

A Tale of Two Churches

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"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times"



St Raymond Church, Providence, RI

Those immortal words, first written in 1859 by Charles Dickens in "A Tale of Two Cities", best describes the circumstances shared by St. George Maronite Catholic Church of Lincoln, RI, and St. Raymond Catholic Church of Providence, RI.



St George Maronite Catholic Church, Cranston, RI

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. 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, where they stayed for 28 years.

On August 23, 1983, Father Paul F. Mouawad was assigned as Pastor to St. George Church. During his first three months, the Church Hall was remodeled, the Sunday school was reformed, and a host of new fund-raising activities were implemented. Within a very short time, the church and hall were paid in full and on December 11-12, 1983, festivities were held to celebrate the final mortgage payment. It was the best of times.

On October 25, 2005, St. George Maronite Catholic Church and hall at 50 Main Street, Pawtucket, was stricken with devastation as a fire raced quickly through the buildings. The entire facility was ruined beyond repair, requiring a crane to completely demolish the remains the very next day. The parishioners were devastated and left homeless with an enormous loss in their lives. It was the worst of times.

Within a few weeks of the tragedy, the parish rented St. Raymond Church in Providence to use as a temporary house of worship. In July 2006, Fr. Paul was transferred to Newtown Square, Pennsylvania to serve the Maronite parish of St. Sharbel Church. Father Edward T. Nedder was assigned to serve as Pastor of Saint George Church, his primary mission to restore the faith of his congregation, and to establish a new permanent home for the parishioners. In May 2007, a house residing on 8 plus acres of land at 171 Twin River Road, Lincoln, Rhode Island was purchased to be the site of the future church, hall and rectory of Saint George.

Fr. Ed quickly earned the respect and admiration of his new Parish with his enthusiasm, inspiration, and unlimited energy. He oversaw the 100th Anniversary Celebration of St George, and worked tirelessly to build a new Church. He established a building Committee, and worked diligently to secure the permits and approvals to begin building. As time went on, 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 Church was thought to be going up for sale.

St. Raymond Catholic Church also has a Fr. Ed. Besides being Pastor, Father Edward Pieroni is a hospital chaplain, an individual with great compassion and an infectious warmth that is inspirational and admired by all who meet him. Coincidentally, he oversaw the 100th Anniversary Celebration of St Raymond.

Two Father Ed's, brought together by tragedy, began a partnership. They covered each other's schedules, co-celebrated their liturgies, took the time to meet and know each other's parishioners, and formed a genuine friendship. Quickly the Parish families blended, often attending each other's functions and activities. "St. Raymond's is so warm and inviting....Everyone here is like a family" was spoken often by many St. George parishioners.

In April, 2013, the Maronite Catholic Dioceses of Brooklyn, NY entered into an agreement with the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Providence, RI to purchase the Church and Rectory of St. Ann Parish in Cranston, RI. On June 30, the purchase was completed and became the new home of St. George Maronite Catholic Church. The first Maronite Liturgy was celebrated on July 6, 2013. Fr. Ed will continue to celebrate weekly Roman Catholic Masses for the Parishioners of St. Ann, and extends a warm welcome to all.

As a sendoff to the St. George Parishioners they had welcomed almost eight years ago, the Parishioners of St. Raymond invited everyone to a farewell reception the weekend of June 29th & 30th. Two receptions were held, one after each of the Saturday and Sunday liturgies.....each a wonderful tribute given by one loving family to another. St. George has already started to make plans to welcome their family at St Raymond to join them in a celebration of their new home. Two Parishes, Two Father Ed's, Two Men of God - Two parishes blended together to become one family with one heart. It was the best of times.

Isn't this the way it should be?

In our hearts forever.....