

Very Reverend George Mahfouz

Assistant Priest at St. George Orthodox Church of Boston 1909-1911

Fr. George Mahfouz was born in Damascus, Syria in 1854. He married Susanne Homsey in about 1880 and he was ordained in Damascus by Patriarch Hierotheos shortly thereafter. Fr. George served as pastor at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Rashaya, west of Damascus, for over twenty years. His brother was also a priest; Fr. Nicholas Mahfouz served in Damascus. In November 1902, Fr. George and his family immigrated to Montreal, Quebec.

He arrived with a letter of release from Patriarch Meletius II [Doumani]. Bishop Tikon assigned him to serve the community at Montreal replacing Archimandrite Meletios Karoum who returned to Syria. The majority of the Montreal community came from Rashaya and knew Fr. George as their former pastor. He oversaw the continued growth of the community and converted his home into a chapel to provide regular liturgical services. In 1904, he returned to Syria and remained there for one year. Two of his older sons, George and Basilios remained in Montreal where they operated a fruit market.

In 1905 Fr. George and his family returned to Montreal. In need of a permanent church, Fr. George led the community in acquiring an abandoned industrial building on Vitre Street East in Old Montreal as a suitable place of worship. The property was renovated into a proper Orthodox church and in 1905 it was dedicated as St. Nicholas Syrian Orthodox Church. In 1908, Fr. George and his family returned again to Syria.

One year later, Fr. George Mahfouz, his wife, Susanna, and four younger children immigrated to the United States. They sailed first from Beirut, Syria to Le Havre, France, and arrived in New York aboard the steamer 'ss. *Chicago*' on 27 September 1909 destined for Boston. Fr. George was sponsored by his friend from Damascus, Farris Diban who lived at 22 Hudson Street, Boston. Farris was an active member of St. George Syrian Orthodox Church of Boston.

Once again, Fr. George presented a letter of release, this time from Patriarch Gregory IV [Haddad]. In October 1909, Bishop Raphael [Hawaweeny] received Fr. Gregory Mahfouz and assigned him to assist Fr. George Maloof at St. George Syrian Orthodox Church in Boston. Established in 1900, the Boston community was growing rapidly and Fr. George Maloof needed assistance in ministering to the new arrivals. Regional loyalties were dividing immigrants from the big cities and the villages which threatened the stability of the community. Bishop Raphael and Fr. Maloof believed the best solution to the dissension in the Boston community was the establishment of a second Syrian Orthodox parish.

Fr. George Mahfouz assisted at St. George for two years and was instrumental in establishing the Society of St. John of Damascus in order to satisfy the needs of the Damascene contingent of the Syrian Orthodox community. By 1911 this group was able to purchase a house on Hudson Street and renovate it to serve as a church. Fr. Mahfouz served as the first pastor of the newly formed St. John of Damascus Church until 1913.

In 1913, Bishop Raphael assigned Fr. George to Detroit, Michigan, to assist the growing Orthodox community there. He celebrated the first Divine Liturgy for the community and was the first priest to serve the newly formed St. George Syrian Orthodox Church of Detroit. This is the last reference for Fr. George Mahfouz. It is believed that he died prior to 1917 but to date no record has been found. His son, Basilios, was ordained a priest in 1917.

Compiled and submitted by Fr. Timothy J. Ferguson