

# Our life at Anta Akhi

Serving a life of dignity for people with disability



April 2017



May this holy period help us increase our confidence in He who knows everything, can everything, and loves us!  
Who is our security!  
Let us rejoice in His resurrection  
For yesterday, Christ who was mocked, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross, rises today from the tomb!

*Happy Easter*

*Yvonne Chami*

## Being Christian today

Is this an inheritance? A duty? A way to calm our conscience? A source of solutions to our problems? A set of ceremonies and dogmas?

How do we live our faith in today's world, where violence, selfishness, injustice, repeated scandals, inconsistencies and contradictions reign? Or, is it still possible to live our faith in the world today?

Many Christians throughout the world are sad and weighed down by the contradiction between the two logics: the logic of the world (power, destruction, self-sufficiency ...) and the logic of Jesus (mercy, forgiveness, peace, love ...). The difficulty and the big challenge lie in the positioning that everyone is called upon to take: "Which way do I decide to take? Living according to the values of the world, or living according to the values of Jesus?" Indeed, with all the changes of our time, the globalization, the tension between two systems of value, Jesus remains the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

No, Christianity is not ruined, but we Christians have gone away, we have no longer believed, or lived Jesus' teaching. We have lost the sense of being Christians.

For being a Christian is to be a disciple of Jesus: "If you hold to My teaching, you are truly my disciples." *Jn 8:31*.

To be a Christian today is to accept being present to the other, far from selfishness; It is accepting the other person as he is, with his strengths and weaknesses; It is to look at him with Jesus' eyes; It is also to recognize that we are weak, sinners, and to remind ourselves constantly that we need help: need of others and need of God.

This relation to the other person and to God can only be sustained and maintained by the power of the Holy Spirit who teaches us to pull out our peace, serenity and joy from Jesus' love for each one of

us. Each one is called by his name: "You are my beloved son, you are my joy." *Marc 1:11*.

To be a Christian today is to respond to the Love of Jesus by loving our neighbor in spite of all the circumstances of life.

To be a Christian today is to dedicate time to Jesus to meet him, to know him more, to pray with him, to nourish ourselves with His Word, so that we may become witnesses to his love, and to live and share the love that we receive.

To be a Christian today is everyone's responsibility, yours, mine, his...

We need to change, to live, to be an example, to allow others to believe that Jesus is true, that He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Yes, it is possible to live our faith today. It is far from being a mere inheritance, a duty... It is enough to say "yes" like Mary and Joseph, without fear, with conviction and commitment. It's then, that we would be able to sing, praise and announce to the whole world the resurrection of Jesus.

**Christ is risen, alleluia!**

*Roula Najm*



## Our Easter Schedule

- Holy Thursday:** Mass in Saint Maroon Church - Jeita with Sesobel's family at 10:00 AM  
Night of worship at the Home of Tenderness with our young adults from 8:00 PM to 11:00 PM.
- Holy Friday :** Prayer before the Holy Cross T the Home of Tenderness from 10:00 AM to 12:00 noon.  
Good Friday ceremony at Saint Therese convent in Sheilé at 3:00 PM.
- Easter Saturday:** Ambulant Easter "Jesus comes to us" visiting our young adults limited by disabilities and their families starting 8:00 AM.  
Evening of prayer at 7:00 PM, followed by a Mass at 11:30 PM at the Home of Tenderness.
- Easter Sunday:** Our Home is open to welcome our friends
- Easter Monday:** Mass at 11:00 Am at Our Lady of Lebanon - Harissa to congratulate Mary.

*Our Home of Tenderness is always open to welcome you and to Share together beautiful moments! We are waiting for you!*

## Our life at our Home of Tenderness during Lent

Every year, Anta Akhi's team members and the young adults with disability, altogether, we wait for the Lent period to come back to ourselves, and try to bear fruits by being a loving presence to each other. In the activities carried out in large or small groups, our young adults are very involved; they try as much as they can to reach the finality of these activities and be witnesses of "a life together in peace and joy in spite of difficulties". What was particular about this year?

In order to be present at the Lord's presence inside of us, we were silent every Friday during lunch. The soft music, combined for 10 minutes with Mirna's voice reading prayers, allows us to enter into ourselves and meditate the word read. Team and young adults are delighted with this touching moment, even if some hide their laughter, or some others make remarks aloud: "It's such a beautiful silence! It gives peace! "

Since we are part of the universal Church, morning and evening prayers, and Friday prayers, are inspired by the Maronite, Byzantine and Latin rites. The discovery of these rites allows a greater openness to our minds and makes us appreciate their richness.

And it is always Friday... by meditating the Path to the Cross, we see the difficulties we face, and we realize that our path of life

resembles that of Jesus and that with Him difficulties becomes lighter.

Finally, for each week of the Lent, we decided to live a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and we chose seven: joy, love, peace, goodness, patience, goodwill, faith... *Ga 5, 22*. The panel decorated with beautiful sentences, photos, and drawings made by our young adults, with the help of their life companions, describes each week the expected fruit...

