

THE CEDARS

ASCETICAL CENTER

**OVERVIEW,
BUSINESS PLAN &
FUNDRAISING INITIATIVES**



OVERVIEW:

THE NEED & FACILITATION



Abba Paul of Thebes and Abba Anthony

“The Church must breathe with her two lungs!”

- St. Pope John Paul II

The Eastern Catholic Traditions have much to offer both the East and the West, and making those Traditions available to the faithful in South Alabama is the particular aim of The Cedars Ascetical Center. The ascetical approach is not just a path for monastics, but is relevant to all walks of life. The rich contributions of great Saints like the Desert Fathers and Mothers, John Cassian, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Palamas, Jacob of Serugh, Ephraim the Syrian, Maron, and even more modern saints like Charbel Makhlouf and Paisios of Mount Athos need to be shared and explored. These saints have left us a treasury that when put to practice becomes a great armory for the spiritual life.

Along with increased opportunities to study the Desert Fathers and Mothers, The Cedars Ascetical Center will also endeavour to make access to regular spiritual direction more readily available. Spiritual direction is much needed in our society, and is arguably the biggest deterrent to the faithful leaving the embrace of the Catholic Church. Many lay men and women desire spiritual direction, but cannot find clergy who are capable of making the time to facilitate the need.

St. Anthony of the Desert desired the solitude of the ascetic life, choosing to retreat to the desert to contemplate God, to pray and to practice renunciation of the world. God responded by telling him to go meet with Paul of Thebes who for the past 60 years had already been in the desert contemplating God, praying and practicing renunciation of the world. Where there is revival in the Church, the Desert Fathers and Mothers will be present inspiring us to seek radical discipleship, spiritual direction and to focus on the interior life. Today we see the need just as St. Anthony saw the need, and providentially we have the Traditions of the East to support our efforts just as St. Anthony had Abba Paul of Thebes to help inspire him!

The Cedars Ascetical Center seeks to be a conduit for the teachings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, a solace for those seeking spiritual direction, and encouragement for those seeking discipleship to our Lord Jesus Christ. We hope to accomplish this through the following offerings:

- Access to Eastern Rite Liturgies and Prayer from our Chapel, presided over by visiting clergy.
- Facilitating Spiritual Retreats which focus on very small groups working with a Spiritual Father on a focused topic.
- Promoting the Prayer of the Heart, a return to rigorous fasting, and living more penitentially through workshops and spiritual retreats.
- Provide a place where all Catholic clergy can go on retreat - with their families when applicable - at no cost so that their own spiritual needs can be served.
- Regular access to Spiritual Directors for the faithful both on-site and through virtual means.
- Produce continued formation materials to continue guiding retreatants and guests after their experience at our facility.

Our goal is more than just providing a profound experience for retreatants and visitors, but is focused on the progression towards theosis/sanctification of each individual during and after an event or retreat we offer. Here are some words from the Desert Fathers which guide our approach:

“Some have afflicted their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment, and so they are far from God.” - Abba Pambo

“If a man’s labors are not in harmony with his prayers, he labors in vain.” - Abba Moses the Black

“Strive with all your might to bring your interior activity into accord with God, and you will overcome exterior passions.”

- Abba Arsenics

“The nearer one draws to God, the more he sees himself a sinner.” - Abba Matoes

We will facilitate these offerings by building a Retreat Center on land that has been provided in Semmes, Alabama. Our structures will include:

- Chapel
 - West Syriac design
 - Dedicated to St. Paul of Thebes
 - Can accommodate up to 85 people
- Conference Center
 - Dedicated to St. John Climacus
 - Seat up to 85 people lecture style
 - House a small commercial kitchen
- Clergy Cabin
 - Dedicated to St. John Chrysostom
 - Can sleep a family for clergy with wife and children
- 10 Retreatant Cabins
 - Each Cabin will be dedicated to a different saint:
 - Abba Anthony the Great
 - Abba Moses the Black
 - Abba Macarius of Egypt
 - Abba Amoun the Hermit
 - Abba Pachomius the Great
 - Abba Poemen the Hermit
 - Amma Syncletica of Alexandria
 - Amma Mary of Egypt
 - Amma Sarah of the Desert
 - Amma Theodora of Alexandria
- Restrooms with toilets and showers
- Customized spaces for personal prayer and reflection
 - These will be Pavilions dedicated to different saints:
 - St. Cassian Pavilion
 - St. Palamas Pavilion
 - St. Gregory of Nyssa Pavilion
- Large open space for larger events
- Convenient parking

BUSINESS PLAN: PHASE ONE



Syriac Desert Fathers

Phase One focuses on Chapel and Retreat activities. We want to build a reputation as a center with beautiful liturgical prayer offerings for both retreatants and the greater Gulf Coast area. Daily Liturgical prayer will be the cornerstone upon which all other programs are built at TCAC. We will offer Morning and Evening Prayer daily in the Maronite Tradition, and Night Prayer on special occasions. We will offer Divine Liturgy on days when competent clergy is present, and will pray the Service of Typica when no clergy is available.

