



**Darbessama**

**Fondation P. Simon El-Zind**

### **A first summary of the “*Darb Mar Charbel*” project in Lebanon**

Dear friends,

We are wholeheartedly thankful to HE Archbishop Elias Abdallah Zeidan, and to the Maronite diocese in Los Angeles, for linking us to your esteemed persons in order to present the project *Darb Mar Charbel* (The Saint Charbel Trail), hoping for your precious support.

*Darb Mar Charbel* is the first-ever long-distance pilgrimage route in Lebanon. It is engulfed within the picturesque Lebanese nature and modeled, in many ways, after the *Santiago de Compostela* trail (Spain). Destined to become a universal heritage for mankind, the *Darb*, as we hope and believe, will become a much-cherished international pilgrimage destination for our Maronite and Christian youth scattered worldwide, as well as for any pilgrim all over the world and, obviously, for the inland Lebanese population, irrespective of denomination.

The creation of this “*major Christian spiritual itinerary*” will highlight Lebanon as a “*terra sancta*” (holy land), according to the words of Saint John Paul II, and as a major pilgrimage destination, according to the official advocacy of the Holy See, which regularly publishes a list of such countries. This will also pave the way for initiating other similar pilgrimage itineraries within Lebanon, currently in preparation.

*Darb Mar Charbel* will be a trail of about 130 km, covering almost all the places that were significant stages in the life of Lebanon’s patron saint, Mar Charbel. It starts from Qozhaya and Beqaa Kafra, in the North, heading towards the sanctuary Our Lady of Lebanon-Harissa across Mayfouq and Annaya, before ending up in Bkerki, where Mar Charbel was ordained priest. The *Darb* can also be walked the other way round, but then it is more challenging physically.

The *Darb* requires an average of nine hiking days with eight overnight stays. It will go through some 45 towns and villages. It can be achieved in whole or in part. All are welcome to partake: pilgrims or hikers of all backgrounds; families; diocesan faithful; people with disabilities; youth organizations; prayer groups;

school and university clubs; international associations; high mountain hiking groups, etc.

After four years of intense preparations, we are now launching the public fundraising campaign for implementing this admirable and unique project, having scrutinized all its details and secured the enthusiastic support, among others, of Mother Church and the Maronite Lebanese Order, Mar Charbels' order. The launching event will take place in the Saint Maron Monastery of Annaya, on November 1, 2023.

A standing committee, the *Darb Mar Charbel Committee*, operating under the umbrella of the *Darbessama* association, and in close association with the *Commission for Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism* of the patriarchal diocese of Jounieh as well as with other Church agencies in Lebanon, will supervise all the phases of implementation.

The association *Lebanon Mountain Trail*, specialized in designing mountain trails according to international standards, will be entrusted with laying out and equipping the whole trail as funds are gradually secured. The track of Santiago de Compostela will be the model to follow in terms of milestones, marking out and information panels along the *Darb*.

Some specific objectives of the project are the following:

- Promote sustainable development and rural tourism in the explored regions, including the establishment of a network of accredited hostels and guesthouses throughout the *Darb*.
- Promote books, documentaries, and children's stories about the *Darb*.
- Establish partnerships between *Darb Mar Charbel* and one (or more) Christian pilgrimage trail(s) outside Lebanon.
- Work towards having *Darb Mar Charbel* recognized as a *UNESCO World Heritage* site.
- Offer official certificates to individuals who complete the *Darb*, in whole or in part.
- Introduce the culture of pilgrimage routes into school and university curricula.

### **Fundraising campaign in support of the project**

A full-fledged fundraising campaign in support of the project will start as of November 1, 2023. Around sixty per cent of the budget will be injected in human development (employment of around 500 people from 15 villages in field work

for about two years, creation of at least sixty long-term jobs). Around forty municipalities will benefit from the infrastructure work and, on the long run, from the influx of pilgrims and tourists.

Our target is to secure half of the budget (i.e., around a million US\$) by April 2024 as a threshold amount. This would allow to start safely the full landscaping of the trail while additional funds continue to flow.

If everything goes according to plan, we hope to launch the trail officially by May 2026.

We are interested in collecting donations from any person, not exclusively from big donors. This is a matter of principle. We have calculated that equipping and fitting out one meter of the *Darb* would cost around 20 US\$, and anybody is welcome to contribute in equipping 1, 2 or a certain number of meters.



### **More info about *Darb Mar Charbel***

Please reach us at:

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The *Darb Mar Charbel* Committee

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