And that's all ... All? No! In fact, we spend moments in prayers, we celebrate masses, confessions, adoration, existential training, catechesis... it was during a weekly catechesis session with Samira that our young adults thanked the Lord. But... say thank you to Jesus? And why? What do I have? What's left? Below are some answers from our young adults:



"Thank you Lord because my life is important; Thank you for the people who think of Anta Akhi and realized how important is our life; Thank you for the gift of life; Thank you because You are my father; Thank you because I can see; Thank you for the capacities I still have; Thank you for Mary, she's my mom!"

## « Are you beautiful? »

**Funny question! Layal, who had to animate an hour with our young adults and their life companions, and after a little prayer to the Holy Spirit, had the bright idea to ask them if they were beautiful and why... It is difficult to comment on our young adults answers, so simple and true. We leave to the reader to appreciate the pearls coming out of the mouth of the "smallest"...**

### To start with a touch of freshness:

I am beautiful because I am thin and I make people laugh. *Elie K. who is on a diet!*  
I am beautiful when I wear fine clothes. *Elie B.Z*  
I will become beautiful when I lose some weight. *Madonna*

### Some find they are beautiful:

I am beautiful, because all people are beautiful. *Samo*  
I am beautiful because I love others. *Aïda*  
I am beautiful because I am created in the image of God. *Ghassan*  
I am beautiful because I believe in God ... *Joanna*  
Are you beautiful? Yes ... And after several attempts: because you are cute? Yes. *Mikael*  
Ana helo I'm beautiful ... and he ends with a smile. *Joe*

### Others are beautiful but also see the difficulties:

I'm not beautiful when I'm alone. *Marianne*  
I feel that I am not beautiful when I do bad things, but I am beautiful when I am at peace with myself and with others. *Carole*

**What if each of us asked himself this question? And not give up before he finds an answer able to satisfy him, an answer which would enable him to find the true beauty, that is a reflection of an inner one, finding its Source in God?**

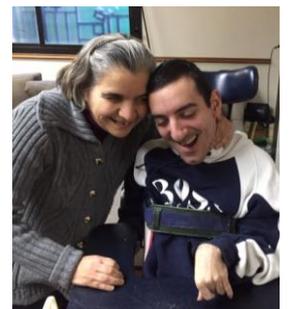
Sometimes I'm beautiful, some not... it's related to my heart. *Barbara*  
I'm beautiful when I'm calm, but not when I'm upset. *Pierre*  
I am beautiful when I am happy, when I live joy, but not when I am sad. *Philippe*

### Some, still searching, did not find that they were beautiful that day:

People say I'm ugly and I think that's a truth. *Tony*  
I am not handsome because I am getting old. When I look at my pictures I find that I was very beautiful when I was younger. *Elie S.*

### But it is Marcelle who expresses in such beautiful terms, beauty as she sees it, in her admirable truth:

I think that I am not beautiful because I get old, I have wrinkles and white hair. But when I think that God looks at me, I'm sure he finds me beautiful, so I remain a beautiful young girl. *Marcelle*



## Are their lives worth it?

The “chouchou” ... This is our way of naming our young adults suffering from multiple disabilities. These young people whom we cannot approach with joy and consideration, without understanding the way of greatness in which the Father looks at them ... What is the use of their life ? They cannot express themselves by words, sometimes they cry out and we barely understand what disturbs them. Adaptations are necessary, they cannot in any case be autonomous, satisfy their daily need, and life companions are required 24/7 at their side. Productive according to the logic of the world? They can never be... Are their lives worth it? Worth the cost?

Emmanuelle a French volunteer of 23 years, dynamic, smiling, in a true search for Jesus, returned for a second stay at the Home of Tenderness. It is with the “chouchou” that she finds herself ... obviously she has discovered the importance of living together, in peace and joy, as brothers.

"I like it when Stephanie touches me: I like to put my head on the table of her wheelchair and let her pass her fingers in my hair, on my face. I watch her smile during that time. Not always. Sometimes she doesn't feel like it. So when I really want to, when I need this tenderness, I insist a little. It amuses us both I think.

I have been working for almost 4 years in a large house in France, where about sixty people with multiple disabilities live. But we are asked to hold a "just educational distance". Here, I'm not Stéphanie's educator. She's my friend and I love her. And by letting myself go to that love, I feel in my heart that she also loves me. Even, if my professional gaze would want me to take nothing for granted.

I was told that friendship could not be mutual with people with such big behavioral disturbances. But I was told here that when “Fanny” hears my name, she smiles.

My name is Emmanuelle and I have a friend called Stephanie.

We sing, we cry, we laugh, we play, we get angry, we eat, we do not talk for hours and suddenly I start telling her things. She is Lebanese and I am French.

She surely doesn't understand anything of what I say, as I do not understand when she speaks to me. Except that Fanny does not speak at all. Not even Arabic. She just understands it.

I believe that she understands mainly the language of the heart.



