

## PRESS RELEASE

Brooklyn, NY—September 27. Maronite Patriarch, His Beatitude Bechara Peter Rai-- the head of the largest Catholic patriarchal church--will be making his inaugural visit to the United States from Lebanon October 4 to 23, 2011.

The Patriarch arrives in St. Louis, Missouri on Tuesday, October 4. He will then undertake a vigorous pastoral schedule which will take him to Peoria, IL-- October 9; Chicago, IL-- October 10; Cleveland, OH --October 11, Houston, TX--October 13; and Los Angeles, CA--October 13-16.

The last week of his trip brings him on Monday October 17 to Uniontown, PA, October 18 to Fall River, MA, October 18 to Petersham, MA, and October 19 through 23 to New York. He is scheduled to meet with Ecumenical leaders Thursday, October 20 at the national headquarters of C.N.E.W.A. and with United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, in New York on Friday October 21.

In announcing the itinerary for the Patriarch's visit, Bishop Robert Shaheen and Bishop Gregory Mansour, said that the Patriarch, as father and head of the Maronite Catholic Church, was coming with the purpose of "visiting his flock."

The Maronite Church is the largest of the six Eastern Catholic patriarchal churches, with an estimated 3.3 million faithful around the world and in full communion with the Holy See in Rome. There are 45 bishops throughout the world, two eparchies (Dioceses) here in the United States. His Beatitude's full title as *Patriarch of Antioch and All the East* reflects the responsibility he has for the Maronite Church in Lebanon and the Middle East, and from this perspective he serves as a principal of unity for Catholics of the Middle East.

"While the Patriarch is coming to visit his flock here in the United States, as the full schedule of his visits attests, nevertheless, we must not forget that he is also concerned with the broader issue of the future of Christians in the Middle East, as well as the well-being of the Lebanese state which was deliberately created to be a home reflecting the conviviality between Christians and Muslims," Bishop Gregory has said.

While in New York, the Patriarch will hold press conferences—on October 20, at the offices of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA); and on October 21, at the United Nations sponsored by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See.

**For press information and interviews please contact:**

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