



# Newsletter



*From the Chaldean Archbishop Bashar Warda*



*I hope you all have had a safe and happy Christmas.*

*A very challenging year has left us and I wish all of you a safe and healthy 2021. I thank all the donors who have kept us alive in the darkest of times and those who still keep us alive and full of hope as a remnant community in Christ.*

*I detail our current situation and focus for 2021. We have had a great start with the priestly ordinations of Deacon Milan Sabah Odeesh Kakone and Deacon Handlula Savyo Twafeeq Bols, on Saturday 9 Jan, at St Joseph's Cathedral. Like you, our community, I eagerly and expectantly look forward to the visit of Pope Francis this March. The historic importance of this visit to the Christians of Iraq is truly immense. It will be a massive lift for a people who have been marginalised and pushed to the very edge of their own existence after 2000 years. The world cannot afford for Christianity to disappear from Iraq and the Middle East. We have been here for 2000 years and we need help. His Holiness' visit will refocus the media's attention on us and other ancient minorities like the Yazidis who have suffered greatly, and shed light on our plight to survive into the future.*

*I would ask for you to go back to your donors to make this year a special appeal for Iraq to tie in with the Pope's visit. We cannot survive without your support until we can address the problem of unemployment : we are expectant of the possibilities and outcomes of the Papal visit to support this and of course security and minority rights.*

## General situation for approximately 8000 Christian families in Erbil

Generally speaking, since ISIS in August 2014 most people have been living off their savings as unemployment remains over 70 per cent, especially on the Nineveh Plain. It has been further protracted by the pandemic with the government holding back on paying salaries by some 4 to five months and reducing the actual payment by up to 21 per cent. The financial woes of the community were further exacerbated when on the 22nd December, Baghdad devalued the Iraqi dinar by 20% from 1182 to 1450 to the US dollar, which all of are so dependent upon. We have to find support to help the families during their difficult times until they can get back on their feet.



## Covid

Around 75 per cent of the Christian community has contracted the disease. The worst period was in September as Priests visited hospitals in search of oxygen and drugs. I give my warmest thanks to ACN, Königstein for providing us with a factory oxygen machine for the Maryamana hospital. This has been a life saver for many people and also to Muslims, whilst at the same time freeing up priests to tend to the other ever challenging needs of the community. Our priests are overworked and overburdened, and I thank the diocese of Rottenberg-Stuttgart for their support of priest salaries during the long closures of the church. We have had 25 deaths and we are coping well at this moment, which takes me on to the Maryamana hospital.

## Medical Treatment and chronic drugs for the poor

The Maryamana hospital opened in April. It is a blessing for all as the private hospitals are very expensive and the public ones dangerous. The overall goal of the project proposal is to bring effective healthcare to all faiths, all incomes, IDPs/refugees/elderly people to a war torn region. The Kurdistan Ministry of Health was very impressed with the hospital and we were able to provide them with a field hospital in the Sultanate building, close by the Mother of Perpetual Help School, provided by L'Œuvre d'Orient a few years ago and equipped by Hungary Helps.



All those above 65 years are most are at risk due to poor health care and the total absence of any geriatric care. The main issues are cardiovascular, cancers, respiratory (especially in the winter). Breast cancer is the biggest killer of women in Iraq. We can help these women and many others, but we need money to do this. The Anglican charity *Embrace the Middle East, UK* have just started support us. Another much smaller charity in the UK, *Iraqi Christians in Need* have been helping for the last year.

We need money for major operations, for chronic drugs and Covid tests. All drugs at the Maryamana are at cost price.



## Supporting the Retired

Before ISIS there was a retirement club which assisted the retirees for medicine and hospital visits; this stopped after ISIS. The issue was made worse with the government deducting around 21 per cent of their monthly pension and for only 7 months a years due to ISIS. It meant that on average retirees received \$316 – \$553 per month when medicines can cost between \$100 to \$200 per month. During the last six years the retired have been dependent on family or relatives in the diaspora. As mentioned in my opening statement since the pandemic the government is paying employees their salaries 5 months late and deducting 21 per cent. It means families cannot support their retired parents.

