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Ladies and gentlemen good morning.

My name is Br. Riccardo Ceriani, director of the Terra Sancta International Organ Festival, and I am the founder with Fr. Khalil Rahmeh of Lebanese Pipe Organ Week. In fact, the SOL Festival, Lebanese Pipe Organ Week, is a co-production between the NDU School of Music and the Terra Sancta Organ Festival.

This joint venture came about in 2015 in a very unique way, which I will briefly tell you about. You should know that the Terra Sancta Organ Festival takes place in the countries of the Middle East and the Levant where the Custody of the Holy Land is present (Custody of the Holy Land is the name of the mission in the Middle East of the Order of Friars Minor Franciscans since 1342). Although in Lebanon the Custody of the Holy Land has few monasteries and parishes, in 2015 I came to Lebanon to organize the Terra Sancta Organ Festival here as well. Here I met Fr. Khalil Rahmeh, who also wanted to organize a festival dedicated to the organ. It was natural for us to immediately think of a co-production, to avoid having two organ festivals in Lebanon, when up to that time there was none. Thus, thanks to the joint venture between Notre Dame University and Terra Sancta Organ Festival, the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week has strong local roots and, at the same time, an international dimension.

The Lebanese Pipe Organ Week is the only festival in Lebanon to highlight this monumental instrument, played by renowned international organists. The festival takes place in different churches and venues in many areas of Lebanon, giving the audience the opportunity to explore different music repertoires during a one-week course, with free admission to all concerts.

The Lebanese Pipe Organ Week is one of the few festivals in Lebanon (maybe the only one) that is not restricted to one area, but has the vocation to spread across the country. In these years the concerts were held not only in Beirut, but also in Zouk Mosbeh, Ajaltoun, Harissa, Maayssra, Antelias, Tripoli, the Bekaa valley, and in the near future also in Tyre.

An important aspect that should be highlighted is that our concerts are all free admission, thanks especially to the foreign embassies and cultural institutes that support us (and who will be mentioned and thanked by Fr. Khalil).

Thanks to the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week for some years now Lebanon has witnessed a renewed interest in the pipe organ: many churches and institutions have restored their pipe organs or have acquired new ones while others are planning to install one: the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week acts as an incentive for this renaissance.

The festival takes care of Lebanon's pipe organs maintenance for the concerts of the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week. The pipe organ is not like a trumpet, which works even if nobody plays it in two hundred years: pipe

organs need to be played and maintained, or they get out of order and lose their value. And their value is high, because they are very expensive.

The best way to preserve the health of organs is to play them. Let me give you an example: Egypt is full of organs, bigger, more beautiful and older than the organs in Lebanon. But in all of Egypt there is not a single organ that works completely, because there is no one who teaches this instrument and therefore no one who knows how to play it. So there is no interest in doing maintenance and as a result the organs no longer work and remain in churches and conservatories as very expensive furniture that has lost all its value.

So, you need organists, not only for culture, not only to enjoy a specific music repertoire, not only to accompany your celebrations and solemn liturgies, but also to preserve your heritage.

I wanted to emphasize this aspect to tell you the great importance of the Lebanese Pipe Organ Week, but especially the NDU organ school strongly desired by Fr. Khalil Rahmeh, to whom I now yield the floor.

Thank you.