We will adopt a Retreat Schedule which follows the Maronite Liturgical Calendar, and the first year will include:

- 32 Weekend Overnight Retreats
- 3 Weekend Day Retreats
- 2 Weekday Overnight Retreats
- 7 LENTEN Weekday Overnight Retreats
- 6 LENTEN Weekend Overnight Retreats
- 1 Icon Writing Overnight Retreat

The total profit from this first year is estimated to be \$52,215 as illustrated.

This first year Schedule also allows for 11 Open Weekends and 43 Open Weeks to allow for future growth, but also to allow potential use of our facilities by specific groups who need a host for their programs - ie. Homeschool co-ops, parishes, dioceses, other non-profits and service organizations - and we will utilize a Use Agreement for outside groups desiring to utilize our campus.

Special attention will be given to cultivating a beautiful campus with landscaping and icon initiatives so as to cultivate an atmosphere conducive to prayer, contemplation and silence.

PHASE TWO



Christ The True Vine

Phase Two will focus on continuing to develop the Chapel and Retreat activities and expound on our offerings to clergy, spiritual directors and leaders/catechists. We want to ensure that any clergy who desires to go on retreat, have a place for sabbatical, or - in the event they are married clergy - have a place to visit with their family, can do so at no cost. We will also develop a Weekday Overnight Retreat specifically for Spiritual Directors and available to both clergy and lay directors.

During this phase we will also develop a vineyard of scuppernong and muscadine grapes on the premise. We will apply for a Farm Winery License with the state of Alabama and will make both sacramental and table wine. The table wine will be served with certain meals on site, while the sacramental wine will be used in the chapel and sold to other Catholic and Orthodox churches in the area. Wine sales in Alabama are dictated by very restrictive import/export laws, making wine more expensive than it would be in other areas. The Farm Winery License will allow us to produce on a small scale and sell to other churches with none of the same hassle as out-of-state producers, providing us a unique opportunity to lessen the financial burden of the cost of sacramentals for other congregations while providing stability for our own ministry.

To ensure good pollination of our vineyard, we will also work with a local beekeeper to install hives on the property. The honey these hives produce will be used in the food offered to retreatants, and the wax will be used to make votive candles which can be burned in the Chapel. This will allow us to decrease, or potentially cease, having to purchase candles for liturgical use.

PHASE THREE



Epitaphios

Phase Three will see the continuation of development efforts for Retreat and Chapel activities, as well as continued cultivation of the vineyard and beekeeping initiatives. At this stage though, we desire to be well-established enough as a permanent fixture in the life of the community that we can also give back in a meaningful way by providing a place to bury the dead.

Cost of burials have created a hardship for many, and to assist in alleviating that burden where we can, we will start a columbaria initiative to provide burial options for those without the funds or family to bury them. We will also provide the opportunity for donors, supporters and Eastern Rite Catholics to purchase niches in the columbaria so that they can be entombed at a facility where Eastern Liturgies can be offered for them and they can be ministered to through prayer in a beautiful and meaningful way by retreatants, visitors and their families.

While this is the last Phase detailed in this document, it will certainly not be the last phase in the continuance for TCAC. We will endeavour to expand our Retreat offerings while adhering to our dedication to preserve an intimate atmosphere where discipleship, spiritual direction and focus on the interior life can flourish, and the asceticism of the Desert Fathers and Mothers will continue to serve as our guide.

FUNDRAISING INITIATIVES:
501(C)(3)



