

# ST. THOMAS MISSION

*A Publication of the Chaldean Archdiocese of Erbil*



“May you be blessed with the spirit of the season, which is peace - The gladness of the season, which is hope - And the heart of the season, which is love.”



Traditional Irish Christmas Blessing contributed by Michael J. O'Connor.

## The Pilgrims ate Dolma

*by Michael J. O'Connor*

While I'm currently listening to the dulcet tones of Christmas jazz, the Ankawa air is still a relatively balmy 56 degrees Fahrenheit – not yet cold enough for a rollicking snowball fight, but just in the last few weeks getting into the cozy sweet spot of sweater weather. Students and teachers alike are rapidly entering into the spirit of the season of Christmas. The fun and festivities of the holidays have been a joy and blessing, with a rousing fest for Christmas coming up and a Thanksgiving that was a combination of American and Iraqi culture. From turkey and stuffing to bryani and dolma, the feast was a tapestry of culture set against a backdrop of blessings and gratitude. While it will be good to be with family soon (the other American teachers and I will be heading home for Christmas and then returning in early January), there is already a profound sense that celebrating any holiday here will continue to be a joy, with the newfound blessings of community and family of our students and fellow teachers.

Merry Christmas from all of us at the St. Thomas Mission!



## To Become like Children

by Rosie Prezzia



"Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mathew 18:3). Started by a past team member, LUX is an initiative to bring Christ to our students outside of and beyond the school-day. Every two weeks, we meet at St. Joseph Cathedral for games, spiritual discussions, and, of course, prayer. Beyond doubt is the value of the academic relationship between student and teacher, but LUX offers an entirely different collegial experience. When I engage with my students at LUX, I find it far easier to see and appreciate them as completely unique individuals with personalities, qualities, and quirks. LUX permits a certain sense of familiarity neither possible nor prudent within the walls of a classroom. This familiarity with the students inspires reflection on my familiarity with Christ. Compared to me, these children do not possess much technical knowledge about Him but, compared to me, their hearts have a greater, more intuitive inclination to love that can only inspire others to open their own hearts to the Lord with such trust and humility.

## Workouts for the Soul

by Anna Cannon

At Mar Qardakh, we prioritize our students' character development both intellectually and spiritually. From well-planned and passionately-delivered lessons to daily prayer and weekly Mass, opportunities to learn abound. This year, we added intensive physical development to the list by forming a sports program for football, basketball, and volleyball. Students have already seen incredible improvement not only athletically but also in character-developing virtues. It is a joy to witness the light in a student's eyes, or the burst of confidence when they make a shot, after practicing diligently for weeks. In fact, some of my middle school athletes have never played basketball before and are unearthing genuine talent. The growth mindset they learn in sports translates into all areas of their lives, improving their work ethic and confidence on the court, in the classroom, with friends, and at home.

