

# Our life at Anta Akhi

Serving a life of dignity for people with disability



Septembre 2016

## Gharib... until we meet again



He arrived early to the Father's house.

Stricken by the Duchene Muscular Dystrophy, Gharib made his entry into Glory on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 2016, a day before the Assumption day, at the age of 31, following a cardiac arrest.

This young man who dedicated his life to Mary, whose life was a testimony of the love of the Father and his tenderness, was full of attention to the needs of others, and perfectly understood the language of those who can't speak. He gradually lost his physical abilities until he was no more able to turn alone in bed... but he was happy! How was that possible?

"I would like to say that in general, I live the Joy and I want to spread it around me. My mission is to be here for the community, not for myself! I am very happy in Anta Akhi because I live my mission in the community and I particularly love the fact that we all live happily as family. Life is beautiful! It is a wonderful adventure and I welcome everything it brings me. My words might surprise you but I am a very happy person. I don't seek to being able to walk anymore. When I was a child, I understood that I won't be able to walk; the existential training and the accompaniment I received in Anta Akhi helped me to accept my situation in peace. And you, who read me, my hope for you is that you live in joy... like us!"  
*Summary of his testimony in the newsletter of Anta Akhi in 2013.*

### Gharib and heaven's joy

Letter from Anne, a friend of Anta Akhi

Dear Yvonne, dear Ghassan and all Anta Akhi family, I would like to express my proximity to you at the occasion of the birth of Gharib in heaven. I can imagine his joy and the Father's joy when they will hug for the first time, and also Mary's joy for welcoming Her child on the Assumption day! We have mixed feelings of joy and sorrow. Sorrow because Gharib will be absent and missed. And this is quite normal. I am carrying you in my prayers, especially you Ghassan. Don't hesitate to snuggle in the arms of Mary. She is a wonderful mother who comforts us, sympathizes with us. I would like to thank Mary, Set el Beit, for opening to me the doors of Anta Akhi, for giving me so many brothers and sisters. For Gharib who is going to be able to achieve his mission like Ste Therese of Lisieux: spend his heaven doing good deeds on earth. Kisses to all. Anne.

For those who knew Gharib, his words were not utopian; they were an expression of a life of joy and transcendence. Yvonne has revealed its essence during Gharib's funerals on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August.

"Gharib is still alive. It is only his body lying here.

Gharib has been a grace and a benediction to us during these years where he was among us. The Saint Trinity has lived in him, and that's why we don't say farewell to Gharib. He is now celebrating with Jesus, Mary's Assumption. This is our reality. Everyone is free to believe or not, but the one who doesn't, surely misses the Grace that can only come from above.

Today, we celebrate Mary : My soul magnifies the Lord for he has looked upon his lowly servant, Mary, Gharib and each one of us, if we only say yes to the project of the Father, to make us his children. We have these earthly years to prepare ourselves to be in the Father's heart. And during these years, we are in the heart of Mary for she prints in us the image of Her loving Son, making us discover how important we are: we all have the same value. If this wasn't the case, we wouldn't be children of God, but children of the world, where everyone boasts about what he has, not what he is.

Gharib was engaged in this path. He has adopted the idea of devoting his life to Mary and his decision is irrevocable. I was asking Mary earlier if she could have Gharib celebrating with them today.

Happy are you Gharib for on this day, there are festivities in heaven; angels, saints and all inhabitants are overflowing with joy for Mary's splendor. This is the sign of what awaits us. This is the path of our life."



## Together we share the best moments of joy



We have had the joy of welcoming **Mgr Jean-Pierre Cattenoz**, archbishop of Avignon in France for the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. Thank you Mgr Cattenoz for helping our youth, the team, the general assembly members and friends deepen their relationship with Jesus Alive and Victorious, while learning to become familiar with the Word of God.

Whether they stayed with us for 6 months or just a few days, our **34 french visitors** have experienced with our young people outstanding moments! Towards the end of their stay, their testimony revealed a deep, human and spiritual transformation. Mathieu reveals:

“At first I was a bit reluctant, but it turned out to be pure joy: day after day I let myself be, confidently around the *chabibeh*, the youth, and everyone else. And I quickly felt I belonged to a big family, where everyone has his own place, is accepted as a brother as we are all sons of one Father, the Lord himself. From this perspective, I felt that I too was a child of God, and a full member of the human family. Yes! It really felt like family!”