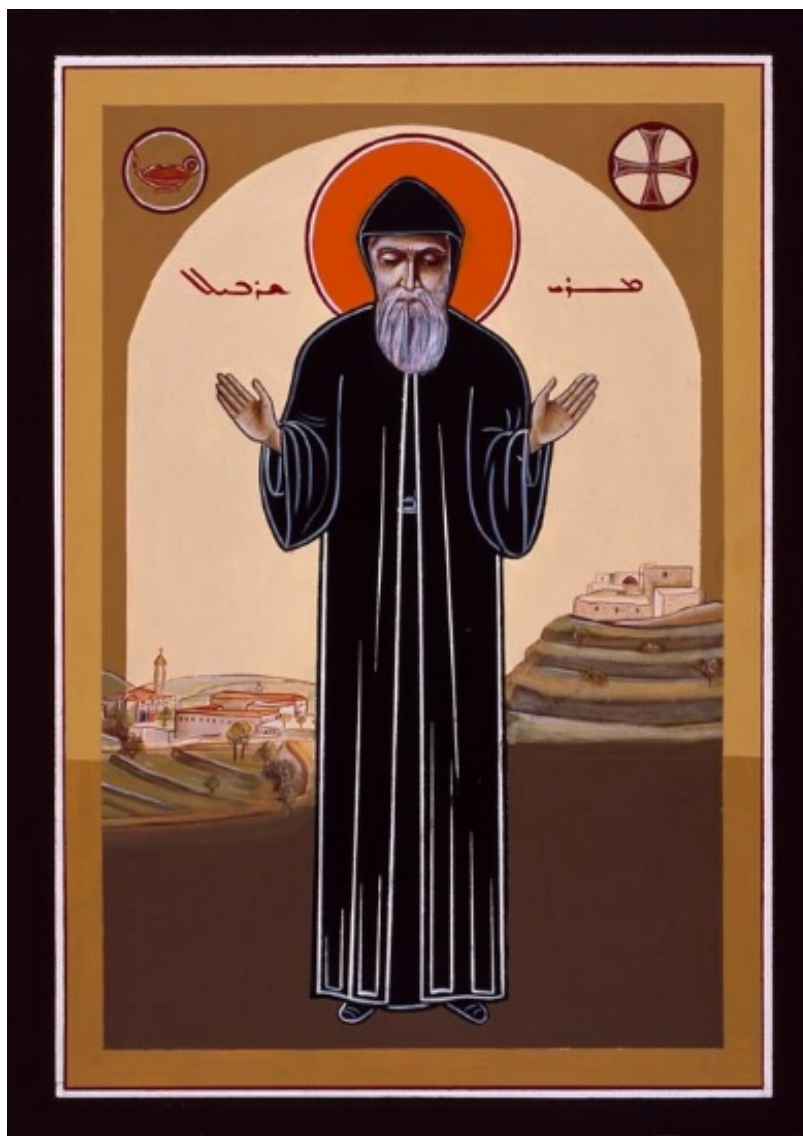
Christ the Sower

We have applied for 501(c)(3) status with the IRS as a public foundation providing religious education and promotion. As such, all donations from this point moving forward will be tax deductible so long as our application is approved. Because of the nature of our organization's work, we were permitted to utilize the EZ filing system for our tax exempt application, which is the most expeditious and permissive route toward gaining tax exempt status. We have also consulted with multiple lawyers to ask their judgements on the expectancy of our success, and all have agreed independently that it seems quite inevitable that our application will be accepted. However, to ensure that we are as transparent as possible, there is a potential that our application will be denied, which will result in donations made up to the date of that determination potentially being deemed as not tax deductible.

While we know that the uncertainty of our tax exempt status may be a deterrent for some to give to our efforts early in the process, others will not be as affected. In the event we do not attain tax exempt status, we will still be a Non-Profit Organization and will conduct business accordingly. If a gift is given with the anticipation of it being tax exempt and that status is not granted to TCAC, then we will work with the donor to provide a service - admission to retreat(s), use of the facility for event(s), columbarium niche(s), etc. - or work to return the funds in a reasonable timeframe. We are committed to maintaining transparency through the IRS filing process, so any and all updates pertaining to our tax exempt status will be shared with all donors in a timely fashion.

There is always uncertainty, but we trust that where Christ sows, good fruit will spring forth!

100 CHAPLETS



St. Charbel of Lebanon

To assist in our initial efforts, we will hold a 100 Chaplet Fundraiser. We will make 100 unique St. Charbel Chaplets to sell for \$100 each. The Chaplet will be made from semi-precious stones and silver filings and will include instruction on how to pray the chaplet as well as a St. Charbel holy card. Once the 100 Chaplets are sold, we will not make any more in that style in the future. We want this fundraising offering to be a truly unique gift for those supporting us in this early stage of our development!

If all 100 Chaplets are sold, then we will raise \$10,000 for our efforts. All the parts and labour have been donated for this project, so the funds raised through this initiative will completely go toward initial projects at TCAC which need to be addressed: **the installation of a large culvert to access the property, building permits, installation of an initial dirt/gravel road and other menial needs necessary for prepping the land for development.**

We will entrust our efforts to St. Charbel's patronage and in addition to the 100 Chaplets made, we will continue to spread devotion to him by offering the St. Charbel Healing Qurbono on the 22nd of every month - which is a Maronite tradition in many parishes - as long as we have clergy available to do so.

