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Aid to the
Church in Need
ACN CANADA



Your help
in Iraq!
The dawn of a new day

EDITORIAL



Devoted benefactors,

Your generosity, your sense of solidarity, and —dare I say— your sacred sense of duty move me. It's thanks to you that for over ten years, we have been supporting the Christians of Iraq.

On August 6, 2014, the Islamic State (IS) invaded the Nineveh Plains, the ancestral homeland of history's first Christian communities—a tragedy that, without you, would have remained as it was. From the very first days, Aid to the Church in Need could not have accomplished the miracle of helping thousands of fleeing Christian men and women, terrorized by this cruel and inhumane group. Your help even made it possible to build a temporary village to house the displaced.

I don't know about you, but I remember it like it was yesterday. There was so much information coming in, so many feelings of horror and disbelief.

In this *Fall 2024* issue of the *Magazine*, we bring you miracles, from the saving of ancient manuscripts, to the hope raised by Pope Francis' visit to the country. And some figures too: you've helped to build almost 3,000 houses, enabling Christians to stay. This testifies to your solidarity with your poor and persecuted brothers and sisters in Iraq and around the world.

Without you, Iraq's Christian community would likely be on the verge of extinction. Yet, the Christian presence in the Middle East plays a crucial role in interfaith dialogue. Today, thanks to your faith and hope in tomorrow, they are still in Iraq.

For all this, and on their behalf, I thank you.

God bless you, and have a wonderful fall!

Marie-Claude Lalonde
National Director

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It doesn't cost a thing, but it helps a great deal!

Cover page: In 2015, smiling children in the village created for displaced persons in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan.
Smiles only possible thanks to you! ©Caroline van Pradelles /ACN



A FEW PROJECTS WE SUPPORTED IN 2023

ASIA

- Support for 91 students of the Holy Spirit Major Seminary in Dhaka, **Bangladesh**
- Completion of Arooj-e-Mariam Catholic Church, Faisalabad, **Pakistan**
- Demolishing and renovating the halls for the church activities of St. George Parish, Bartella, **Iraq**

SOUTH AMERICA

- Construction of a parish house for the parish of San José Partriarca de la Esperanza, in the region of Maipo, **Chile**
- Repair and maintenance of vehicles used by diocesan pastoral workers in the Diocese of Ciego de Ávila, **Cuba**
- Participation of 300 young people in the pilgrimage and youth mission to Margarita Island, **Venezuela**

AFRICA

- Construction of a new chapel for the Sisters of Mary of Ingelmunster, Kinshasa, **Democratic Republic of the Congo**
- Repair and restoration of the convent at St. Mary's hill, after the roof was blown off during a storm, Lugazi, **Uganda**
- Completion of the training center for the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of Africa in Isoka, **Zambia**

Christians, Like Olive Trees

You are the bearers of great hope in Iraq. Thanks to you, Christians once again feel freer to live and profess their faith.

From August 2014 to the fall of 2016, the Islamic State (IS) committed genocide against Iraqi Christians in the Nineveh Plains. Last July, at a press conference organized by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) on this subject, Archbishop Nizar Semaan, Syriac Catholic archbishop of Adiabene (northern Iraq), said, "The people here are like the olive tree. You can cut it down, you can burn it, but after ten or twenty years, it will bear fruit again. They've tried everything, but we're staying here, and as a Church, we're doing everything we can to give a sign of hope."

Without you, this "sign of hope" would have disappeared from the Nineveh Plains, whose existence is even mentioned in the Old Testament. Today, it is inhabited by the descendants of the first Christians in history. It's thanks to you that they are still there. It is with your support that our sisters and brothers in faith still form living communities, with a deep faith and an undeniable love for the Church. Bashar Warda, Chaldean archbishop of Erbil, also took part in the press conference last July. He confided: "You should know that people feel a great attachment to the Church." Despite the difficulties and hardships they have experienced, Iraqi Christians have never questioned their faith and love for the Church. "That's why I encourage you to help the Church in its pastoral activities, because if the Church is strong, the community will stay here. If the priest leaves, so will the community."

Priests, brothers, sisters, and lay catechists have remained despite the climate of terror imposed by



Msgr. Bashar Warda during a spring procession in 2017 to celebrate the return of Christians to the Nineveh Plains.

the Islamic State. Some died as martyrs. Thanks to you, Christians remain. They are like the olive tree, a symbol of peace in a country where peace is still fragile. Your help in Iraq dates back to 1972, but it has become vital there since the events of 2014. For this, we thank you sincerely, and thank you for continuing!



Watch a video ➔



Msgr. Najeeb holds in his hands the history of Christians in Iraq, preserved thanks to you!

You Have Helped Rescue the Memory of a People!

Ten days before the Islamic State (IS) invaded the Nineveh Plains to reign over it for two horror-filled years, Dominican Archbishop Najeeb Michaeel, Chaldean archbishop of Mosul, foresaw the tragedy to come.

A few weeks earlier, he had already been alerted by anti-Christian attacks in and around Mosul. Unlike other attacks on the Christian community in the recent past, these were more serious. From this inspiration—which he describes as divine—Msgr. Najeeb decided to carry out the transfer of ancient documents. These documents represent the memory of Iraq's Christian community. These treasures of humanity were then sent to Erbil, capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, for safekeeping.

