

2017 St. George Maronite Catholic Church Lebanese Food Festival

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St. George Maronite Catholic Church hosted its 4th Annual Lebanese Food Festival from Friday, Sept. 15th, thru Sunday, Sept. 17th, 2017, at its home in Cranston, RI. The Parish celebrated a fun-filled weekend with traditional Lebanese dance performances, children's games, raffles, and a large selection of delectable Middle Eastern foods, pastries.

St. George, a tightly-knit Maronite Catholic community under the authority of the Pope, dates back to the turn of the century in a period when there was an influx of Lebanese emigrants, who settled mainly in the Federal Hill area of Providence, RI. Their original church, a three-story converted house at 85 America Street in Providence, was home until November 1977, when the growing community moved to a larger church in Pawtucket, their home for 28 years, led by Reverend Paul F. Mouawad.

In October 2005, the Pawtucket church was stricken with devastation as a fire raced quickly through the building. The entire facility was ruined beyond repair, requiring a crane to completely demolish the remains the very next day. The parishioners were left devastated and without a spiritual home to worship and serve as the center of their treasured Lebanese community activities.

Within a few weeks of the tragedy, the parish of St. Raymond's Church in Providence graciously opened their doors to embrace the St. George community. And for over eight years the parishes shared a place of worship. In July 2006, Father Edward T. Nedder was assigned to serve as Pastor. His primary mission was to restore the faith of his congregation and to establish a new permanent home for the parishioners. A building committee was formed, with a mission to find the perfect site. In May 2007, a house residing on 8+ acres of land in Lincoln, RI was purchased to be the site of the future church, hall, and rectory of Saint George.

While Father Ed quickly earned the respect and admiration of his new Parish with his enthusiasm, inspiration, and unlimited energy, it became evident that building a new Church would be too costly and beyond the reach of the Parish. The effort transitioned into purchase mode, and he then led the effort to investigate every lead where a local Church was thought to be going up for sale.

On June 30, 2013, the Maronite Catholic Dioceses of Brooklyn, NY purchased the Church and Rectory of St. Ann's Parish in Cranston, RI from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence to become the new home of St. George Maronite Catholic Church. The first Maronite Liturgy was celebrated on July 6, 2013. Father Ed continues to celebrate additional weekly Roman Catholic Masses for the Parishioners of St. Ann, and always extended a warm welcome to all.

In September of 2014, St. George welcomed the neighborhood to its first Lebanese Food Festival, offering authentic Middle Eastern Food, Pastries, Music, Entertainment, Wine, and Beer. Char-Broiled aromas filled the air as the festival organizers presented a taste of Lebanon with traditional Lebanese foods: Shish Kabob (Marinated Beef and Vegetables); Shish Tawook (Marinated Chicken and Vegetables); Kibbee (a mixture of meat, bulgur (cracked wheat), onions and traditional Lebanese spices) Kafta (grilled ground meat, with onions, parsley, and a variety of traditional spices); Warak Enab (stuffed grape leaves); Hummus (a creamy blend of chickpeas, garlic and olive oil); Baba Ghanouj (Roasted blended Eggplant mixed with spices); Tabouli (a blend of chopped parsley, tomato, scallions, lemon juice, olive oil, and spices); Chicken and Beef Shawarma wraps; Thoum (Garlic Spread); and Falafel (a mixture of mashed chick peas and Middle Eastern spices deep fried to golden perfection). Also featured are authentic pastries: Maamoul (fruit and date filled cookies); and the Lebanese version of Baklava, called B'learwa, along with other homemade Lebanese treats and authentic Lebanese Coffee.

In addition to the delicious food, the weekend festivities featured live Arabic music with a welcoming dance floor, and a partitioned Adult Bar Area, offering authentic Middle Eastern Beers, Wine, and Liquors. There was a separate supervised Children's Area, with a Bounce House, Face Painting, and an Ice Cream Bar serving popsicles and many assorted novelties, all staffed by proud volunteer parishioners. A large display of business and personal sponsor banners hung visibly throughout the tented area demonstrating the generous and enthusiastic support of this Lebanese community, culture, and church. This year, there were three cash raffles - \$250, \$500, and \$1000, and one for a 256GB Apple iPad Pro. Tickets were \$10.00, and the winners did not have to be present.

The weather was perfect, and this small but growing St. George community hosted a wonderful family event with authentic Lebanese food, music, dance, and festivities. Admission and parking was free and a lucky winner took home a new Apple iPod Pro.