St. Charbel is a more modern saint in the synaxarion, but one with many miracles attributed to his intercession, and his popularity is growing in the United States. His life was simple, solitary and penitential - traits TCAC will promote with all who visit!

SPONSOR A BUILDING



Saints of Antioch

The property will house the structures listed in the “Need and Facilitation” section above. To assist in building these structures, we will offer benefactors the opportunity to sponsor a building. Each building sponsored will have a placard placed at the entrance with the benefactor’s name or the name of the person in whose memory the funds were donated. In addition to the placard, each building will also have the additional benefit to the donor:

- Gazebo: **\$7,500** (3 available) - donor will be invited to attend one Day Retreat annually with no retreat fees
- Cabin: **\$12,500** (10 available) - donor will be invited to attend one Spiritual Retreat annually with no retreat fees
- Restrooms: **\$15,000** (2 available) - donor will be invited to attend one Spiritual Retreat annually with no fees
- Clergy Cabin: **\$25,000** (1 available) - donor and a guest will be invited to attend one Spiritual Retreat annually with no retreat fees
- Additional Acreage: **\$25,000** (3 available) - donor and a guest will be invited to attend one Spiritual Retreat annually with no fee - or - if one donor contributes all three sponsorships, the benefit will match that of the Chapel
- Conference Center: **\$35,000** (1 available) - donor and a guest will be invited to attend one Spiritual Retreat or Lenten Retreat annually with no retreat fees
- Chapel: **\$75,000** (1 available) - donor will be invited to attend a Weekday Overnight Retreat (4 day, 3 night) with 9 other guests annually with no retreat fees

Total Building and Grounds Need: **\$387,500**

The cost of each building includes the finished building and also all landscaping and cosmetic costs - including the Chapel as many sacramentals have already been donated. The initial property donated for the project will house the Chapel, Conference Center and Clergy Cabin, but the additional acreage will need to be purchased to facilitate the retreatant cabins, vineyard and event space.

SPONSOR A ROW, NICHE OR HIVE



Laborers in the Vineyard

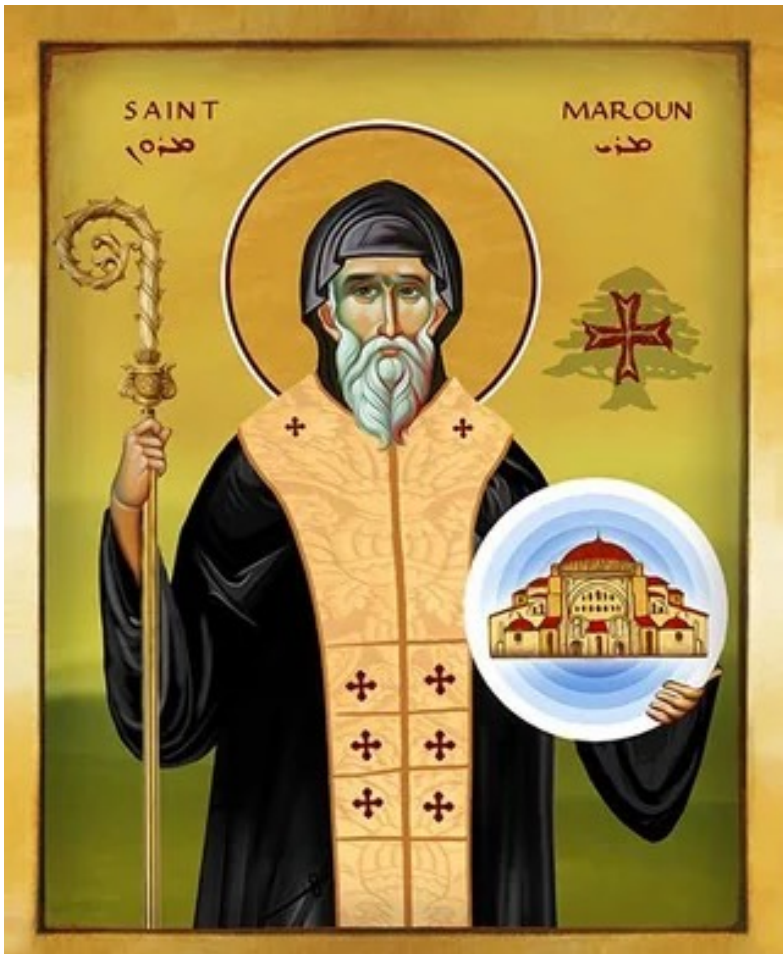
Our vineyard will accommodate 18 rows of vines, with 16 vines planted in each row. To assist in the effort of planting the vineyard, we will solicit for donations of \$2,500 per row to pay for the vines, trellis and labour for planting and installation. We will install a placard at the beginning of each row with the donors name or the name of remembrance.

