**CHRISTIAN SPEECH**

**FOR**

**MANAL AKIKI**

To friends and family, distinguished guests and parishioners, Bishop Zaidan, Deacon Collin, and to all who have supported, encouraged, guided, and counseled my husband, Father Wissam, (**please note the name was not mentioned in the questionnaire… I searched and found this. Please fix if not correct**) and our family, today is a day of inexpressible joy and honor. Today, we celebrate the ordination of a truly incredible human being, and while on most days, it would be enough to acknowledge this stellar and deeply faithful individual as a great man, it is a tribute to him, his character, his devotion to religion and to his family, to say of FR. Wissam Akiki, that he is also and incredible father and husband.

If we’re lucky, once, or maybe a few times in a lifetime, someone comes along and shifts the “order” of things, and life, as we know it changes for the better in unimaginable ways. It is truly an act of God when that happens, and I think it’s safe to say that when it is your husband, the person you love most in the world… the one you call partner and best friend, as well as your spiritual inspiration, it is a monumental occasion when that person is recognized and acknowledged as FR. Wissam is being acclaimed today.

Romans 12: 11-12 teaches us… “Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer…” all these things describe FR. Wissam Akiki. Over the years, many of you have witnessed the passion and dedication he brings to his calling. I have been blessed to see all of it first hand, and clearly, today, as we celebrate, it is a tribute to the man and his faith that he represents the best the human spirit has to offer. His devotion is singular. His wisdom is unparalleled, his determination is unquestioned, his willingness to uphold the teachings of our faith is remarkable, and so it is even more remarkable that he has been chosen and approved by Pope Francis to be ordained as the first married priest in the Catholic Church.

To me, he is my husband. To our children, he is “Daddy.” To his parishioners and fellow clergy, he is a voice of leadership and guidance. The one thing we all have in common is that our lives have been touched and blessed by a man that shows all of us, every day, what having a living, breathing life of faith can achieve. Fr. Wissam ministers to his congregation as well as to all those who come from far and wide to seek his spiritual touch, with the same amount of care and thoughtfulness as he provides for us, his family. He demonstrates every day what it means to be a vessel of God, to spread the message in word and deed. While some people may find him single minded, the truth is that he is a man of many facets. He is a person who leads with compassion and empathy. He wears many hats and ministers with rare thoughtfulness. And while some may have a first impression of sensing a bluntness about him, he knows the most effective ways to get his point across. He knows how to deliver the message of his faith with impact and integrity.

And while all of you see him as your spiritual leader, at home, when the doors close behind us, when he can take off his shoes and relax and be my husband or just plain “Daddy,” he can’t help but be a guiding, loving force, and for that, I, and our children, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are incredibly grateful. It’s interesting that he and I are different in our approaches to life. While I can be described as “laid back,” my husband…. well… **meticulous** is one word I would use to describe him. He’s meticulous about time… about expressing himself… about setting goals and expressing his commitment to us and the church. He accepts every facet and influence that he is blessed to have and uses all of it as a means of motivation to fulfill his dreams of building a church, a wonderful congregation, strengthening his dedication to his vocation, all while being such a loving husband, father, and family man. Even though there are so many instances and memories I can cite to show the measure of this man, I will let your experiences of him speak for each one of you.

Today is a moment of gratitude and acknowledgement. While it’s not possible for me to be prouder of my husband, he and I both know that it is through his work and our devotion to faith that we count our blessings. It has been said that the people in our lives are the reflection of of what we put out in the world. **NONE** of FR. Wissam’s achievements would be possible without the generosity and faith that each one of you… and those who could not be here today, have given to my husband. There is a quote from the English poet, Alfred, Lord Tennyson that teaches us, “I am part of all that I have met.” Because of that, there are so many people to thank… for being a reflection and a part of our lives. To the parish council finance committee here at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (**name of church**) , to the amazing Ladies Guild and their president, Marie… to the teachers of catechism… to Deacon Collin, who is wheats by Abounae side altar servers (**please fix this…typing was not clear**), the choir… to Bishop Zaidan for his wonderful support and being with us throughout this process, and to Father Sleiman for his generous sponsorship of Abouna, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Most importantly, we thank you, our parishioners, for your willingness to trust, believe in, and support Fr. Wissam throughout this journey and every day. This truly could not have happened without all of you. Thank you all!!