The pressure for these elderly people is severe; they turn to the church to help them and to give them respect in what they have given in the past; It is only fair that they need to be supported in their final years. They need to feel valued and wanted. We view this as a humanitarian appeal. They are from different villages in Iraq and now remain in Ankawa where it is safe for them.

## Syrian Families

There are 575 Syrian Catholic families without work in Erbil. In brief the reality for these families has been : arriving in Erbil as a stepping stone to another country; spending their savings they brought with them as visas very difficult to obtain; then funding for an Iqama and trying to find any sort of work which is a huge challenge; being unemployed, not being able to afford an Iqama or Iqama renewal; building daily fines for not having an Iqama; no employment, now stuck in the country unless they can pay the fines; no money for rental , essential utilities such as water/electricity, food, clothes and schooling.



The pressure on these families in beyond immense and for such a long time, and we worry for them and their mental well-being. We are doing our utmost to help them. It was difficult enough before Covid; however, the pandemic has entrapped all of the community in the repercussions of it: loss of jobs and the delay in paying salaries of those who have jobs by 4 months and more. It means the community cannot help as it did before; we help for education, but this is becoming harder as we have our own costs to cover. We had help from the *Aid to Church in Need* from a major contribution by the *Archbishops of Austria* from March until July 2020, but the need continues as they are totally helpless, feeling trapped and abandoned.

## 2500 IDPs that cannot return to the Nineveh Plain/Mosul.

Our new NGO, *Ankawa Humanitarian Committee (AHC)* is working with *CRS, USA* and *USAID* on helping these families in Ankawa and Erbil to help meet their essential needs of rental and food. As part of the programme we are helping families to access information, think through key decisions, and plan for integration or return. AHC will assist the Archdiocese's humanitarian work in reaching out to national and international donors.



## Schools

All of the pupils, in each of the Archdiocese's four schools, have a personal accompaniment through the pupil, teacher and the parents. They are given active personal development throughout their education .The Archdiocese gives the students what the public schools cannot do i.e. non overcrowded classrooms and a well-rounded and formed education that makes each student ready and prepared for higher education. I am supporting over 300 pupils as I will not turn away any child that needs an education. However, the financial pressures on the Archdiocese are going to force unwanted decisions on parents desperate for an education for their children. Similar to CUE I need international help to find money to pay for these students to attend our schools.



## The Catholic University in Erbil (CUE)

The CUE is the critical anchor project with a mission and vision for keeping the remnant Christianity and the minorities in Iraq, becoming strategically diverse in the CUE's multi faith student population to increase social cohesion, peace, reconciliation and religious freedom. The CUE is one central point for the minorities to study with other faiths and learn together without fear.

ACN and the *Knights of Columbus* paid for the new Architecture and Pathology wing and *Knights of Columbus* for the Sciences and Engineering wing. We look for funding for a library that will be the heart of the university and the community in Erbil. *USAID* is helping us on grants for adult education and they also have provided us computers for the computer lab.

The Archdiocese covers over 60 per cent of the fees of the students as their parents do not have the money to send them there. KAS, Beirut office is sponsoring 8 Yazidi students for the duration of their degree. Mitsubishi Corporation, Japan, sponsored 10 students including three Yazidis. Barnabas Fund helped us last year with 12 students. The intake for the CUE this year was 66 students; It could have been 250 if we had provided free education as the Public Universities do. We must give this seed of hope, peace and reconciliation a true chance to succeed. By providing free education over the next five years, the CUE will become one of the top ten universities in Iraq producing young leaders in to make one nationhood in Iraq. I need international help to compete for students on equal grounds, to become fully established as the key university in arts and sciences to go to for all faiths.



## Catechism and Youth Programmes

The pandemic stopped the full programmes from happening but we managed some online programmes and small events when we were not in lockdown. Sister Neam and Fr Denkha are now preparing for their full programmes for 2021 for which we will need your considerable support for. We are doing First Communions this week.

## Alqosh/ Batnaya/Karamles

The people in the International Office here are trying to help these dioceses in their individual needs; some of you will be hearing or have already heard from them.

*Yours in Christ.*

*Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil*

*15 January 2021*