



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P., Director Lesley Warnshuis, Office Manager Nancy Keating, Finance Manager

2506 Pine Street P.O. Box 15367 San Francisco, CA 94115-0367 415-931-2183 www.dominicanmission.org

November 2020

Vol. 57 No. 11

No Healing Without Peace



Dear Mission Friends:

In an ironic quirk of fate, Iraqi Christians are experiencing a sense of equality with the rest of the world, a perception that their chances for survival are on a par with the rest of their country, indeed with every other country. With a bow to Covid-19, according to Sr. Luma Khuder, O.P., our English-speaking contact for the Iraqi Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, many have latched on to the “We’re all in the same boat” mentality, desperate to feel included after generations of being disregarded, ostracized or banished.

But of course, we’re not all in the same boat. Living conditions and the ability to combat Covid vary from place to place, and certainly those of Christians in Iraq are not equitable with other developed countries.



Students in joyful anticipation as they watch their Dominican sisters of St. Catherine of Siena at the ribbon-cutting ceremony to reopen their school outside Mosul 3 years after its destruction during the ISIS takeover.

Thanks to the compassionate generosity of you, our donors, the Mission Office has been helping to support the ministries of this congregation of Dominican Sisters since the summer of 2014, when Christians and other minorities were forced to flee their homes in Mosul and the Nineveh Plains overnight as ISIS captured the area. We contributed to emergency relief efforts to ensure the immediate survival of 11,800 internally displaced families, providing basic food, sanitary and medical needs, temporary housing in camps, and eventually, makeshift classrooms.

In July 2017, after three years of terror, persecution, and selective extermination—ultimately recognized as genocide by the international community—Iraqi forces were able to overcome ISIS, and many of the displaced reluctantly but courageously began to return to the devastation of their hometowns to rebuild their houses and communities and lives. Our Mission Office aid has continued to flow, assisting with the short- and long-term rehabilitation phases. As of April of this year, 45% of the families had returned and over 8,000 homes had been rebuilt, along with businesses, schools, and churches, which also helped provide much-needed jobs.



Pre-Covid moments of camaraderie and joy as students from kindergarten through 8th grade returned to their freshly rebuilt schools after over 3 years of exile. We pray that distance learning can soon give way to this happy normalcy once again.



Nevertheless, according to a July report published by the Catholic charity “Aid to the Church in Need” (ACN), **100% of the Christians who have returned live in constant dread.** Not only do they fear the possibility of a return of ISIS but also the violence and hostility of the local militias who, while they helped the government defeat ISIS, now operate through harassment, intimidation, and extortion.



Sr. Luma, O.P.

Such living conditions, exacerbated by unemployment and enduring religious discrimination, had been pushing Christians to migrate out of their ancient homeland, and ACN warned that if the international community did not take immediate action to uphold justice and human rights, the Christian community would be as endangered with extinction as it was during ISIS’s reign of terror.

Then came Covid-19. The country’s numbers began slowly in March but by August had risen to 4,000 new cases a day and approximately 500 deaths a week. September reports show continued escalation to over 5,000 new cases a day. The curfew is lifted every few weeks only to allow the minority of those who do have jobs to work for a short time and earn what they can, albeit having to take drastic wage cuts. And because rebuilding and repair had to cease, hospitals, which were already fragile and poorly equipped, cannot deal with such numbers, and infected people are advised to stay home until they cannot breathe!

The good sisters in Iraq, ever optimistic, are carrying on as well as possible, however.

Sr. Luma writes, “In our convents, daily religious life goes on... Thankfully, we have small chapels...to pray and renew. It was powerful to see Christians in Iraq sharing posts on media about a small corner in their homes that they have turned into a place of prayer, where God is powerfully present...and many people have discovered their faith in the inner church of their heart. Recently we were given permission to receive one family at a time to join us for the occasional Mass we have in our convent.” When the lockdown began, shuttering their schools, they decided as a congregation to continue paying full salaries, already quite low, to their lay teachers and staff. They have since instituted online teaching, dealing not only with the resulting obstacles presented to teachers across the globe but also with the lack of reliable electricity peculiar to such war- and post-war zones

Indeed, Iraqi Christians are not in the same boat as most of us and are still in dire need of humanitarian aid, of concrete signs of solidarity. Their spokesperson Sr. Luma sends her deep gratitude to all of you for your support and prayers which help them significantly with their immediate daily needs.

