

Helping refugees part of ACN's heritage



Help for refugees has been part of Aid to the Church in Need's mission since it was founded by Fr Werenfried van Straaten in 1947 to provide material and spiritual help for Christians fleeing to the west of Germany to escape the advance of Communism in Eastern Europe.

Today aid for refugees and displaced families continues to be part of our work and, in addition helping Syrian and Iraqi Christians in the Middle East, the charity has been assisting those displaced in Mali and the Central African Republic.

Helping Iraq's forgotten refugees

Many Iraqi Christians who fled to neighbouring Jordan, following attacks from extremists, are being cared for by Fr Khalil Jaar and his helpers.

One mother came to Jordan with her children after fanatics kidnapped her husband and then sent his head back to the family. Fr Khalil took them in when they had nowhere else to turn.

The stream of refugees from Iraq is never ending. "Just today I received ten new arrivals," said Fr Khalil when we visited him. In Jordan alone, an Iraqi refugee population of 450,000 includes more than 50,000 Christians. Father Jaar has extended pastoral care to some 1,600 Iraqi Christian families through his St. Mary of Nazareth Parish in West Amman, which is part of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

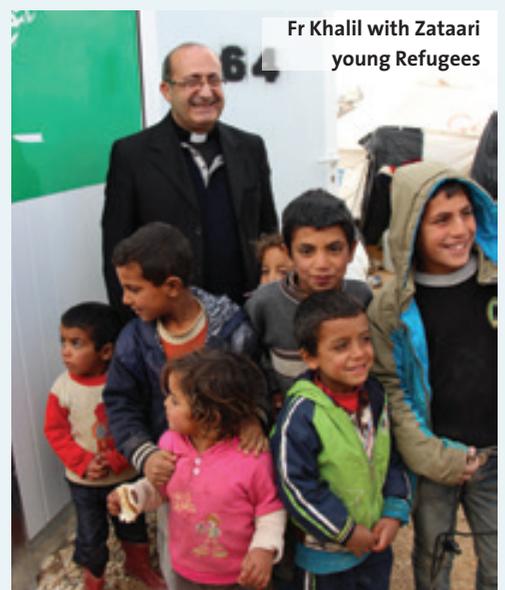
Once they are in Jordan they try to register with the UN Refugees Council – but families told us their appointments are scheduled for three-to-five months from the time of their arrival. They won't receive any help until then and so the Church steps in.

Fr Khalil has been helping Iraqis since the invasion of Iraq began and he has paid the price. Shortly after the invasion began, he was kidnapped at Baghdad airport and after several days in captivity brought before their Caliph for judgement. Asked why he was there he revealed that he was on a mercy mission to take two sick children to Jordan for treatment. The priest believes his life was only spared because the children he was helping were Muslim. Since then he has continued to help tirelessly those of all faiths who need his assistance, including the more than 100,000 Syrian refugees in Zataari camp.

Only through your compassion has Fr Khalil been able to continue his important work. At one of his weekly food distribution sessions for Christian refugees from Iraq he told us: **"On behalf of these people I would like to thank Aid to the Church in Need for always standing with us. You encourage these people that you are standing with them – and loving them."**



Refugee children in Zataari camp



Fr Khalil with Zataari young Refugees

God's Scattered Children

Helping refugees throughout the Middle East

"Thousands of families have fled to Lebanon and other countries in the last two years... We pray that many 'Simons of Cyrene' might appear, ready to carry the cross and lighten the load of this people."

Archbishop John Darwish of Zahle, Lebanon



Sister Rita of the Good Shepherd Sisters with some of the Syrian refugee children being helped in Deir Al Ahmar, north-east Lebanon.

"What can we do, if they knock at our door and we have nothing to offer them?" asked Sister Micheline of the Good Shepherd Sisters.

She was telling us about the problems the Sisters faced when Syrian refugees turned to them after heavy rainfall destroyed most of their tents.

Drawing on their limited resources, little by little, they started providing tents, blankets and food packages for the refugees in Deir Al Ahmar, Lebanon.

The Good Shepherd Sisters, who are helping refugee families regardless of their religion, have also opened a makeshift school for 200 Syrian children.

Thanks to your generosity, the Good Shepherd Sisters have been able to offer help, not only when refugees knock at their door in Deir Al Ahmar, but also when they turn to the clinic they

run on the outskirts of Lebanon's capital Beirut.

Here it is not only Syrian refugees but also Iraqis who are turning to the Sisters for help.

