

**St Clements Melkite Rite Church,
South Brisbane**

5 April 2016

Mr Simon Haddad

[This is a summary of the talk given by Mr Haddad as no text of the actual talk was available.]

Mr Simon Haddad, Secretary of St Clement's Parish Council gave an interesting history of the church and of the Melkite community generally. He began with the ninetieth anniversary celebrations which were attended by Archbishop Robert Rabbat, the Melkite Catholic Eparch of Australia and New Zealand and Archbishop Amel Nona, the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop, as well as our own Archbishop Mark Coleridge. As part of these celebrations, Simon presented a history of St Clements, which is essentially the talk given to our Society in April.

The story of St Clements really dates back to the 1880s when large numbers of predominantly Christian migrants from Lebanon began arriving in Australia. Lebanon was then part of Syria, and in the 1891 New South Wales census, 116 Syrian born people were recorded as living in the colony. By 1921, that number had risen to 850. These early settlers mostly belonged to one of three Christian traditions – Melkite, Maronite and Orthodox.

The first Melkite priest from Lebanon arrived in Sydney in 1891. He was Archimandrite Sylvanos Mansour, and at first he ministered to all three communities. The first Melkite rite church in Sydney was completed in 1895. Rev Mansour died in Brisbane in November 1929 while visiting St Clements.

The Lebanese migrants spread rapidly throughout the rest of eastern Australia, and in 1929 a second Melkite rite church was established in South Brisbane. The foundation stone of St Clements was blessed on 7 March 1929 by Archbishop Duhig and laid by His Lordship Archbishop Clement Malouf from Lebanon. The latter had come to Australia to attend the 29th International Eucharistic Congress in Sydney, and Archbishop Duhig made sure that Brisbane was on his Australian itinerary. The first parish priest of St Clements was Archimandrite Sophronus Khoury. He had migrated from Lebanon to Sydney in 1908 and in 1928 arrived in Brisbane where he gained permission to build a Melkite Rite Church. Until it was completed, he offered Mass for Syrian Catholics in St Marys, South Brisbane. The Church was dedicated to St Clement, the third successor of St Peter, who according to tradition, was imprisoned by the Emperor Trajan, and was martyred by being tied to an anchor and thrown into the sea.

St Clements was blessed and opened by Archbishop Duhig and Archbishop Clement Malouf on 29 March 1936. It was described in the *Daily Standard* as a handsome brick structure, 70 feet long with an approach of double steps. The interior of the Church is more Latin than Byzantine in style, something that the local

parishioners were probably more familiar with. The architects were Hennessy and Hennessy, and the builder Mr. L Machin. The total cost of the land, church and presbytery was £3305. Although the community was small and its members not wealthy, a fund-raising committee was formed and eventually the debt was paid off. Rev Khoury ministered to the Lebanese community in Brisbane until his death in 1952. He was succeeded by Rev Alexis Malouf, who had come to Brisbane in 1951 as Rev Khoury's assistant. Rev Malouf ministered to all three sections of the Lebanese community – Melkite, Maronite and Orthodox, even receiving permission from the Vatican to officiate at Orthodox weddings. He was much loved by the Lebanese community, ministering at St Clements until his death in 1990. He was succeeded by Rev Lawrence Ayoub, whose 90th birthday was celebrated as part of the Church anniversary.

Although the parishioners of St Clements continue to be largely of Lebanese descent, the church and its parishioners have played a significant role in the wider society. Several parishioners lost their lives in the world wars, and the church recently held an exhibition commemorating St Clements connection to the ANZACS. The St Clement Catholic Association continues to provide volunteers to St Vincents Aged Care and assists in finding employment opportunities for young people. Several prominent former parishioners were listed by Simon as having contributed significantly to life in Australia and abroad.