We will start with three bee hives on the property and will add more according to the needs of the Center and the ability for the grounds to provide adequate pollen for the bees. A donation of \$1,500 per hive will be solicited for this initiative and a placard will be placed in the Conference Center (to ensure every guest can access it without fear of being stung).

Each columbarium installed will hold 64 niches. We will strive to accommodate any request to be laid to rest in our columbaria whether the deceased had means to pay a donation for the niche or not. Supporters of the Center will have the opportunity to purchase niches for themselves, but will also be able to sponsor niches for others. This will ensure that our dedication to bury and pray for the dead becomes and remains a reality for our community. Liturgy will be offered for the dead regularly and an altar will be built on the grounds with the columbaria to facilitate liturgies of remembrance.

We anticipate that many retreatants, clergy and visitors to the Center will walk the paths by the vineyard and the columbaria, and all will be encouraged to pray for those who donated to our efforts and to those laid to rest there. Our retreats will focus on prayer, solitude and fasting, and as such will allow much time for retreatants to wander the grounds in prayer. You can be assured that upon seeing the dedication and identification placards around the property, those names etched on them will have fervent prayers offered for them constantly!

LEBANESE FESTIVAL



St. Maron, founder of the Maronite Church

The Cedars Ascetical Center will host an Annual Lebanese Festival to assist in initial fundraising efforts, but also to provide a source of continued revenue once we are operational. The Festival will focus on providing opportunity for the Gulf Coast area to learn about Lebanese culture, food, music and will highlight Maronite Liturgy and prayer. There are many Lebanese business owners in the Greater Mobile area who will support and benefit from this Festival - from restaurants and grocers to clothing stores and funeral homes.

We will solicit Sponsorships for various activity areas, sell Vendor Space to local artisans and concessions, sponsor a 5k Marathon (with the starting and finish line being conveniently located on our property!) and have our own Religious Gift Store as the primary income producing activities at the festival. Being a community-focused event, we will not sell admission tickets.

Here is a sample schedule for the day:

- 7am: 5k Marathon
- 9am: Maronite Morning Prayer and Confession
- 9.30am: Maronite Divine Liturgy
- 10.30am: Festival Grounds Opened
 - Food Vendors and Food Trucks Open
 - Merchant Vendor Booths Open
 - Activity Areas Open
 - Tours of the Chapel Available
 - Tours of the Retreat Center Available
 - Tours of the Vineyard and Winery Available
 - Confession Pavilion Open (specific times based on clergy availability, but hopefully throughout the event)
- 5.30pm: Maronite Evening Prayer
- 6pm: Free Concert for the community
- 8pm: Blessing and Conclusion of Festival

Similar Festivals run by other Eastern Rite Churches/ Missions generate significant (\$15-\$85k) income to assist in their annual operating costs; we anticipate the same success.

CONCLUSION



Our Lady of Elige, Our Lady of the Maronites

There are many religious and cultural reasons why a center such as this would benefit the Mobile area in particular, but given the access of Mobile with a regional airport and major interstates which intersect it coupled with the warm climate, The Cedars Ascetical Center will be poised to serve the greater Eastern Catholic community in the United States year-round. Access to spiritual direction is greatly lacking in the Catholic community as a whole, but there are very few centers which focus on Eastern spirituality.

Ignatian spirituality centers can be found throughout the US, and here on the Gulf Coast there is one in Louisiana called Manresa. It is booked years in advance, so access is very limited and younger men and women seeking entrance are put on waiting lists - this is a common issue with established retreat centers nationwide. When space can be found at an existing facility, Eastern Rite Catholics must often choose to participate in latinized programs rather than ones which celebrate their liturgical autonomy, or they sacrifice in-person offerings for virtual ones as they are made available. Furthermore, Western Rite Catholics who are interested in programs focusing more on the Desert Fathers and Mothers and the Early Church Fathers are left with very few options.

The Cedars Ascetical Center truly will service a need that exists in a universal sense for Catholic Churches here in the US. We have the location, we have the staff, we have local interest, and now we simply need to raise the funds to build the facility. The grand total of just under \$400,000 for Phase One of the project is not only achievable, but has been set up in a manner to be beneficial to those supporting our efforts.

We place our success into the hands of Our Lady of Elige and we humbly ask for your consideration to assist us. Our Lady of the Maronites - pray for us!

To make a donation, please contact us at:

info@TheCedarsAC.com

