**The History of St. Anthony + St. George**

 Until May 1997, St. Anthony and St. George Parishes maintained their unique and separate identities.  Msgr. Stephen Hector Doueihi was enthroned as Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn in February, 1997.  One of his objectives was to unify all Maronites of the Eparchy, not only through the Liturgy and various activities, but also through the unity of its people:  the followers of St. Maron.

During the first year a seamless transition toward the unification of the Maronites of Wilkes-Barre was introduced by Fr. Azar.  His design and implementation progressed over a number of years toward the realization of St. Anthony + St. George Maronite church.  Much was accomplished while Fr. Azar served our community.  A duplication of services and programs was eliminated as the parishioners of St. Anthony and St. George worked diligently to become one.  All aspects of the churches financial, liturgical and societal components were merged into one.

Some of the memorable highlights our church experienced while Fr. Azar served our community are too numerous to mention, however, it is incumbent to mention a few.  On October 1, 1997, Fr. Azar honored St. Theresa with a special service and commemorative celebration for the Centennial of her death.  Fr. Azar also implemented one Great Friday Service with a Procession beginning at St. George Church and reciting the Stations of the Cross until reaching St. Anthony’s Church.

In a letter dated May 20, 2002 The Most Reverend Stephen Hector Doueihi, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, USA and our Eparch had requested to grant Father Azar the Order of Periodeut in recognition for all the appreciated parish work he accomplished and at the approaching of the 25th Anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.  On October 13, 2002 Bishop Doueihi bestowed upon Father Azar the dignity of “periodeut” with the title of Monsignor.

Monsignor Azar served at St. Anthony/St. George from 1997 to 2004 and has always stated; “My seven years in Wilkes-Barre was the honeymoon.  The people were my family.”

From 2004 through 2006, the Reverend Bartholomew Leon served as pastor.

From 2006 through 2008, Monsignor William Bonczewski served as pastor.  “Msgr. Bill” brought to St. Anthony/St. George great history and was a perfect fit for the parish.  Born and raised in Wilkes-Barre, he attended St. George with his family and knew early in life that he had a love for his church, God and the community.  Father David became his mentor and guided Msgr. Bill, helping him grow and receive his vocation into priesthood on May 29, 1976.  It’s been said that when Msgr. Bill was younger that he would build altars in his home.

During Msgr. Bonczewski’s time at St. Anthony/St. George, he celebrated 80 years of the novena to St. Theresa in 2006.  The first Novena to St. Theresa was held at St. George in 1926.

Msgr. Bonczewski also served a prominent role in the history of Our Lady of Lebanon Shrine in North Jackson, Ohio.   After his ordination in 1976, the monsignor was assigned to Our Lady of Lebanon, where he served for three years. He moved on to Olean, New York for two years, but at the insistence of the people of North Jackson he returned to Our Lady of Lebanon.

In 1981, then-Father Bonczewski was driven to make the Our Lady of Lebanon Shrine independent.  It had been in operation with the assistance of two other churches. The monsignor headed the effort to build the Cedars of Lebanon Hall, providing meals for pilgrimages that came to the hall.  From this effort, he was able to erect a chapel for Our Lady of Lebanon.  He served the parish until 2003.

Father Hanna Karam arrived in the United States in March 2006 and was assigned to help Father Jim Root in Pittsburgh, PA.  Having completed his assignment there he served as Assistant at Our Lady of the Cedars in Boston, MA.  In June 2007 Father Hanna was asked to serve as assistant to Msgr. George Sebaali at St Anthony’s in Richmond, VA where he stayed until he arrived in Wilkes-Barre in Sept. 2008.  He quickly assumed his position as Administrator at St. Anthony + St. George faithfully tending to his priestly duties serving the Maronite Community of Wilkes-Barre.  In recognition of his service to the Diocese and Parishioners of St. Anthony + St. George Bishop Gregory Mansour appointed Father Hanna as Pastor effective August 2011.

 - As of June 1,2018 Father Hanna Karam was transferred by Bishop Gregory Mansour to Pittsburgh, PA to assist Father Rodolph wakim who is in Lebanon on a sabbatical. Father Paul Damien was assigned as the new pastor of St. Anthony – St. George. Before coming to Wilkes Barre, Fr. Damien served as Administrator priest of Saints Peter & Paul Mission in Tampa, Florida.