Thank you Anta Akhi for allowing me to meet a new friend with simplicity. As it is my job in France, I refused here to accompany the young adults with disabilities for their toilets. I learned to meet someone without beginning with this often systematic complicity (nevertheless true and beautiful) when approaching the intimacy of the body. Just Stephanie, just me. And I did not tell you about Joe, Kiki, Mela, Algo (Mikael), Elie and all the others. It's beautiful what you allowed me to do. Thank you Stéphanie. Thank you."

## Some beautiful moments of our lives these few months

- Ghassan made a dream trip last December in France; He testified about his life at Anta Akhi in front of the 350 guests who gathered at the annual dinner of Anta Akhi France in Paris. Thanks to all the friends who made possible such a successful dinner!

- We cannot but celebrate the new marriages of our friends and the new births in their families, by a mass followed by animations and friendly meals in our Home of Tenderness.

- Every week we welcome around 80 students who come to get acquainted with the world of disability. They come with the intention of helping our young adults, and leave transformed! Truly Happy!

- Our Home is always open to welcome volunteers from Lebanon and abroad. Thank you for your kind presence, your commitment and the love you put in everything you do!



## Fadi Rechdane –« God made me the beautiful surprise of a miracle »

He has a regressive disease, Marinesco Sjorgen Syndrom: he has gradually lost the ability to walk, hear or see. If he still distinguishes the shadows, Fadi had reached a point where he could barely hear a word, repeated loudly in his ear... until an operation in the ear was possible...

### How was your life before the operation?

I began to realize that I was losing my hearing in 1990. This loss was painful because I saw that people were making a lot of efforts to talk to me, and I felt that at some point they gave up: they preferred to chat with others, able to hear them and establish a conversation with them. I thought alone that if I heard better, I would have had more people at my side. I used to tell God: "You can do all things good. I put everything I live in Your hands."

### How was your relationship with God?

I have a strong relationship with God. I tell him in my prayers: "I know that the problem does not come from You, for You cannot give anything bad. But I am honored to carry the cross with You, even though I wear a small part of it." I speak with God... God loves it when we talk to Him, when we tell Him how we feel... and so He gives us comfort.

### And the operation?

It happened after a lot of hesitation, some doctors not being sure that it is effective. And I knew from my side that I was not going to completely recover the hearing. In the hospital, on the day of the operation, I prayed saying: "Lord, if You want, You can dispense me from the operation by restoring my hearing, but may Your will be done." My relationship with God is not based on miracles, but I realized later that the real miracle was this operation that allowed me to hear again. I always expose Him everything, without asking Him for anything, and He made me the beautiful surprise of this miracle.

Today I am happy, because I can tell if someone speaks by my side, I hear what is said on the microphone, I can follow the rosary in the community. But, to improve my hearing, I follow weekly speech therapy sessions.

### You seem happy... you barely hear, you don't see, you don't walk ... what can you say to the able-bodied who complain about less difficult things?

It is normal for someone to be tired because of a given problem. But it is by praying to God, by seeking His will, that we receive consolation in the heart. It is a journey, one cannot be happy in a day or two. When I am tired, I think of Jesus suffering, humiliated,

carrying the cross, and forgiving his executioners ... for us forgiveness is difficult, but with God's help it is no longer difficult.

After all sufferings, we receive the peace which comes from God. It reminds me of the episode of the Gospel after the resurrection, when the Lord appeared to His disciples who had labored all night and could not catch

any fish. By throwing the net at Jesus' word, they were able to gather 153! Nothing can be achieved without difficulties, but God sees our struggle and gives us all that is good!

When I look at my life and all the graces I received, my heart is full of recognition! I mainly thank him for the joy He gives me!

### But what are these graces? What did He give you?

With a beautiful smile: He gave me life, and it is the most beautiful gift! He put friends in my life. I have a good relationship with others, despite some difficulties. He gave me back my hearing and I thank Him very much for this. He put His love in my heart and when I see how much our Lord loves me, I am freed from the judgment of people. The most important thing is the gaze of God on me.

### Fadi liked to conclude with a little prayer:

I would love to thank you, Jesus, for all the graces in our lives, for all the joy, for every person You put in our path. And I thank You personally for the grace of hearing that You have given me. Help us to see all the graces You give us. You are visible through people, You change our hearts, and without You there is nothing good. You fill us with Your graces, You are love, You created us in Your image, and You are still watching over us. To You be the glory forever. Amen



## Call

*Tony, who has cerebral palsy, is suffering today from the corneal deformation of the left eye which needs to be corrected because it alters the vision.*

*Optical correction will be done by surgery called "intercorneal ring segments" for the cost of \$ 3,000.*

*We thank each of you for the part you will take in his life!*

## How to help Anta Akhi:

1. Sponsor a share of the cost of the accompaniment of the life course of a young person with disability starting from \$ 10 (or € 10) per month, \$ 120 (or € 120) per year.  
Bank Audi - Iban: LB07 0056 0001 6520 8465 0440 1605
2. Make a single donation possibly specifying the need that you want to support.