"The Christian community here in Iraq is not a new community. It is very old, almost 2,000 years old," he told Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) in the fall of 2020. "We have numerous grammars and dictionaries dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries, particularly in Aramaic, the language of Christ. It's our mother tongue and we're proud to preserve it."

Interviewed on Salt and Light Television's *En toutes choses* program, he confided that this rescue wasn't just about preserving old manuscripts. When he was fleeing the Nineveh Plains on August 6, 2014, for example, Msgr. Najeeb didn't hesitate to take families fleeing on foot into his car. "Normally, it's catastrophic to sit on such fragile manuscripts, but I said, 'We have to save the human and the book and the culture at the same time.' We can die together, or live together... with our culture, with our past."

During this dark period, his efforts led to the safeguarding of 800 manuscripts dating back from the 13th to the 19th centuries. In addition, since 1990, Msgr. Najeeb has contributed to the protection of a further 8,000 manuscripts and 35,000 documents of the Eastern Church. In October 2020, his work earned him a place as a finalist for the European Union's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

Regina Lynch, then in charge of projects for the whole of ACN, said: "The prize underlines the efforts of this pastor who, in the face of barbarism, saved historic manuscripts that are so important in helping Iraqi Christian communities to keep their culture and heritage alive, despite all the obstacles."

Throughout these tragic times in Iraq, your support has enabled many religious congregations to help the population. Thank you!

Watch a video ➔





Your support for the students of the Catholic University in Erbil ensures the future of Iraq's Christians.

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Your Support is Their Future!

Without you, the future of young people in Iraq is uncertain. Thanks to your generosity, you are helping to secure that future. With these young people, you are building the Iraq of tomorrow!

Pope Francis visited Iraq in March 2021. He is the first pontiff in history to set foot in the land where, according to the three monotheistic religious traditions, Abraham was born. In a video message recorded on the eve of his departure, the pope said he was "honoured to meet a martyred Church: thank you for your testimony. May the many, too many, martyrs you have known help us to persevere in the humble strength of love." He went on to say that he wanted to "bring the affectionate caress of the whole Church, which [is] close to you and to the martyred Middle East, and I encourage you to move forward."

Moving from words to deeds, Pope Francis has always concretely helped this Christian community. For example, in 2017, the pope auctioned off a Lamborghini that had been offered to him. The dividends were shared between four organizations, including ACN, which used the funds to rebuild houses in the Nineveh Plains. Another concrete act was the creation of the Pope Francis Scholarships. ACN is the first and largest donor, with a commitment of over \$1.7 million over four years. It will benefit 150 young students, at least 90% of whom are Christians.

They all attend the Catholic University in Erbil (CUE). The brand new CUE was founded in 2015, and is the only university in the country where students are introduced to Christian ethics and Catholic social teaching. "I thank all the ACN offices that work tirelessly around the world, and all their benefactors who have helped young Christians in Iraq to have not only the right, but also the opportunity to receive a higher education," Chaldean Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil wrote to us. "This gives them and their families hope for the future."

Normally, Aid to the Church in Need does not support this kind of project. In Iraq, however, such support has become essential to ensure the survival of the country's tiny Christian community, estimated today at around 250,000 people.



You can continue to contribute to the Pope Francis Scholarships, and in doing so ensure young Iraqi Christians remain at home and enable them to actively contribute to the future of their country. Thank you!



Watch a video →

A Historical Chapter, Thanks to You!

**Do you know one of the most beautiful hymns in the Anglo-Saxon Christian tradition?
It's called *Abide With Me*.**

Without this God of love, who dwells within us in times of darkness as well as in moments of light, nothing is possible in our hearts. The same could be said of your support. In emergency situations, you respond generously to our partners' appeals. You did so in August 2014, when the Islamic State (IS) invaded the ancestral homeland of Iraq's Christians, the Nineveh Plains (northern Iraq). At the time, more than 100,000 people were forced to promptly flee. From food and housing assistance to educational and health support, Iraq's Christian community was able to stay in the country thanks to you.

This is why we can say with certainty that Pope Francis' historic March 2021 visit to Iraq could not have been the huge success that it was without you! Indeed, it was mainly ACN's benefactors who supported the reconstruction of the towns and villages of the Nineveh Plains in the north of the country. Without your support, Pope Francis might have visited Iraq, but all he would have seen were its ruins.

Another topic on the agenda was a call for reconciliation. In Iraq, tensions between different Muslim traditions continue to divide the population. As is the case in many countries, the Church, especially when it is in the minority, is often present to help bring factions together and defuse potential conflicts. Around the world, many of the projects you support aim to encourage dialogue, the healing of wounds, and, ultimately, true reconciliation. During his visit, Pope Francis held an interfaith meeting in the city of Ur. According to Vatican News, at this meeting, several support workers testified to their desire to live in peace. "Two young people, a Muslim and a Christian from Basra who have set up a clothing store together testified to their long friendship ... and a Muslim academic presented [his] efforts at interreligious cooperation."

We are grateful to you. Because, without giving directly for this visit, the help you have given the Iraqi Church for over 10 years enabled it to organize this historic chapter in its existence. It has, in the process, earned greater respect in its own country. For this, we offer you our immense gratitude!



Pope Francis during the Interreligious Meeting at the Plain of Ur.

Watch a video ➔





Together,
**let's build the
Iraq of tomorrow!**



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