid has been proactive in serving and reaching out to the wider community. The Society has a long history of promoting harmony and supporting the formation of seminarians in our Eparchy. They also remain mindful of those who are suffering, both in Australia and in Lebanon."

Commitments and Reflections honouring the Maronite Legacy in Australia

During the event, several official speakers shared their thoughts and pledges. The Premier of NSW, Chris Minns, highlighted the invaluable contributions of the Maronite community to Australia, extending special thanks to Bishop Tarabay for his guidance and collaboration on community-related matters. Meanwhile, Mark Speakman, Leader of the Opposition in NSW, reflected on the rich history of the Maronite people, who first arrived in Australia 150 years ago, emphasizing their enduring legacy and cultural impact.

Federal Minister Tony Burke spoke about his visit to Lebanon and deep relationship with the Australian Lebanese community, and announced that, should Labor win the upcoming election, they would allocate a \$5 million grant to St Rafqa Maronite Church to build a car park and hall. Similarly, David Coleman MP pledged to match this amount if the Liberal Party secures victory.

John Chedid, President of the Maronite Catholic Society, addressed the guests saying, "This gathering is a testament to the strength of our community and our shared dedication to faith, compassion, and service. The Maronite Catholic Society is proud to stand as a bridge, connecting our traditions and values to the needs of both our local and global communities. Together, we honour those who inspire hope and build a better tomorrow for generations to come. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to His Excellency Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay for

his spiritual guidance, as well as to the dedicated committee members whose tireless efforts have brought this remarkable event to life.”

Recognising Pillars of the Community

One of the highlights of the evening was the presentation of the Jubilee Year of Hope Medals, honouring individuals who exemplify faith, service, and resilience. Among the recipients were Fr. Ghassan-Hanna Nakhoul and his wife, Mrs. Jocelyne Nakhoul, recognised for their extraordinary strength and faith following the loss of their son, as well as for Fr. Ghassan’s media contributions. Also awarded were Daniel and Leila Abdallah, whose forgiveness and advocacy through the i4Give Foundation have inspired healing and reconciliation nationwide.

Mrs. Ruth Geagea was chosen as the Best Pharmacist of the Year 2024, and Dr. Albert Mansour and Dr. Charbel Sandroussi were honoured for their excellence in their medical mission.

Additionally, educators from Maronite Colleges were honoured for over 25 years of shaping young hearts and minds, alongside outstanding individuals in professional industries and parish involvement who exemplify commitment to their faith and community.

Supporting Vocations and Community Welfare

In addition to its existing charitable efforts, the Maronite Catholic Society reaffirmed its dedication to supporting vocations within the Maronite Eparchy. Contributions from the Society help cover university fees for seminarians pursuing the priesthood, reinforcing the church's foundation for future generations. Significant donations were also made to the Legacy Foundation Sydney and families of Lebanese Military Martyrs, showcasing the Society's commitment to both local and overseas communities.

Guests were treated to captivating performances by the Dabke Boys, Antonia Khalil, and Damien Haifa, which brought a lively and celebratory spirit to the evening.

The Maronite Catholic Society Gala Dinner once again exemplified the power of unity, faith, and service, leaving attendees inspired to continue their support for the Society's endeavours.

-END-

For media inquiries or further information, please contact: media@maronite.org.au