**The missionary group of the College of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts – Ain Najem was here for 8 days with sister Maya.**

These 50 young people have made a difference in the life at our Home, and their hearts were deeply moved by this experience. Sister Maya said: “Chabibet (youth of) Anta Akhi have taught us how to exceed our limits, to enforce our capacities to overcome difficulties and challenges, and to employ our physical, intellectual and psychological energies to reach our objectives. Another lesson from the chabibeh is how to bounce from our failures and continue, instead of letting us be discouraged by them. Also, we learnt how to face life with courage and serenity, and live it with joy and confidence in He who gave us everything, our Lord Jesus Christ. Chabibet Anta Akhi made us realize the meaning of everything we do or experience in life.”

**We usually thank our visitors. This year, we would like to thank, along with them, our youth for the life testimonies and the changes they operate in the lives of everyone who comes near to them. Without accepting the handicap with a big “yes” and the joy that arises from overcoming difficulties, this would have been impossible! Thank you chabibeh!**

## The operational team: our youth are also responsible.

In the previous newsletter, we have exposed the work of the operational team next to our young adults with disabilities. Today, we share with you a big responsibility which is to pray, along with our youth to the sanctification of the bishops and the priests, and mainly to those close to our Family, and whose number have reached 71 this year. Every year, on Holy Thursday, we place their names on the altar. Each name then is drawn by one of the youth or team members, and this person commits herself to pray for the priest for the coming year.

It has been 2 years now that our priest friends know about this initiative. Here are some abstracts of the letters sent by a number of them. We will start by the abstract of the letter of our dear Pope Francis:

“His Holiness has charged me to express his big appreciation for the work that you undertake and he encourages you to remain in perseverance and constant renewal. His Holiness the Pope assures you of his prayers at your intention and thanks you for yours towards him. He also joyfully grants you his apostolic benediction.”

**Mgr Paolo Borga – Vatican.**

Thank you infinitely and I pray that God will always keep us united in his joy and his love. In union of prayers, and thank you from all my heart to Rita for her “yes”. I wish her a beautiful journey towards the “Big Love”. **Father Jean-Paul – Togo.**

I pray your days will be filled with the love and peace of the Lord, and that you may sow the joy in the heart of everyone. I pray to you my beloved. Thank you very much. **Father Daniel – Irak**

Thank you very much for this annual initiative, especially now that

I experience living abroad. I really need your prayers. Anta Akhi’s family has traced my priestly and apostolic paths and it remains a source of inspiration in my life and service. I thank Roger and all the youth team for their prayers; I, too, carry you in my prayers at each mass I celebrate. May the Lord bless your efforts and your mission. **Father Edward.**

**How big is the responsibility of our youth and team members, as well as the one of every baptized person! And how beautiful it is to know that you are loved and covered with prayers! May we never forget the part of everyone in our life, especially the part of our pastors who dedicate themselves day by day so that the Love of Jesus takes place in our lives!**





## Summary of the year: the action around the youth

**The heart, this engine that gives life to our “Foyer de Tendresse” 11 months a year, moves during the month of August and finds another residence at the St Georges Convent in Qlailaat. It is the month of the summer camp, so much awaited by our youth team, they indeed need a break, to go out on trips, to welcome family, friends and volunteers in the outdoors and breathe the fresh air! They especially appreciate this moment after a year full of hard work! Let us now pause and look back. How did this year take place? What particular events have marked it out?**



This year, and with great pleasure, we have welcomed more than 3000 visitors. Out of this number, there were 1200 students who have been able to be in touch with the world of disability and discover through the youth testimonies, that life can be beautiful despite the difficulties.

Along with welcoming visitors, we have been on several outings (98) and we were able to live beautiful spiritual moments (47% of the outings), recreational and cultural (53%). When we are out, the approach is always more personalized and is adapted to the needs and wishes of our youth.

Along with the social activities, we have spent some time together. To optimize the morning time, we were divided in 3 groups according to the type of handicap (physical, mental and polyhandicap); each group have been exposed to different levels of activities: trainings, manual work, relaxation time, etc.

And the rest of the time (65%) was dedicated to satisfy the vital needs of health and daily life. This number might be surprising but often people don't realize the amount of time needed to fulfill the requirements of a highly dependent handicapped, mainly in a community.