One refugee from Mosul in northern Iraq told us how her family had fled after leaflets were distributed telling Christians to leave their homes within 24 hours or be killed.

Another Iraqi refugee Nadia,* fled her home after extremists told her husband he would be killed if he did not leave Mosul immediately. The five members of the family are now living in one room.

The Sisters are providing food packages in addition to medical care for refugee families like Nadia's.

Sister Hanan who runs the clinic in Beirut said: **"Aid to the Church in Need help us a lot... with the refugees. I would like to express to them and all their benefactors my gratitude, asking God to bless them and their big hearts in their efforts to help others."**

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*Some names have been changed to protect people's identities in this report.

CAUTION: Readers may find some of these refugees' stories inside upsetting.

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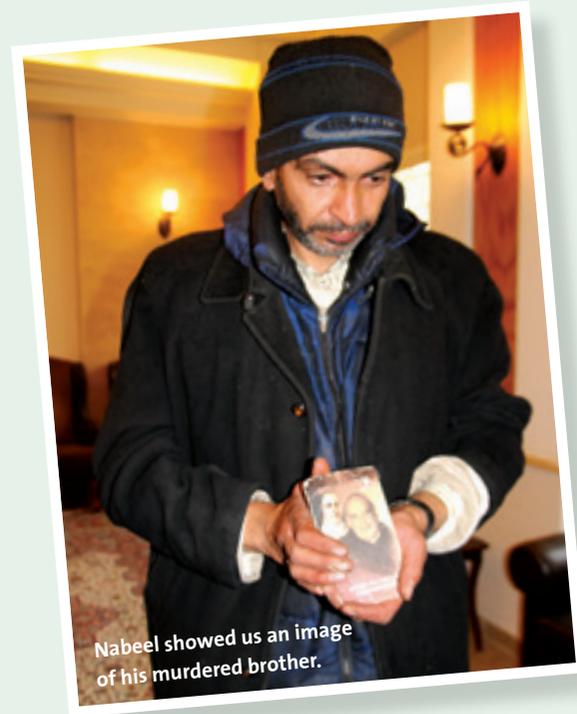
Our children are safe now



When ACN visited we helped out with the food distribution.



Michael with his children.



Nabeel showed us an image of his murdered brother.

Preparing the food parcels to help families like Michael and Jemina's.

Michael and Jemina fled Syria when armed gunmen went to the Christian school where their children were studying and threatened to kill them.

They told us how, frightened for their children's lives, they ran to neighbouring Lebanon, literally taking nothing with them. Michael told us that even the clothes on their backs had been given to them by the Church. Thanks to your generosity, Aid to the Church in Need has been able to help the local Church provide the very basics that families like Michael and Jemina's need to survive.

Michael takes casual work whenever he can find it – but work is scarce and his income is never as much as the rent for the rooms where the couple live with their four children. To keep a roof over their heads the Church also helps refugee families cover the cost of their lodging if they do not have enough money. **"I thank God that my family is OK and that we are receiving help from Archbishop Darwish"** said Michael. Archbishop John Darwish is the head of the local Melkite Church – an ancient Eastern Rite Church in full communion with the Pope – which has been providing humanitarian relief for the refugees that have sought refuge in Zahle since the conflict began.

The Melkite Church began helping just 18 families and they are now providing two food parcels every month for well over 600 families. When Aid to the Church in Need visited Lebanon earlier this year we saw the distribution for ourselves. Michael and Jemina were among the refugees who had come to collect a parcel containing food and basic hygiene items. Like most of the Christian families we met, they rely on the Church for the very basics of daily life such as food, medical care and education. Michael told us: **"The world may have taken my worldly goods, but I have my dignity – and my children."**

A refugee's story

At the food distribution in Zahle (see story left) one refugee recounted his own personal tragedy to us:

"My name is Nabeel, I am married and the father of five children. I am from Yabroud, Syria. Several months ago I had to leave my country for lack of security. I am one of the millions of refugees from the war in Syria. "My brother, who was a priest, was kidnapped for two months. They asked for a ransom of \$120,000 in exchange for his life. Christians have become currency in this tragedy. With great effort my family managed to raise the money in time and deliver it to the kidnappers, who promised to set him free the next day. "But, hours later, my brother was killed and his body cut up. They sent part of him to me in a box – his wrist tattooed with a cross. I know my brother is a martyr and takes care of me."

Many of Syria's Christian refugees have experienced terrible persecution at the hands of extremists. Please help us to continue helping them.