



Father Jack Morrison

Father Jack Morrison brought his many talents to further build on the work of his predecessors in the service of God. Many needed renovations and upgrades were made. The Outreach ministries were enlarged, a new Rectory located close to the Church was purchase, completely renovated and the parish today is looking forward to a long and fruitful future in service to the community and each other.



Father Sam Najjar

Our present Pastor, Father Samuel Najjar arrived in July 2006. Additional renovations have been made. The interior of the Church has been refurbished and a new Tabernacle has been placed in the Center of the Sanctuary. While the icon of Christ remains in the sanctuary, during several seasons of the Liturgical Year, it will be covered with a shroud and a 7 foot Crucifix will be suspended from the ceiling beams. Also, St. Michael's is now on the Historical District Registry.

On behalf of the Archangel Michael Community, I welcome you to our Parish, and hope that your faith experience is a wonderful one.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,  
Fr. Sam Najjar

## A History of



## St. Michael the Archangel Maronite Catholic Church

## The Beginning of a Maronite Parish in Fayetteville, North Carolina

The history of the Maronite church in the Carolinas began at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with immigrant merchants from Lebanon came to the Carolinas. In hope of beginning a new life, they settled in the area of the Cape Fear region.

The South, at that time, had few Catholics; even today, only a small percentage of the population is Catholic. In the early part of the last century, the Maronites made up one of the largest ethnic groups of Catholics in the Carolinas.

From his See in Raleigh, Bishop Vincent S. Waters recognized the significant contributions these early immigrants were making to the Church and the secular life in the areas where they settle. His own deep love and gratitude for all the Maronites had done, coupled with his personal friendship with Archbishop Francis Zayek, led Bishop Walters to share with these people his dream of establishing a Maronite parish where the ancient and beautiful Divine Liturgy could be celebrated. Until that time, Maronites worshipped in local Roman Catholic Churches.



Father Joseph Thomas (Center)

It was an exciting day in 1973, with Joseph (“Uncle Joe” as he was known by many) Monsour received a telephone call from Bishop Walters telling him that the Maronites, in Fayetteville, would be getting their own parish. Archbishop Zayek would be sending the first Maronite priest, Father Joseph Thomas, on September 22, 1973 to establish the first Maronite Church in North Carolina.

The Maronite community contracted to purchase the old St. Patrick's Church, built in 1936 on Arsenal Avenue, from the Diocese of Raleigh and began an extensive three year renovation project. Visitors to the Church are drawn to the beautiful stained glass window of St. Patrick on the east wall of the Church. The remodeling culminated with the hanging of the icon of “Christ in Judgment” behind the altar. The icon is a copy (by Orlando Lagman) on the huge mosaic in the Baptistry of San Giovanni (Saint John) in the piazza (plaza) of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (St. Mary of the Flower) in Florence, Italy.

Now, the duly re-dedicated St. Michael's Mission would become the spiritual home for the Maronites and would allow them to celebrate the faith of their forefathers, restoring the spiritual heritage they had not been able to practice for many years. Father Thomas made it clear by encouraging all Catholics, regardless of Rite that they were welcome at St. Michael's Church – and they came.

The building of a social hall in 1978 further gave this community of faith of much – needed place to have their social functions, which further enhanced and cemented the parish life of this new community. Father Joseph Thomas, during his thirteen years as Pastor, shaped the parish known for its deep spirituality.



Father Larry Jensen

In April of 1988, Father Larry Jensen applied his leadership and administrative abilities in helping establish the community as a solid parish, creating financial stability, growth in membership and a community committed to many outreach programs to the community at large. St. Michael's is widely known as “the little Church with the big heart”.

Close “family” togetherness has helped shape this parish into a vibrant Christian community, which attracts people of many different nationalities. Visitors often comment they had never been to an Eastern Liturgy before; but, without exception are drawn to experience the presence of God in a special way through the prayers, singing, chanting and ineffable beauty of the Maronite Liturgy.

What is most important to the history of this parish is what is within: our involvement in serving others, our focus in meeting the spiritual needs of this diverse parish. We give thanks for rich heritage as we meet today's challenges and nurture the faith in a bright future.