**In a society where we are called to produce more and more, our youth team teaches us how to lead a more peaceful life, at a slower pace. Instead of rapidity, efficiency, and production, we live the virtues of patience, love, kindness, and gratitude for everything God does in our lives.**

### Many thanks to the Rotary Club of Beirut for their precious donation

**We have received a donation from the Rotary Club of Beirut, a van capable of accommodating 3 disabled people. Many thanks for this wonderful initiative, and for the president of the Club, Mr. Pierre Debahy, who visited us along with 4 other members of the club. On their visit, Debahy declared:**



“On my personal behalf and on behalf of the Rotary Club of Beirut, I would like to express our deep satisfaction and our great joy for the concretization of this project that has been dear to our hearts since August 2015. To deliver a van to facilitate the transportation of people with reduced mobility. This is only a drop in the ocean of the needs of your Association but we hope that this drop will manage to cover an urgent need, and to ease the work of the healthcare team. In addition, we are particularly pleased to be here, in the headquarters of the Association to live a moment of brotherhood and sharing with you and with all these women and men, who have been hurt by life (or spirit-wounded) and who have come to Anta Akhi in search of help, comfort and human warmth.

To all the healthcare team, we grant our wishes of courage and perseverance; may this admirable work keep on flourishing, helping people in easing their pain, warming their hearts and maintaining, despite all, the hope for a sweeter and more fraternal existence.”

## Michael, surrounded by his family !



A playful, funny, attentive and very touching 26 year old young man, Michael doesn't like to go unnoticed. If by chance, you happen to forget to greet him, he will surely remind you to do so! Stricken by cerebral palsy- Little Syndrome, Michael is dependent in all his daily life activities. He also can't express himself clearly; it is only through closed questions to which one can answer by 'yes' or 'no' that we can communicate.

He enjoys going out, debating and laughing with his friends! Michael listens to all sorts of music and loves to eat ice cream and cakes, especially his mother's chocolate cake that he can only eat grinded, like any other sort of food.

Our young man loves Anta Akhi but he waits for Fridays to go back home! And then again, he waits for Mondays morning to go to Anta Akhi. An evidence: Michael is a desired and loved child in a family composed of his devoted parents, despite a fragile health, his twin brother Antonio who works abroad and Charbel, his youngest brother who oftentimes comes to volunteer in Anta Akhi. His mother reveals:

"At first, we suffered a lot especially that Michael and his twin brother were prematurely born and had undergone many surgeries. But it was Michael who had been close to death, but made his way out. Assuming a handicap is not an easy task but the team of Anta Akhi has sustained us along the way. With time, things became easier. No mother wishes her son to have a disability but once the situation is accepted, difficulties are overcome, in a smoother way.

As a family, we used to go out often, courageously defying the pitiful look on the face of strangers, which was a real ordeal. But since our health declined, we stay at home when Michael comes for the week-end. He spends time chatting with us, his brother, and friends. He also makes a long distance chatting with his brother who lives abroad.

I continuously thank the Lord for all he has given us. I am very proud of my son, so are his brothers! I praise God for Michael's presence, an angel's presence, among us and I oftentimes entrust Michael with my prayer intentions. Until my last breath, I will be grateful to Anta Akhi who has been a real family, real brothers and sisters to our Michael, who love and care for him deeply."

The parents of Michael are particularly available to Anta Akhi family. They go out of their way to support our action, diligently and joyfully. We would like to thank all the parents of the 'chabibeh' our young people, for their assistance, whether it is by attending the church mass, the events, by helping us in the cooking work, or by supporting our fundraising activities, like the folkloric night, the family dinner and the monthly breakfast. It is only through this partnership, knit with daily love, that we can form a family around our child with disability.



### Urgent call

*Dear friends, this is an urgent call for a ventilator for Paul, one of our young people, who has had a tracheostomy and a gastrotomy and needs respiratory assistance. His parents don't have the required amount to pay the machine. We have rent a ventilator but we should buy one at the earliest. The cost is 10700 USD.*

*Thank you in advance for your generosity!*

### How to help AntaAkhi

1. Sponsor a young person starting from \$ 10 per month, \$ 120 per year.

2. Make a single donation possibly specifying the need that you want to support.

To make a tax exempt donation in the US, please contact [sesobelusa@gmail.com](mailto:sesobelusa@gmail.com)

Thank you for being part of what we build together in our journey of life.

If you wish to receive our newsletter by email, please notify us on [communication@antaakhi.org](mailto:communication@antaakhi.org)

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