But there is a bigger picture and we must urge those in authority to see it and act upon it. As expressed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, **“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.”**

According to Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Vatican Commission for Covid-19, “...instead of being united for the common good against a common threat that knows no borders, many leaders are deepening international and internal divisions.” In a Vatican press conference held on July 7, 2020 entitled, “Preparing the future, building peace in the time of Covid-19,” the Cardinal continued: “Armed violence and conflict and poverty are indeed linked in a cycle that prevents peace, furthers human rights abuses, and hampers development...” Affirming the UN Security Council’s recent endorsement of a global ceasefire, he warned, “We can’t fight the pandemic if we are fighting, or preparing to fight, each other...While today unprecedented sums are devoted to military expenditure,

the sick, the poor, the marginalized, and victims of conflict are disproportionately being affected by the present crisis...widening the gap between the rich and the poor... between zones of peace, prosperity, and environmental justice and zones of conflict, deprivation, and ecological devastation.”



Covid-19 patients in the crowded severe-case ward of Al-Kindy Hospital, Baghdad.

Peacebuilding is essential for post-conflict communities to respond effectively to Covid-19. Cardinal Turkson urged, “Now, more than ever, is the time for nations of the world to shift from national security by military means to human security as the primary concern of policy and international relations...Reducing conflicts is the only chance for reducing injustices and inequalities...We need global leadership that can re-build bonds of unity while rejecting scapegoating, mutual recrimination, chauvinistic nationalism, isolationism, and other forms of selfishness.”

In the meantime, the ever-selfless Iraqi Dominican women of the congregation of St. Catherine of Siena show up every day, putting one foot in front of the other. **We thank you, especially in this month of Thanksgiving, for your part in furthering their efforts and for all of your selfless support in all of its forms, from encouraging notes to heartfelt prayer to financial sacrifices, improving the quality of life for those in all our mission areas for 57 years.**

Peace,
Lesley Warnshuis

To refresh your memory of the remarkable journey of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in Iraq—and to glean inspiration and hope for human nature and the world in these dispiriting times—visit our website at www.dominicanmission.org, to re-read the following newsletters devoted to them: Aug & Sept '14; April '15; March & July/Aug '16; Jan/Feb & Sept '17; April '18; Sept '19.

On November 1, 2, and 3, in honor of St. Martin's feast day, a Triduum of Masses will be offered at St. Dominic's Church in San Francisco, invoking his intercession for your intentions, particularly those marked on your slip. We invite you to join us in prayer each day by reciting the Triduum below. November is also the month for us to pray for the souls of those who have gone before us. If you have sent in the names of your departed loved ones, they are on the altar at St. Dominic's and are being remembered all month.

St. Martin de Porres Triduum

Nov. 1: *St. Martin, you always had sympathy for the poor and those who were suffering. I need your help and now ask for it with great confidence in your goodness and power. Please remember me, as you adore God. Amen.*

(Your petitions, followed by the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)

Closing Prayer: *Dear St. Martin, I turn to you in my sorrow and anxiety to seek your friendly protection. Please intercede for me with our merciful Father in heaven so that I may be truly sorry for all my sins and be freed from the evils that shackle me. Ask that I might have something of your spirit of love and self-sacrifice, and so be at all times reconciled to God's holy will. Oh heavenly Father, in the name of your Son and of His blessed Mother, and by the merits of your faithful servant Martin, help me in my trouble and do not forsake me. Amen.*

Nov. 2: *St. Martin, we praise God for the manifestation of His love. The favors you received from God encourage us now to seek your intercession and help. We ask you most humbly to befriend and assist us from your place in heaven; but most of all, we beg you to commend us to our beloved Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

(Your petitions, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)

Nov. 3: *Brother Martin, when you were here on earth, you spent your life loving God and your neighbor. This we know from the testimony of your own Dominican brethren. Now that you live in the presence of God in paradise, intercede for those who stand so much in need of the healing help of God and beg the Divine Physician to give us health of the soul and body. Amen.*

(Your petitions, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)